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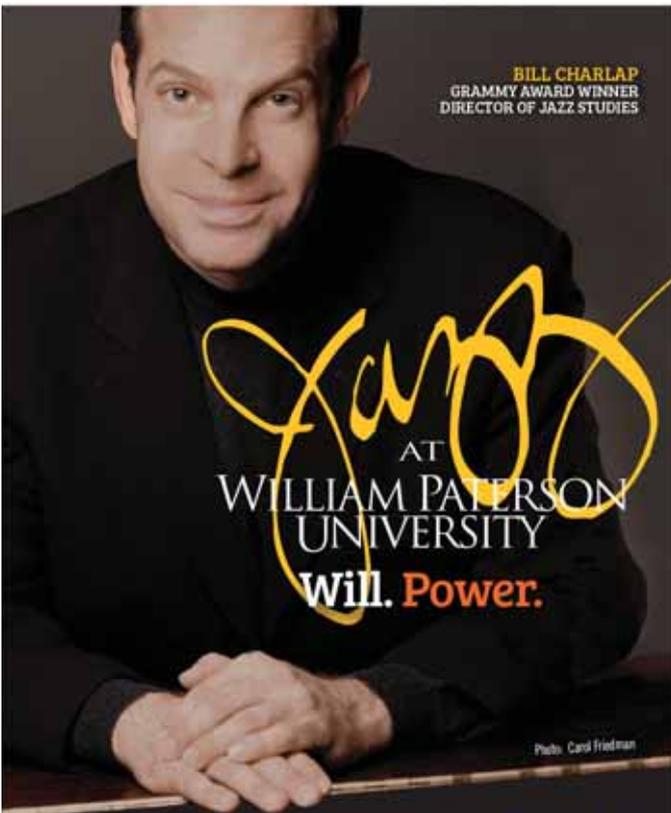
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SEPTEMBER 2018

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'All for the Funk of It'

BY ANDY HERMANN

Christian McBride and one of his idols, the funk master Bootsy Collins, share firsthand accounts of working with soul icon James Brown.



Wayne Shorter (left), Esperanza Spalding and Terri Lyne Carrington perform in 2014.

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Cover photo of Christian McBride (left) and Bootsy Collins shot by Paul Wellman in Los Angeles on March 10.

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First Take > BY BOBBY REED



Christian McBride at the 2017 Newport Jazz Festival

What's in a Musical Name?

JAZZ IS THE LIFEBLOOD OF DOWNBEAT. Jazz is the central focus of our editorial coverage. When people think of jazz journalism, they think of DownBeat, and we're proud of that.

Occasionally, readers complain when we run a story online or in the print edition about an artist who is not readily, easily categorized as a jazz artist. However, we feel that the DownBeat reader, in general, has "big ears" and is interested in a variety of music styles. After all, that's certainly true of many jazz musicians, including bassist Christian McBride (seen above playing electric bass at Newport with his funk-and-r&b-flavored trio The Philadelphia Experiment, which also includes keyboardist Uri Caine and Roots drummer Questlove).

For this month's cover story, we orchestrated an interview and photo shoot in Los Angeles with McBride and one of his heroes: the intergalactic superstar Bootsy Collins, whose discography includes work with James Brown, Funkadelic, Parliament, Teena Marie, Sly & Robbie, Keith Richards, Herbie Hancock, The Golden Palominos, Lucky Peterson, Victor Wooten, Blind Boys of Alabama and Sheila E.

Our assumption in creating this story was that readers would want to be a "fly on the wall" as the most prominent jazz bassist of his generation sits down for an animated chat with one of the most revered and recognized bassists on this (or any other) planet. Bootsy, of course, is one of those musicians that we call a Beyond artist, to use the handy umbrella term.

As longtime readers know, DownBeat puts the phrase "Jazz, Blues & Beyond" on its cover.

The content of every issue matches that description, thanks to the Blues and Beyond columns in our Reviews section.

Granted, some issues of DB include more non-jazz content than others. This issue, for example, includes an article on ageless blues icon Buddy Guy. We've also got a story on drummer Bernard "Pretty" Purdie, a profile of saxophonist Dan Wilensky and a Master Class by pianist, composer and arranger Deanna Witkowski—three musicians who have all worked in multiple genres, including jazz.

DownBeat is never going to stray from its primary mission—to focus on jazz—but we're enthusiastically interested in spotlighting exciting, unique, well-crafted and (often) improvised music from other genres.

In journalist Josef Woodard's interview with Wayne Shorter beginning on page 34, the jazz icon talks about how problematic he finds it to use names and labels. Shorter discusses the inspiration behind his new album, *Emanon*, the title of which is "no name" spelled backwards.

Some readers and musicians find the term *jazz* to be limiting. Do you? For decades, people have debated exactly what types of music (or subgenres) fit under the term *jazz*. Since 1934, DownBeat has played an essential role in that ongoing debate.

So, how do you think we're doing in 2018, with regard to covering the music that *you* like? In your opinion, do we cover the right types of artists? Let us know by sending a detailed email to editor@downbeat.com. Thanks for your support, and please keep on reading.

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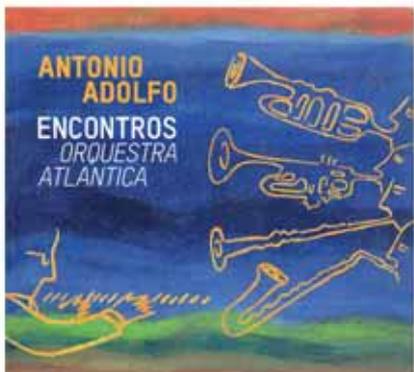
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Chords & Discords >



Experimental Point of View

I've been a regular reader of your magazine since the mid-1960s, when I was a teenager. I would like to commend you for putting Mary Halvorson on the cover of the June issue. Following the demise of the magazines Signal to Noise and Coda, it is gratifying that DownBeat

has become more open to covering music that is avant-garde or experimental.

The Reviews section appears to be reflecting more of the jazz spectrum. Thank you.

BILL BARTON
SEAGOVILLE, TEXAS

Keep It Up

In the Chords & Discords section of the July issue, two readers scolded DownBeat for daring to be political. Both readers then went on to clearly express their own political opinions. Interesting. The truth is that most art forms make political statements from time to time. I wouldn't want it any other way. So, please keep on keepin' on.

BILL BENJAMIN
BILTMORE LAKE, NORTH CAROLINA

Art Reflecting Life

From time to time, a reader will write a letter to DownBeat to complain about political themes creeping into the magazine. I have never understood how one can be a complete jazz fan without considering the political questions that have always been an essential part of our culture.

Not open to debate are the cold, hard, tragic facts that young, unarmed black men are being killed by police officers, that our private prison system thrives on having as many occupants as possible and that they are overwhelmingly black. (This is not because blacks commit more crime, but because they are more likely to be arrested.)

Also not open to debate is the fact that jazz has always been music closely tied to black culture and experience. So it is not only unavoidable but absolutely desirable that such

themes are expressed in the music. It's called art reflecting life. When musicians are interested in these topics, I want to hear about it, regularly, right here in DownBeat.

SCOTT SANDEL
LUCERNE, SWITZERLAND

This Music Is Political

You cannot be a jazz/blues fan without being political. This music was created by Africans brought to these Western shores against their will and have faced oppression and discrimination ever since. Their anguish and anger is part of the music: It gives it passion, and if you dig it, you enter that political world. Period!

TOM ATWOOD
TOM63BONES@GMAIL.COM

Too Much Love

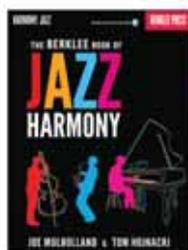
All the reviews and articles in your magazine are complimentary. The hyperbole in DownBeat prevents me from figuring out which music I might like. You seem to love artists who have won Grammys. As I understand it, winning a Grammy means the artist has sold out and wants to be a celebrity and make money, and is now churning out elevator music.

LEE T. JENNINGS
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

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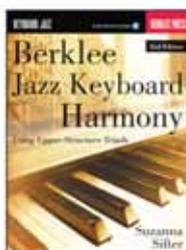


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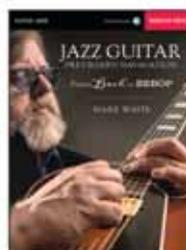


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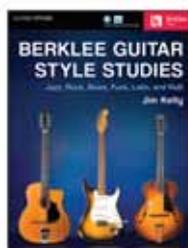


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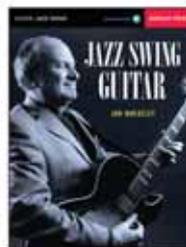
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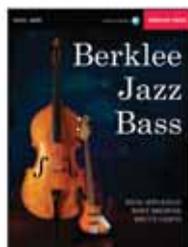


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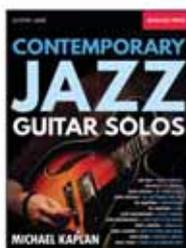


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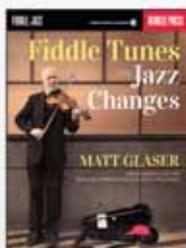


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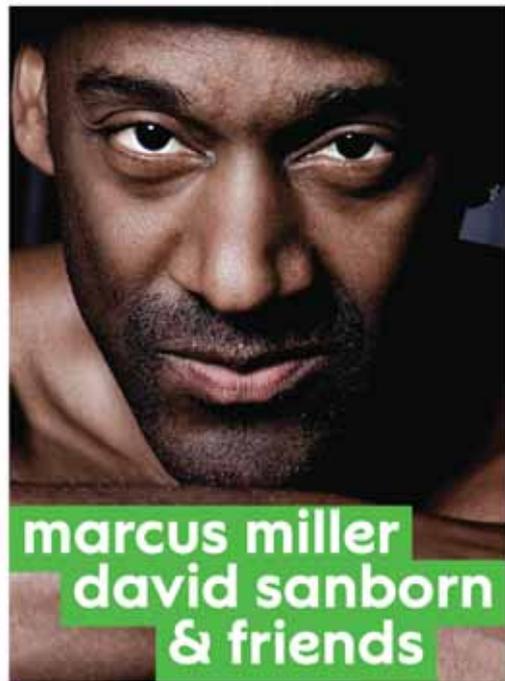


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Beat

Owens' Vision of Freedom

Clear, purposeful communication has anchored Ulysses Owens Jr.'s artistry since he was a kid playing drums in church. While growing up in a family of ministers and musicians in Jacksonville, Florida, Owens observed how both music and oration reached people. "What I love about great preachers is that they understand what they want to say, first, and then they're able to drive the points home in so many dynamic ways," the 35-year-old, Grammy-winning drummer and bandleader said. "Church is so much a part of what I do and how I do it."

For the past two years, Owens has been delivering poignant messages with his captivating Songs Of Freedom project, which has resulted in an excellent album of the same title. For both the staged project and disc, Owens explores the repertoire of Abbey Lincoln, Joni Mitchell and Nina Simone with themes centered on freedom.

The idea for *Songs Of Freedom* came after Jason Olaine, director of programming and touring for Jazz at Lincoln Center, approached Owens and trumpeter Riley Mulherkar in 2015 to work on the concert hall's "100 Years of Song" celebration. Inspired, in part, by the frequent news reports of unarmed black and brown people being assaulted or killed by police officers, Owens decided to focus on material from the '60s that evoked the civil rights movement. "I've always had a love affair with Nina Simone and Abbey Lincoln," he said. "I always wondered what would have happened if the two of them had done a project together. Then I thought about Joni Mitchell. So basically, the idea was bringing these three prolific women together as if they were hanging out at a rally."

To reinvigorate the classics, Owens recruited three spectacular singers for the project's September 2016 premiere: Alicia Olatuja, Theo



Ulysses Owens Jr. has released an album, *Songs Of Freedom*, based on his touring show.

Bleckmann and Dee Dee Bridgewater.

Owens explained that he was attracted to Olatuja's ability to convey any concept to an audience and Bleckmann's inventiveness. Jazz at Lincoln Center suggested Bridgewater.

"It worked well because of the breadth and level of expertise that Dee Dee brought to the project," said Owens. "She had a lot of instances with Abbey and Nina; she was Abbey's goddaughter."

After the project received critical acclaim, Owens' manager and booking agent encouraged the drummer to broaden it and take on the road. Bridgewater couldn't make all of the tour dates, so Owens transformed her role into a revolving spot, which has been occupied by René Marie and Joanna Majoko, both of whom appear on the album, alongside Olatuja and Bleckmann.

Owens steers an empathic quartet with bassist Reuben Rogers, pianist Allyn Johnson and guitarist David Rosenthal through arrangements that highlight each singer's interpretive prowess.

A key element of Owens' M.O. is being authentic, which enables him to better reach audiences. For him, retaining authenticity involves vigorous research into whatever music he's exploring, as well as establishing strong bonds with his bandmates, on and off the stage.

"When I work with people, I try to become intertwined with their personalities," Owens said. "So, when I get ready to perform with them, I can really tap into their core. I want to make the most in-depth connection with them, so that what we do is tangible, beautiful and real."

—John Murph



DOWNBEAT ARCHIVES

Bill Watrous (1939–2018)

Final Bar: Trombonist **Bill Watrous** died July 3 in Los Angeles at age 79. The Connecticut native—who won the Trombone category in the DownBeat Critics Poll in 1976 and 1977, as well as in the Readers Poll from 1975 to 1980—had a career that spanned the coasts and innumerable jazz subgenres. While he led dates for labels like Columbia and MPS, Watrous' work with Kai Winding, Wes Montgomery, Prince and Quincy Jones made him a visible proponent of his instrument. ... **Henry Butler**, a tireless purveyor of New Orleans jazz and r&b, succumbed to cancer July 2 in New York at the age of 69. The pianist, who was blind from infancy, yet still practiced photography, won fans around the world and maintained an active recording and touring regimen. Apart from releasing leader dates since the mid-'80s and contributing session work to a handful of others' recordings, Butler gigged with Steven Bernstein alongside a group dubbed the Hot 9. The band played at this year's New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival.

Motor City Jazz: Fans will flock to the Motor City on Labor Day Weekend for the Detroit Jazz Festival, which is marking its 39th edition on Aug. 31–Sept. 3. In addition to artist-in-residence Chick Corea, attendees can expect to catch a wide range of what the genre offers at the free festival, including performances by Cécile McLorin Salvant, Ravi Coltrane, Chris Dave & The Drumhedz, Christian Sands, Joan Belgrave, Harold López-Nussa, Nicholas Payton and more.

More info: detroitjazzfest.org

Big-Band Monk: Miho Hazama has quickly made her mark as a big-band arranger and composer of consequence. Recently, she contributed writing to a project by Owen Broder, *Heritage: The American Roots Project*, and now she's returning with a live set of arrangements of Thelonious Monk tunes. Recorded in 2017, *The Monk: Live At Bimhaus* features the Netherlands' Metropole Orkest Big Band and is set for release Aug. 31 on Sunnyside.

More info: sunnysiderecords.com



Marc Ribot performs at the Montreal Jazz Festival.

FRÉDÉRIQUE MÉNARD-AUBIN

Protest Voices Enrich 39th Montreal Jazz Festival

JAZZ HISTORICALLY HAS AIMED FOR DEEP cultural relevance and a commitment to social justice. But for the past few decades, the music often has felt untethered from the broader culture, with hip-hop and indie rock boldly taking on that role. Concerts during the first four days of this year's Montreal Jazz Festival by Cécile McLorin Salvant, Keyon Harrold and Marc Ribot strongly suggest that jazz might be busting out of its cultural and political isolation.

Salvant's wry, subtle commentaries at the grand Théâtre Maisonneuve on June 28 were especially rich, since, in deference to the Quebecois audience, the 28-year-old often spoke and sang in French. Her set included Josephine Baker's poignant "Si J'Étais Blanche (If I Were White)" and an even edgier "Darkies Never Dream" (recorded by Ethel Waters), which cut deep with its ambivalent mix of resignation and resistance. Salvant ended her set with a magnificent version of French singer Barbara's world-weary masterpiece "Le Mal de Vivre," exhibiting a breadth and scope that continues to expand at an astonishing rate.

Harrold is probably best known as the trumpet double for Miles Davis on the soundtrack to *Miles Ahead*, but with his 2017 album, *The Mugician* (Legacy), the 37-year-old has come into his own as a bravura, Charles Tolliver-inspired player with a fat tone and fiery flare. Hailing from Ferguson, Missouri, Harrold delivered a cinematic, hip-hop-influenced set at the atmospheric and intimate stone church venue Gesù.

Segueing from one album track to the next, Harrold and his sizzling band wore their politics on their sleeves. "When Will It Stop?" referenced tension in Ferguson and the Black Lives Matter movement, and at one point the band even played "We Shall Overcome."

Ironically, the same day Salvant and Harrold performed, people gathered in Montreal to pro-

test a different festival performance, *SLĀV*, billed as a "theatrical odyssey based on slave songs" performed by a predominantly white cast. As a result of the program, on July 3, singer Moses Sumney posted a statement to his Instagram account explaining his decision to cancel his appearance at the festival. It quickly spread over social media channels.

Three *SLĀV* performances took place and were sold out, according to the festival. But the 13 subsequent shows were canceled.

"Since the beginning of *SLĀV* performances, the Festival team has been shaken and strongly affected by all comments received," a July 3 press release from the festival stated. "We would like to apologize to those who were hurt. It was not our intention at all. For the Festival International de Jazz de Montréal, inclusion and reconciliation between communities are essential. We made the decision with the artist Betty Bonifassi to cancel all performances of the show at the Festival."

A few days prior to the cancellation, during his quartet show at Gesù, Ribot observed that refusing to "change the chord after four bars" is also an act of resistance. But Ribot, the musical iconoclast, said he felt that speaking out in these "strange times" was "a matter of now or never." Hence, *Songs Of Resistance: 1942–2018* (Anti-), the forthcoming album from which he drew most of his set list.

Seated in a chair with a hollowbody guitar and reading lyrics from a music stand, Ribot vibrated with abrasive rage, spitting Sprechstimme rants, the most compellingly repeatable being "Fuck La Migra," a reference to the Trump administration's border policies.

From Ribot to Harrold and Salvant, it was easy to draw a direct and welcome line. May it signal more of the same from other quarters in jazz.

—Paul de Barros

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Buddy Guy's new album is titled *The Blues Is Alive And Well*.

Guy Delivers Blistering Blues on New Album

IN THE AFTERMATH OF HIS HERO B.B. King's death, Buddy Guy certainly is the most revered blues musician on the planet, a standard-bearer for the genre who continues to expand his fan base. Among his honors are induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and receiving the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award and a National Medal of Arts. But he's not merely resting on his laurels. For decades, he has been a premier attraction on the festival circuit.

Guy's new album, *The Blues Is Alive And Well* (Silvertone/RCA), is a blistering set of 15 songs strategically designed to reaffirm what its title claims. His guitar work and his frequently underappreciated vocals remain in mint condition.

"I think I need a little more help with it to make sure it stays alive and well," the Chicago-based icon said in a June phone interview. "Now [fans' exposure to the] blues is limited unless you've got satellite radio. The big stations don't

play it no more. The next superstar might be some young woman who will maybe hear these songs on the radio and say, 'I want to learn how to play like that.'"

With Guy's 82nd birthday approaching on July 30, the new disc makes several references to mortality, particularly on "A Few Good Years," "When My Day Comes" and "Blue No More." Guy is grateful that his accolades—which include a Louisiana highway that will be renamed for him later this year—have come while he's alive to enjoy them.

"My mother said, 'You got flowers for me, give 'em to me now, because I'm not going to smell them when you put 'em on the casket.' That's what I told the state of Louisiana when they talked about naming the highway for me," he said.

The native of Lettsworth, Louisiana, has never forgotten his roots, as evidenced by the

cover photo on the new album. Wearing denim overalls, he poses in front of a dilapidated shack in the town where he was born into a sharecropping family in 1936. There was no Photoshop trickery involved, he asserted. "I was right there. That building was a grocery store when I lived there."

Today, while hobnobbing with Jimmy Kimmel on late-night TV, dining on Grecian chicken with David Letterman in a segment for Letterman's Netflix talk show and lending his celebrity power to the fight against the prostate cancer that killed his younger brother Phil, Guy maintains a relentless touring schedule. It can be grueling, he admitted: "I ain't gonna tell no lie. I can't kick my leg as high as when I was 23 years old." But he can still deliver a high-energy show, he said, "as long as I get a shot of cognac ..."

Guy's passion for the high-end brandy is well known, and he extols his passion for the drink on "Cognac," for which he enlisted the help of pals Keith Richards and Jeff Beck, who each contribute dazzling fretwork. Other guest stars on the new album include Mick Jagger, who plays harmonica on "You Did The Crime," and young British singer-guitarist James Bay, Guy's duet partner on "Blue No More."

Guy said the guest contributions were all delivered remotely. "They sent 'em in separately. If you're recording with a lot of people, unless you're doing a live album, I can concentrate on my guitar and singing more if I just record them myself."

Besides a cover of Sonny Boy Williamson II's "Nine Below Zero," the new songs were written primarily by some combination of Tom Hambridge, Gary Nicholson and Guy. Hambridge was singled out for praise by Guy, who said the producer and drummer helps him flesh out his ideas with his lyrics. "You've got to give 99 percent of the credit to [Hambridge], who comes up with these songs from some of the conversations we have. We'll have a conversation and he'll say, 'You're writing songs and you don't even know it.'"

The new album has a lot of songs about relationships, and it concludes with a 57-second novelty track that features some risqué wordplay: "Milking Muther For Ya." Although some of Guy's previous material, such as his 2008 ballad "Skin Deep," has contained social commentary, he said he did not feel the need to weigh in on the hot-button issues of the day on *The Blues Is Alive And Well*.

"I don't get into politics too much, but I do keep my eyes and ears open," he explained.

Guy will promote the new album throughout the year. His tour itinerary includes a string of dates in California Aug. 9–15, followed by shows in the South in September, including Richmond, Virginia (Sept. 6), Louisville, Kentucky (Sept. 13), Knoxville, Tennessee (Sept. 27), and Chapel Hill, North Carolina (Sept. 29). —Jeff Johnson

Ben Paterson Takes First Place in Marsalis Piano Competition

BEN PATERSON, OF PHILADELPHIA, Pennsylvania, is the winner of the inaugural Ellis Marsalis International Jazz Piano Competition, which was held at Missio Dei Church in Huntington, West Virginia, on June 22 and 23. Along with the honor comes a \$25,000 prize, an album deal with Elm Records, assistance with management, promotion and booking, and 12 performance opportunities.

The seven finalists—Joshua Espinoza, of Baltimore; Dave Meder, of Tampa, Florida; Arcoiris Sandoval, of Tucson, Arizona; Oscar Rossignoli, of San Pedro Sula, Honduras; Isaiah J. Thompson, of West Orange, New Jersey; Rina Yamazaki, of Saitama, Japan; and Paterson—were drawn from a pool of 160 applicants.

The combined experience of Marshall University's staff, and judges Ellis Marsalis, Branford Marsalis, Arturo O'Farrill and Jon Batiste made the inaugural EMIJPC a rigorous challenge for the competitors.

Accompanied by bassists Mimi Jones and Dezron Douglas, drummers Da Yeon Seok and Jerome Jennings, and saxophonist/vocalist Camille Thurman, the finalists navigated four segments designed to test their ability to play solo, as part of an instrumental trio, in a quartet with a vocalist and in multiple jazz styles.

Thompson, the youngest finalist at 21, picked up both third place's \$5,000 prize and the award for the best rendition of an Ellis Marsalis song for his execution of "Swinging At The Haven." Yamazaki received second place's \$10,000 prize and the Chico & Lupe O'Farrill Award for her original composition "With You Always."

In the final segment of the competition, a rare slip of Paterson's revealed not just his musical competency, but his courtesy as well. During a call and response with drummer Da Yeon, he played a little into her solo and bopped his head twice with the heel of his hand. That sort of awareness could have contributed to his win, as one of the competition's benchmarks is how well performers could coordinate with bandmembers.

It is far too easy for a new jazz musician to replicate the reflexivity of a performance as a hard-coded elocution exercise, a pernicious mistake in Branford Marsalis' eyes.

"They don't know how to play with other people," he said. "They spend a lot of time in the practice room by themselves."

He continued while signing posters, patiently explaining one factor in his deliberations: "They never looked at the other people in the group. I never felt viscerally that they were reacting to what was going on ... and that's prevalent in music and jazz right now."

But after all the awards had been handed out,

Ellis Marsalis expressed a high opinion of the finalists' fortunes: "Well, they're all good, all of them," the pianist said. "[In a] situation like this, there's no losers. There's just some people here who didn't come in first, second and third. If you're into jazz at all, just keep your ears and eyes open. Down the road, you're gonna hear from all of them."

—Mark Boykin



Jason Marsalis (left), Ellis Marsalis, Ben Paterson and the Nu Jazz Agency's Jerald Miller

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WYNTON MARSALIS BY PIPER FERRELLSON

McKenzie Spotlights Bay Area History

HEADLINING A MONDAY NIGHT SHOW AT NEW YORK'S BLUE

Note, the blond-haired, blue-eyed singer-pianist took the stage with her all-male quartet. With no chit-chat, and just a nod and smile at the audience, she launched into "You And The Music," a newly minted original. Four more of her own tunes—she writes both music and lyrics—would follow, before she played her first standard of the show, Jerome Kern's "The Way You Look Tonight."

The set conveyed Sarah McKenzie's priorities as an artist, reinforced during an interview a few days later at her Manhattan hotel: Although she sings and plays with swinging assurance, the thing that she's counting on to distinguish herself is her songwriting.

The Blue Note was an important stop for the peripatetic 30-year-old, already a jazz star in Europe and her native Australia. A world traveler since her early twenties, McKenzie got her first degree in jazz studies in Perth; her second on a full scholarship to Berklee College of Music in Boston; and then spent two years playing and soaking up *la belle vie* in Paris, the inspiration for her new album, *Paris In The Rain* (Impulse!). In 2017, she moved to London, her new base of operations, from which she has toured Europe, North America and Brazil.

"Oscar Peterson is the reason I play music," McKenzie said in her lilting Australian accent. Her four albums reflect a style that is tradition-minded, swinging and song-oriented. Besides Peterson, she cites George Shearing, Gene Harris and Shirley Horn among her influences. "I took blues lessons when I was 13. My piano teacher said, 'You've got the feel for this. You should check out jazz.' I was like, 'What's jazz?' ... I bought a compilation CD and didn't need to go past the first song, because it was Oscar's 'Night Train,' with Ray Brown on bass."



© PHILIPPE LEVY-STAB

Sarah McKenzie's new work, *San Francisco—Paris Of The West*, will have its world premiere at the Bay Area's Leshner Center for the Arts on Sept. 14.

Often compared to Diana Krall, whom she greatly admires, McKenzie said she never really saw herself as similar, "primarily because of my songwriting and arranging." Despite her reverence for the Great American Songbook, McKenzie has a taste for straightforward jazz and a fondness for arrangers and bandleaders like Maria Schneider and Terri Lyne Carrington, both of whom she considers role models.

The day after the Blue Note gig, McKenzie began recording her fifth album at New York's Sear Sound. The program will be mostly originals. "I don't know if it's valid anymore to play another version of 'Corcovado,'" she said. "What's the point? There are so many people who do it better. Jobim wrote it, and he probably did it the best. Am I gonna do it better than that?"

She raved about her collaborators for the project: tenor saxophonist Troy Roberts, bassist Pierre Boussagnet, drummer Donald Edwards and up-and-coming guitarist Dan Wilson. "Dan plays down-home blues with so much soul, but he also knows the Brazilian repertoire," she enthused. The album "swings, pays homage to the blues, but also has the Brazilian thing, too."

The busy singer/songwriter recently finished a 90-minute song cycle titled *San Francisco—Paris Of The West*, a commission from the Diablo Regional Arts Association in Walnut Creek, California; she'll premiere it in the Bay Area's Leshner Center on Sept. 14. "San Francisco has been known as 'The Paris of the West' for years, but I wanted to find out why," McKenzie said. In the Gold Rush era of the 1850s, the Verdiers, a family of French immigrants, opened a retail store called the City of Paris; it eventually became a center of French culture.

"I've written 13 songs, and we've assembled an all-star band to help me deliver them." The group will include Jeff Clayton and Rickey Woodard on saxophones, John Clayton on bass, Jeff Hamilton on drums, Warren Wolf on vibes, Graham Dechter on guitar and Gilbert Castellanos on trumpet.

McKenzie makes no bones about writing in the style of the American and the Brazilian songbook masters who inspired her: "It's new repertoire, new songs. A lot of the players say to me, 'Who wrote this song? You did? It sounds like a standard.' To me, that's success." —Allen Morrison

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Biography Enhances Tri-C JazzFest

AUTOBIOGRAPHY WAS A KEY MOTIF of Cleveland's 39th Tri-C JazzFest, which ran June 28-30 at Playhouse Square. Bracketed by the JazzFest debuts of Dee Dee Bridgewater and Common, who threaded their life stories through the music, the torrid weekend successfully updated a Cleveland institution.

The acts playing the State, Ohio, Allen and Hanna theaters spanned JazzFest regular Kirk Whalum, artist-in-residence Terence Blanchard, jazz collective (and lone sellout) Snarky Puppy, B-3 master Dr. Lonnie Smith and Joshua Redman's group, Still Dreaming.

"What makes the Tri-C jazz festival unique is it's all the colors of the rainbow aesthetically when it comes to jazz, blues, r&b, rap—all those are aspects of black culture that got this whole thing started," Whalum said. "The harsh reality is that what we call jazz is harder to sell now, if it's not embracing all these other things. You can still call it 'jazz,' but you got to know that you'll automatically color it in such a way that a lot of people can't get their heads around, because they didn't grow up with it."

Before Whalum took to the State Theatre stage, the DIVA Jazz Orchestra played politely received originals, including drummer Sherrie Maricle's "The Rhythm Changes," which set the stage for the night's honors.

In conferring a Jazz Legend Award on DownBeat Publisher Frank Alkyer, Alex Johnson, Cuyahoga Community College's president, cited the profound influence of the magazine's jazz advocacy. Alkyer's fellow honorees were Larry Simpson, a former Tri-C executive who was instrumental in forming JazzFest and now is provost at Berklee College of Music in Boston, and pianist Jackie Warren, a leading light on Cleveland's jazz scene.

After a long intermission, Whalum's group arrived. He was particularly strong on the fierce "Triage," and his interplay with singer Vaneese Thomas, the little sister of Stax hitmaker Carla Thomas, was a high point. Thomas shone on a French version of "In This Life" and a melting "It's What I Do."

Whalum knows both Thomas and Bridgewater from Memphis—and Paris, where all three Memphis natives have lived. Whalum also produced *Memphis ... Yes, I'm Ready* (OKeh), Bridgewater's homage to her hometown.

The singer and her snappy band went on at 10:30 p.m., launched by a sharp take on The Bar-Kays' "Soul Finger"; the high-heeled Bridgewater played for more than an hour. While her energy was striking, her autobiographical shtick diluted the songs and her interpretations were erratic. She killed on The Temptations' "I Can't Get Next to You," but she slaughtered Carla Thomas' "B-A-B-Y" and oversexed Barbara Mason's winsome "Yes, I'm

Ready." A high point was her getting Whalum and saxophonist Bryant Lockhart to vie for her affections in a startling "Don't Be Cruel."

The 39th iteration of JazzFest concluded on a sharp, charismatic note. Hip-hop icon Common took the stage to "Nature Boy," and was unsurprisingly political ("the new plantation is mass incarceration"), telling his story through hits including "I Used To Love H.E.R.," "Black Maybe" and "It's Your World," his plea for a colorblind society.

—Carlo Wolff



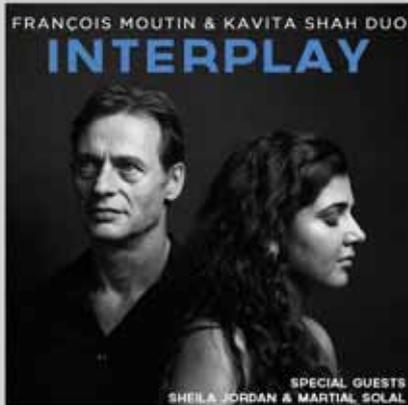
COURTESY OF TRI-C JAZZFEST

Dee Dee Bridgewater opened her set with a Bar-Kays tune at the Tri-C JazzFest in Cleveland, Ohio.

An advertisement for Sabian FRX Frequency Reduced Cymbals. The background is a teal color with a faint image of a cymbal. The text "DON'T HOLD BACK" is written in large, white, outlined letters. Below this, a quote from Gregory Smith (Drummer) reads: "It doesn't matter how hard you play, these cymbals are never too much for the mics onstage or the crowd in the room." The FRX logo is prominently displayed in the center, with "FREQUENCY REDUCED CYMBALS" underneath. At the bottom, a white box contains the text "SEE THE WHOLE STORY AT SABIAN.COM/FRX".

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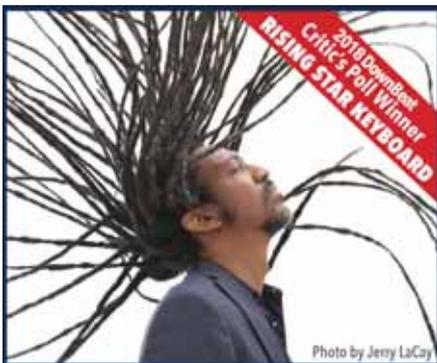


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European Scene / BY PETER MARGASAK

Pianist's Instinct

Many musicians cite specific individuals as key influences, but for Swedish pianist Lisa Ullén, a particular community provided one of the strongest impacts upon her art.

She's one of Stockholm's most versatile, probing, and skilled musicians—qualities that have allowed her to thrive in all kinds of settings, whether in free improvisation or working in theater—and she's said that encountering members of the collective behind the artist-run space Fylkingen in the early '90s was crucial to her creative development.

"Over the years, I've met so many musicians, composers, and artists through Fylkingen who have influenced me on many levels," said Ullén, 53. "I have listened to the best concert performance in my life there. I also first heard the pianist Sten Sandell, who has been a very important and supportive friend and colleague."

Indeed, her circuitous path forward has embraced a wide variety of contexts and approaches, and although Sandell's well known as a steely, daring improviser, her work extends in many other directions, much like Fylkingen's eclectic programming.

She was born in South Korea and at age 4 was adopted by Swedish parents who lived in the small northern Swedish town of Örnsköldsvik; a few years later, she followed the lead of a friend and began taking piano lessons. Ullén hungrily listened to pop music on the radio, but her training led her to study classical music at the Royal College of Music, from which she graduated in 1991. Even then, her curiosity led Ullén outside of conventional thinking.

"My classical training has been important for the way I listen to details, I think, but I feel much more connected to jazz and improvisation and experimental music," she said. "I am especially interested in investigating the possibilities of the piano, regardless of genre. At some level, the question is always about what the instrument can do and what you want to do with the music."

The music contained on her ambitious recent 3-album set *Piano Works* (Disorder) clearly reflects such thinking, mixing compositional ideas with rigorous improvisation, sometimes incorporating preparations on her keyboard.

"I guess you could call them either composed improvisations or improvised compositions, in the sense that there is an idea for a rhythm or a soundscape when I begin playing. But it's always an open question how the piece will be achieved," she said. "It can't happen the same way twice."

The path to this recent opus has been circuitous, with endless turns, including pe-



Lisa Ullén

riods spent away from the scene and raising three children. Early on, she applied her classical training as an accompanist, playing church concerts, dance classes and theaters, and it wasn't until the mid-aughts when she began making a recurring presence on the international scene, issuing records and playing globally.

Ullén has released more than a dozen albums as leader or co-leader, working with an international cast, including Swedish bassist Nina de Heney, Korean cellist Ok-kyung Lee, Canadian bassist Torsten Muller, Swiss violist Charlotte Hug; and she's remained a crucial member of several working bands, including the quartet Festen and Anna Högberg's Attack, moving between driving post-bop and abstract free improvisation. The pianist continues to build a compositional repertoire for contemporary classical music, dance and theater, in addition to curating improvised and experimental music festivals in Stockholm.

She said her range doesn't reflect a conscious effort, though.

"I follow my instinct," Ullén said, "if I feel that I can contribute something in a collaboration I'm in, provided I have an interest in the musical idea at the heart of the project, and there's a good energy. Other than that, there's no plan."

In the wake of *Piano Works*, she released a radically different ensemble project called *Sequences And Layers*, which she described as "a scored piece built as a rhythmic canon, in which the musicians are instructed to relate to the music as something living that has petrified. So, they may imitate, repeat, interrupt, resist and find new directions for the score."

Ullén said that this approach reflects her belief that improvisation is more than a method; it's a way of thinking and creating.

"It's a matter of thinking concretely in music, not talking about it." **DB**



The crowd applauds a performance by legendary percussionist Poncho Sanchez (second from left) at MCG Jazz in Pittsburgh.

MCG Jazz Helps Genre Thrive

IN 1983, WHEN MARTY ASHBY WAS A STRUGGLING YOUNG JAZZ guitarist in New York City, fresh out of Ithaca College, he went looking for a day job. Answering a classified ad from the New York Philharmonic, he found himself in an elevator with a man carrying a stack of sheet music.

"I asked him," Ashby recalled, "what his gig was, and he said, 'I put the scores on the music stands.' I said, 'That's a gig?'" And I realized that the four floors of this building were full of people like him, who supported some of the finest musicians in the world. But I was a jazz musician, and I was used to playing with some of the finest musicians in the world in front of the New York Public Library for tips. That's when I realized that jazz didn't have the same support system as classical music."

That epiphany led Ashby to found MCG Jazz in 1987 to provide just such support. It was part of the Manchester Craftsmen's Guild, a non-profit organization that provides arts education to local children. Founded by Bill Strickland, the group built its headquarters near the economically depressed Manchester neighborhood in north Pittsburgh and equipped the facility with a 350-seat concert hall and recording studio.

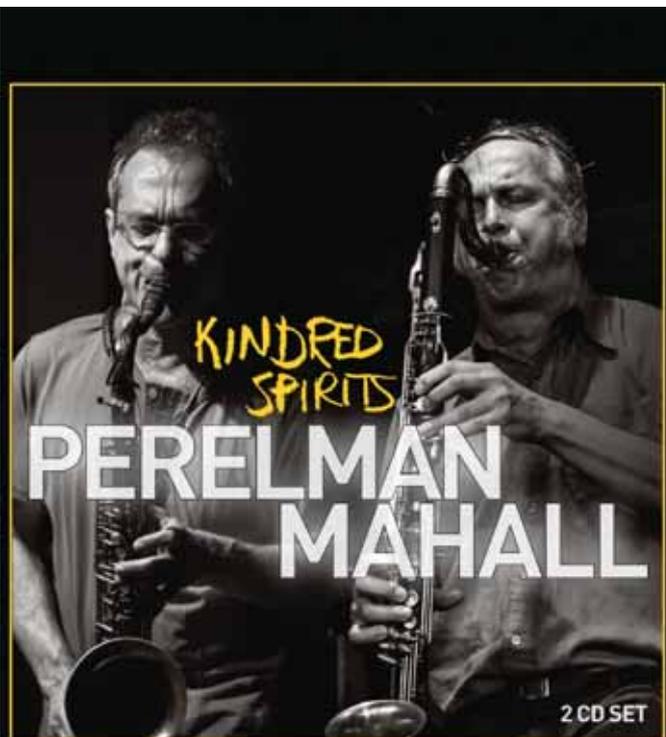
Drawing on his experience with the New York Philharmonic, Ashby launched one of the earliest jazz subscription series for a 1987-'88 concert season that included Betty Carter, Kenny Burrell and James Moody. The series quickly became so renowned that from 1992 through 1995 NPR broadcast "Jazz at Manchester Craftsmen's Guild." Listening to those tapes, Ashby realized that MCG Jazz could release its own recordings.

"We were already paying the musicians to come play, so the extra upcharge for recording them was a lot less than taking them into the studio," Ashby said. "One of our first recordings was the Count Basie Band with the New York Voices, and lo and behold it won a Grammy."

The label's latest release, *Meeting Of Minds*, also features the New York Voices, this time with the Bob Mintzer Big Band. With four singers and a large ensemble (including Ashby on guitar), such a project is an expensive undertaking. But just like San Francisco's SFJAZZ, MCG Jazz offers institutional support that keeps big band jazz alive.

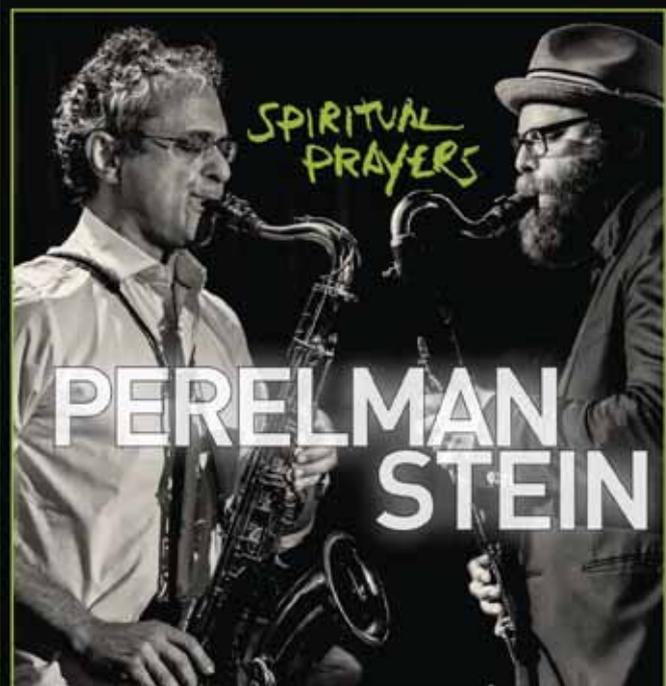
"For a composer/arranger, a big band is fantastic because you have so many colors and possibilities to work with," said Mintzer, saxophonist for the Yellowjackets and the chief conductor for Germany's WDR Big Band. "There's something very compelling about an 18-piece jazz group playing as one. ... If big bands went away, a lot would be missing: less playing opportunities for musicians and poorer listening experiences for audiences. But I don't see them going away, thanks to organizations like MCG Jazz."

In addition to concerts—René Marie and Delfeayo Marsalis (Feb. 23) and Kurt Elling (Oct. 6)—and upcoming releases by pianist Frank Cunimondo and the DIVA Jazz Orchestra, MCG Jazz also has made education part of its mission, providing master classes, internships and other educational opportunities for the youth of Pittsburgh. —Geoffrey Himes



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—Neil Tesser



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In Istanbul, a Display of National Culture

VITRIN IS TURKISH FOR “DISPLAY WINDOW,” like those of the dense storefronts lining even Istanbul’s quietest streets. That’s exactly what the Vitrin Contemporary Turkish Music Showcase is: a window display of the country’s musical culture in 2018.

It’s the second year of the showcase, a component of the Istanbul Jazz Festival that ran from June 27-30. This time around, it featured a contingent of 30 performers from around Turkey—plus one from Azerbaijan, signaling the festival’s hopes of making Vitrin not just a national event, but a regional one.

For all of Istanbul’s picturesque scenes and concert venues, Vitrin opened in a small, windowless salon on the ground floor of the festival organizer, Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts. Also inauspicious was the double bill. Alike Places, a trip-hop duo featuring vocals over laptop electronics, hit the right buttons, channeled the appropriate voices (Sade, Portishead) and ultimately managed competent mediocrity.

Vitrin’s second evening was the “Night Out” was a marathon: 22 artists performed across nine venues, with attendees free to pick and choose where to go and what to see.

First came experimental percussionist Cevdet Ereğ—who stood alone on stage, beating a large shoulder-slung drum at the Moda Sahnesi performance space. He played a mallet in one hand and a stick in the other, keeping separate and often conflicting time with each. The Selim Selçuk Quartet at the nearby Baba Sahne theater, however, was fascinating. Drummer Selçuk featured alto saxophone, Fender Rhodes and bass in a remarkable, challenging set that simultaneously evoked Kneebody and electric Miles.

The showcase’s finest hour came on day

four—back at the inauspicious Salon IKS.V. The wonderful Coşkun Karademir Quartet blended Anatolian folk music and sufi mysticism into surpassing loveliness. From the moment the quartet began and for the next 50 minutes, it was absolutely spellbinding—so intricately bound together that it’s impossible to say whether there was any improvisation.

No festival is perfect, nor a component 31-band showcase. Vitrin, though, is on to something in displaying these artists to the world.

—Michael J. West



Selim Selçuk performs on the second night of the Vitrin Contemporary Turkish Music Showcase at the Zorlu Center in Istanbul, Turkey.



Pete Shand (left), Bernard “Pretty” Purdie, Brian J and Ivan Neville collaborated on the new album *Cool Down*.

‘Pretty’ Returns as Leader

FORGET ARETHA FRANKLIN, JAMES Brown, Herbie Hancock and the multitude of other artists with whom Bernard “Pretty” Purdie has played. What most animates the drummer is talk of himself at age 8, in Elkton, Maryland, coming to terms with what would become his signature contribution to music: the Purdie Shuffle.

The Shuffle—that celebrated swirl of “ghost notes” and rock-solid backbeat, at once connected and propelled by the whoosh of the hi-hat opening and closing—was suggested to him by the rhythms of the trains he heard as a youth.

By his own count, he’s been heard on 4,000 records, yet he claims a relatively modest 15 albums as a leader. So, it’s with some excitement that he has released *Cool Down* (Sugar Road), his first studio leader project in a decade.

The Purdie sound is identifiable throughout these 10 tunes, not least on the instrumental “Golden Tie.” With Purdie’s drums rumbling, the tune recalls the cadences of those trains from the past. But in his own estimation, the sound’s elements reveal themselves most clearly on ballads. The album’s closing number, “Stranded,”

features Ivan Neville’s Hammond B3 organ backing the plaintive vocals of his uncle, New Orleans legend Cyril Neville. Despite the tune’s languid pace, it has a propulsive edge and, like most of the tracks on *Cool Down*, an air of spontaneity.

“I’d start out a groove by myself while the rest of the band was taking a break,” Purdie said. “Next thing I know, they’d jump into the song and away we go.”

Reflecting that, the writing credits for most of the tunes go to the core band—Brian J on guitar, vocals and percussion; Pete Shand on bass; and Ivan Neville on keyboards—along with Brian Gitkin. To Purdie, this is no small matter: “It was a group effort. Everybody wanted to contribute, so that’s how I look at things.”

For Purdie, that was not always the case. In a career spanning more than half a century, he said, the songwriting credit—and the lion’s share of the money—usually went to those who crafted the “single-note” melodies. And don’t even talk about sampling.

“I was the beat for so many records in the ‘70s,” he said. “Folks have taken those albums and made their own albums out of them.”

Still, he has no regrets. “I know that I really should be paid more for helping out and supporting the young people today with their songs. But you know what? The man upstairs has given me all these good, fabulous years. He watches over me, and I know that.”

—Phillip Lutz



Pharoah Sanders performs June 10 at City Winery during the DC Jazz Festival in Washington, D.C.

DC Jazz Festival Reaches New Peak with Sanders, Carrington

SINCE ITS FOUNDING IN 2005, THE DC JAZZ Festival has pursued an expansive vision: not just in terms of music styles, but of the city's geography. This year, in its 14th iteration, the festival advanced that vision in both dimensions, perhaps further than ever before.

The flagship venue for DCJF throughout its span (June 8-17) was City Winery, a branch of the New York-based franchise, located in Northeast D.C.'s long-dormant—and now gentrifying—industrial Ivy City neighborhood.

Most of its headline acts performed there—among them The Bad Plus, Patricia Barber, Ben Williams, Raul Midon and a sublime June 10 set by the legendary Pharoah Sanders. The 77-year-old saxophonist showed that age has robbed him of neither richness nor power. In his opening piece, Sanders counterbalanced the swing-and-gospel-charged undulations of his band with long, serene tones, played with his slightly coarse tenor. He was mellow, pacific—and still, even as he tamed his accompanists' motions, somehow thoroughly intense. When the troupe shifted into 3/4 for John Coltrane's "Ole," Sanders doubled his tenor with a vocal performance. It was somewhere in the rarely heard middle ground between scat singing and ranting gibberish: violently rhythmic nonsense syllables, which he then emulated on his axe.

The festival's triumphs in Southwest included not just cavernous theaters, but the smaller, fringier spaces. Union Stage, a 225-seat basement room, featured a coruscating set by avant-garde trumpeter Jaimie Branch. Accompanied by a version of the ensemble that appeared on her 2017 *Fly Or Die* (International Anthem) recording—bassist Jason Ajemian, cellist Fred Lonberg-Holm and drummers Chad Taylor and Stoli L. Sozzleberg—Branch covered a remarkable sonic

range. Here, she was playing loose phrases that coalesced into longer and longer lines, never quite crystallizing into a melody; there, in a duet with the kookier sounds of Sozzleberg's palette, emerged the most cohesive and melodically logic moment of the night.

The festival's standby locations also got superlative musical workouts. At the historic Sixth & I synagogue in Chinatown, drummer Terri Lyne Carrington laid out an arresting tribute to Geri Allen with a band that included pianist Orrin Evans, bassist Ben Williams, alto saxophonist Tia Fuller and vocalist Charenée Wade. Opening with two pieces from *Feed The Fire*, Allen's collaboration with vocalist Betty Carter, the quintet evoked both Carter (with Wade adopting her punchy scat on "Feed The Fire") and Allen (with Carrington, Williams and Evans raising the specter of her elastic approach to rhythm). A subsequent performance of Allen's "Dolphin's Dance" demonstrated something this writer hadn't quite grasped before: Evans' heavy pianistic debt to Allen. Evans was a bit trepidatious as he began his solo on her challenging harmonic structure. As he settled in, though, he was a tidal wave, bringing in clanging chords whose percussive power almost concealed his remarkable voice. Williams, in the meantime, was the one player at ease with the harmonic equations from the get-go, an example of his sterling virtuosity.

This handful of acts was a tiny sampling of the full festival, which featured about 170 performances. And while each wasn't quite on par with the aforementioned spectacles, the sheer volume was sufficient for the DCJF to reach a magnificent new peak in its history. That augurs well for success, both creative and commercial, in the future. —Michael J. West

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Nicole Johäntngen recorded her album *Henry* in New Orleans, while *Henry II* was recorded in Zurich, Switzerland.

DANIEL BERNET

NICOLE JOHÄNTNGEN

Congenial Globetrotter

When Nicole Johäntngen was growing up in Fischbach, Germany, she routinely was awakened by her father's New Orleans-style trombone playing.

"I've had that sound in my head forever," she said in June, "and I wanted to [record] a CD with a trombone like it."

More than two decades later, Johäntngen, 36, has done just that—twice. In the process, the alto saxophonist has built a project that honors her father, Heinrich (for whom it is named) and one that raises her international profile.

The project, so far, consists of two self-produced CDs—*Henry* and *Henry II*—that, in 15 deceptively simple tunes, meld Johäntngen's modern melodies with a traditional New Orleans groove.

"It's contemporary music," said Paul Thibodeaux, who plays drums on the albums along with fellow New Orleans-based musicians Jon Ramm on trombone and Steven Glenn on sousaphone. "Nicole called us because she wanted a danceable vibe."

For the Zurich-based Johäntngen, the project grew out of a 2016 trip to the United States. Amid a six-month stint living on New York's Lower East Side—where she bounced between mainstream jazz and the avant-garde—she took a memorable side trip to the Big Easy.

In only a week, she corralled Thibodeaux, Ramm and Glenn, and brought them into a studio for a whirlwind session. Sustained by catfish sandwiches—the session's "secret ingredient," Thibodeaux said—the band cooked up enough

material for the first *Henry* album.

The recording struck a chord among those who heard it, sparking a June 2017 tour that took the group to Germany and Switzerland. Thus seasoned, they recorded *Henry II* at Zurich's 571 Recording Studios in one day. The session benefited from a heightened level of improvisatory interaction.

The group's simpatico was reflected in the process of arranging and composing. The program consists of seven original compositions and one surprising cover: the theme song from the 1984 film *Ghostbusters*, arranged collectively on the fly. And while Johäntngen fashioned the other songs' frameworks with Cubase software—retaining songwriting credit—her bandmates contributed ideas to the final product.

"I don't think she ever told me to play a certain pattern or feel," Thibodeaux explained.

The quartet's music varies in tone and temperament. *Henry*, for example, includes both the dirge-like "Slowly"—a song about the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina—and the title tune, which recalls the "sunshine" mood her father conjured in his trombone reveille.

On *Henry II*, the tunes range from the kinetic "Tanzbär" ("Dancing Bear")—which features free-jazz asides around a sousaphone line that suggests the onstage gyrations of the lithe Glenn—to the languid "Nachspaziergang" ("Night Walk"), which was inspired by a lazy, slightly giddy post-gig perambulation in Pforzheim, Germany.

Having listened widely to saxophonists like

Cannonball Adderley as a teen, Johäntngen devoted her undergraduate and graduate study to jazz saxophone, composition and arranging at a university in Mannheim, Germany.

She played in several bands, first and foremost a jazz-funk quartet founded with her brother, keyboardist Stefan Johäntngen. That band, Nicole Jo, celebrated its 20th anniversary this year with the release of *20*, its seventh album. But the *Henry* project might be gaining more notice.

"It has opened a lot of doors for me in Germany and Switzerland," she said, adding that it also helped her land her first gig in France. Working with Swiss and Swedish personnel, she performed the *Henry* repertoire at the 2018 Jazz Sous Les Pommiers festival in Coutances.

Johäntngen also has emerged as a strong advocate for women in jazz. In 2016, she released the album *Sisters In Jazz*, which brought together female musicians from Sweden, Estonia, Poland, Japan and Norway. And this past March, she led the networking group Support of Female Improvising Artists in five days of workshops and performances in Zurich.

Johäntngen plans to continue working with her New Orleans-based collaborators. In October, she will bring Thibodeaux, Ramm and Glenn back to Germany and Switzerland for 11 dates—a precursor, perhaps, to further recording sessions for the *Henry* series.

"I hope it's a never-ending story," she said.

—Phillip Lutz

CHRIS BECK

Beauty in the Ashes

Reading the credits of Chris Beck's debut recording, *The Journey* (A.W.M.C.), an anomaly catches your eye: Eric Clapton's hit song "Tears In Heaven." While Beck grew up singing in gospel choir before switching to the drums, that doesn't readily explain the inclusion of a rock ballad on a jazz outing, performed by a young Philadelphian and his peers. Speaking with Beck at a Manhattan eatery, this bearlike, gentle giant of a man doesn't mince words.

"I lost my first-born son in 2015," Beck said. "The song on the album, 'Waiting For Aiden,' that's named for him."

Like Clapton, who lost his son at a young age, Beck puts great depth of feeling into his music.

"Aiden drowned at the babysitter's house," Beck said. "I was at a gig in Atlantic City when I got the call that my son had been in a terrible [pool] accident. By the time I got home, his body was already stiff. It only takes a second, especially with water and kids. That's why I named the album *The Journey*. It symbolizes my life, the things I've endured. I grew up seeing a lot of darkness. This is my way of releasing what I've been carrying and giving it to the world. It's about finding beauty in the ashes."

An old soul at 36, Beck plays entirely for the music. Befitting his teachers Victor Lewis and Michael Carvin (who co-produced *The Journey*), Beck rejects frivolity for the music's core values.

"The album is more about showcasing the band and my tunes," he said. "I didn't feel the need to play a bunch of stuff on the drums. If someone is interested, they can check me out live. I knew when this album process began that I didn't want to solo a lot. This is more like a

family gathering."

Beck's band includes Stacy Dillard on tenor saxophone, Terell Stafford on trumpet, Anthony Wonsey on piano and Eric Wheeler on bass. The group plays an elegant version of Wayne Shorter's "Mahjong"; Beck's "Teona" recalls Wayne Shorter's "Nefertiti." The drummer's compositions "Yeshua (His Love)," "Quintessence" and "My Inner Circle" swing with sweet soul.

After developing his skills at the Philadelphia venue Ortlieb's Jazzhaus, Beck studied at Temple University, and then matriculated to Rutgers University for graduate work. His resume includes time with Rufus Reid, Mulgrew Miller, Charles Fambrough, Nicholas Payton, Tim Warfield, Mark Whitfield, David Murray and Wycliffe Gordon. His drumming is graceful and streamlined, a trademark heard throughout *The Journey*.

"This was a special project, a very emotional project," recalled Stafford, one of Beck's best friends and a former instructor. "I can't speak to the last truly emotional recording I've had, or if I've ever had one to this extent, where the whole time I felt a spirit in the room there with us. There was a peacefulness about Chris that I'd never seen before."

Beck frequently collaborates with Cyrus Chestnut, and he'll appear on the pianist's next release. The drummer can also be heard on Oliver Lake Organ Quartet's *What I Heard* (Passin' Thru).

Beck's advice to drummers fond of rudimentary gymnastics?

"Broaden your scope," he said. "If you want to work and do this for a living, it can't just be about your chops. It's got to be about supporting, making the other person sound good."

—Ken Micallef



LUCIANA SOUZA

THE BOOK OF LONGING

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To put it simply, *The Book Of Longing* is a song cycle - a passionate melding of poetry by the likes of Leonard Cohen, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Emily Dickinson, Christina Rossetti and Luciana herself - set to beautiful string accompaniment - for which all of the music was written and arranged by Souza. But this album is anything but simple - and its treasure trove of tracks comb the depths of human emotion from start to finish.

When describing the creative process behind the making of *The Book Of Longing*, Luciana was very concise as to how she approached the recording. "It became clear to me that I wanted this recording to be about words and how they make me feel. How a set of ideas can take me places, reveal things I didn't know or even knew that I needed to know. As I started setting these poems I wanted the words to be heard, but not necessarily defined. To me, the string instruments offer the best canvas for these songs. Like the voice, the sound of plucked strings decay and brings on silence and more possibility for listening. Also, the idea of counterpoint between the voice and strings was essential to me. The music would have to be simple and unadorned. Thus began the process of editing and shedding layers of more complex harmony and melody in favor of the most basic and expressive of landscapes - it's about the words, I reminded myself - simple triads moving directly, tonal melodies, no fuss or unnecessary activity or ornaments."

Accompanying Luciana on the CD are Scott Colley on bass and Chico Pinheiro on guitar. The album was recorded as a live project with percussion overdub. Produced by Larry Klein.



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Bassist Corcoran Holt has worked with such icons as Benny Golson, Steve Turre and Jimmy Cobb.



CORCORAN HOLT

Strong Social Chemistry

The first instrument that bassist Corcoran Holt ever played was the djembe, a West African rope-bound drum. As a child playing with a Washington, D.C., dance troupe, Holt came to appreciate the spiritual connection that existed between himself and the instrument, the other players and the audience. Even though Holt's career now embraces a multitude of different performance

settings, this connection remains fundamental to his music.

"That's where I play from, regardless of who I'm playing with," he said after a recent gig at Ginny's Supper Club in Harlem. "What's important to me is giving myself and my spirit to those who are listening."

With his new album, *The Mecca* (HoltHouse Music), Holt demonstrates that a shared connec-

tion trumps musical athleticism at every turn. Each of the tunes—including original compositions such as "Zuri Nia" and "14th Street Bounce"—bears its own sonic thumbprint. All of the players on the album are long-standing musical collaborators. And the groove and the group vibe are so right that the spirit soars.

Even though *The Mecca* is Holt's first album as a leader, he's hardly a newcomer to elite musicianship. The list of jazz artists he has worked with as a sideman is long and impressive: trombonists Wycliffe Gordon and Steve Turre, saxophonists Jimmy Heath and Benny Golson, pianists John Hicks and Eric Reed, drummers Jimmy Cobb and Al Foster, and guitarists Bucky Pizzarelli and Russell Malone. On his website he refers to these (and his many other) professional associations as career blessings.

One of the biggest blessings, perhaps, was his move in 2005 to New York City from his native D.C. to work on a master's degree in jazz studies at Queens College. At the same time, a good buddy from his hometown—drummer McClenty Hunter Jr.—also was moving to New York to attend The Juilliard School. Before long, the two had distinguished themselves on New York's competitive music scene, with both eventually landing spots in saxophonist Kenny Garrett's quintet, which earned a Grammy nomination in 2013. This shared journey, from school to career success, provided the thematic inspiration for *The Mecca*.

"A lot of people think the title refers to making a [pilgrimage] to Africa or Islam. But I'm really talking about New York City, because everybody on the record ... came here for a reason," Holt explained. "Through searching and trying to grow artistically, we all met each other."

Holt's compositions—melodically infectious and harmonically sturdy—reflect a deep awareness of why people listen to music. "It comes from gospel, that understanding of how music can really touch the heart," Hunter said regarding the album's appeal. "Because of the social chemistry [among the players], it made it easier to transcend standard musical form."

In discussions about the why and how of his music, Holt pays tribute to his ancestral, musical and philosophical elders—from his great-grandfather, a bassist who lived next door to John Coltrane, to Miles Davis and Malcolm X. "I like to honor these people," he said. "They're a part of what I'm doing now."

Though Holt often is strapped for time due to frequent touring and the birth of his first child earlier this year, he still manages to visit the Greater Harlem Center for Nursing and Rehabilitation to play drums for the elderly. When he plays, some patients who were previously unresponsive begin to move along with the rhythm. Holt marvels at the transformation: "The music is bringing them life."

—Suzanne Lorge

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Bongwool Lee grew up playing classical music before switching to jazz.

COURTESY OF ARTIST

BONGWOOL LEE

Jazz Epiphany

Call it a revelatory jazz moment. As a classical music prodigy in Seoul, South Korea, pianist Bongwool Lee was listening to the radio one day when she heard the graceful but sturdy sound of Oscar Peterson.

"I'd listened to the radio every day since I was very young," said Lee, who today is based in New York. "When I heard Oscar Peterson on the radio, it changed my life immediately. I was 16 and I decided to become a jazz musician, even though I didn't know anything about chords."

Still, Lee pivoted from the classical world into the land of jazz, with one of her first album purchases being *Oscar Peterson Trio + One* with Clark Terry.

Lee's next stop was to head to New York to fully immerse herself in the jazz scene. "I had a lot of passion for the music, and New York is the best city for jazz musicians," she said shortly after the release of her all-instrumental debut, *My Singing Fingers* (Origin), with bassist Luques Curtis and drummer Kendrick Scott. "I was planning to study in New York [she earned her master's degree at the Manhattan School of Music in 2012], but more than that, I wanted to feel the city itself that is full of jazz culture. I could study and practice during the daytime, and I could go to random clubs to listen to music at night. That's how I knew I wanted Luques and Kendrick to play with me."

Her trio album teems with her keyboard velocity and captures her improvisational leaps within a program of eight originals and one standard. "I tend not to make a plan meticulously," she said. "And I try not to get used to some specific situations or circumstances. I try to take on variable situations willingly because that gives me a lot of ideas."

The same story with the same ending can be boring. When I play, I don't think about any scales or licks. I just try to sing."

Keyboardist Taylor Eigsti, who is the associate producer of the album, said that Lee's music is a remarkable balance of the accessible and unpredictable. "Bongwool is a great composer who writes heartfelt songs," he said. "She's coming out of a cool place where she's exploring her creative, adventurous concepts. It's as if when people actually hear her music, that's when it gets born, when her own sound comes through."

Eigsti met Lee five years ago, when she sought him out for piano instruction. "She used to be shy, almost too shy in the lessons," he said. "But gradually she came out of her shell to let the world see what she offered."

On her album, Lee moves through a variety of soundscapes, including the swinging and dancing dazzle of the title track, the aggressive launch into "Repeating Nightmares" with Scott's tumultuous beats, the melancholic lyricism on her "How's Up There?" (an homage to her best friend who died in an accident), her charming championing of the now-discontinued perfume ("Feminite Du Bois") and the beautiful, classical-like "Burning Incense," a solo piano piece that ends the album.

One highlight is her original "Why Not," which features the bandleader on funky, soulful Fender Rhodes. "I love jazz, but I also love hip-hop, hard rock, soul and funk," Lee said. "I'm a big fan of D'Angelo. I went to his concert a few years ago and that inspired me to write ['Why Not']. I've always dreamed of recording this kind of style, with simple instrumentation and a soul-funk groove."

—Dan Ouellette



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CHRISTIAN MCBRIDE & BOOTSY COLLINS

'ALL FOR THE

FUNK

By Andy Hermann
Photo by Paul Wellman

OF IT'

"GREATEST DAY OF MY LIFE," DECLARED A GRINNING CHRISTIAN MCBRIDE WITHOUT A HINT OF HYPERBOLE. EVEN FOR A SIX-TIME GRAMMY-WINNER WHO'S SHARED STAGES AND STUDIOS WITH DOZENS OF JAZZ, POP AND R&B LUMINARIES, FEW EXPERIENCES CAN TOP HIS FIRST MEETING WITH ONE OF HIS CHILDHOOD HEROES: FUNK LEGEND BOOTSY COLLINS.

Among bassists, there are few figures more revered than Collins, who during his brief stint with James Brown in 1969 and 1970 played on several of the Godfather of Soul's most iconic singles, including "Sex Machine," "Soul Power" and "Super Bad." From there he became part of George Clinton's Parliament-Funkadelic collective, where he continued to create some of funk's most indelible bass lines. He also perfected the persona he's still famous for today: a fun-loving, bespectacled, psychedelic spaceman, playing a star-shaped bass and

preaching the gospel of funk in a distinctively laid-back speaking style as syncopated as his bass lines.

Both as a solo artist and with his group Bootsy's New Rubber Band, Collins remains active, collaborating with numerous artists across a variety of genres. His most recent album, last year's *World Wide Funk* (Mastcot), features guest appearances by Stanley Clarke, Victor Wooten, Musiq Soulchild, former Zap Mama bassist Manou Gallo and hip-hop icon Chuck D, of Public Enemy, who all slide seamlessly into the syrupy, multi-layered grooves of Collins' music.



Collins played guitar and briefly studied clarinet before diving into the bass.

McBride—one of the most accomplished jazz bassists on the scene today—is no stranger to funk, having explored the genre on a variety of projects, most notably the Philadelphia Experiment, his 2001 collaboration with keyboardist Uri Caine and Roots drummer Ahmir “Questlove” Thompson. He also has the distinction of having been the bandleader and bassist for James Brown’s final performance at the Hollywood Bowl in 2006, just a few months before the singer’s death.

For much of 2018, McBride’s focus will be New Jawn, his quartet with Josh Evans (trumpet), Marcus Strickland (tenor saxophone, bass clarinet) and Nasheet Waits (drums). The group’s album, *Christian McBride’s New Jawn*, is slated for an Oct. 26 release on Mack Avenue. The program features adventurous original compositions by all four members. McBride also continues to host NPR’s *Jazz Night in America* and serves as artistic director of the Newport Jazz Festival.

Collins, meanwhile, is working on a Broadway show and writing a memoir tentatively titled *Funky Tales From The Crib!*

Despite having a long list of mutual collaborators besides Brown, McBride and Collins had never crossed paths before coming together for their DownBeat interview and photo shoot on a rainy Saturday afternoon in Los Angeles. Within minutes, though, they were laughing and joking like old friends, swapping stories about the tempestuous Godfather of Soul and comparing notes about instruments, techniques and influences.

Collins spoke about cutting his teeth in the jazz clubs of his native Cincinnati, often alongside his brother and fellow future Brown sideman, Phelps “Catfish” Collins (1943–2010). The tracks they recorded with Brown made a lasting impression on the Juilliard-trained McBride, especially when he later learned that his father, Philly soul bassist Lee Smith, had once shared a stage with Brown and Bootsy.

Below are edited excerpts from the conversation.

BOOTSY, YOU’VE WORKED WITH A LOT OF JAZZ PLAYERS, BUT HAVE YOU PLAYED A LOT OF JAZZ YOURSELF?

Bootsy Collins: Well, I grew up around a lot of jazz players. They were inspiring to me, and brought me in as one of the little young cats. Probably the reason I didn’t go that direction was because James Brown called us off the street. ... And as soon as we got out of there, we went straight to George Clinton. So I didn’t get a chance to learn all the jazz stuff and music theory.

WERE YOU SELF-TAUGHT?

Collins: Oh, yeah. I had no training at all, man. None. It was all for the funk of it. Whatever I heard in my head, that’s what came out.

Christian McBride: Do you remember a guitar player named Kenny Poole? Did you play with him in Cincinnati?

Collins: Yeah, [and with] Wilbert Longmire. Actually, Wilbert Longmire embraced me first. He was the Wes Montgomery [of Cincinnati]. He

had me going out on the road when I was like 14. I had to tell the club owners I’m 18. So, yeah, I’ve been surrounded by all kind of jazz cats, but like I say, once the funk master put you in his thang—
McBride: You in.

CHRISTIAN, WHEN YOU PLAYED WITH JAMES BROWN, DID YOU GO BACK AND STUDY BOOTSY’S BASS PARTS?

McBride: I was a huge fan of Bootsy’s before I knew he had played with James Brown. One of the first records I heard as a kid was *Stretchin’ Out In Bootsy’s Rubber Band* [1976]. I just thought he was this cool musician that sang these great, funny songs. I’m maybe 7 or 8 years old. Around the time I was graduating from high school ... I fell madly in love with James Brown’s music.

BUT BACK THEN, YOU DIDN’T KNOW WHO PLAYED ON HIS RECORDS.

McBride: They didn’t list the musicians on any of [James Brown’s] records. I knew just about all James Brown’s hits, from “Please, Please, Please” all the way up to “Bring It On.” When I was just starting to learn to play the electric bass, “There Was A Time” was not too hard of a bass line to learn. “Papa’s Got A Brand New Bag,” “The Payback,” “Make It Funky”—they all were bass lines I could kind of put together. [But] “Soul Power,” “Talkin’ Loud And Sayin’ Nothing,” “Sex Machine,” “Super Bad”—especially “Soul Power.” “Soul Power” blew my mind.

I remember even as a kid thinking, “Whoever’s playing bass on this is not the same

bass player on them other songs.” [laughs] Not to take nothing away from the other guys, but whoever’s playing on “Soul Power” and “Super Bad”—the sound of the bass, the technique. I was like, “Man! Who is that?” And then later on when I read that interview and saw it was Bootsie Collins, my world was blown to bits, man.

Jaco [Pastorius] is also my electric bass hero. But when I heard Jaco, it was obvious to me that he listened to Bootsie. He got all this stuff from Bootsie, James Jamerson, Larry Graham, “Duck” Dunn: All them guys made Jaco. He was a force of nature, but he was inspired by somebody. And listening to “Soul Power,” I was just like, “Look, I know some of y’all think Jaco’s bad, but y’all need

cross between an upright and an electric.

James hated it. He didn’t hate the sound of it; he hated the look on the stage. He said, “Son, you don’t ever get up on my stage with that kind of bass. What kind of bass you want, son?” And I had been dreaming of this Fender Jazz bass.

McBride: There you go.

Collins: So, I asked Mr. Brown: “I’d like to have a Fender Jazz bass.” “You got it, son. You just gotta get rid of that green thang. Never come back up here on my stage—on my stage!”

CHRISTIAN, DO YOU HAVE ANY JAMES BROWN STORIES FROM YOUR TIME WITH HIM?

McBride: The title track of my first album, *Gettin’*

P-Funk. It’s just a big band with electric instruments, instead of acoustic instruments. And in some cases, even still acoustic instruments.

I think of Horace Silver as funky. I think of Cannonball Adderley as funky. Ramsey Lewis, Les McCann, Stanley Turrentine, Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers: All that stuff has got a high cholesterol content. And I find that jazz, a lot of it—at least a lot of it that gets critical acclaim—is what I like to call gluten-free jazz. You know, the healthy lifestyle has gone a little too far when it comes to the music. I need some Crisco in my jazz, you know? Some fatback.

BOOTSIE, ON YOUR NEW ALBUM, YOU BRING SOME JAZZ GUYS INTO THE MIX: VICTOR WOOTEN, STANLEY CLARKE. BUT THERE ARE ALSO SOME BASSISTS ON THERE WHO ARE LESS FAMOUS: MANOU GALLO AND ALISSIA BENVENISTE.

Collins: They’re kind of the new generation of bassists. They’re coming up, and I saw them on the horizon. And they’re female, so it was like, “Wow.” ‘Cause when we were coming up, you didn’t have a lot of females doing that kind of stuff.

McBride: Yeah. They’re killing it.

Collins: Killing it. So, we became friends. Alissia, she lives in New York. And she did the Berklee thing, so she’s very educated, and she got that thang. Whatever it is, she got it. So, we hooked up and started doing some tracks, and it was like, “Yeah, I need to put this on the record.” ... And then, Manou, she’s from West Africa. ... And she plays everything.

CHRISTIAN, LET’S TALK ABOUT SOME OF THE YOUNG BASS PLAYERS YOU’VE WORKED WITH OR MENTORED.

McBride: Sure. Joe Sanders, Ben Williams, Matt Brewer, Russell Hall. All these young bass players out there killin’ it. I have not had a chance to spend a lot of time with Linda Oh yet, but Linda Oh is killin’ it. Esperanza goes without saying. She’s her own universe at this point.

THUNDERCAT IS PROBABLY ANOTHER ONE.

McBride: Yeah, the first time I met Thundercat—I knew his brother, [drummer] Ronald [Bruner Jr.] first, ‘cause we worked together with George Duke. He said, “Man, you gotta meet my brother, Stephen.” He didn’t say, “You gotta meet my bass-playing brother, Stephen.”

SO, YOU MET HIM WHEN HE WAS REALLY YOUNG.

McBride: Yeah, a teenager, probably. He was a really super-nice dude. And then the second time I saw him, he says, “Hey, Christian, what’s happening?” I was looking at him [trying to remember him]. He says, “Stephen. Some call me Thundercat now.” I was like, “Yo, what’s up man?” That’s a bad dude, man. Super bad. And there’s another cat out here: Hadrien Feraud. First time I heard him play, I almost got sick.

Collins: It’s a brand new day. When we was starting out, bass was like the bottom of the totem

‘I HAD NO TRAINING AT ALL, MAN. NONE. WHATEVER I HEARD IN MY HEAD, THAT’S WHAT CAME OUT.’ -BOOTSIE COLLINS

to get inside ‘Soul Power.’ ‘Cause if you take the bass line of “Soul Power” up an octave, it almost sounds like a rhythm guitar part.

WOULD YOU AGREE WITH THAT, BOOTSIE?

Collins: I never thought of that.

McBride: ‘Cause you played guitar first.

Collins: Yeah, I played guitar. That totally makes sense.

YOUR BROTHER PLAYED GUITAR, TOO. IS THAT WHY YOU SWITCHED TO BASS?

Collins: Yeah, I wanted to play with my brother. One night his bass player wasn’t gonna show up. And I’d been begging him, “Let me play.” But you know, older brothers don’t want the responsibility of a young long-haired sucker hanging around.

So that night came that the bass player didn’t show, and he had to take me. And we was playing the show and my brother starts seeing how the people—although I [only] knew about three or four songs—just started gravitating toward me.

DID YOU CONNECT WITH THE BASS RIGHT AWAY?

Collins: Well, I asked my brother to get me four bass strings. Because I was thankful to get the \$29 guitar, I knew I couldn’t ask [my mother]: “I switched my mind—I wanna play bass.” So, I asked my brother for four bass strings, and I took the edge off the top of the strings and put them in the little guitar pegs. And that bass was the bomb. It was short. Short neck. It was greenish-blue and everybody hated [that color], which made me love it that much more. But the sound of it was a

To It, was inspired by “Get It Together.” I basically took the same bass line and rhythm and wrote a melody on top of it. So, when James Brown heard it the first time, he was like, “Yeah, son, that’s mean. You got a thing happening on there.” And then about a year later, I just caught him in a not-so-good mood. [imitates Brown] “That song ain’t nothin’. I’m-a sue you.” [laughs]

Collins: Oh, he could turn on you like that.

McBride: And when we did the Hollywood Bowl, right before he passed, it was such a monumental night. He’d done this record called *Soul On Top* with Louie Bellson’s big band. Oliver Nelson did all the arranging. I wanted to play that album live with the big band. So, I asked Mr. Brown if he would be into doing it.

When we were rehearsing, and he’s singing with the big band, we were doing “Kansas City”—which actually is not on *Soul On Top* ... And after we stopped, he got real reflective. He says, “Son, I wanna thank you for putting me back in my original bag.” I said, “Really?” He says, “You know, I wanted to be a jazz singer first. But then I got side-tracked by the funk.”

ON YOUR MOST RECENT ALBUM, *BRINGIN’ IT*, THERE’S A PRETTY FUNKY BASS LINE ON A BIG BAND ARRANGEMENT OF “GETTIN’ TO IT.” CAN YOU TALK ABOUT MIXING BIG BAND MUSIC WITH FUNK?

McBride: Well, I never thought that was a stretch at all. All great funk records have great horn sections. You think about Ray Charles, James Brown, all those Motown records—and then later on with Earth, Wind & Fire and Kool & the Gang and



'A lot of jazz that gets critical acclaim is what I call gluten-free jazz.'

—Christian McBride

pole. ... And now bass has become so prominent. If you don't have a great bass player, it's like you ain't even in the—

McBride: You're one of the main people we can thank for that. Seriously. You and Larry Graham. Especially the electric bass.

Collins: Let me just say one thing: After meeting this mug right here [*points to McBride*], we gotta do something. Once we got together today, he feels to me so much like Fred Wesley. I get the same exact vibe from Christian. And you know, I don't just go out and meet somebody and get that.

McBride: That's beyond touching. I was telling Bootsie, I almost didn't play the acoustic bass because I picked the trombone. I was in middle school and I had to pick an instrument to play in the school orchestra, and I picked the trombone, because I wanted to be Fred Wesley. I didn't want to play the acoustic bass at first. So, I was gonna play electric bass and trombone. But I had no skills on trombone.

Collins: He said the trombone was playing *him*.

McBride: Oh, man. I was turning blue trying to get some sound out that thing.

Collins: When I was in the sixth grade, getting

ready to go to the seventh, I was trying to make my mind up on what instrument I'm gonna play. The guy upstairs was playing clarinet. I would hear him and I was like, "Well, maybe I should play clarinet." Because I got somebody that possibly could teach me right upstairs.

So, I kinda chose clarinet. And once I got in there, the teacher suggested, "Man, you should play upright bass." And I said, "OK, let me try it out." And then I started trying to—[*mimes playing upright strings*] "Nah, I don't think so." I felt the weight and I felt how you have to pull the strings. It was like, "Man, this boy is playing me."

DID YOU PICK UP THE SLAP BASS STYLE FROM LISTENING TO LARRY GRAHAM ON SLY & THE FAMILY STONE RECORDS?

Collins: Well, not so much the records. It was when I got a chance to go to his house, [when] we were touring as Funkadelic. 'Cause I didn't know what that was on the records. We didn't get a chance to go to the shows and none of that. But I knew that sound was different. And you gotta understand, the finger playing on the electric bass—that was new. That was like the thing to do.

I thought I was going really good with the finger thing and everything was moving in that direction, until Larry pops on the scene.

McBride: I was telling Bootsie that my dad played with Brenda & The Tabulations. He played with The Delfonics, Blue Magic, Billy Paul, Major Harris—all the Philly soul groups. My dad remembers being on a triple bill—he was playing with Brenda & The Tabulations, and James Brown was the headliner. And my dad told me, "Man, I remember James Brown had this tall bass player. We were like, 'Who is that? That dude is bad!'"

THAT'S AMAZING—ESPECIALLY BECAUSE BOOTSY DIDN'T PLAY WITH JAMES FOR THAT LONG, RIGHT?

Collins: About a year on the road. But in Cincinnati, we started recording earlier. This was like, 1969.

McBride: But y'all were prolific.

Collins: Well, actually, 1968. Because we went out with Hank Ballard. He was the first one we went out on the road with—which was James Brown Productions. And then the next year, with Marva Whitney—which was [also] James Brown Productions.

WAS THE BAND ALREADY CALLED THE JB'S?

Collins: Definitely not. He called us The Blackenizers.

McBride: Right. That was a [1969] Hank Ballard tune: "Blackenized."

Collins: So, we got all caught up in the middle of everything: [*imitates Brown*] "Listen boys: Y'all the baddest band in the world. The only thang, you just can't play." And when he would say that—it would hurt you. 'Cause all you wanted to do was please him. And, man, every time we'd come offstage, he had his whole rap: "Listen, y'all didn't do it, man. Y'all didn't kill me. You wasn't on the 1. Y'all gotta practice, man."

McBride: Oh, that must've drove you crazy.

Collins: It did at first, until he slipped up on this one thing. One night he called us in and we knew that we didn't kill. We knew that we had a bad night: [*imitates Brown*] "C'mon back to the dressing room. I got something to tell you, fellas!" He had a whole new energy. We come back there: "Ah! Man, y'all killed me! Killed me dead!" And we're like—

McBride: [*laughs*] What?!

Collins: You know, it's like, "This motherf---, um, is crazy." 'Cause we knew we didn't kill him. When we killed him for real, his knees was bleeding, he was sweating profusely. And those were the nights he would tell us: "Baddest band in the world! You just can't play." In the long run, it only made us practice that much harder. What he was doing to us, telling us, "Guys, y'all need to hook it up, 'cause y'all ain't got it." 'Cause when you start thinking you got it—

McBride: That's when you start going downhill.

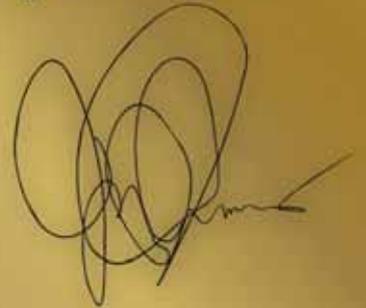
Collins: So he was building us [up]. Even though it felt negative, it was a good thing for us. **DB**

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ART

By Josef Woodard
Photo by Michael Jackson

EMERGES

Wayne Shorter was never one to abide by a strict plan—even his own. That goes for his musical endeavors, interviews and holistic views of art and life.

There he was on a November evening in 2016, in Wrocław, Poland, at a press conference before playing his chamber-jazz piece *The Unfolding* at the Jazztopad festival, one of the work's commissioning bodies. In lieu of the typical Q&A format, Shorter launched into a 15-minute tone poem/essay, laced with personal philosophies.

"This music is just a drop in the ocean of life," he said, later referring to his visit with astrophysicists at Stanford, a strong influence on *The Unfolding* (as in the "unfolding multiverse," in contradiction of the Big Bang theory). He surmised that "music is a vehicle to discover what it means to become more human, in eternity."

He ended his talk shortly before going on stage with an orchestra and band, and dazzling the crowd, with one of his operative adages: "Never give up."

At age 84, Shorter is living up to that credo. His ambitious new album, *Emanon*, is a three-disc set recorded with both the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra and his long-standing quartet. It is packaged with a graphic novel, which Shorter helped create with writer Monica Sly and comic book artist Randy DuBurke. (The album title is the phrase "No Name" spelled backwards.) In addition to this auspicious project, Shorter is working on his first opera, in collaboration with musical comrade and kindred spirit Esperanza Spalding. He's also the subject of an eagerly anticipated documentary, fittingly titled *Zero Gravity*.

Shorter long has been one of jazz's paradoxical superheroes, an important composer and distinctive improviser who sometimes seems to be hiding in plain sight. His quixotic and non-linear approach to music (and communication) has made him a unlikely candidate for a high-profile spotlight. Yet he has been in lofty situations for decades, as a critical player and writer in Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers going back to the '50s, in the great Miles Davis Quintet of the 1960s, and as co-founder and co-captain (with Joe Zawinul) of Weather Report in 1970.

Shorter's solo career has been a circuitous and modular adventure, from the classic early Blue Note albums to the brilliant Brazilian project *Native Dancer* (with Milton Nascimento), to masterful electro-acoustic album projects such as *Atlantis* and *High Life*. In this millennium, he has steered his quartet with pianist Danilo Pérez, bassist John Patitucci and drummer Brian Blade.

"There are many moments that exemplified what we called 'Zero Gravity,' a musical language created by this quartet that is based in an experience of freedom," Pérez said. "We do not hang on any preconceived musical idea to start playing, but explore the process of composing music instantly as a group, trusting our individual and communal relationship. Many times, we go on naked, without rehearsing. I call this 'comprovising.'"



Danilo Pérez (left), Wayne Shorter, John Patitucci and Brian Blade perform on the saxophone icon's new album, *Emanon*.

The quartet has recorded, if sparsely, for Verve Records and, starting with 2013's *Without A Net*, for the Blue Note label. Blue Note President Don Was, who signed Shorter, was essential in making the complex *Emanon* a reality, despite its potentially limited commercial appeal.

Was acknowledged that he, Shorter and the creative team “knew that something was happening that hadn't been done before, which is really an extension of what I think is at the core of jazz, anyway. The whole idea behind improvisation is to do anything but what you've done before. There's a real excitement when you do that, when you feel like you're doing something that hasn't been done before.”

In recent years, Shorter has been maneuvering ever deeper into orchestra work—favoring what he called “sagas,” rather than “tunes.” The “sagas,” so far, include 2016's *The Unfolding*, and the even more ambitious 2013 work *Gaia*, featuring the Los Angeles Philharmonic, his quartet and Spalding as miracle-working vocalist.

DownBeat caught up with Shorter at his Hollywood Hills abode above Sunset Boulevard. He wore a T-shirt with an image of Albert Einstein swirling in psychedelic regalia, and a baseball cap a friend had made for him. It said: “Wayne Shorter, Saxophone Hero” and “Top Human Being.”

On this early summer morning, Shorter was recovering from a bout of pneumonia, but still eager to talk, in his inimitable way. He spoke of his current projects and what he and his wife, Carolina, referred to as a new flowering of creative energy, following his illness.

“In Buddhism,” said Shorter, who has practiced Nichiren Buddhism for 40-plus years, “we call it Sancho Shima—three demons and four devils. They will appear when you seem to be getting to some creative, original something, thwarting your mission. The Sancho Shima, or

‘resistance,’ will surely arise. That's when a lot of people give up. In some of the sutras, they say, ‘But remember, an airplane cannot take off without resistance.’”

Below are edited excerpts from the cosmic conversation.

Was there a grand design at the outset of *Emanon*, or did the idea grow and take on a life of its own?

Actually, it emerged rather than started. I like to think about, “There's no such thing as a beginning or an end.” It emerges.

We got together with the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. We actually rehearsed with them and played at Carnegie Hall. Then we played in the studio the next two or three days to record what we did. After we did that recording, [the quartet was] going to London, anyway. With all of this talking with Don Was, it just emerged. There was no grand, strategic plan or anything like that. It was the opposite.

Don asked me about [Blue Note founder] Alfred Lion and [label partner] Frank Wolff—“What were they like?” I would tell him as much as I could. He said something about, “I don't want to stray away from that vision.”

When Frank Wolff had pictures taken in the studio all the time, all the artist knew that you'd have a first take, second takes. Maybe on the fourth take, when Frank Wolff was taking pictures and he started dancing, that was the take. He knew. Alfred Lion was crazy about the bebop years and all that. They both came over from Germany, escaped Hitler. That kind of spirit is something Don Was didn't want to go away. This kind of record is another kind of spearhead for what Frank Wolff and Alfred Lion, and people in Japan, say about jazz and bebop. They talk about the “authenticity” of it. There is authenticity, and then there is classical. I know, on the totem pole, jazz and classical are on a low rung. It's a kind of

a salute to everybody—not to say that [it's about] jazz more than the rest.

Regardless of how people talk about separating jazz and classical, let's say what this really is. It's without a name. It goes along with Stephen Hawking, when he was dealing with the question, “Which came first, the chicken or the egg?” He said [imitating Hawking's voice], “Neither, it was simultaneously.” There's no such thing as a beginning. He also said, “There's no such thing as nothing.”

That's what this album is. I'm surprised the front-office guys went along with it. But they don't want to lose Don. He put this thing on the line. He went to them several times. He has his name on it.

The [live quartet recordings] we did in London, at the Barbican, that's like fallout from the large ensemble stuff. Or it's the reverse—“fall in.” They're both “fallout” from each other.

How did the graphic novel become part of the project?

It was Don Was' idea. He said, “Why don't we do a graphic novel?” It's about the multiverses. The main thing in that novel is that the greatest awakening that exists in humanity is within humanity itself.

I use the name “No Name.” Elizabeth Kolbert, who won a Pulitzer Prize, wrote the [2014] book called *The Sixth Extinction*, and she says, on the first page: “We get in trouble when we start naming things.”

The album segues from the scored Orpheus version of “The Three Marias” into the quartet's extended version of that same tune, a juxtaposition we also hear with “Lotus” and “Prometheus Unbound.” Was the contrast something that you wanted to impart?

Yeah, it represents to me the idea that there's no such thing as “finished.” Something evolving may be occurring. But something more than evolving or evolution is at work. And that's “no name.” People name something, and they figure the work is done [slaps his hands]. Or you can blame with a name, or brand stuff, like Trump does.

You can try to separate all you want, but connection and the kinsmanship among people and things and sound, all the senses, it's like a relative mission that seems to have no name, too. The mission is hidden in the attempt to separate. But the mission is not separate. The mission goes on. There's a whole thing about this album [that says], “Never give up.”

Also, the closest thing that comes to creation itself is the attempt to make something original that *inspires* creation. You can't have one without the other. It's intertwined.

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What a great team, with Esperanza Spalding. The director [Penny Woolcock] directed *Doctor Atomic*. Opera Philadelphia is the home base. There's one person who said, "Count me in" for set design—that's [architect] Frank Gehry. Esperanza went to his house. He called her to come to his house one time. She came back and said, "You know what we were doing? We were jamming." She was playing bass and singing while he sketched.

Spalding was quite amazing on your piece *Gaia*. You two are kindred spirits, it seems.

Esperanza is writing the story, the libretto and all that, and she's gonna be in it.

The opera's called *Iphigenia*. She was the daughter of Agamemnon. They say it's the only tragedy from that time that did not end in a tragedy.

Miles called me, before he died. Most of the time, he would say, "When you work with classical musicians, the hardest thing is to get them to swing." Classical musicians know what swing is. You alter [the rhythm]. But Miles never said, "They don't swing" to me. But he called me and said, "Wayne, I want you write something for me, with strings and horns. When you get to the strings, make sure you put a window in there, so I can get out of there."

Did you write that piece?

I was going to work on it, but then they had the whole thing in Montreux, with all the guys. [Davis performed Gil Evans-era material at the 1991 Montreux Jazz Festival, shortly before

his death.] He wanted to do something with *Turandot* and a couple of other things.

What do you think of the new documentary, *Zero Gravity*? Does it give you a picture of who Wayne Shorter is and was? Or is it a portrait in flux?

I think it's a vehicle that somebody might want to jump onto, or wish they had. Or they might see something in themselves that they disregarded and might want to take up the fight. It could be like a movie of their own lives where they are the director, producer and actor of the destiny of their lives.

It's almost like the black ladies who were working at NASA [portrayed in the film *Hidden Figures*]. Nobody knew about that. A lot of people didn't know that when the government was after [boxer] Joe Louis, [Frank] Sinatra went to Joe Louis and gave him a blank check, said, "Fill in what you want."

Did you have a strong concept of how you wanted the quartet to sound from the beginning, or has it been a work in evolutionary progress?

Yeah, it's another thing like, 'Let's see where it's going.' We've never rehearsed. No rehearsal.

That's your secret?

Most people, when they're playing together, have their time to solo, solo, solo. If somebody comes in while you're doing your solo, it's thought of as an interruption. There have been many fights—I don't know about fist fights, but fights backstage—with people saying, "What were you doing? You cut me off..." or stuff like that. Or it's held within, not saying anything but holding this

anger or something like that, because when they were doing something, someone else was doing something, and they didn't get a chance to speak with their instrument.

When we think of an interruption, it's not an interruption: It's an opportunity.

There is an element of "free-jazz" thinking at work in this band. Has the search for freedom been a constant throughout your musical life?

Yeah. A lot of the titles of things we play are like "Zero Gravity," but it's "Zero Gravity 1," "Zero Gravity 2." ... We listen to the pieces and say, "There it is—right there."

That's why the documentary is called *Zero Gravity*. It just means not being attached to anything too long that holds you hostage to yourself. I still say, "Take along stuff you can use from the past, a flashlight to shine into the darkness of the unknown."

Your recent work seems like a "thinking big" period, with *Gaia*, *The Unfolding*, this project and the opera. Was there something that triggered this more expansive energy for you?

Actually, when I was 18 or 19, I started working on an opera. I abandoned it, because I went to finish school and was in the Army. But this opera was called *The Singing Lesson*. It's about a family down in Greenwich Village, and there's a brother hanging out with a motorcycle gang and stuff like that. When I stopped working on it, here comes *West Side Story*, with gangs.

I still have the pages and I look at it sometimes. But I was thinking in that way when I was 18 or 19.

But you never had the opportunity back then?

The people who wanted to get in there with it ... there were no sponsors or nothing like that. When I first heard this bebop, I knew—in Newark, New Jersey, at least—that this was going to be a long trip, a *looong* trip. People were still listening to Bobby "Blue" Bland, Big Ivy Joe Turner, my man the "Blueberry Hill" guy [Fats Domino] and Elvis.

You were a cartoonist as a kid. Does *Emanon* harken back to that experience for you?

Yeah, I created a comic book, science fiction. It was called "Other Worlds." I was 14 or 15, 1949. Some people see it and say, "Hey, you should put this out there." We'll see. Neil deGrasse Tyson came here, when Herbie and I were here. It's in the documentary. He saw the book and said, "Hey, you've got a spacecraft commandeered by a woman. How old were you in 1949?"

The superhero *Emanon* is called a "rogue philosopher." That would seem an apt description of you. You're a philosopher working outside the norm.

Yeah, and it's a philosophy with no name, too.

DB



Emanon reflects the many dimensions of Shorter.

The Making of *Emanon*

Wayne Shorter's *Emanon* is one of the more innovative releases of 2018, and it started with alchemy between the artist and a record company executive.

Blue Note President Don Was, who signed (technically, re-signed) Shorter to the label for which the saxophonist recorded classic '60s albums, is also an abiding fan. "To say that he's a treasure is such an understatement," Was said. "It's an incredible opportunity to be able to actually sit and talk with a guy who can tell you about sessions for Blue Note with Art Blakey, and yet he's still doing vital new music that doesn't sound like anything anybody else is doing."

The seeds of *Emanon* were planted with Shorter's desire to document his orchestral compositions. Was

remembered seeing Shorter's teenaged sci-fi comic book "Other Worlds." Recognizing Shorter's fascination with visual culture, he posed the idea of including a graphic novel with the album package. Impressed with Randy DuBurke's graphic novel adaptation of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Was commented, "I just knew he would connect with Wayne." After meeting in Europe two years ago, "They concocted this thing. Then, it just seemed like, 'All right, let's also do quartet versions of the same music.' It was just to try to do something special and different, that reflected the dimensions of Wayne, and I think we got that."

Shorter's longtime pianist/bandmate Danilo Pérez fondly remembers the London dates, the source of the album's band recordings. "We were happy to be back after a break we had," Pérez recalled. "The atmosphere was fantastic, and we were all really excited to play in London once again."

As for Shorter's Blue Note boss and future album options, Was insists that the saxophonist has complete artistic freedom: "Wayne Shorter has license to do whatever he wants to do. Any idea he has, we'll help him realize it and get it out there. That's his contract. [It's] just a paragraph: 'Do whatever you want.'" —Josef Woodard

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EXPERIENCING THE CATHARSIS

BY SEAN J. O'CONNELL | PHOTO BY YANN ORHAN

The small Southern California town of Solana Beach is nestled between the flip-flop affluence of Carlsbad and the billionaire beach sands of La Jolla. On Memorial Day, the beach was populated by wetsuited surfers and a few obstinate tourists hell-bent on a dip. One might assume that little would be happening in this sleepy town on a Monday night, but there was a capacity crowd inside the sprawling Quonset hut-turned-rock club the Belly Up Tavern. Singer-songwriter **MADELEINE PEYROUX** had no trouble selling out the house.

Many in the crowd huddled up to the stage, while various tiers of seated patrons watched in one of the best clubs situated between San Diego and Los Angeles. Peyroux sat center stage with an acoustic guitar, backed by her quartet and armed with a skeptical, inquisitive vibe—quietly observing the room, assessing the crowd for hopeless romantics and inebriated misanthropes.

She opened her set with a wry “Way Down Yonder In New Orleans,” warming up the band with a gentle tempo and a welcoming demeanor. Not long after—to the audible surprise of several attendees—she played the first track from her million-selling 2004 album *Careless Love*: Leonard Cohen’s “Dance Me To The End Of Love.” In her hands, the song tiptoed through an imaginary velvet-lined cabaret half a world away, slow and strolling with a pluckish four-to-the-bar swing that got the crowd swaying. In her voice, Cohen’s macabre standard gets a vintage varnish. A half an hour into the set, she made an announcement that the band was going to play some tunes from her forthcoming album, *Anthem* (UMG). There were a few cheers in the crowd and Peyroux, 44, looked

up: “The rest of y’all get a beer or something.”

Peyroux’s debut, *Dreamland*, was released half her life ago, a part of Atlantic Records’ mid-’90s push back to the forefront of the jazz market that included such gems as Cyrus Chestnut’s *Revelation*, Carl Allen’s *The Pursuer* and Henry Butler’s *For All Seasons*.

“My connection at Atlantic was through Yves Beauvais,” Peyroux said while sipping a cappuccino a few hours before her set at Belly-Up. “He was an anomaly. He had come up with reissues of old Atlantic records on CD. He had made them a whole lot of money and he was signing people he loved.”

The hallmarks of Peyroux’s sound are present on that first album. She is surrounded by top-notch jazz musicians: Chestnut on piano, violinist Regina Carter, guitarist Marc Ribot, drummer Kenny Wollesen, trumpeter Marcus Printup and saxophonist James Carter. The ensemble summons up a folksy acoustic swing over a choice selection of simmering standards—from Edith Piaf to Patsy Cline.

Peyroux offered a weary vibrato, which, at the time, drew widespread comparisons to Billie Holiday (some of which were favorable, others,



**MADELEINE
PEYROUX**



For *Anthem*, Peyroux reunites with producer Larry Klein, who also worked on *Careless Love*.

not so much). The buzz surrounding her arrival included commentary on the juxtaposition between her appearance and her sound. After all, she was a white woman in her early 20s who sounded as though she had lived a life that had left her as fragile as Lady Day. But no one truly knows what another heart has endured. Peyroux's childhood wasn't without its own trials and tribulations.

Born in Athens, Georgia, Peyroux's family bounced around to Hollywood and Brooklyn before her parents divorced. Her father was a restless artist who stayed in New York. Looking for a fresh start, her mother moved the family to Paris. At age 12, Peyroux was well on her way to becoming her mother's worst nightmare. She dropped out of school and began busking, singing jazz standards with the resigned maturity of a woman three times her age in tourist traps and street corners. Ten years later, she was back in New York making waves as an upcoming jazz vocalist. A second album was recorded for Atlantic Records but priorities changed at

the label and the album was shelved. Peyroux's music would not fully return to the airwaves until she was 30. "It was kind of a big deal for some people and I got burnt out by the whole thing," she said with a note of acceptance.

In 2004, at a time when many people were declaring the end of physical media, *Careless Love* (Rounder) went Gold in the United States, United Kingdom and France. In the intervening years, Peyroux updated her songbook by half a century and found her audience in wistful optimists and old souls. It was basically the same voice from *Dreamland*, but the jazz world was too small to contain her.

Her take on Elliott Smith's "Between The Bars" struck an emotional chord less than a year after the singer's suicide. David Piltch's upright bass repeats a simple phrase amid a hazy sonic cloud, courtesy of producer Larry Klein. Peyroux slows the tempo, awash in brushes and a humming Mellotron. Larry Goldings' piano searches the clouds for peace. It was an aching-ly cathartic rendition that somehow managed

to make Smith's music and passing even more somber.

Elsewhere on the album, Bob Dylan's "You're Gonna Make Me Lonesome When You Go" was propelled by Jay Bellerose's brushes and Golding's distant B-3, while the title track was an upbeat shuffle of coffeehouse cotton candy. Such performances—including a reading of Cohen's "Dance Me To The End Of Love"—solidified her reputation as a graceful, intriguing interpreter of popular song. But in the years since then, Peyroux has focused more on her own compositions.

"The studio has to be a nurturing place for creation. It has to be sincere. You can hear everything," Peyroux said. "But I don't know if there is an ideal way to make a record. One producer told me, if you get the food orders right, the rest will be fine."

Sure the food is important, but so is the company. Klein was essential to Peyroux's global success with *Careless Love*. The bassist/producer is revered among industry insiders, particularly jazz and folk musicians. His work with Joni Mitchell, Lizz Wright, Luciana Souza and Tracy Chapman illustrates a crafty ability to balance serious art and commercial appeal.

Peyroux reunited with Klein for *Anthem*, paper and pen in hand. The album, out Aug. 31, contains 10 original songs and two covers.

"I always wanted to write," she said. "But I'm not very good at it. I just keep trying. The co-writing thing is the best stuff I've been involved with, in terms of writing. There are a lot of people involved in making the songs good." With help from songwriters like keyboardist Patrick Warren, guitarist David Baerwald and drummer Brian MacLeod, the program for *Anthem* was composed with no particular deadline and with the songwriters also serving as Peyroux's backing band.

The material evolved through a steady, organic process: "We'd work. Go off on tour. Write some more songs. Go back on tour. That continued for a year—getting together three or four times. Then I called Larry and said, 'I love these songs. Let's record them.'"

Throughout *Anthem*, Peyroux shares stories of love and loss far more personal than what many of her fans have heard before. Album opener "On My Own" glides in on trombonist Andy Martin's regal pronouncement, followed by drummer MacLeod's gentle march. Harmonica master Grégoire Maret helps the band groove on "Party Time," a reflection on chemicals and chaos with a sly '80s r&b coo brought to life by a bevy of soulful background singers.

Peyroux has aged into her voice, shedding some of youth's preciousness and adding a more convincing emotional weight. Nowadays, she conveys a sense of self that is confident, charming and thoroughly captivating. A dry sense of

humor is part of her stage persona, and it's displayed in the music video for "On My Own." Despite that levity, there's tremendous depth to the album, thanks to a willingness to explore tragedy and pain.

The death of poet John Ashbery last September prompted Peyroux and Baerwald to reflect on the recent wave of artists who have passed on: David Bowie (1947–2016), Prince (1958–2016) and of course, Cohen (1934–2016). The result is "All My Heroes," one of the most arresting songs in Peyroux's catalog.

"All my heroes were failures in their eyes," she sings. "Losers, drunkards, fallen saints and suicides." Here Peyroux sounds unlike anyone else; she owns her voice with a knowing reflec-

spent his final years as the suave elder statesman of cool.

"Larry and I had been talking politics, and he said to check out 'Anthem.' I started to get obsessed with it. A couple days later, someone else mentioned that they couldn't get that song out of their head, too. I was inhabiting it for months. I did not [initially] intend for it to be the title. But it is."

The band maintains a gentle simmer with wisps of B-3 riding over the triumphant lyrics: "Ring the bells that still can ring/ Forget your perfect offering/ There is a crack in everything/ That's how the light gets in." Peyroux's phrasing is delicate but not weak, her voice just above a whisper and augmented by a fluttering duduk

'What I'm searching for in singing is the form of communication that doesn't come through language.'

tion as Dean Parks' pedal steel guitar slides confidently into the ether. The narrator wrestles directly with grief and comes out the other side stronger and more vibrant. An acceptance seems to wash over the entire band. In the album's liner notes, Peyroux writes: "Every hero is flawed. So how did we idolize them in the first place? We focused on what they stood for and not on where they fell short. We still need our heroes, even after they are gone. Let us mourn as we must, and remember them forever."

"One of my strengths is that I won't let go," Peyroux said. "The song is not done until it is done. There are some people—especially people who write songs professionally—that are always going to write another song. So that song is done. My thing is: 'No, it's not done until it's perfect.' On this album, we belabored those things more than we might have usually."

The effort paid off. The album is a finely polished production, each performance in crisp servitude to the song. Occasional sonic curveballs, such as sound effects, add a playfulness that keeps listeners on their toes.

The album's title track is an interpretation of Cohen's "Anthem," a song he once claimed took him 10 years to compose, and which he famously recorded on his 1992 album *The Future*. Peyroux said she received Cohen's blessing by way of his daughter Lorca. Peyroux eventually met Cohen in Los Angeles, where he

played by Jivan Gasparyan.

But Peyroux's greatest triumph of emotional investment comes on "Lullaby," a somber meditation on the fearlessness and risks taken by refugees around the world. "A lot of people are suffering," Peyroux said. "This thing of 'Don't talk about politics'? That seems like it's out the window. Maybe that's because I'm getting older and mature enough ... I recognize these universal human experiences."

In Guillermo del Toro's Oscar-winning film *The Shape of Water*—a tale of forbidden aquatic romance—Peyroux supplies the soundtrack to the couple's watery consummation with a cover of Serge Gainsbourg's "La Javanaise." The Technicolor mystique is awash in grand gestures and precious imagery, and Peyroux injects a Parisian air to the Baltimore-based fantasy. She tipped her cap to the film at the Belly-Up, delivering "La Javanaise" with delicate accompaniment by Andy Ezrin.

"People in this country love when I sing in French, but I know most people don't understand what I'm saying. So, I know there's something to that," Peyroux said. "I've been doing 'La Javanaise' a lot on this tour. Normally, I wouldn't pull that out in the States. It's a wordy song in French, and I just assume people aren't really going to get the story. And I think the story is so important. But I'm learning that I'm probably wrong about that. Sometimes the

story is important, but how it gets told doesn't necessarily have to be on the money. They can just dream, 'What is she talking about?'"

Anthem concludes with "Liberté," a tune in which Peyroux and Klein rework lines from Paul Éluard's popular French poem. Elsewhere on the album, Peyroux sings in Spanish—knowing full well, again, that some of her fans won't understand the literal meaning of the lyrics.

"I want people to know what I'm saying, but I'll admit my own pleasure comes from not having to focus on that aspect of it," she explained. "What I'm searching for in singing is the form of communication that doesn't come through language. There is something that can't be said with lyrics. It is the fusion of the melody and the harmony and the everything that create this meaning that can't really exist separately. So, singing in another language acknowledges that in a way—especially if the audience doesn't know what [the song is] about or speak the language."

The Solana Beach concert was the culmination of a month-long U.S. trek that concluded with Peyroux and her band traveling about 5,000 miles in six nights. After a week off, she flew to Australia. To promote the new record, she will hit about 25 U.S. cities and nine European countries over the course of a couple months. It's a lifestyle to which she has become accustomed: "Even when I was playing on the street, you go where you get paid."

Today, Peyroux seems confident and in control, an unflappable presence who has weathered music industry machinations and who now benefits from hard-earned wisdom. "Over the last six or seven years, I started to understand the best way to do this touring thing is to make it a show rather than a night of random music. I've got more of a construction, more of an idea. It's more of a show than it used to be—at least by jazz standards."

One of her previous jaunts—a tour with strings—forced Peyroux to find those spots that an improvising musician can exploit. "I had to have a curated set list and stick to it and try to do the same thing as much as possible, yet still find some kind of newness—the illusion of the first time, to inhabit the spirit of the song every night, regardless of the tedium of the non-variables."

Onstage, Peyroux reveals just enough of her personality to retain an aura of mystery.

"Don't fully inhabit the character," she said. "[Otherwise], I think you'll lose the point of doing what you do. My theory was that your job is to be available to be the character, but you're not doing it for yourself. You're doing it for the people experiencing the catharsis of the story. If it turns into just the characters, instead of the story, then it is selfish. You have to be unselfish to do it right, to give something back." **DB**



‘If you can find that thread—
the lineage that connects
everything—and hold on to it,
then you can manipulate it.’

— *Sullivan Fortner*

'BAPTIZED IN JAZZ'

BY TED PANKEN | PHOTO BY MARK SHELDON

The cover shot of **SULLIVAN FORTNER's** *Moments Preserved* (Impulse!) portrays the leader, forehead bisected by the crisp brim of a porkpie hat, his left eye assessing the photographer before him through the viewfinder of a vintage Praktina FX camera, the middle finger of his right hand poised to snap. Both title and image reveal an interesting portal into the aesthetics that animate the 31-year-old pianist's approach both to his second leader album and the rapidly increasing number of high-profile artists with whom he associates.

Rather than present a program of arrangements or worked-out treatments of each song, Fortner offers a series of snapshots that document his attitude—in conjunction with bassist Ameen Saleem and drummer Jeremy “Bean” Clemons—at decisive moments in the studio. The repertoire represents an expansive and venerable timeline: the language and nomenclature of bebop innovators Bud Powell, Thelonious Monk and Elmo Hope; various blues vibrations; idiomatic portrayals of African-American hymnal and Afro-Cuban song; and refractions of the European canon, Duke Ellington and the Great American Songbook. Fortner addresses each style on its own terms of engagement, displaying throughout what Jason Moran—his one-time teacher at Manhattan School of Music and frequent confidante—called “Sullivan’s addiction to swinging.” The harmonic environment is tonal; sophisticated voice-leading, creative counterpoint and complete left/right hand independence is his default basis of operations. It’s hard to detect a cliché.

“Just playing a normal tune, Sullivan has a bottomless gumbo pot of ideas, the way Herbie Nichols did,” Moran said. “He seems never to repeat himself. You could listen to him forever. He’s so carefree and careful.”

“This was my sixth record in two months,” Fortner said, citing yet-to-be-released sessions with trumpeter Roy Hargrove (his steady employer from 2010 to 2017) and Cécile McLorin Salvant, and two tracks for Paul Simon, including an arrangement of “Some Folks’ Lives Roll Easy.”

“I was burned out,” Fortner said. “So, I said, ‘Screw it; let’s just play.’” He contrasted that go-for-it attitude to his approach to his 2015 debut, *Aria* (Impulse!). “Everything was written out; everyone was boxed to



STEVEN SUSSMAN

Fortner has been searching for the “missing link” of piano, an approach that connects boogie-woogie, stride and bebop.

play a specific way. I gave them too much information. For this record, I told the guys, ‘I want you to sound like you, and I want the vibe to be open and loose and free.’ A lot of old records by Sonny Rollins or Bud Powell or Charlie Parker that I enjoy have that quality: Here’s a tune; let’s just play it and record.”

That approach infuses Hargrove’s three contributions to the album.

“I came, we did what we had to do, and I left,” Hargrove said over the phone. He first encountered Fortner in 2009 at Cleopatra’s Needle on Manhattan’s Upper West Side, where Fortner recently had inherited a weekly Friday–Saturday sinecure from Jon Batiste, his friend since they were classmates at New Orleans Center for Creative Arts. Pianist Rodney Kendrick assessed his skills, and urged Hargrove, who was then looking for a pianist to succeed Batiste, to check out the new kid on the block. After sitting in on a blues, Hargrove took Fortner’s phone number. A few months later, after Fortner returned from his maiden voyage to Europe with vibraphonist Stefon Harris, Hargrove’s manager called with an offer.

“I noticed right away that Sullivan had a mature stance at the piano, which reminded me of McCoy Tyner in those videos of him playing with John Coltrane,” Hargrove said. “That was intriguing. Plus, Rodney said, ‘He can swing; he plays really well.’ Whenever Rodney tells me somebody can play, I definitely believe it.

“He has great ear-training, like a sponge. When I taught him music, he always retained it

and personalized it. He’s not trying to impress anyone. He’ll play a half-chorus and still get it all in there. He’s also very good at accompaniment. We’d do a duo segment, and it was like playing with an entire band. He’s got a lot of layers, like an onion.”

Many of those layers revealed themselves during Fortner’s engagement at the Jazz Standard over Memorial Day weekend, which coincided with the release of *Moments Preserved*, but transpired with a new trio—bassist Matt Brewer and drummer Marcus Gilmore—in dialogue with, on successive nights, Hargrove, tenor saxophonist Melissa Aldana, trumpeter Peter Evans and trumpeter Ambrose Akinmusire.

Before commencing on night four, Fortner recited the lyrics to “Nature Boy” from the piano bench, positioned between the house Steinway and a Hammond B-3 organ. He began to signify on the organ in a stately, ecclesiastical manner. Akinmusire ravished the melody. Sustaining the rubato, they created variations for a while, then morphed into tempo as they transitioned to an unidentified song. They traded ideas back and forth, each exchange provoking higher levels of complexity and virtuosic execution, before Fortner cued a wind-down to the melody.

He returned to the piano for an improvisation evocative of Monk and Andrew Hill. After Akinmusire’s long, inflamed declamation, Fortner picked up where he left off with a force-of-nature solo on which he postulated a string of fresh ideas, eventually transitioning to “Body And Soul.” After the set-closer, Charlie Parker’s

“Now’s The Time,” Fortner announced, “What you have witnessed was real; nothing was rehearsed—a gift from the Creator through us to you.”

Fortner’s “relationship to the piano as a spiritual device,” as Moran put it, gestated in the King Solomon Baptist Church in New Orleans, where his mother served as choir director. Gifted with perfect pitch, Fortner started playing organ there at age 7. He estimates that he was 9 or 10—still an ear player—when he began to guide the service and play for the choir. He became intrigued with jazz as a way “to better my gospel playing,” and auditioned for the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts.

“I didn’t know any jazz standards; I didn’t even know how to play a scale,” Fortner recalled. “[Trumpeter] Clyde Kerr asked me, ‘If Jesus Christ was sitting here, what would you play for him?’ I auditioned on a hymn. He said, ‘I’m going to let you in, but you need to get with a teacher and learn these things.’” By his senior year, Fortner was playing piano with Kerr and tenor saxophonist Kidd Jordan at local gigs. After graduating, he turned down a full scholarship to Xavier University, where he’d intended to major in pre-med, for a partial scholarship to Oberlin Conservatory of Music.

“Playing with Mr. Kerr was intimidating, but he trusted me and he was inspiring,” Fortner said. “Once, I told him that I was having problems playing, I wasn’t getting what I wanted. He said, ‘Are you listening to yourself?’ ‘Yeah, I record myself.’ He said: ‘I don’t mean that. You’ve got to play with your ears out in the audience—not just play what you’re hearing and letting your ears fly, but what you would want to hear yourself play in the context of what everybody else is playing.’ If I put my sound inside of Roy, how would my playing change? Or if I put my sound inside of Cécile, would I play differently? Absolutely.

“When I’m leading my trio, I think about my original intent, but I also think about being the accompanist for the people I’m playing with. It’s not: ‘OK, this is my gig—y’all just lay down and hug the carpet for me to just go.’ There’s a record Mary Lou Williams did with Buster Williams, where they all carry equal weight, but you can tell it’s Mary Lou Williams. I think of Alice Coltrane. Earl Hines, his incredible late stuff, or the duo things he did with Louis Armstrong. Duke Ellington. People who accompany in a way that isn’t just laying something down, but it’s ‘I’m going to make a statement, and we’re going to actually have a conversation.’”

The conversations are literal in Fortner’s increasingly frequent duo encounters with Salvant, who will present a suite of them on her forthcoming fall release. Over the phone, Salvant recalled first meeting Fortner in 2012, then being impressed with his “otherworldly playing” at various jam session encounters. After Fortner won the 2015 American Pianists Association Cole

Porter Fellowship in Jazz competition, he called Salvant for a gig at New York's club Mezzrow.

"It was one of the most beautiful nights of my life," Salvant said. "I hadn't known I could experience that musically. It was more than just admiring his playing or all the ideas he brought to the table, or his being adventurous and supportive. I was moved. Sullivan has an almost encyclopedic knowledge of American music—actually music of the world—and he'll memorize things he hears once or twice, and then be able to play it back for you in every key for the rest of his life.

"Sullivan doesn't claim it, but he's a singer. He knows all the lyrics to every song, and he's always in service of the story. He's always in service of what the person he's playing with is trying to go for. Sometimes he'll play such complex, completely out stuff, and I still know exactly where I am rhythmically and in terms of the harmony—I can still find my way very easily."

During a phone interview prior to his performance with Salvant at Scullers Jazz Club in Boston, Fortner was asked to clarify a remark he'd made earlier, that "during the last six years, I've been into what I call the 'missing link' of the universe."

"The other day, Cécile asked me if I'd ever listened to Keith Jarrett," Fortner began. "I told her that when I was at Oberlin, I wouldn't listen to anybody but Keith Jarrett. Jon Batiste and I used to have Oscar Peterson battles in high school—sometimes he'd win, sometimes I'd win. Herbie, Chick and McCoy will always have a special place in my heart. But there's a disconnect between their modern sounds and what Monk and Bud and those guys were doing. You can hear the split in the solo piano playing—the rhythms became more even, there's less emphasis on using the entire instrument, less emphasis on stride and boogie-woogie. I think there has to be a way to link those approaches together."

Fortner traced his "conversion experience" to 2011, when, at Kendrick's instigation, he listened to a 1937 recording of Parker, then 17, playing "Cherokee."

"Rodney was always telling me to see Barry Harris, and I hadn't yet, so I figured I'd listen so I could say I did it," Fortner said. "I was traveling with Roy to the Chicago Jazz Festival, and I had it on repeat from the plane ride up until we hit the stage. We played something similar to 'Cherokee.' When we got off the bandstand, I listened to Charlie Parker at 17 one more time, then played a bit of the gig recording I'd made on my phone. I broke down crying. It was one of the most humiliating and humbling experiences of my life. At that moment, I knew I had to weigh what I knew upon what Bird knew, my strength upon his strength—and it wasn't even a comparison. My playing was too weak. That began my quest going back. I like to call that the day I got baptized in jazz."

Fortner has attended "the church" of Barry

Harris ever since. "Barry will tell you that his belief system is very narrow," Fortner said of the 88-year-old piano guru, who has propagated the gospel of Parker and Powell for about 70 years. "But within that small amount of information he taught me how to find the world. In school, we're taught all these different harmonic substitutions and ways of playing against rhythm—but when I left school, the percentage of how much I felt I really knew was 30 percent knowing, 70 percent chance. After studying with Barry, it's the flip of that. He's taught me the importance of honing and understanding what you know, so that you can flip it upside

down and make it your own, to the point where it stands as something modern—where you can play the same information on a Yosvany Terry record and it will work.

"I go back to my New Orleans roots. It's a port city, and it's about all these different communities and cultures coming together to create this one thing. If you can find that thread—the lineage that connects everything—and hold on to it, then you can manipulate it, as opposed to grabbing as much as you can from all these different styles and putting them together. It's all about finding that thread—being present, in the moment."

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DAN WILENSKY



Dan Wilensky plays tenor and soprano saxophones on his new self-released album, *Good Music*.

WILENSKY'S ONGOING DIY JOURNEY

To say that Dan Wilensky has had a diverse career is an understatement. The multi-instrumentalist has a resume that would stir up deep feelings of envy within even the most storied player.

In 1979, by the tender age of 18, Wilensky had landed a gig touring as the lead alto saxophonist in Ray Charles' big band, before briefly attending The Eastman School of Music in

Rochester, New York, and later playing tenor for "Brother" Jack McDuff. Having left his Berkeley, California, childhood behind, Wilensky spent the better part of the next three decades in New York City, grabbing whatever work came his way and slowly building his reputation as a versatile and reliable player.

As word spread of his talents, Wilensky amassed an impressive array of credits, includ-

ing tours with Joan Baez, David Bowie and Steve Winwood, as well as session work for Madonna, Melissa Manchester and Santana. Wilensky has contributed to more than 250 recordings and was featured on the PBS children's TV show *Between The Lions*.

Wilensky also is an author. His sense of humor is reflected in the subtitle of his 2013 book *Musician!*, which is sold on his website and

is tagged *A Practical Guide for Students, Music Lovers, Amateurs, Professionals, Superstars, Wannabees and Has-Beens*.

In addition to all the road work and studio sessions, Wilensky has spent thousands of hours nurturing musicians in one-on-one lessons and master classes around the country.

"I never wanted to do the same thing," Wilensky said, enjoying a rare moment of downtime in his home in a suburb outside of Portland, Oregon, where he has been based for the past seven years. "I love wearing different hats. That's the way I've been rolling since I was little."

Having survived in the industry as long as he has—and having been in the orbit of so many different artists at various levels of fame and fortune—Wilensky has gained a lot of wisdom. He has had a front-row seat for the rise and peak of the CD era and then commercial chaos that ensued with the rise of the MP3 and streaming.

These days, he is the embodiment of the DIY approach. His wide variety of experiences have made him particularly well prepared to follow his creative pursuits without the help of a record company, booking agent or even a manager. With few exceptions, Wilensky now is handling every aspect of his career himself.

"It's the way I've always done it," he said, "because I wanted that control."

To date, Wilensky has self-released six full-length albums as a bandleader, primarily play-

ing saxophones and flute. His new album is titled *Good Music*, a reference to a famous quote attributed to Duke Ellington, and a decent summation of his mindset when it comes to writing and performing.

"It's really about the musicians playing or servicing the song, whatever the song is," he said. "I know I'm not unique in that. The modern musician has a pretty egalitarian view of things, especially the young cats coming up. They draw from all different kinds of influences."

That attitude certainly is reflected by the track listing for *Good Music*, which was recently released on Wilensky's label, Polyglot Music. Along with five of his original compositions, such as the bubbly bop of "Country Mouse" and the gently funky "Jazz In The Park," Wilensky and his ensemble of Portland players—drummer Jason Palmer, bassist Dan Captein and, on a handful of tracks, guitarist Dan Balmer—interpret standards, such as "S Wonderful," "Sway" and The Beatles' "And I Love Her."

The band also interprets the oft-recorded 1960s tune "Get Together," which was a hit for The Youngbloods in 1969. Wilensky is promoting the album with a polished, mind-blowing music video of the track.

While he is paying someone to handle radio promotion for the album, Wilensky is in charge of keeping up with the album's distribution (through CD Baby). His expectations for the

album's success are realistic. He knows he has enough fans around the world that he can expect a baseline of album sales, and he trusts that most jazz fans are active ones, always on the hunt for new sounds and artists. Some of the fans who end up purchasing *Good Music* will be curious jazz consumers who find it on their own.

But the financial outcome of the *Good Music* project won't make or break Wilensky's career. And he's well aware of how fortunate he is to be in that type of position in 2018. Having wisely invested the money he's made from three decades of steady work, he is not forced to play undesirable live gigs just to make a mortgage payment. His family is set up comfortably. He performs regularly around Portland and teaches out of his home, and he has adapted to fitting his music around the responsibilities of being a husband and father.

As his children are growing up, he is looking ahead at the possibility of taking on bigger projects that might require him to leave town for an extended stretch.

"My wife has given me permission," Wilensky said, with a laugh. "You can go on a little tour." It really doesn't matter still want kind of music that is—although it would be nice to be playing my own stuff. So, I've got my eye on Europe. We'll see what happens. I dig really living day to day and seeing what the day brings."

—Robert Ham



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DEANNE MATLEY



PERSISTENT ENTREPRENEUR

Six years ago, as Deanne Matley was building her career as a jazz singer in Calgary, Alberta, fans kept approaching her after performances to ask if she had released any albums. So, Matley took the hint and decided to do it herself.

“As a full-time musician, I’m an entrepreneur, you know?” she said. “This is my business.”

Raising capital to release an album, though, is a different proposition than, say, opening a hardware store. For her first album, *Stealin’ Blue*, her approach was fairly simple: It documented Matley and pianist Bruce Petherick performing live at Café Koi in Calgary. “I decided that I was going to do my debut album live, because I figured that if I can’t do this live, then I shouldn’t be doing it.”

Coming up with the cash for the album took some doing. Although Matley signed up with the self-funding website Kapipal, she also had fans

simply offering to contribute. “This was before crowdfunding became [such] a big thing,” she recalled. “People knew I was recording an album, and would say, ‘We want to help.’”

By August 2016, when Matley began work on her new album, *Because I Loved*, she had another duo album under her belt (*Can’t Help Falling*, with guitarist Larry Koonse), as well as a two recordings with her band and a Christmas disc. Even so, this new project presented an entirely different set of challenges. Not only would Matley be working for the first time with a producer, drummer Jim Doxas, but the album would also feature a variety of ensembles in the studio.

“I’d done four albums before, but this one was like releasing my first album, in a way,” she said. But as she began planning the album, she realized it would cost her almost \$15,000 to record

and manufacture, “which is a lot of money in my world,” she said.

So, Matley decided to apply for a grant. “In Canada, there’s the FACTOR grant, which is national, and there’s also one in Alberta, called the Alberta Foundation for the Arts,” she explains. (FACTOR—the Foundation Assisting Canadian Talent on Recordings—is a program founded by Canadian broadcasters, funded in part by broadcast license and renewal fees.) In addition to having to submit an outline of her project, including a budget, bios, marketing plan and the like, Matley was required to include a demo of some of the material she planned to record. “Now, you don’t have to spend a lot of money on these, but obviously you want to put your best foot forward,” she explained. So she flew to Montreal to record in a studio with Doxas.

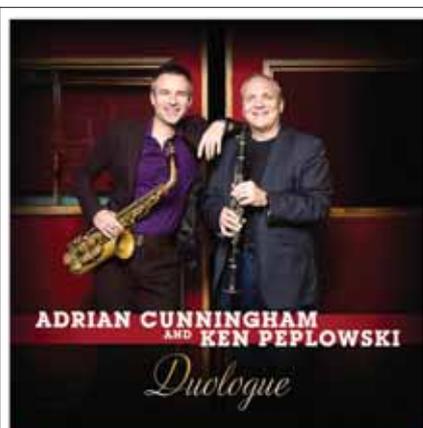
Initially, both grant proposals were rejected. “The first time I applied for a FACTOR grant, I [missed it] by .6,” she said. “You had to get 83.7 overall, and I got 83.1.” Matley was understandably crushed by the result: “When I received the ‘no,’ I instantly went into a place of ‘I’m not good enough.’ Then I realized that I was tying my worth to whether I got this grant or not. But I shifted that around and decided we’ll just try again.”

In the meantime, she decided to try crowdfunding again. “One of the hardest things for me is asking people for money, because I was brought up thinking if you can’t afford to do it, then don’t do it,” she said. “I had to step into the uncomfortable to do this, but it was one of the best things I ever did. The album is all about relationships—being in relationships with your friends, family, and fans—and being open to receiving support is another big thing.”

This time, her crowdfunding was through Indiegogo. “This got researched by my team,” she explained. “There’s Kickstarter and Indiegogo and a bunch of things, and they said this is the best one, because even if you don’t reach your target, you still get to keep the money that you raise. With some of platforms, if you don’t make your target, you get nothing.

“The Indiegogo campaign raised a lot of money, but I still kept applying for the grants,” she said. “I kept applying for grants because at that point I felt, why not? What do I have to lose?” On her third try, she got an Alberta Foundation for the Arts grant for \$10,000, and on her fourth, a FACTOR grant for \$2,000.

Despite the struggle, Matley is glad things worked out the way they did. “It was what I was supposed to do,” she said. “Because if I had gotten the grants, I wouldn’t have done the Indiegogo campaign, which wouldn’t have helped create the awareness of who I am.” —J.D. *Considine*



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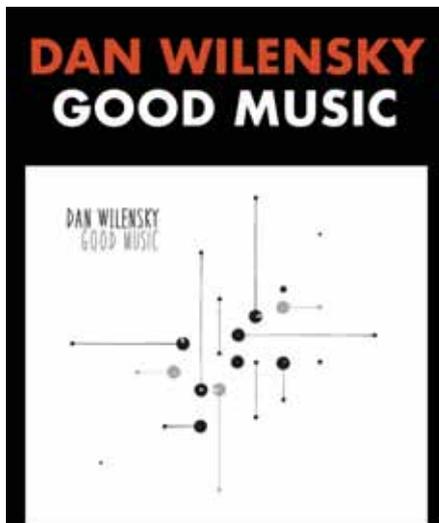
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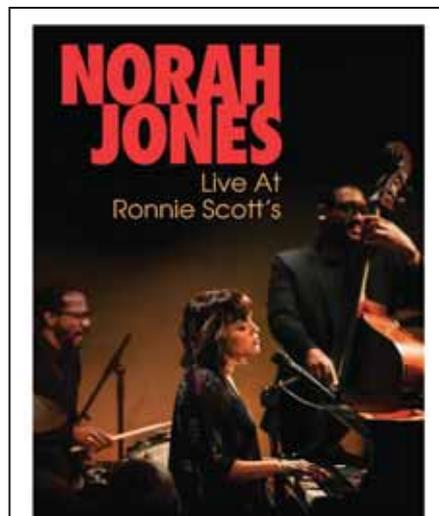
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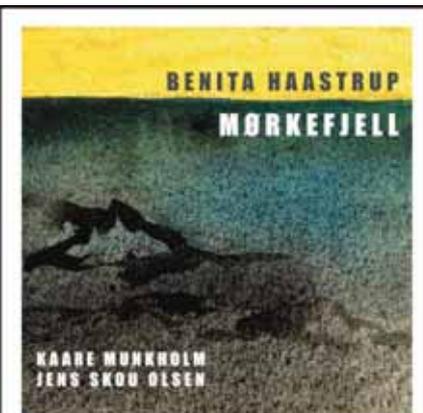
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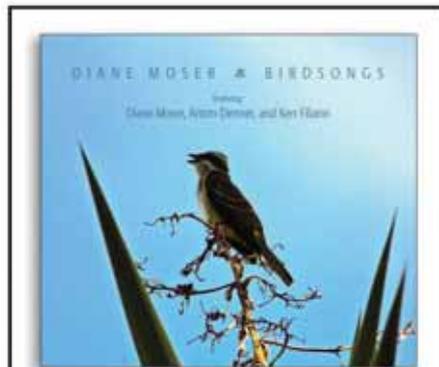


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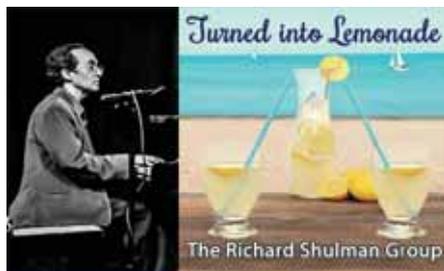
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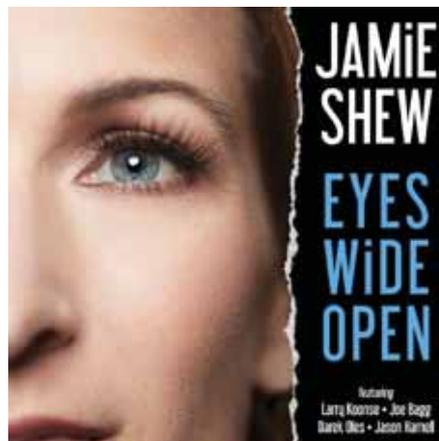
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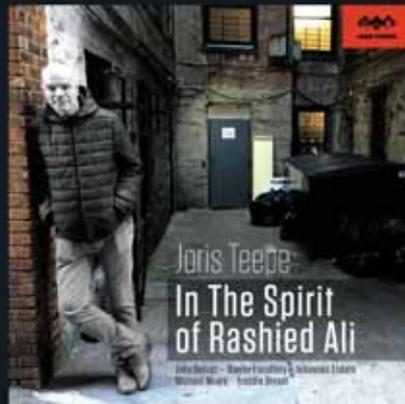
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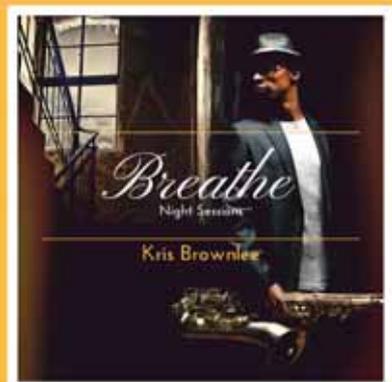
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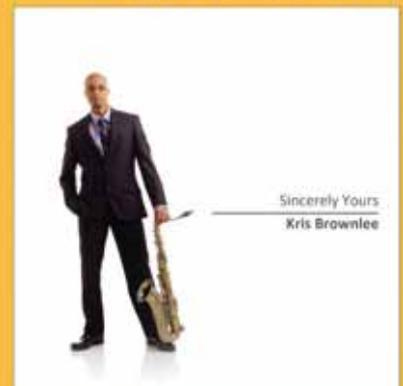
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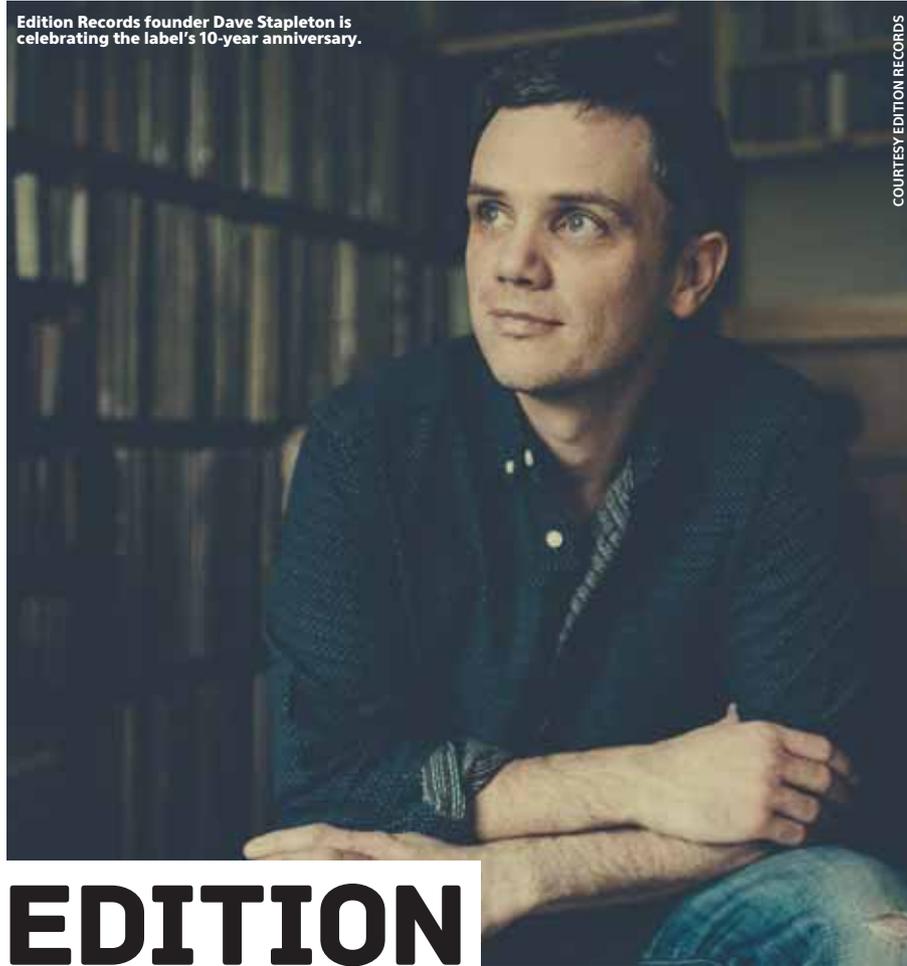
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EDITION RECORDS

Edition Records founder Dave Stapleton is celebrating the label's 10-year anniversary.

COURTESY EDITION RECORDS



EDITION FORGES GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

As Edition Records founder Dave Stapleton reflected on the label's 10-year milestone with his friend, bassist and composer Jasper Høiby, Stapleton came to a significant realization.

"The label is built on connections because, through you"—he motioned to Høiby, before reeling off a number of Edition signees—"I met Marius Neset, and through Marius I met Daniel Herskedal. Then through Daniel Herskedal I met Eyolf Dale, and then through Verner Pohjola and Olavi Louhivuori I met Aki Rissanen ... it just spreads."

Edition—which was founded in Cardiff, Wales, and now is based near Reading, England—has a global outlook, with an emphasis on Europe. In addition to British artists Slowly Rolling Camera and Tim Garland, the

label also nurtures Oddarrang (Finland), Eyolf Dale (Norway) and Phronesis, featuring Høiby (Denmark), pianist Ivo Neame (U.K.) and drummer Anton Eger (Sweden).

It was American drummer Mark Guiliana who formally introduced Stapleton and Høiby. "I remember Jasper talking to me about Phronesis and his ideas for a live concert," Stapleton recalled. "It was just a no-brainer." The conversation that Stapleton recounted turned out to be a fruitful one; *Alive*, the critically acclaimed live recording released in 2010, was Phronesis' third album—and first with Edition. (It also featured a different lineup, with Guiliana on drums.)

It's clear that Stapleton and Høiby, who began working with each other a year after Edition was founded, share a bond that is fused by both professional admiration and friendship.

"I remember I told you to sign the trio because I would sell more albums than anyone else on your label," Høiby said with dry humor.

Edition has had a busy 10 years, thanks to Stapleton's broad aesthetic, which honors the jazz tradition but also is expansive enough to include cinematic soundscapes, Scandinavian elegance and, in the recent case of Dinosaur's *Wonder Trail*, indie jazz-rock.

Although Edition's reputation has strengthened over the decade, Stapleton humbly admitted that there have been "more failures than successes." He explained: "Of course we only talk about the good things that happen. The rewards aren't the big moments that you expect. It's looking back on the breadth of everything that we've achieved, and how we've adapted, what we've learned, and navigating the way through the difficulties in building a business in music. If someone had said to me in 2008 what would happen in order to get to this point, I'm not sure I would have gone with it: Why start a jazz label in a recession year? On paper it doesn't make sense at all."

None of this phased Høiby, though. "I thought that Dave was better in the business than anyone else around," he said. "I'm proud of many of the things I've done on the label. As an artist you tend to measure things in the shorter term because you spend a lot of time living in the moment. You keep chasing little achievements. It's really good to have someone in your corner who can go, 'It's good, I trust you, here's what you should do.'"

Stapleton then offered an analogy: "If you sit in a boat on the Atlantic, you're always looking at the horizon. That's always gonna move with you. You forget about what's going on in that boat there and then. You miss the detail of what's going on in the wind of the sails, for example. I've learned to enjoy the process, enjoy the day-to-day. It's making those the successes, rather than what's perceived to be the obvious successes—like getting a gig or a new signing."

This fall, Edition will release the eighth album from Phronesis, *We Are All*. The trio continues to explore angular melodies and evocative soundscapes. And as an ensemble, they sound tighter and more confident than ever.

"It's still the start of where we can go," Stapleton said. "Having that collaboration and trust between us, it's quite rare. That's the sort of thing that makes me really proud and happy to be doing this thing. It's been a great journey so far, and look at where we could be in another 10 years—that part is the most fun for me."

—Tina Edwards

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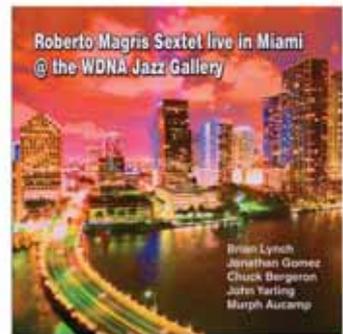
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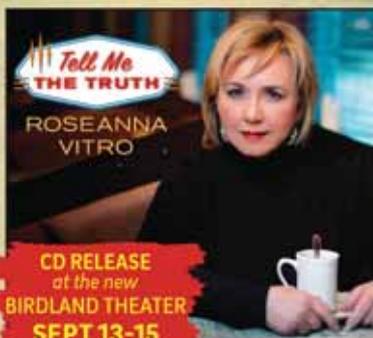
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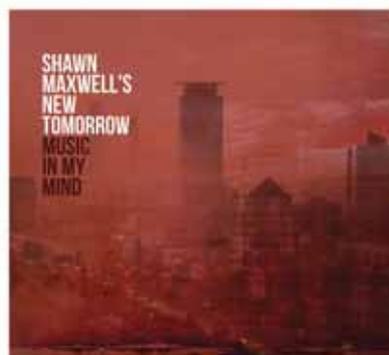


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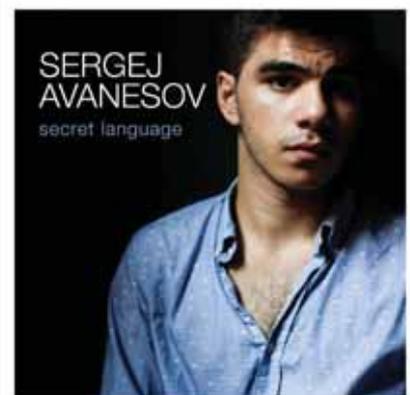
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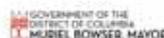
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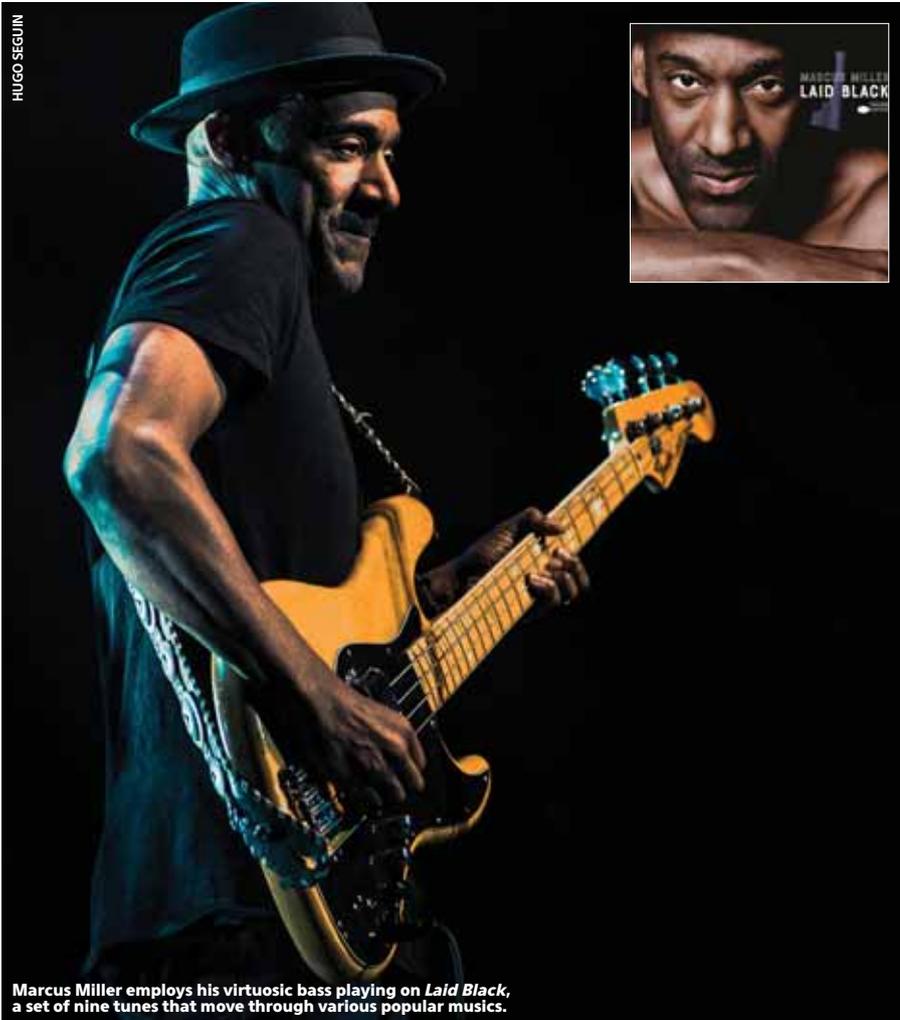


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Marcus Miller employs his virtuosic bass playing on *Laid Black*, a set of nine tunes that move through various popular musics.

Marcus Miller *Laid Black*

BLUE NOTE 0028508

★★★

There's no judging an album by its cover. But the cover of Marcus Miller's *Laid Black* is a litmus test: The title's pun, the image of a shirtless Miller gazing with soulful directness and the musician's reputation itself will divide most listeners into believers and doubters before they've even heard the first bass slap.

Lovers will find plenty to love in this groove through urban styles—hip-hop, trap, soul, funk,

r&b and jazz—with guest artists like Trombone Shorty, Take 6, Jonathan Butler and Selah Sue rounding out Miller's fine working band. In the foreground is virtuosic slapping and popping from Miller's cherished '77 Fender, with vigorous lows, a sharp middle and metallic high end. Haters will find plenty to hate in that bass exhibitionism and the album's synth-pop stylings, in Miller's steadfast dedication to his formative *Tutu*-era aesthetic. I land in the middle.

On "7-T's," Miller's expert slickness packages even the authentic street funk of Trombone Shorty in an '80s softcore soundtrack, the stuff of chocolate-covered strawberries and hot tubs.

A guitar solo that dates to Miller's popular emergence can dislocate a more compelling track, like the Sly Stone-inspired, downtempo funk cover of "Que Sera Sera." And not to build sandcastles of taste here, but when the hip-hop-influenced "Keep 'Em Runnin'" opens with a synth Weather Report salvo, I can't help thinking of Flying Lotus, who covers some similar territory with more contemporary relevance.

Miller puts more passion into the standout "Sublimity 'Bunny's Dream,'" a tribute to Miller's late mother-in-law, whose South African heritage is beautifully memorialized in both Butler's vocals and Miller's restrained, heartfelt bass. There's lovely gospel writing on the closing "Preacher's Kid," with Miller's bass clarinet going richly against the grain of Take 6's lacquered vocals—until a David Sanborn-styled saxophone solo once again whiplashes us back in time.

Anachronism aside, that solo, like so much else on the album, tells us exactly how to hear it, dictating the listening experience. "Uh-huh!" Miller will shout during his own solos, announcing a shift from funky to *fonky*. There's not much room for self-guided discovery in this music: Appreciation already is included in the purchase price.

Unlike 2015's *Afrodeezia* (Blue Note), where Miller's glibness was balanced by the gravity of a slave-history theme, *Laid Black* is more blatantly commercial, a smooth, all-inclusive cruise of an album. That these tracks are finely produced and superbly performed has little relevance to whether you'll like them. To misquote Tom Wolfe, you're either on the boat or off the boat—your personal taste long ago decided your eagerness to make this trip.

—Michelle Mercer

Laid Black: Trip Trap; Que Sera Sera; 7-T's; Sublimity "Bunny's Dream"; Untamed; No Limit; Someone To Love; Keep 'Em Runnin'; Preacher's Kid. (53:56)

Personnel: Marcus Miller, electric bass, bass clarinet, vocals; Adam Agati, guitar; Troy "Trombone Shorty" Andrews, trombone; Alex Bailey, percussion; Cliff Barnes, piano; Jonathan Butler, guitar, vocals; Louis Cato, drums, vocals; Brian Culbertson, trombone; Russell Gunn, trumpet; Alex Han, alto saxophone; Charles Haynes, drums; Mitch Henry, keyboards; Marquis Hill, trumpet; Honey Larochelle, vocals; Caleb McCampbell, vocoder; Julian Miller, Selah Sue, vocals; Patches Stewart, trumpet; Take 6, vocals; Kirk Whalum, flute, tenor saxophone; Brett Williams, keyboards.

Ordering info: bluenote.com



Rolf Kühn
Yellow + Blue

MPS 0212745MS1

★★★★

Rolf Kühn is one of the few performers who has made a small place for the clarinet in contemporary jazz, when all genres seem obliged to attach the prefix “post-.” *Yellow + Blue* is an asymmetrical package that divides between five jazz standards and six Kühn originals. The latter particularly suggest the narrow niche into which the clarinet has been typecast.

The standards are very nicely chosen. “I’m Through With Love” and “Angel Eyes” are

Luciana Souza
The Book Of Longing

SUNNYSIDE 1518

★★★★

Luciana Souza is a singer who needs no adornments. She doesn’t lay on thick layers of attitude or vocal condiments; she sings frankly and tends to get the most of out of a song when using sparse accompaniment.

On *The Book Of Longing*, joined only by guitarist Chico Pinheiro and the ink-dark bass of Scott Colley (plus her own percussion overdubs), Souza continues exploring the soft divide between the communicable and the ineffable. It’s artistic territory she mined on her previous album, *Speaking In Tongues* (Sunnyside). But this time, without drums and forgoing the wordless vocalizing that defined her last effort, the focus falls hard on poetic language—its sharp power and its limitations.

Souza has put 10 poems to music: four by Leonard Cohen, whose poetry collection *Book of Longing* inspired the project; three of her own; and one each from three eminent poets of the past two centuries—Edna St. Vincent Millay, Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti. Souza’s phrasing is direct and unfussy, nearly conversational. The melodies she’s written have a warm, discursive flow, sometimes blurring the bar lines. She waxes epigrammatic on “These

tunes as natural to the jazz spirit as they are rarely heard; Kühn is in no hurry with them. The tempos are slow, the introductions leisurely and abstract, and Kühn’s tone is submerged mostly in the instrument’s intimate chalumeau depths. His sonority has a fine, classical propriety about it.

Kühn’s originals exude a brainy austerity, full of clipped, staccato angularity that has become a trademark of modern—sorry, make that postmodern—clarinet. Without the muscle of the tenor or trumpet, the clarinet fell into a more chilly and dainty place when it lost the heat of swing. The transition was amazingly abrupt. Kühn, 89, began his career under the sway of Benny Goodman in the ’50s. About that same time, though, the Jimmy Giuffre Trio already was experimenting with much of the prickly brittleness that inspires Kühn here. One could say he’s come a long way. But not really. His clarinet tiptoes about in a hunt-and-peck manner, finding odd notes that suggest a serial randomness. But the elegant precision of the interplay belies a firm compositional hand.

—John McDonough

Yellow + Blue: Both Sides Now; Angel Eyes; Yellow And Blue; Impulse; The Second Time; Train To Norway; I’m Through With Love; Conversation III; Mela’s Interplay; Body And Soul; What Are You Doing For The Rest Of Your Life? (61:50)

Personnel: Rolf Kühn, clarinet; Frank Chastenier, piano; Lisa Wulff, bass; Tupac Mantilla, drums, percussion.

Ordering info: mps-music.com



Things,” then romantic and wistful on “Alms.”

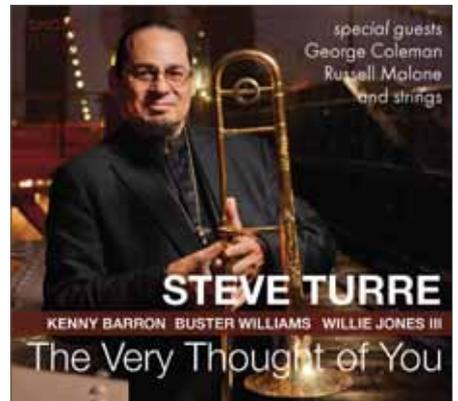
On this spare and pensive album, Souza sings Cohen’s poem “The Book” with gentle irony and sly harmonic shifts, à la Cole Porter. The lyrics are a solipsistic single man’s lament (“I’m living on pills/For which I thank God”). But Souza leaves melodrama at the door, and it pays: As the song’s imagery wanders toward abstraction, the feeling grows only truer.

—Giovanni Russonello

The Book Of Longing: These Things; Daybreak; Alms; Night Song; Paris; The Book; Tonight; We Grow Accustomed To The Dark; A Life; Remember. (40:54)

Personnel: Luciana Souza, vocals, percussion; Chico Pinheiro, guitar; Scott Colley, bass.

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com



Steve Turre
The Very Thought Of You

SMOKE SESSIONS 1804

★★★

Few artists “own” their instrument to the degree that trombonist Steve Turre does. Whether playing the music of Raasaan Roland Kirk, performing as a member of the *Saturday Night Live* house band or with one of his own units, his voice is distinctive and memorable.

Leading a group that includes an eight-piece string ensemble and a couple of guest stars, Turre is way out front for eight ballads and a trio of medium-tempo songs. So, for those who prefer trombone as a side dish, this might be too much of a good thing.

Languorous on the title song—buoyed by the string octet—and gruffly assertive on “September In The Rain,” Turre chooses to cast his work in the mode of a vocalist, focusing on the central melodies of iconic standards like “Danny Boy.” “No Regrets,” a melancholic piece he wrote while in Chico Hamilton’s band during the 1970s, and a newer composition, “Freedom Park, SA,” provide the opportunity to change the script and step into the more familiar role of burly improviser.

Equally burly, tenor saxophonist George Coleman, 83, solos expressively on a richly orchestrated “Never Let Me Go” and an exceptionally sprightly “Yardbird Suite.” Guitarist Russell Malone, no slouch when it comes to balladic improvising, doesn’t fare as well. His brief solo on “September In The Rain” sounds like it was tacked on, and his sound is muted in comparison to Turre’s horn in his other three appearances.

With a stellar rhythm section and material this solid, *The Very Thought Of You* ought to be more engaging. Instead, it frequently sounds like the concept outreaches the execution.

—James Hale

The Very Thought Of You: The Very Thought Of You; September In The Rain; No Regrets; Carolyn (In The Morning); Never Let Me Go; Sachiko; Freedom Park, SA; The Shadow Of Your Smile; Time Will Tell; Yardbird Suite; Danny Boy. (58:52)

Personnel: Steve Turre, trombone; George Coleman, tenor saxophone (5, 10); Kenny Barron, piano; Russell Malone, guitar (2, 3, 8, 9); Randall Goosby, Valerie Kim, Brendan Elliot, Meng Jia Lin, violin (1, 5, 8, 11); Chloé Thominet, Jasper Snow, viola (1, 5, 8, 11); Khari Joyner, Marza Williams, cello (1, 5, 8, 11); Buster Williams, bass; Willie Jones III, drums.

Ordering info: smokesessionsrecords.com

The Hot Box

	Critics	James Hale	John McDonough	Michelle Mercer	Giovanni Russonello
Marcus Miller <i>Laid Black</i>		★★½	★★★	★★★	★★★★½
Rolf Kühn <i>Yellow + Blue</i>		★★★★	★★★★	★★★★½	★★★★½
Luciana Souza <i>The Book Of Longing</i>		★★★★½	★★★	★★★★★	★★★★
Steve Turre <i>The Very Thought Of You</i>		★★★	★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★½

Critics' Comments

Marcus Miller, *Laid Black*

Miller sounds like he's used a time machine to ship back to the 1970s, when hyper-masculinity and outrageously showcased musical chops were in vogue. There's no question he and his sidemen have the chops, but originality is sparse. —James Hale

Trombone Shorty offers a few wry surprises in this compendium of short, boxy riffs that bump along on Miller's staccato ostinatos. Funky smooth jazz by experts. —John McDonough

Miller's talent is in keeping a groove burlap-strong, even as he improvises above and around it. Drawing equally from hip-hop, disco and gospel on these smartly arranged tunes, he proves his flexibility and fortitude throughout. —Giovanni Russonello

Rolf Kühn, *Yellow + Blue*

Kühn's supple attack and liquid tone seriously belie his 89 years. He pushes these ballads far beyond what's anticipated, mining a lifetime of experience for nuance and layered meaning. Pianist Frank Chastenier adds inestimable depth. —James Hale

Bright dexterity as expected from a musician whose Mozart clarinet concerto is one to beat. But Kühn also brandishes his command of the jazz tradition back to Benny Goodman, including a version of "I'm Through With Love" that shows he's lived the life. —Michelle Mercer

This is a spacious document, with a lot of melodic hangtime, punctuated by moments of striking potency. Most appealing is the stealthy deployment of rhythm and Kühn's flecks of weird blues flavor. —Giovanni Russonello

Luciana Souza, *The Book Of Longing*

So spare, so lovely. Few vocalists can carry this volume of text and impart so much meaning, with so little accompaniment. Souza never has sounded better. —James Hale

An intimate literature of self-reflection and interior stories set to Souza's original music. Her contralto has a lonely whispered calm and emotional neutrality, while the poetic content resides in more veiled shadows. A well-crafted, but elusive, concept album. —John McDonough

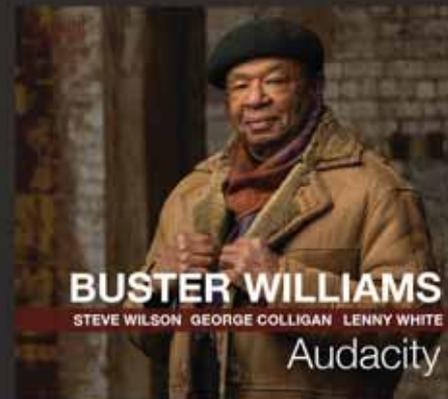
Souza's *saudade* heritage gives her empathy for poetic longing, and her expressionistic melodies and phrasing take full possession of even the most intricate lines. Elegant strings favor the blossoming and decaying tones of Souza's accented vowels. —Michelle Mercer

Steve Turre, *The Very Thought Of You*

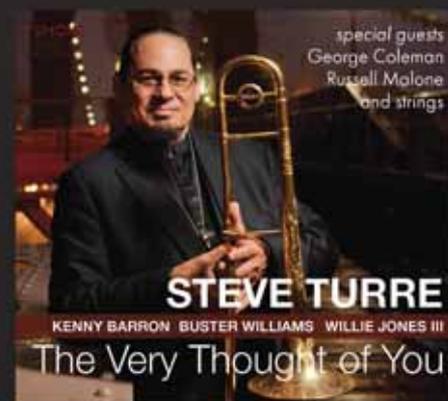
Turre showcases his skills in a variety of contexts, from several scenic Jackie-Gleasonish ballads to a pair of contrasting duos that sustain an absorbing ensemble cohesiveness. —John McDonough

The trombone ambassador's lyricism balances good humor and sentiment here. That aesthetic hits a peak on the mutetastic "Danny Boy," which is like hearing a gifted poet recite verse from memory while deep in his cups. —Michelle Mercer

Turre's burly, unhurried trombone finds traction easily over an expert rhythm section, light and aerated as it is. The string section is deployed tastefully, but the subtle highlight is "Freedom Park, SA," with Turre in a tête-à-tête with drummer Willie Jones III. —Giovanni Russonello



BUSTER WILLIAMS bass
STEVE WILSON saxophones
GEORGE COLLIGAN piano
LENNY WHITE drums



STEVE TURRE trombone
KENNY BARRON piano
BUSTER WILLIAMS bass
WILLIE JONES III drums
 with special guests
GEORGE COLEMAN tenor saxophone
RUSSELL MALONE guitar
 and **STRINGS**



ORRIN EVANS and
THE CAPTAIN BLACK BIG BAND



Adi Meyerson *Where We Stand*

A:M RECORDS 001

★★★★½

Adi Meyerson's skills on acoustic bass are deep, her chops strong. Her instincts are not to show off, but to enhance the music and the talents of her colleagues. Compositions on her debut are extraordinary. The musicians recruited for *Where We Stand* reflect these same qualities: They're in full command of their instruments, they improvise with fire and fidelity to the music, and they play together as one.

That pretty much sums up all one needs to

Sachal Vasandani *Shadow Train*

GSI 011

★★★★

Vocalist Sachal Vasandani works hard to sound as relaxed as he does. Certainly, there's a natural element to his mellowness: his smooth, warm baritone instrument, for one thing. Perhaps the sleepy, come-hither croon to which he fits that instrument is a creative instinct as well. Details matter, however, and *Shadow Train* is a wondrous demonstration of Vasandani's punctilious manner of interpretive work.

His rhythmic conception, primarily, reveals careful cultivation. Vasandani frequently sounds further behind the beat than he is. In fact, he begins most lines, and spends much of them, squarely in the pocket. The effect is achieved in umpteen tiny ways: the restrained delivery; the split-second extension of the syllable "old" past the quarter note on "When I Grow Too Old To Dream"; the unnatural pause between "re" and "turn," with the accent on the latter, in "That's All." He also has some help from his accompanists. When the singer reaches the bridge of "I Concentrate On You," drummer Eric Harland moves to the front edge of the beat, so Vasandani, in its dead center, still sounds laid back. These are subtleties, but somehow on display here in ways that the singer's four previous albums elided.

know for a first listen, but replays substantiate all of this by illuminating the details.

Amid the changes of "A 'D' Train," the bassist lays out for the blowing section and inserts a burst of between-the-beat descending chords, which recur in the same place within each verse. They blaze by in a microsecond, but each soloist reacts to them, maybe emphasizing a particular note or syncopation, or spinning the line in a different direction. That finesse, both in her arrangement and the musicians' responses, pays off here, with a similar device employed on "Rice & Beans" and elsewhere.

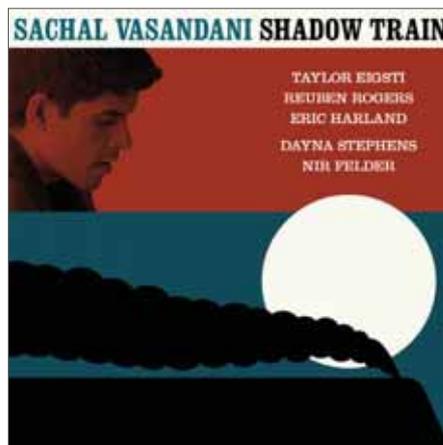
Mentioning the breadth of Meyerson's writing, too, is significant. *Where We Stand* offers several sensitively crafted ballads, including "Holes," a beautiful, fragile bass-and-piano duet. The two vocal tracks stand out, though, for Camila Meza's expressive and virtuosic handling of a difficult melody on "Little Firefly" and her miraculous, wordless caress of the title cut. And while all this is going on, don't overlook Kush Abadey's magnificent contributions—the sound of a master at work.

—Bob Doerschuk

Where We Stand: Rice & Beans; A "D" Train; Eunice-Intro; Eunice; Little Firely; A Touch Of Grey; TNT; Holes; Where We Stand; Unfinished Business. (52:52)

Personnel: Adi Meyerson, bass; Joel Frahm, tenor saxophone; Mike King, piano; Kush Abadey, drums; Freddie Hendrix, trumpet (1, 2, 4, 7, 10); Camila Meza, vocals, guitar (5, 9).

Ordering info: adimeyersonmusic.com

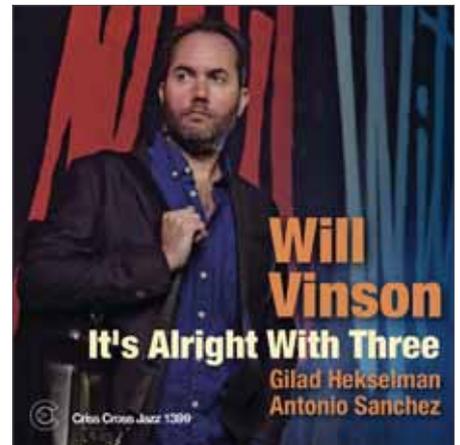


Remarkable as all of this is, the album's most arresting moment is surely its most contrived. There's nothing effortless in the darkness of Abbey Lincoln's "Throw It Away." Between Taylor Eigsti's eerie piano fills, Nir Felder's moody, reverb-filled guitar lines and Vasandani's masterful harmonic turns, the tune is a stark counterpoint that only reinforces the cunning of the musicians' art. —Michael J. West

Shadow Train: Day In, Day Out; When I Grow Too Old To Dream; That's All; I Concentrate On You; I Love Paris; Throw It Away; For All We Know; To Love Somebody; Unforgettable; Very Early. (48:50)

Personnel: Sachal Vasandani, vocals; Dayna Stephens, saxophone; Nir Felder, guitar; Taylor Eigsti, piano; Reuben Rogers, bass; Eric Harland, drums.

Ordering info: gsirecords.com



Will Vinson *It's Alright With Three*

CRISS CROSS 1399

★★★★

Listeners might find themselves reminded of flugelhornist John Raymond's trio Real Feels when listening to saxophonist Will Vinson's *It's Alright With Three*. Guitarist Gilad Hekselman is a member of both bands, and like Real Feels, Vinson's trio gets by without a bassist. But more importantly, the two ensembles seem to share a philosophy of accessibility.

Drummer Antonio Sanchez's kick drum has a pleasing whump and his cymbals wash by like cars passing at midnight. Hekselman's guitar rings softly on ballads like "Where Are You?" But on high-energy originals like "Samurai Hee Haw" and "Resting Jazz Face," it swells and develops a sharp bite, and his solos head in the direction of riffastic shredding. Vinson, meanwhile, switches back and forth between alto and soprano saxophone. On the fuller horn, he's got a thick, gravy-slathered tone that recalls the alto's most muscular practitioners, like Arthur Blythe and Cannonball Adderley. On the soprano, he avoids sounding like a kazoo, which is the least you can ask of the guy.

The album includes four originals with witty titles—the two previously mentioned, "The Pines" and "Down Homeless"—and versions of several standards, including "My Shining Hour," the title track and "Nobody Else But Me," that never get bogged down by reverence. The latter piece is particularly impressive, transforming into an atmospherically swinging nine-minute album closer full of murmuring alto, shimmering guitar and booming drums.

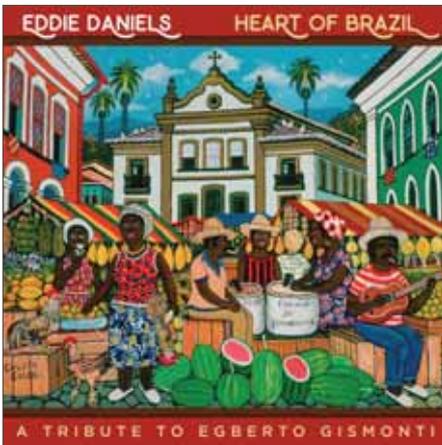
All these disparate takes fit together, as this unique group puts its personal stamp on every note.

—Phil Freeman

It's Alright With Three: My Shining Hour; The Pines; It's Alright With Me; Samurai Hee Haw; Where Are You?; Resting Jazz Face; Down Homeless; Nobody Else But Me. (56:06)

Personnel: Will Vinson, alto, soprano saxophone; Gilad Hekselman, guitar; Antonio Sanchez, drums, percussion.

Ordering info: crisscrossjazz.com



Eddie Daniels
Heart Of Brazil: A Tribute To Egberto Gismonti

RESONANCE 1027

★★★★½

Heart Of Brazil: A Tribute To Egberto Gismonti celebrates a brilliant transformation of the Brazilian polymath's early music into a heady, seamless suite for octet with veteran clarinetist Eddie Daniels and sizable string contributions from Harlem Quartet. Gismonti's pre-ECM songs, dances, film and theater pic-

es (1972-'87) breathe anew here, evoking his dream-travel consciousness, deep dive into world music and tireless excursions into piano and various guitars.

Daniels, a whirling dervish and warbling genius, conveys breathless wonderment: His pristine tone and purling conception—links to Artie Shaw—sound as fresh as his 1988 Grammy-winner, *Memos From Paradise*. Like Clark Terry, he bends notes to a precise azure wavelength. In tenor saxophone sallys, Daniels dazzles with cuica-like squeals, Stan Getz-like lemony vibrato and empathetic cries, all unerringly musical.

Brisk interaction between ensemble players blends earthbound energy with aspirations of flight. Charts by Ted Nash and Kuno Schmid barely bottle Gismonti's genies. These twice-told tales span wine-dark seas, tribal magic and nature's vivid palette, embracing Amazon batuque, Rio samba and carnival frevo.

"Lôro (Parrot)" flies featherlight over ostinatos; strings strut and the clarinet leaps for joy on "Baião Malandro (Badass Baião)." "Ciranda (Folk Dance)" unfolds as a keening fairy-ring dance, leading to a frenzied "Folia (Revelry)." A spine-tingling fantasia for drums and col legno strings opens "Maracatú (Sacred Rhythm)": Daniels sails atop eerie piano

octaves and impassioned pizzicati.

The front six tracks seethe with a wiry energy, where drummer Maurizio Zottarelli's elan excels; the second half looms deeply introspective, as pianist Josh Nelson shines in nimble duo ("Tango") and sets up Daniels' altissimo portrayal of wrenching homelessness on "Cigana (Gypsy Woman)." Getz's aura glows brightest on Daniels' "Tango Nova (New Tango)," as strings invoke Eddie Sauter's work on Getz's 1961 album *Focus* and Nelson trips the light fantastic.

The dreamy "Adágio" leads to rattling horn-string exchanges on "Trem Noturno (Night Train)" and the calm self-possession of young Rembrandt on "Auto-Retrato (Self-Portrait)." More solos—like Daniels' and Nelson's flights on "Chôro"—polish this gem.

Kudos to producer George Klabin, who realized a dream to capture Gismonti's "deeply transportive experiences." In divisive times, let us rejoice when the best of two worlds meet.

—Fred Bouchard

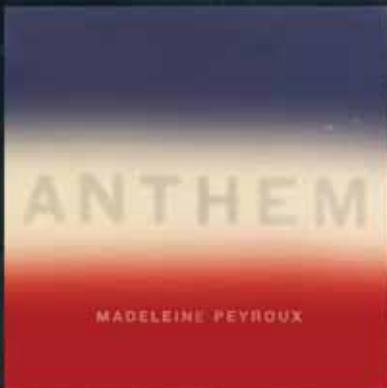
Heart Of Brazil: A Tribute To Egberto Gismonti: Lôro (Parrot); Baião Malandro (Badass Baião); Água e Vinho (Water And Wine); Ciranda (Folk Dance); Folia (Revelry); Maracatú (Sacred Rhythm); Adágio; Tango Nova (New Tango); Chôro; Tango; Cigana (Gypsy Woman); Trem Noturno (Night Train); Auto-Retrato (Self-Portrait). (77:08)

Personnel: Eddie Daniels, clarinet, tenor sax (3, 4, 8, 12); Josh Nelson, piano; Kevin Axt, bass; Maurizio Zottarelli, drums; Ilmar Gavilán, Melissa White, violin; Jaime Amador, viola; Felix Umansky, cello.

Ordering info: resonancerecords.org



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Jure Pukl (left), Melissa Aldana, Joe Sanders and Greg Hutchinson perform on *Doubtless*.

COURTESY WHIRLWIND RECORDINGS

Whirlwind Gathering Steam

Less than a decade old, London-based Whirlwind Recordings gives modern jazz a fresh, new face. The label's inspired roster of talent bridges genres, instruments and generations—a testament to founder Michael Janisch's insight into not only where jazz has been, but where it's headed. The following recent releases stand as a portent of the label's promising outlook.

Slovenia-born **Jure Pukl** and his wife, **Melissa Aldana**, both tenor saxophone players, share a common musical vision and vocabulary. The reciprocal exchange between these like-minded players provides the signature sound for Pukl's quartet with Aldana, bassist Joe Sanders and drummer Greg Hutchinson. Their sweetly entangled saxophone lines reach ever upward, grounded by the driving pulse of the chordless rhythm section. On Pukl's latest, ***Doubtless* (4724; 43:28 ★★★½)**, the saxophone duet tumbles in and around the harmony on tunes like "Doves," a waltz with an engaging hook and extended solo sections. But on Ornette Coleman's "Intersong," the two play in unison, seemingly grudgingly, splintering off into discrete, sometime dissonant reveries at the end of each chorus. These explorations of musical closeness and distance neatly mimic the conversations between friends and partners; the key to the success of this album lies in the natural rapport among these players as they engage and improvise.

Bassist/composer **Wojtek Mazolewski**, leader of the Polish experimental jazz quartet Pink Freud, offers up a bundled version of some of his works with ***Polka (Worldwide Deluxe Edition)* (4725; 52:42 ★★★★★)**. On the album, Mazolewski swaps three tunes from his critically acclaimed 2014 *Polka* (Agora S.A.) for the title cuts from his 2017 12-inch, "London/Theme De YoYo" (Lanquidity). This rejiggering leaves Mazolewski with a musical travelogue of sorts—all but

one of the 12 originals on the new collection bear the name of a place. Hearing these city-inspired compositions side by side, listeners can appreciate just how gifted Mazolewski is at capturing place through sound. On "London," the enervated horn and drum parts recall the noise of a hectic traffic jam, and on "Paris," a spare melody ripples out like a whistled tune along a sunlit boulevard.

Drummer **Gene Jackson** has been best known as a sideman for Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter, but his debut is set to change that. At the helm of his close-knit ensemble, Trio NuYorx (pianist Gabriel Guerrero and bassist Carlo de Rosa), Jackson maneuvers into the foreground with ***Power Of Love* (4723; 65:18; ★★★½)**, 10 tunes of varying rhythmic textures that showcase each member of the trio as both a composer and player. On Jackson's "Before Then," he hews as close as possible to an unwavering, fast-as-a-bullet tempo, challenging the others to keep up. Which they do—this ensemble is nothing if not cohesive.

In another drummer-directed group, **Jeff Williams** explores evolving improvised forms and shifting emotional terrain on ***Life-like* (4721; 60:41 ★★★½)**. Recorded live in London last year, the album reprises six of Williams' original tunes from three previous albums, performed this time with additional personnel and altered arrangements—to intriguing effect. "Borderline," first heard on 2013's *The Listener*, opens this time with a deceptively casual saxophone and percussion improvisation, before the tune's jaunty horn motif enters almost three minutes in. Guest trumpeter Gonçalo Marquez contributes the only new tune on the recording, his "Canção Do Amolador," a worthy vehicle for Williams' thrumming and the horns' regal, celebratory blowing. **DB**

Ordering info: whirlwindrecordings.com



R+R=Now *Collagically Speaking*

BLUE NOTE 0028360

★★★

Taking cues from his work on *Nina Revisited* (Legacy)—the tribute to the politically motivated Nina Simone—Robert Glasper assembled the supergroup R+R=Now, though the resulting sessions are more an auditory celebration of Black joy and survival in the present than a commentary on our current, all-American mess.

Opening with the mellifluous "Change Of Tone," Glasper's keyboard signals the melody, Terrace Martin—on synthesizer and vocoder—gently fills in the track and Justin Tyson's drums guide its spirit. "Resting Warrior" buzzes on waves of frantic keyboards, persistent drums and Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah's trumpet.

Martin's electronic voicing provides the right nuance to "Colors In The Dark," while "Need You Still," featuring Omari Hardwick, sonically echoes its vocal plea for reunion and embrace. "Respond" is a glorious reaction to catastrophe, written by bassist Derrick Hodge, steadied by Tyson's beat and Taylor McFerrin's sweet synth.

The stylistic range and reach of the compositions here move easily through themes of love and empowerment, acceptance and loss, though the pointed lyrical jabs and musical left hooks characteristic of Simone largely are absent. The titles of the pieces don't reflect the imagination, ambition or the depth of creativity of this collaborative display. Despite that, Glasper and company succeed in relating their topical message: As the world burns, what we need is a little more love, tolerance and beauty. The music delivers those values, even as the world around us seems in dangerously short supply of each. —Denise Sullivan

Collagically Speaking: Change Of Tone; Awake To You; By Design; Resting Warrior; Need You Still; Colors In The Dark; The Night In Question; Reflect Reprise; HER = NOW; Respond; Been On My Mind. (73:18)

Personnel: Robert Glasper, keyboards; Terrace Martin, synthesizer, vocoder; Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah, trumpet; Derrick Hodge, bass; Taylor McFerrin, synthesizer; Justin Tyson, drums; Jahi Sundance, DJ (3, 11); Goapele (1), Omari Hardwick (5), Terry Crews (7), Stalley (8), Amanda Seales (9), Yasiin Bey (11), Amber Navran (11), vocals.

Ordering info: bluenote.com



Karrin Allyson
Some Of That Sunshine

KASRECORDS 2
★★★★

There are so many ways to savor Karrin Allyson's artistry. Start with her voice, its rare clarity and resonant timbre. She phrases impeccably, staying close to the melody, except on the occasional scat chorus. Everything she sings seems to rise from a smile.

The flip side is that, more than most of her peers, she shies away from any blues influence. Here and there she'll adorn the melody with a flat-third filigree, though more as a sprinkle of

The Royal Krunk Jazz Orchestra
Get It How You Live

ROPEADOPE 430
★★★★½

So much about Russell Gunn's Royal Krunk Jazz Orchestra feels like a perfectly executed nostalgia act. Wes Funderburk and Gunn's arrangements for this large ensemble hearken back to so many Black musical influences. The introductory track lays out the album's thesis, an intermingling of genres aimed at enabling fans from disparate sonic quarters to end petty squabbles. "Sybil's Blues" (a composition sampled on Digable Planets' "Cool Like That"), Shai's "If I Ever Fall in Love" and two DeBarge songs do the trick. These aren't jazz standards—more like r&b encroaching on old-school joints. And like most nostalgia-inducing works, *Get It How You Live* summons the good vibes Gunn seems to be courting.

Alto saxophonist Brian Hogans' solo on Dionne Farris' "Fair" is the moment the entire project comes into focus. Nestled in the middle of her fantastic vocals and those sweeping horn arrangements, Hogans ensures all the tray tables are in an upright and locked position, prepares for takeoff and leaves listeners in the clouds.

Farris' presence on the album displays the rapport she and Gunn have, the bandleader perfectly framing Farris' talents with members of

spice than a fundament of her style.

These qualities make every moment on *Some Of That Sunshine* unmistakably Allyson. As does her writing. Each track is concise, built on an unvarying verse/chorus/bridge structure, her band providing perfect support. The solos are not about stretching out; their purpose is to frame the lyric and bring out the luster in Allyson's performance. Houston Person does this by complementing her nearly transparent purity with his smoky tenor on "Just As Well." In contrast, violinist Regina Carter mirrors Allyson's playful feel on the title cut by plucking the first verse of her solo.

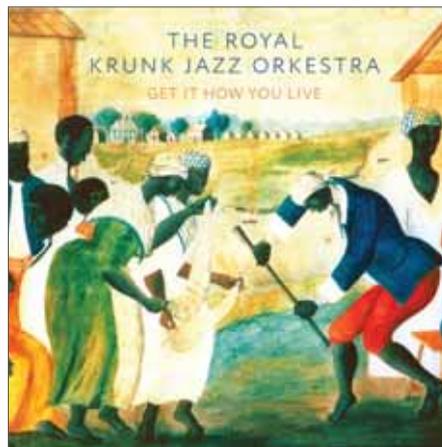
Allyson keeps this same focus through the last two songs on the album. From its first few notes, "You Don't Care" surprises with its old-school country vibe and compositional simplicity. It's easy to imagine it being played on the Grand Ole Opry stage—not today but maybe 50 years ago. And the #metoo message of "Big Discount" couldn't be more timely, though even here Allyson maintains her tuneful vibe.

—Bob Doerschuk

Some Of That Sunshine: I Wish You Were Mine; Home; As Long As I Know You Love Me; Some Of That Sunshine; Shake It Up; Just As Well; Time Is A Funny Thing; One Of These Days; Nobody Said Love Was Easy; Happy Now; Right Here Right Now; You Don't Care; Big Discount. (57:25)

Personnel: Karrin Allyson, vocals, piano, Fender Rhodes; Chris Caswell, Hammond B-3, accordion; Miro Sprague, piano, Fender Rhodes; Jeff Johnson, bass; Lee Sklar, bass (7); Jerome Jennings, drums; Regina Carter, violin (4, 7, 13); Houston Person, tenor saxophone (6, 8, 11).

Ordering info: karrin.com



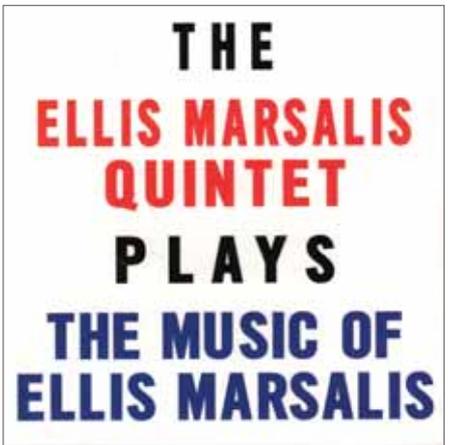
the ensemble. This is an accord that involves not just contemplating sheet music, but how it affects a crowd. And what results is an album that sounds and feels like it was easy to put together, despite the complexity and intent behind it all.

—Anthony Dean-Harris

Get It How You Live: Get It How You Live (Intro); Sybil's Blues; If I Ever Fall In Love; Fair; The Critic's Song; Hopeless; Lyne's Joint; Switch Medley (There'll Never Be/A Brighter Tomorrow I Call Your Name); Ballad Of The Sad Young Men. (57:54)

Personnel: Russell Gunn, Theo Croker, Curtis Watson, Lee King, Melvin Jones, Daniel Harper, Darren English, trumpet; Akeem Marable, Brian Hogans, James Robertson, alto saxophone; Mike Walton, Jamel Mitchell, tenor saxophone; Eric Fontaine, baritone saxophone, alto clarinet; Saunders Semmons, Derrick Jackson, Derrick White, Tom Gibson, trombone; Dionne Farris (4, 6, 8, 9), Dashill Smith (1, 5), vocals; Che Marshall, drums; Tabari Lake, bass; Phil Davis, keyboard; Rod Harris Jr., guitar; Ali Barr, trumpet, percussion.

Ordering info: ropeadope.com



The Ellis Marsalis Quintet
The Ellis Marsalis Quintet Plays The Music Of Ellis Marsalis

ELM 19793
★★★

Ellis Marsalis long has enjoyed the practice of bringing songs to different sessions and groups to see how they change in the process, and to see what new players can add to the template he's provided. The snappy classic "Zee Blues," for example, was given a modal makeover with the help of saxophonist Eddie Harris on a 1985 album, and can be heard in full bop mode on the 1998 trio album *Twelve's It*, and played with a charming barrelhouse bent on 1991's *Piano In E/Solo Piano*.

"Zee Blues" shows up again on Marsalis' latest album, a quintet recording made up entirely of new interpretations of some of his best-known tunes. This time around, the tempo is measured with room given over for chipper solos by saxophonist Derek Douget and trumpeter Ashlin Parker. Marsalis takes a lighter, almost Ray Charles-like approach, adding a soulful bite to the circular lead melody.

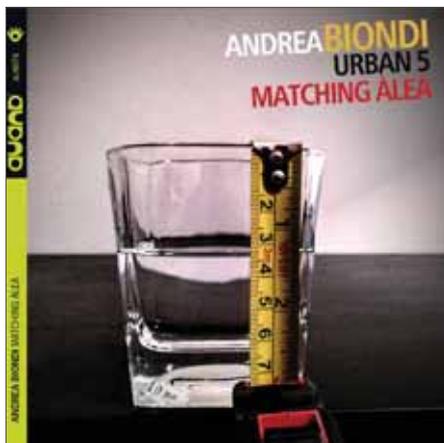
The full album has a zero-stakes quality to it, a playfulness that only can come by working with the pliable clay of familiar songs and resting in the knowledge that, at 83 years old, the only listener Marsalis needs to satisfy is himself. He doesn't throw himself full-body into his solos anymore, instead playing with a relaxed tonality and a delicate touch. And when the tempos start to heat up, he recedes into the shadows. Listeners can still make out his form and presence, but he's lost some of the sharpness and clarity that were his defining qualities.

—Robert Ham

The Ellis Marsalis Quintet Plays The Music Of Ellis Marsalis: Twelve's It; The Garden; Relaxin' At Madara; Tell Me; Orchid Blue; Friendships; The ELM Record Company (Interlude); Dippy; Chapter One; Nostalgic Impressions; Basic Urge; Crescent City Summer; Zee Blues. (72:32)

Personnel: Ellis Marsalis, piano; Derek Douget, tenor saxophone; Ashlin Parker, trumpet; Jason Stewart, bass; Stephen Gordon, drums.

Ordering info: elm-records.com



Andrea Biondi Urban 5 Matching Alea

AUAND 9074

★★★★

Rome-based vibraphonist Andrea Biondi has a classical and new music background, but he also has made an investment in jazz and improvisation. Biondi's compositional approach for the Urban 5 combines 12-tone serialism with a randomness inspired by John Cage's I-Ching strategies. Ultimately, the results hold a jazz majority, the character of Biondi's work suggesting a taste for Eric Dolphy's *Out To Lunch!*

Matt Piet City In A Garden

EARS&EYES 416580

★★★★

If you're looking for the proverbial Eden of emerging improvisers, *City In A Garden* is a listener's paradise. Enter the next installment of pianist Matt Piet's recently exploding catalog—an assimilation of peers from the surging hotbed of up-and-comers, Chicago's Constellation venue. Maybe it's Piet's broad-ranging grasp of bygone avant-garde legends and his Berklee College of Music upbringing. But mostly, this album offers scrappy, yet intuitive, smarts fresh from this cohort's informal jams. These nine tracks explode with insatiable youthfulness, and that vibrancy is perhaps its greatest merit.

City In A Garden weaves a spectrum of wild conversations, a textured topography of chaos and connection in its totality. Piet's haunting introspectives with violinist Macie Stewart brood with expressive, heavy-handed fanfare. He throtles into wildly escalating rush-hour clashes alongside saxophonist Gerrit Hatcher, bassist Charlie Kirchen and drummer Julian Kirshner, spasming with raw energy, dutifully culminating in some impressive swinging. Piet's mad-lab concoctions with guitarist Steve Marquette deliver ephemeral

The Urban 5 takes some time to reflect its name, beginning the album with a cooler, chamber-ensemble palette, studied and calm. As each of the tracks unwind, elements of that expected abrasiveness and hyperactivity gradually appear.

On "Samba Silio," glistening vibraphone progressions are matched sympathetically with Enrico Bracco's open, luminous guitar tone, interspersed with Daniele Tittarelli's tart alto streams. All three instruments frequently seem to be on the brink of soloing, even when negotiating the central theme of a tune.

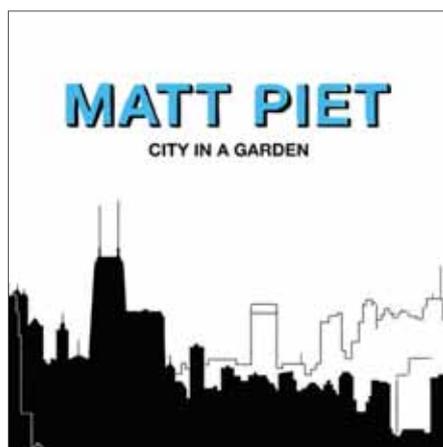
In the final moments of "Pigneto Uncompromised," the guitar accumulates dirt for a surprising freak-out climax. It's quirky touches like this that often derail the listening experience amid otherwise classic sounds. In the middle stretch of the track listing, a suite-like character evolves, making narrative sense as it develops. The first half of the album is strongest, peaking with the increasing urgency of "Brackland," the bass pushed to a finger-bruising toughness, Ferrazza reveling in a heavily percussive string attack.

—Martin Longley

Matching Alea: Samba Silio; Pigneto Uncompromised; Piano Sequenza; T.T.T.T.; Brackland; Psicosi Inversa; Transizione Al Doppio Salto; Doppio Salto Dodecafonico; Cicciococco; Lament. (55:02)

Personnel: Andrea Biondi, vibraphone, synthesizer; Daniele Tittarelli, alto saxophone; Enrico Bracco, guitar; Jacopo Ferrazza, bass; Valerio Vantaggio, drums; Adriano Lanzi, electronics (3).

Ordering info: auand.com



bursts of Jekyll and Hyde discord that's deliciously addictive, and alongside drummer Bill Harris and Jake Wark, Piet proves his worth as an emotive, polyrhythmic storyteller.

City solidifies Piet as active participant and listener. Similarly, it's a must for disciples of the Chicago School of creative music.

—Hilary Brown

City In A Garden: with Macie Stewart; with Gerrit Hatcher, Charlie Kirchen and Julian Kirshner; with Steve Marquette; with Bill Harris and Jake Wark; with Charlie Kirchen and Julian Kirshner; with Macie Stewart; with Steve Marquette; with Gerrit Hatcher; with Bill Harris and Jake Wark. (35:02).

Personnel: Matt Piet, piano; Macie Stewart, violin; Gerrit Hatcher, Jake Wark, saxophone; Charlie Kirchen, bass; Julian Kirshner, Bill Harris, drums; Steve Marquette, guitar.

Ordering info: earsandeyesrecords.com



Steve Tibbetts Life Of

ECM 2599

★★★★★

Because there's so much atmosphere in Steve Tibbetts' music—the reverb-laden guitar, ghostly piano chords, quiet washes of percussion—it can be easy to assume that atmosphere is all he's got. After all, the guitarist is not one for big, brash melodies or deeply funky grooves, nor do his tunes offer anything like the easily decoded structure of pop songcraft. And when the narrative is hard to follow, it's all too tempting to assume there isn't one at all.

With *Life Of*, his 10th solo album, Tibbetts makes it easier to follow the thread by presenting a series of sonic portraits, each one offered as a "Life Of." It's not storytelling in any conventional sense, but it does lend a certain specificity to the mood and vocabulary of each piece.

"Life Of Emily," for example, opens with Tibbetts playing in a sliding, vocalized style that, along with Marc Anderson's hand percussion, evokes the sound of Indian classical music. But about 13 seconds in, the drone beneath those soothingly serpentine lines drops a minor third, and the mood shifts. Although Tibbetts continues to play slippery, string-bending filigrees, the rhythmic pulse quietly has become more insistent. It's drama, but of a sort so subtle it easily can be missed without close listening.

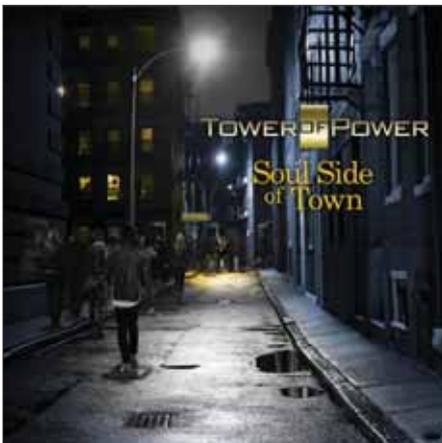
Pay close attention, though, and *Life Of* reveals a world of sonic surprises. With "Life Of Mir," it's relentlessly shifting harmony and splashes of Michelle Kinney's cello; with "Life Of Dot," it's harmonics pulled from bent strings to give each note unique flavor; with "Life Of Alice," it's the intertwining rhythms of finger-picked guitar, sampled gamelan and piano. It might be less than an hour long, but *Life Of* will provide years of deep and rewarding listening.

—J.D. Considine

Life Of: Bloodwork; Life Of Emily; Life Of Someone; Life Of Mir; Life Of Lowell; Life Of Joel; Life Of Alice; Life Of Dot; Life Of Carol; Life Of Joan; Life Of Ei; End Again; Start Again. (50:39)

Personnel: Steve Tibbetts, guitar, piano; Marc Anderson, percussion, handpan; Michelle Kinney, cello, drones.

Ordering info: ecmrecords.com



Tower of Power *Soul Side Of Town*

MACK AVENUE/ARTISTRY MUSIC 7059

★★★★½

No signs of rust surface on *Soul Side Of Town*, Tower Of Power's first album in eight years.

A shiny mix of taut instrumentals, soaring, medium-tempo ballads and tunes suggesting actual locales and characters, this 50th-anniversary recording affirms the trademarks of the meticulous 10-piece ensemble: a razor-

sharp horn section of distinctive saxophone drama, versatile lead vocalists, song titles demanding the listener join in the fun and just enough variety to avoid predictability.

Bracketed by homages to the group's base in Oakland, California, the album pops from the jump, largely thanks to Joe Vannelli, who co-produced the disc with ToP saxophonist/vocalist Emilio Castillo. This highly polished, well-sequenced collection of 14 tunes invites listeners to the soul side of town, where new lead vocalist Marcus Scott assures listeners that "Everybody's welcome/No matter who you are/It's one big family/And everyone's a star."

In this mythical place, there's no greater pleasure than "Hangin' With My Baby"—as long as you "Do It With Soul." There can be setbacks, as on "Selah," a swaggering track on which Castillo relates a tale of betrayal. But overall, an upbeat atmosphere rules across *Soul Side Of Town*, even on the less aggressive offerings.

Tower of Power's lyrics aren't generally what grabs a listener. It's the groove, exemplified on such stop-on-a-dime cuts as the appropriately crispy "Butter Fried" and "After Hours," a sultry lesson in saxophone interplay and cross-rhythms. Standout soloists include guitarist Jerry Cortez, Hammond B-3 master Roger

Smith and Stephen "Doc" Kupka, a baritone saxophonist of puckish authority who co-wrote the majority of the tunes here alongside Castillo.

The music throughout this program is well-arranged—even on occasion surprising. Touches like Tom Politzer's ebullient flute on "Do You Like That?" and the tasteful strings underlining Ray Greene's delirious lead vocal on "Love Must Be Patient And Kind" effectively separate the heartfelt from the saccharine.

Tower of Power somehow has managed to freshen the familiar on this, its 25th long-playing disc. And along with the new recording, a pair of archival sets, as well as CD/DVD pairing, are being made available to help mark the band's history, which stretches back to 1968.

—Carlo Wolff

Soul Side Of Town: East Bay! All Day!; Hangin' With My Baby; Do You Like That?; On The Soul Side Of Town; Do It With Soul; Love Must Be Patient And Kind; Butter Fried; Selah; Let It Go; Stop; When Love Takes Control; After Hours; Can't Stop Thinking About You; East Bay! Oakland Style! (59:11)

Personnel: Adolfo Acosta, trumpet, flugelhorn; Emilio Castillo, tenor saxophone, vocals; Jerry Cortez, guitar, electric sitar, lap steel, baritone guitar, 12-string guitar; Sal Cracchiolo, trumpet, flugelhorn; David Garibaldi, drums; Roger Smith, Hammond B-3 organ; Ray Greene, vocals, trombone; Chuck Hansen, bass saxophone; Stephen "Doc" Kupka, baritone saxophone; Tom Politzer, tenor, alto, baritone saxophone, clarinet, flute; Francis Rocco Prestia, bass; Marcus Scott, vocals; Joe Vannelli, keyboards.

Ordering info: mackavenue.com

Nicola Conte & Spiritual Galaxy *Let Your Light Shine On*

MPS 01666

★★★★½

This is Afro-soul filtered through an Italian DJ/guitarist in a South African studio with a lot of American and Swedish instrumentalists.

This worldly music, made by a worldly crew and meant to groove without interruption, draws most of its substance from the propulsion and repetition of Africa's pop diaspora dating to the 1970s—but with a digital polish. Nicola Conte guides his ensemble—a seamless force of horns and percussion—through a succession of churning tracks. On "Ogun," also saxophonist Logan Richardson jolts and jabs over serenely rolling cymbals and lush piano chords; the nouveau disco of "Cosmic Peace" provides ample space for trombonist Gianluca Petrella to get a spirited spotlight that could've straightened the ruffles on his bandmates' tuxedo shirts. Performances on *Let Your Light Shine On* are immaculate, but what's the message? Song titles often are generic platitudes, lifted straight from the hippie dictionary. And while the album never loses its groove, it's difficult to know if it's actually a success. —Sean J. O'Connell



Let Your Light Shine On: Uhuru Na Umoja; Ogun; Cosmic Peace; Universal Rhythm; Mystic Revelation Of The Gods; Let Your Light Shine On; Space Dimensions; Tribes From The Unknown; Me Do Wo; Essence Of The Sun; Love Power; Afro Black. (62:48)

Personnel: Nicola Conte, guitar; Zara McFarlane (2); Zoe Modica (6, 10); Bridgette Amofah (1, 3, 4, 9, 11, 12); Carolina Bubbico (1, 3, 7, 12), vocals; Gianluca Petrella, trombone, Minimoog; Luca Alemanno, bass; Logan Richardson, alto saxophone; Magnus Lindgren, tenor saxophone, flute; Theo Croker, trumpet; Pietro Lussu, piano, organ, Fender Rhodes; Teppo Mäkyinen, drums, percussion; Tommaso Capellato, drums (5); Abdissa Assefa, percussion.

Ordering info: mps-music.com

Okkyung Lee *Cheol-Kkot-Sae (Steel Flower.Bird)*

TZADIK 4023

★★★★★

In cellist Okkyung Lee's essay that accompanies her new disc, she notes that the traditional Korean music she'd never studied growing up in her homeland began taking hold of her while she was studying in the U.S.

Over time, Lee began exploring her identity, asking herself if the traditional Korean melodies she found herself singing a world away from home were simply part of her DNA. That investigation reaches an apotheosis here, a collision of Korean music and free improvisation.

It's fitting that the work opens with subtle interactions among vocalist Song-Hee Kwon, percussionist Jae-Hyo Chang and Lee, as if summoning Korean tradition. The singer draws upon the phrasing and intonation of pansori—a storytelling form—but Lee wrote the Korean lyrics, and the musicians quickly move outside of tradition, with extended techniques and sophisticated, spontaneous interplay. The work never feels like an exercise in multiculturalism. It does, though, suggest an underlying quality present in so much of Lee's work during the past 15 years, as if her past is a key to unlock part of her multifaceted, ever-evolving makeup. —Peter Margasak



Cheol-Kkot-Sae (Steel Flower.Bird): Cheol-Kkot-Sae (Steel Flower.Bird); Ahp-Ghil-Eh-Neun (On The Road In Front Of...); Jeh-Bi (Swallows); Neup (Swamp); Norae Hanah (Just A Song); Pyun-Ji (Letters); Geu-Ri-Go-Nah-Sun (Then...); Gheo-Wool (Mirrors). (44:31)

Personnel: Okkyung Lee, cello; Song-Hee Kwon, pansori singing; Jae-Hyo Chang, Korean traditional percussion; John Butcher, tenor, soprano saxophone; John Edwards, bass; Ches Smith, drums, percussion, vibraphone; Lasse Marhaug, electronics.

Ordering info: tzadik.com

Can't Stop Now

Jim Vegas, *Soul Shattered Sister* (Goonzy Magoo 04; 42:13 ★★★★★) Jim Vegas, aka Brad Conner, provides an “alternative blues” of his own invention, tapping elements of blues, rock, soul, reggae and even old spy music. His tremulous, tenor voice is a cross between world-weary resolve and heightened anxiety. It draws listeners into the heart of the Wichita-based bandleader’s 11 well-crafted, thoughtful and tuneful originals; most striking of all are the dysfunctional-romance title track and semi-political “Bad Fruit In The Yard.” As a guitarist, Conner evokes lyricism when expressing emotion in his solo on “Till The Whole Thing Blows.”

Ordering info: jimvegasmusic.com

Terry Blersh, *Play It All Day* (Self Release; 35:37 ★★★½) Active in Toronto clubs since the early 1990s, singer and guitarist Terry Blersh hits all the bullet points on his first feature album in a decade and second overall. Beyond the Albert King licks on “Treat Me Right” and his other blues moves, Blersh takes creative flight into neo-soul (“Play It All Day” with singer Quisha Wint) and Chet Baker-type balladry (“Only One”). His reach even extends to a rebooting of Gordon Lightfoot’s “Early Morning Rain” and a celebration of country great Merle Travis’ distinctive fingerpicking technique on the evergreen “I’ll See You In My Dreams.”

Ordering info: terryblersh.ca

Keeshea Pratt Band, *Believe* (Self Release; 53:09 ★★★★★) The winning band at this year’s International Blues Competition in Memphis, Tennessee, these Houstonians (including a horn section) boast a firecracker of a lead singer. Keeshea Pratt invests “Have A Good Time Y’All” and other songs from the pen of musical director/bassist Shawn Allen with a spirit symptomatic of her outsized personality. Yet the music often feels pat and provisional, a grab bag of received blues ‘n’ soul clichés. Eight-minute slow scorcher “So Bad Blues” is the one concert track.

Ordering info: keesheapratt.com

Son House, *Live At Oberlin College, April 15, 1965* (Rockbeat 3389; 38:15 ★★★½) Out of retirement the previous year, Son House—a major figure in the genre who largely is responsible for developing the Delta blues style—kindled a college crowd with the fire of his starkly powerful singing and slide-guitar work. His fingers on strings aren’t always accurate, but for the most part young acolyte Alan Wilson (later of Canned Heat) retrained him well. After a too-long spoken preamble, noting the conflict of being a Christian performing the devil’s music, the 63-year-old sizes up his signature song “Preachin’ The



Blues” and three more, but unfortunately not “Death Letter Blues” and “Levee Camp Moan.”

Ordering info: rockbeatrecords.com

Aki Kumar, *Hindi Man Blues* (Little Village Foundation 1017; 60:38 ★★★★★) Charlie Musselwhite-endorsed Aki Kumar proves to traditionalists that singing in Hindi can co-exist with Chicago blues conventions. This Indian-American’s intense sense of musical discovery as an able vocalist and harmonica player drives worry-and-regret makeovers of Bollywood film songs and adds bounce to a reggae version of “Watermelon Man.” Boosted by top West Coast blues personnel and cross-cultural extras, Kumar proves that the integrity of his music marks the difference between novelty and substance. The best of his three albums.

Ordering info: littlevillagefoundation.org

Various Artists, *Voices Of Mississippi* (Dust To Digital 53; 78:20/78:31/71:22 ★★★★★½) For six decades, distinguished author and scholar Bill Ferris has marshalled all the intellect and ardent feeling at his disposal to document the folk music and culture of his home state, Mississippi. This box takes stock of many performers Ferris sought out between 1966 and 1980, and includes a 120-page hardbound book (essays by others, edited by Ferris, plus track information), three CDs (blues, gospel, interviews/storytelling) and a single DVD of seven short documentaries, filmed in color. Humanity infuses the music of or talk by a renowned few (Mississippi Fred McDowell, Son Thomas, B.B. King, Alice Walker) and by so many lost-in-the-mists-of-time folks (like Lovey Williams, Joe Cooper, Sonny Boy Watson, Rev. Ott & Family). **DB**

Ordering info: dust-digital.com



María Grand *Magdalena*

BIOPHILIA 0010

★★★★½

Lester Young famously believed that an instrumentalist needed to know all the words to a song in order to play it correctly. María Grand takes that a step further by writing lyrics to songs she only intends to play on tenor saxophone. This reflects a strong sense of story in her music, and indeed the liner notes to her first proper album, *Magdalena*, find her explaining not only the tale behind each composition, but how that narrative is manifest in the music itself.

The album’s central trilogy presents in turn the stories of Isis, Maria (the mother of Jesus) and Magdalena (a.k.a. Mary Magdalen). Each piece is constructed around a specific triad, and elements of each character likewise are expressed through the musical structure. In “TI. Isis,” her liner notes explain, “The melody has every note that exists in a chromatic scale except for one, the piece that Isis didn’t find after Osiris died.”

Deep stuff, and Grand backs up her theory in rigorous, inventive practice. Grand’s tenor, meanwhile, has a light, expressive tone that evokes Mark Turner’s early work, making the restless invention of her lines more compelling.

She’s equally resourceful as a songwriter, and her vocal numbers are blessed with the same sort of offhand complexity as Björk’s recent work. But her singing voice lacks the power of her instrumental tone, a weakness that sometimes renders the intended dissonances unconvincing. A pity, given that the vocal accompaniments—a virtuosic turn by pianist Fabian Almazan on “Imani/Walk By,” and gorgeously coloristic guitar from Mary Halvorson on “Last Year”—are among the best things on this album.

—J.D. Considine

Magdalena: La Inmortal; Imani/Walk By; TI. Isis; TI. Maria; TI. Magdalena; Last Year; Pyramid Sphere; Where Is E; Demonium; Sing Unborn; Ejes Y Deseos. (46:33)

Personnel: María Grand, tenor saxophone, vocals; Mary Halvorson, guitar (6, 10); Jasmine Wilson, spoken word (1); Amani Fela, spoken word (11); Fabian Almazan, piano (2); David Bryant, piano (1, 7, 8, 9, 11); Rashaan Carter, bass; Jeremy Dutton, drums.

Ordering info: biophilirecords.com



Cyrille Aimée
Cyrille Aimée Live
 MACK AVENUE 1139
 ★★★★★

Few vocal-jazz groups exhibit the kind of energy onstage quite like the ensemble led by French-Dominican singer Cyrille Aimée. Her group, rounded out by bassist Dylan Shamat, drummer Dani Danor and guitarists Adrien Moignard and Michael Valeanu, has toured the world for five years, playing everywhere from tiny New York clubs to the Django Reinhardt Festival in the singer's hometown, Samois, France.

Hadar Noiberg
Open Fields
 JAMMINCOLORS 18-005
 ★★★★★

Israel-born flutist and composer Hadar Noiberg's expressive finesse moves through sharply defined, well-crafted and flowing compositions on her trio's *Open Fields*. Since 2010, the 35-year-old bandleader has regularly been touring, and for more than a year, the personnel of her troupe has included bassist/guitarist Eduardo Belo and drummer Amir Bar-Akiva.

Open Fields features nine original compositions and the haunting Israeli folk song "Na'ama," showcasing lush accompaniment from New York-based pianist Chano Dominguez backing Noiberg's soulful flute. The album's introductory "I See The Light" highlights the bandleader's fluidity, serving up flavors from Israel, the Middle East and the jazz and classical worlds. The trio uses space patiently, intently listening as a solid collective. Dominguez again joins Noiberg for a passionate performance on "Nova Scotia," a celebration of Canada's Maritimes region.

A stunning moment is the title track's matching up of Noiberg with Belo's ethereal guitar and Bar-Akiva's subtle, sensitive brushwork. But the flutist makes strong statements across the entire album, and her improvisations shine with a confident approach and merging of genres.

Cyrille Aimée Live documents this talented two-guitar lineup's final performance together Aug. 16, 2017, at Manhattan's (Le) Poisson Rouge, coming off a year on the road in support of Aimée's *Let's Get Lost* (Mack Avenue). This 10-track collection expands originals like "Nuit Blanche," from Aimée's *It's A Good Day* (2014, Mack Avenue), and the *Lost* highlight "Each Day," while offering new directions in their interpretations of Stephen Sondheim's "Live Alone And Like It" and Thelonious Monk's 1944 standard "Well, You Needn't."

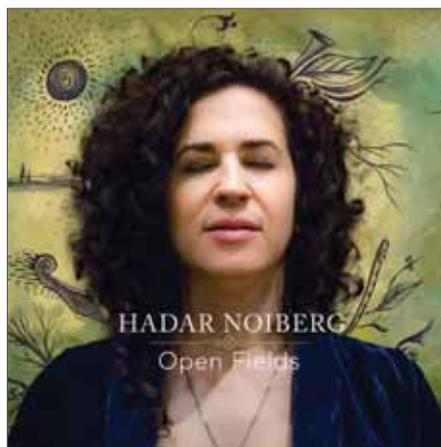
What truly reveals the special nature of this particular combo is the Michael Jackson tribute smack in the middle of *Live*, as Aimée live-loops percussive layers of her own voice on a funky version of "Wanna Be Startin' Somethin'," before the band returns for an impassioned spin on "Off The Wall."

While it's sad to see this incarnation of Aimée's group bid listeners *adieu*, a debt of gratitude is owed to Mack Avenue for having the wisdom to roll tape on what turned out to be a magnificent performance. —Ron Hart

Cyrille Aimée Live: *It's A Good Day; Nuit Blanche; Si Tu Vois Ma Mère; Live Alone And Like It; Wanna Be Startin' Somethin'; Off The Wall; Day By Day; Well, You Needn't; Three Little Words; Each Day.* (57:57)

Personnel: Cyrille Aimée, vocals; Dylan Shamat, bass; Dani Danor, drums; Adrien Moignard, Michael Valeanu, guitar.

Ordering info: mackavenue.com



Inspired by the music of Brazil, Noiberg creates an Israeli choro within her own lyrical composition, "Triste." It's a perfect union of Noiberg's spirited flute in duo with Belo's flawless guitar accompaniment. The closing "Time To Let Go" links up the trio's powerful rhythmic force with an enjoyably sunny take on the simplicity of the moment. It's a melodious departure from a captivating, uplifting listen. —Kerlie McDowall

Open Fields: *I See The Light; Doors Wide Open; Nova Scotia; Open Fields; My Big Why; Na'ama; Rockin' The Boat; Triste; Time To Let Go.* (49:14)

Personnel: Hadar Noiberg, flutes; Eduardo Belo, bass, acoustic guitar (4, 8); Amir Bar-Akiva, drums; Chano Dominguez, piano (3, 6).

Ordering info: jammincolors.com



Jin Jim
Weiße Schatten
 ACT 9677
 ★★★★★

Excuse Jin Jim's second album for reveling in its own cleverness. The group's accessible, polished approach feels ripped from an A&R scout's wet dream. Unsurprisingly, Jin Jim achieved acclaim shortly after its 2013 founding, headlining festivals and touring internationally. And *Weiße Schatten* exudes the charm of a confident crew celebrating its own success and undeniable ability.

"7x7x7" opens the album with its strongest statement. It boasts a knotty time signature and bruising velocity. Throbbing bass notes hit with a blunt force that nicely interacts with the flute's upper-register antics. Genuine head-banging moments rarely occur on jazz albums; the DNA of "7x7x7" might owe more to Scandinavian psych-rock than anything else.

Weiße Schatten excels most when bassist/composer Ben Tai Trawinski gives flutist Daniel Manrique-Smith space to explore. And on the conveniently named "Exploration," he plays the refrain beautifully, simply.

An imbalance between talent and taste, though, occasionally mars the album: The band tries on a bit of everything. On "Dreaming," Nico Stallmann's careful drumming allows for relaxed soloing. Then, inexplicably, the song mutates into a pop-punk symphony, complete with angsty lyrics. Briefly, "Days Of September" flourishes with a genuinely compelling melody and more of Smith's easy poetry, but guitarist Johann May's distorted solo sounds air-lifted from another album and era.

Comparing *Weiße Schatten* to Icarus feels unfair. When Jin Jim soars too close to the excesses its talent permits, it never crashes. But maybe it'd be more interesting if it did. —Andrew Jones

Weiße Schatten: *7x7x7; House Of The King; Intro Duende; Duende; Exploration; Days Of September; Dreaming; Mankafiza; Surface.* (52:21)

Personnel: Daniel Manrique-Smith, C, alto, bass flute; Johann May, guitar; Ben Tai Trawinski, bass; Nico Stallmann, drums.

Ordering info: actmusic.com

Heavy Psych From Japan

During the past 30 years, appreciation of Japanese underground music in the States unquestionably has grown. And some of that has to do with the excitement around releases by the Tokyo-based label P.S.F.

The imprint, which was founded in 1984 by Hideo Ikeezumi, the late proprietor of Tokyo's legendary Modern Music record store and later the editor of freak-music magazine *G-Modern*, focused on authentically non-commercial sounds. And the 240 albums the label released feature an incredible range of non-comm musical styles. Before Ikeezumi died in 2017, Peter Kolovos and Steve Lowenthal made arrangements to reissue many of the label's titles in the U.S., strictly on vinyl. The first batch are just out, and they're mighty fine.

First is the 1991 debut volume (there would be nine) of the **Tokyo Flashback** series (**Black Editions 001**; **25:11/25:44/28:48/32:21/35:20 ★★½**). Subtitled "Psychedelic Speed Freaks," these albums survey the cream of Tokyo's underground bands. Far from the garage-rock revisionists promoted by New York's Midnight Records, these eight tracks sound high, loud and out of control. High Rise, Ghost, White Heaven, Fushitsusha, Kousokuya and Keiji Haino all went on to record great albums for the label. The other two acts on the compilation are Marble Sheep & the Run-Down Sun's Children (spaced riff-rock from White Heaven's original guitarist) and Verzerk (the sole track by this trio playing in an early-'70s British heavy-prog vernacular). The album is a solid sampler of Tokyo's weirdness.

Next is **// (Black Editions 002; 29:27 ★★★★★)** by heavy-psych trio High Rise. Its 1984 debut had been called *Psychedelic Speed Freaks*, the band's original name. This 1986 recording features a new drummer joining guitarist Munehiro Narita and bassist Asahito Nanjo, and the sonics are not quite as thuggish, but the brutality of the band's narrative remains constant. Blue Cheer once claimed to "turn the air into cottage cheese," and High Rise are cut from the same cloth.

Fushitsusha's Live (Black Editions 003; 25:11/25:44/28:48/32:21/35:20 ★★★★★½) is a reissue of the band's 1991 two-CD offering. On this release, the band is a trio, led by the amazing presence of Haino, whose many forms of guitar wildness were well documented by P.S.F. over the years. Fushitsusha's debut had been strange, but was a rock album at its heart. With this one, Haino took things to a place where loud gui-



tar music exists without formal dictates. The tracks run almost continuously and range from melancholy vocal-led pieces to hurdy-gurdy improvs and guitar excursions that take psychedelic tones on some of the most avant-garde trips they've ever been on. It's a breathtakingly deep listen and one of the real high points of Haino's discography.

White Heaven's Out (Black Editions 005; 41:33 ★★★★★) was its 1991 debut LP, and probably the record most responsible for putting P.S.F. on the map. This likely was due to the quartet making music that was easy for psychedelic record dealers to describe. Guitarist Michio Kurihara's playing and tone were very much in the vein of Quicksilver-era John Cipollina: long flowing metallic strands of spider-sound with gorgeous sustain. And You Ishihara often sounded like Tom Verlaine, if he was covering Tim Buckley songs with Television.

Last in this opening sequence is **A Journey (Black Editions 004; 33:51/36:20 ★★)** by **Ché-SHIZU**. This 1994 release was the band's fourth album, but only its second studio effort. Ché-SHIZU was started in 1981 by Chie Mukai, a singer and player of the erhu (a bowed two-stringed Chinese instrument). Mukai came out of the experimental music scene after studying with Taj Mahal Travellers' Takehisa Kosugi and playing with East Bionic Symphony. Ché-SHIZU began as an improvisational unit, but moved toward structured songs as it evolved. Led by Mukai's semi-naïf vocals and erhu, the music here has a progressive feel, beautifully contained and melodic. It makes one think of some of the later RIO-related bands from England and Europe, whose moves into vaguely "acceptable" musical structuring still felt wonderfully off-kilter.

These five releases outline some of P.S.F.'s aesthetic strengths as a truly oddball label. But there's lots more to come. And I, for one, can't wait. **DB**

Ordering info: theblackeditions.com



Kikoski/Essiet/Dudli/Herring *Soul Chemistry*

ALESSA 1065

★★★★★

From the first bash of Joris Dudli's drums on "Art" to his closing blend of toms and cymbals on "Splash," a swinging rhythm section is set in motion, and that flow issues as effortlessly as it is continuous. Dudli, pianist David Kikoski and bassist Essiet Essiet provide a broad tapestry for alto saxophonist Vincent Herring to embroider with quicksilver portions of bop and his own special concoction of sonority.

Soul Chemistry is a fitting title, and the group's cohesion and combustibility never are more apparent than on "Fuller Than Ever," a lively tune where each musician, by turns, increases the song's acceleration. Monkish moments emerge on "Binge Watching" with its rubato-like pace and harmonic clusters. Kikoski's commanding solo, with its intervallic surprises, underscores the influence, before the composition morphs into a beguiling linear progression. The group's collective and individual fluency erupts again on "Smoking At Paul's Stash." Kikoski and Herring connect so wonderfully here that often it's difficult to separate the arrival of their notes. Their intuitive feel for the tune and each other, as they alternate on swatches of melody, indicates a deeply felt familiarity.

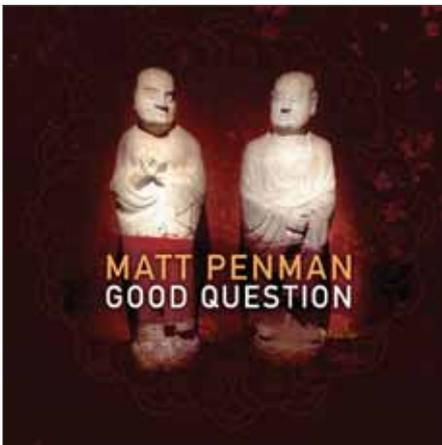
Herring has lost none of the speed and articulation that flourished so abundantly when he burst onto the scene during the early '80s. And a brief passage from "The Song Is You" during his solo on "Onesie Twosie" was a special nod to jazz aficionados and Bird lovers.

Most of the tunes on the album were composed by Dudli, and while he is a masterful timekeeper, he also proves his talent as a talented composer and arranger. —Herb Boyd

Soul Chemistry: Art; Miss Katarina; Zwe; Binge Watching; The Many Ways Of Desire; Bayonne Vibe; Fuller Than Ever; Onesie Twosie; Smoking At Paul's Stash; Splash. (63:33)

Personnel: Vincent Herring, alto saxophone; David Kikoski, piano, Fender Rhodes; Anthony Wonsey, piano, Fender Rhodes (2, 5, 6, 7); Essiet Essiet, bass; Joris Dudli, drums.

Ordering info: alessarecords.at



Matt Penman *Good Question*

SUNNYSIDE 1513

★★★★½

Since moving from his native New Zealand to New York in 1995, bassist Matt Penman has been an important part of the American jazz scene. Likely best known for his associations with the SFJAZZ Collective and James Farm, *Good Question* is Penman's fourth album as a leader and his first since 2008's *Catch Of The Day*.

As with Kurt Elling's recent album, *The Questions*, this Sunnyside release finds Penman posing a series of questions to his musicians,

Rosa Brunello Y Los Fermentos *Volverse*

CAMJAZZ 7925

★★★★★

Vividly recorded in February 2017 at Casa Della Musica in Trieste, Italy, *Volverse* showcases bass player Rosa Brunello's daring Italian quartet. Its six original tunes cover everything from cool, West Coast-inflected jazz to free, heated forays—at times within the same song.

Save for trombonist/electronics manipulator Filippo Vignato's sassy "California Dream" and drummer Luca Colussi's whirly "Christmas Tree," the tunes all are by Brunello. Many lend themselves to singing along, and each one, whether compact like "Stand Up" or sprawling like "Pina Bausch," is consistently stimulating. This ensemble never turns to cliché or playing it safe. It also sounds far bigger than its parts, especially given that the group doesn't include a keyboardist.

One of the most intoxicating moments on *Volverse* is the launch of "Pina Bausch," an homage to Philippina Bausch, a canonical figure in modern dance. The tune opens with a seamless segue from applause for the preceding track to Colussi's rim shots to Alessandro Presti's dart-

some of which are political, while others get a bit philosophical. Since Penman's set is instrumental, his questions mostly remain unknown to listeners, though song titles offer some hints.

The bassist, who wrote each of the nine pieces here, is fond of having a rhythmic pattern span many of the performances, playing an often quiet, but stimulating role, behind the ensemble and soloists. Some of his pieces have a bitonal feel with the lead voices and the rhythm section emphasizing different keys, although similar themes and rhythms. The quartet of Penman, keyboardist Aaron Parks, drummer Obed Calvaire and tenor saxophonist Mark Turner is tight, with concise solos being a logical outgrowth of the ensemble.

Guitarist Nir Felder steals the show during two appearances ("Ride The Paper Tiger," "Big Tent, Little Tent"), adding an extroverted voice on a pair of modern groove pieces that contrast with the more introspective and intellectual performances. Other highlights include a feature for the trio on "Blues And The Alternative Truth" and the folkish theme of "Copeland," each part of a modern and fresh set of creative music.

—Scott Yanow

Good Question: Mr. Right; Small Famous; Fifths And Bayou; Blues And The Alternative Truth; Cave Life; Ride The Paper Tiger; Copeland; Meats; Big Tent, Little Tent. (54:47)

Personnel: Matt Penman, bass; Mark Turner, tenor saxophone (1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 9); Aaron Parks, piano, keyboard, organ, vibraphone; Obed Calvaire, drums; Nir Felder, guitar (6, 9); Will Vinson, soprano saxophone (3); Rogerio Boccatto, percussion (3).

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com



ing trumpet to Vignato's brash trombone. That buildup yields to a warmly melodic composition, packed with striking solos.

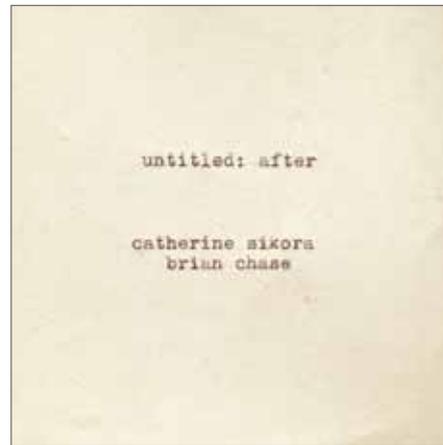
After the Bausch tribute, the compositions become even more elastic, as the group burrows into "30/Nighthawks/Indeed!," a woozy streetscape of a song, winding up with the title track, a walk through an enchanted forest.

—Carlo Wolff

Volverse: Stand Up; California Dream; Christmas Tree; Pina Bausch; 30/Nighthawks/Indeed!; Volverse. (53:20)

Personnel: Rosa Brunello, bass; Luca Colussi, drums; Alessandro Presti, trumpet; Filippo Vignato, trombone, electronics.

Ordering info: camjazz.com



Catherine Sikora/ Brian Chase *Untitled: After*

CHAIKIN 002

★★★★★

Citing the Old English poem *Beowulf* as the chief inspiration behind your album would be a bold statement for any artist, not just a pair of musicians that play turbulent free-jazz. For drummer Brian Chase and saxophonist Catherine Sikora, the decision to put that information up front with their debut collaboration, *Untitled: After*, seems to be to aid the listener in following the flow and mood of the recording.

Like the poem, this record has bursts of action intercut with minimalist stretches of contemplation that presage the battles about to unfold. One might not follow what's on the page or within the grooves of an album at first, but with time and effort, it'll all start to make sense. In the case of *Untitled: After*, what lies below the surface-level assaults are wonderful moments where musicians react and respond instantaneously to one another.

On "Dear As He Was," Sikora sets off on a melodic line that follows the rhythm of Chase's quietly clattering beat, with each of them adapting and pushing every halting movement forward, before fading into small silent moments. On "Death," a fluttering trickle from the saxophone starts spilling over as the drums splash, dip and dive behind it.

During those restrained moments, when Chase retreats to one long brush stroke on the snare or a short floor-tom rumble and Sikora lets loose a quick fusillade of notes, the album can feel like the exhausted exhilaration that results from engaging in a lengthy, hard-won battle. These noble musicians have performed courageous deeds on this fantastic album. To them, we should submit and yield tribute.

—Robert Ham

Untitled: After: Death; Dear As He Was; So. The; Rugged; Hand-To-Hand; Brightly Forged; Ice Clad; Shadow. (41:20)

Personnel: Brian Chase, drums, percussion; Catherine Sikora, tenor, soprano saxophone.

Ordering info: chaikinrecords.com

Avant-Garde Through the Decades

By the mid-1980s, the avant-garde jazz of the '50s and early '60s long had atomized into various individual styles and movements. So-called "free-jazz" was already 25 years old and had moved beyond free-form improvisation into a more eclectic, post-modern approach.

Some of the best music was playful and diverse in its influences, with a spirit of controlled chaos, an awareness of jazz history and world music, and a healthy dollop of humor: the absurd over the self-important.

That combination of freedom, structure and ironic wit was epitomized by the **Beaver Harris/Don Pullen 360-Degree Experience**. Harris, a drummer who moved freely between avant-garde and traditional jazz, started the group in the 1970s with Dave Burrell; a second iteration included the formidable Pullen on piano. Their 1984 album **A Well Kept Secret (Corbett vs. Dempsey 046, 46:26 ★★★★★½)**, impeccably produced by the great Hal Willner and now released for the first time on CD, is a revelation. Pullen, who co-wrote all five tunes, exemplified the truism that technical mastery is a prerequisite for complete freedom of expression. The tunes continually surprise and delight, especially the 17-minute "Goree," featuring a French horn section; and "Double Arc Jake," which starts with a quasi-calypto feel but very quickly devolves into dada-ist parody, with Pullen letting loose a fusillade of demonic, but rhythmically right, note clusters.

Ordering info: corbettvsdempsey.com

Don Cherry's Home Boy Sister Out (WEWANTSOUNDS 14; 65:27 ★★) is arguably the oddest of this odd assortment. Produced in Paris in 1985 and initially released only in France—after Ahmet Ertegun reportedly passed on releasing it—the album highlights the visionary trumpeter and world music explorer primarily singing, and not especially well. The material is described as "a typical Paris sound mixing funk, jazz with African and Latin music," but it sounds like poorly thought-out post-punk club music. There's an under-written doo-wop song ("Call Me"), followed by a disco-funk song called "Treat Your Lady Right," with Uruguayan-French punk singer and actress Elli Madeiros contributing an out-of-tune background vocal. Maybe you had to be there.

Ordering info: wewantsounds.com

Mike Westbrook, now 82, is the pre-eminent British composer of avant-garde jazz, with a 50-year career composing for



his own big band and sextet, the jazz-rock group Solid Gold Cadillac, dancers, theater groups, classical ensembles and television. **The Last Night At The Old Place (Cadillac 016; 78:39 ★★)**, a live album from 1968, is probably not the best introduction to his work. The "old place" in question was Ronnie Scott's Old Place, a basement bequeathed temporarily to Westbrook's cheerfully anarchic group, **The Mike Westbrook Concert Band**, when the iconic jazz club moved to a new location. A recently unearthed tape of the event, with sub-par sonic quality, documents the last performance at a venue that nurtured the big band. It counts stalwarts of the British avant-garde scene among its ranks, including saxophonists George Khan, John Surman and Mike Osborne. At its best, there is a cheerful lunacy to some of these tracks, but the poor sound quality tends to make this recording tough sledding.

Ordering info: cadillac77.bandcamp.com

Stamps (Corbett vs. Dempsey 045; 86:06 ★★), a double CD set of live tracks from 1979, marks the end of a creative period that **Steve Lacy**, one of the great pioneers of the soprano saxophone in jazz, once described as "the scratchy Seventies." With a quintet including saxophonist Steve Potts, bassist Kent Carter, drummer Oliver Johnson, Irene Aebi on cello and one vocal, Lacy explores the limits of free-jazz. Most of the tunes have brief heads, then all hell breaks loose. Lacy and Potts' horn solos emphasize intervallic leaps, squawks, honks and shrieks, while the drummer, bassist and Aebi flail away. Depending on one's point of view, it's either a tour de force of chaos and improvised atonality or it puts the "caca" in cacophony. **DB**

Ordering info: corbettvsdempsey.com



Hugo Fattoruso Y Barrio Opa

Hugo Fattoruso Y Barrio Opa
FAR OUT 0204

★★★

Pianist and composer Hugo Fattoruso is best known in the States for his work with Airto Moreira during the '70s. He made invaluable contributions to the percussionist's *Fingers* (1973) and *I'm Fine. How Are You* (1977).

Fattoruso's first iteration of Barrio Opa, a group that at one time counted Moreira in its ranks, spawned the track "Goldenwings," a tune that became an underground hit in London clubs back in the '70s. In 1997, Fattoruso composed the music for Milton Nascimento's Grammy-winning album *Nascimento*, before returning to his native Uruguay.

Since then, he's kept a low profile internationally, while releasing a steady stream of albums with Barrio Opa at home. The Afro-Uruguayan rhythms of candombe, a style that might sound vaguely Brazilian to American ears, is at the heart of Fattoruso's music here. The bandleader is joined on this set by the Silva brothers, a trio of percussionists who play tamboriles, conga-like drums with deep bass tones. Their intertwining polyrhythms provide the music's backbone on "Candombelek," a laid-back outing that has the brothers' intricate work supported by Fattoruso's electric piano. It segues suddenly into "Candombe Alto," a supercharged dance tune with Nicolás Ibarburu's howling electric guitar joining Francisco Fattoruso's bass and Hugo's piano, urging the Silvas into a frenzy.

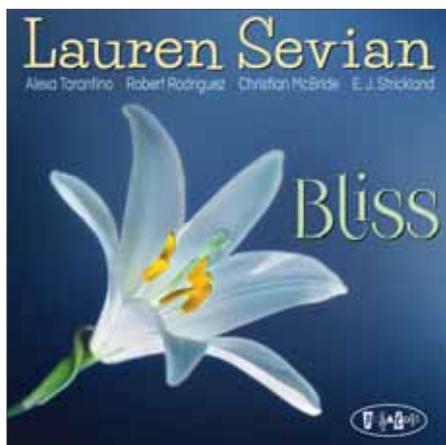
In a career that's spanned decades, it seems as if Fattoruso and his troupe still have some rhythms to explore.

—j. poet

Hugo Fattoruso Y Barrio Opa: La Del Cheche; Botijas; Candombe Beat Funk; El Romance Del Sordo; Trenes De Tokyo; Candombelek; Candombe Alto; Llamada Insólita; Antes/Goldenwings; For You To Be Proud. (53:22)

Personnel: Hugo Fattoruso, keyboards, vocals; Francisco Fattoruso, bass; Tato Bolognini, drums; Albana Barrocas, percussion, vocals; Nicolás Ibarburu, guitar; Mathías Silva, tambor piano; Guillermo Diaz Silva, tambor chico; Wellington Silva, tambor repique.

Ordering info: faroutrecordings.com



Lauren Sevian *Bliss*

POSI-TONE 8184

★★★★½

"This record is a love thing," baritone saxophonist Lauren Sevian writes in the liner notes of *Bliss*. It shows.

The bandleader and Mingus Big Band member shines on her second album, released 10 years after her debut as a leader on *Blueprint*. From her first notes on the album's opening track, "Triple Water," Sevian's confidence in her instrument and her compositions (she composed nine of the album's 10 tracks) is undeniable.

Salim Washington *Dogon Revisited*

PASSIN' THRU 667

★★★★

Salim Washington, born in Memphis, Tennessee, but currently living and teaching in South Africa, is a multi-instrumentalist and composer whose work recalls 1970s loft jazz, but feels present-tense and modern. He plays tenor saxophone, oboe, flute and mbira here, backed by bassist Hill Greene and drummer Tyshawn Sorey.

Track titles like "To Know Yahweh," "You Can Fly" and "Self Love/Revolutionary Ontology" offer an idea about the overall feel of the music: It's spiritual jazz with a powerful, hard-swinging bottom end. Greene and Sorey are a great team, especially given the drummer's hard, wood-block sound. "Self Love" draws strongly from Impulse!-era Pharoah Sanders, adapting and bending one of the saxophonist's melodies.

When Melanie Dyer's viola appears on the boppish "Uh Oh!," it's a burst of energy, setting the tune loose. The nearly 10-minute version of Julius Hemphill's "Dogon, AD" that follows is significantly heavier. Dyer takes the first solo—a hoarsely crying journey into African blues—top the rhythm section's miles-deep throb and clatter. When Washington steps forward, his phrases come in short hectic bursts, like thoughts

Full of evocative, innovative compositions that each reveal an element of her musical growth, Sevian created an album that showcases not just each player individually, but highlights their fluid collaboration.

On the playful "Lamb And Bunny," Sevian and pianist Robert Rodriguez share an impressive interplay, each building off the other. They slide effortlessly into musical conversation—no doubt helped along by their work as bandmates in LSAT. Sevian honors the genre's history on the John Coltrane-influenced "Minimal Moves," the album's closing track, looking back on the past without losing sight of her own clear vision. She reaches for inspiration again on the hip-hop and funk inflected "In the Loop." While lacking the edge of the pieces surrounding it, repeated listens reveal some nice touches, like E.J. Strickland's superb drum work against Rodriguez's soulful piano work.

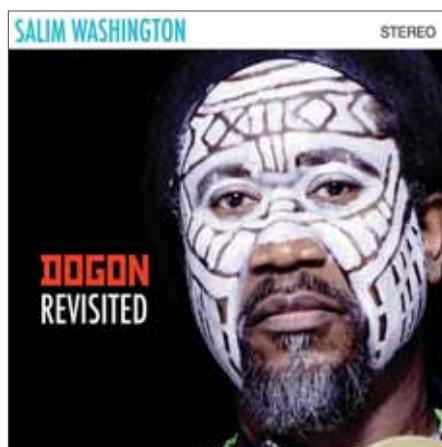
On *Bliss*, Sevian has figured out the story she wants to tell with her music, and it's one well worth listening to. Let's hope another decade doesn't pass before we get to hear what's next.

—Ashawnta Jackson

Bliss: Triple Water; Square One; Bliss; Bluesishness; Goldies Chance; Miss Lady; Lamb And Bunny; In The Loop; Evergreen; Minimal Moves. (55;04)

Personnel: Lauren Sevian, baritone saxophone; Alexa Tarantino, alto saxophone; Robert Rodriguez, piano; Christian McBride, bass; E.J. Strickland, drums.

Ordering info: posi-tone.com



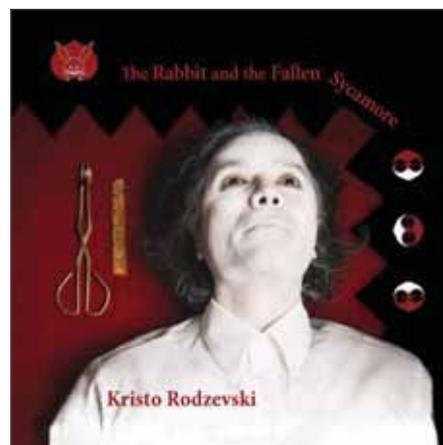
he can't quite control or keep to himself. Dyer returns, and the two embark on complex unison interactions, as Sorey chops up the beat behind them, turning the minimalist thump of the Hemphill original into a shuffling march and bringing it all to a close with a short, potent solo statement. The album concludes with a bouncing, swinging romp through Thelonious Monk's "Four In One."

—Philip Freeman

Dogon Revisited: To Know Yahweh; New Invasion Of Africa; Bitter Sweet; You Can Fly; Jamila; Self Love/Revolutionary Ontology; Uh Oh!; Dogon, AD; Four In One. (48:34)

Personnel: Salim Washington, tenor saxophone, oboe, flute, mbira; Hill Greene, bass; Tyshawn Sorey, drums; Melanie Dyer, viola, vocals (2, 7, 8).

Ordering info: passinthrough.org



Kristo Rodzevski *The Rabbit And The Fallen Sycamore*

MUCH PREFER 003

★★★★

Singer-songwriter Kristo Rodzevski, raised in the Republic of Macedonia and a longtime New York resident, has recorded his third in a trilogy of albums exploring the psychological rebirth inherent to the immigrant experience. Each album was created in league with simpatico jazz improvisers, including guitarist Mary Halvorson, bassist Michael Blanco and drummer/co-producer Tomas Fujiwara.

Along with his bittersweet tenor voice and flair for unexpected song structures, Rodzevski has a cinematic sense of storytelling flecked with sharply evoked details. In "Polyester Suit," he sets a scene: "A glimpse of lips, collar bones and ankles/In a dim hotel, via 1-800 numbers/You wake up empty, and they are gone/Your life has become a body in a cubist painting, a documentary of war parades and Communist buildings." Halvorson's wide range of rock phrasing—along with her characteristic phase-shifting wooziness—invests this song and others with a sinewy beauty. "Bucharest, 1913" references the tussle between Greece and Macedonia over ancestral identity and place names, with Brian Drye conjuring grandeur via a trombone solo that's almost vocal in its expressiveness.

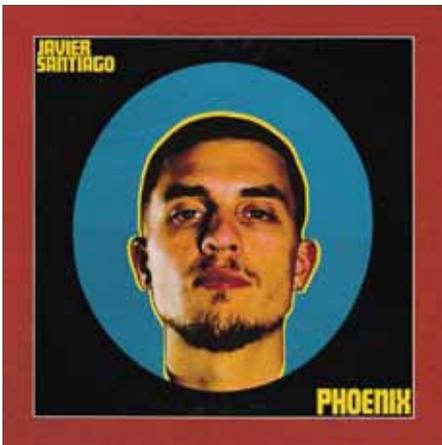
Whether about shape-shifting, suicide, sadism or online dating, Rodzevski's songs maintain an off-kilter sense of romanticism, flowing like scenes in an arthouse film. *The Rabbit And The Fallen Sycamore* has the feel of a vintage album from the Knitting Factory scene of the 1990s, when art-minded songwriters regularly rubbed shoulders with avant-jazzers to gritty, poetic effect.

—Bradley Bamberger

The Rabbit And The Fallen Sycamore: Polyester Suit; Bucharest, 1913; Your Name; Madadayo; Octopus; Meet Me Online; Out Of Key; Wire; Varanas; The Rabbit And The Fallen Sycamore. (41:34)

Personnel: Kristo Rodzevski, vocals, guitar; Ingrid Laubrock, tenor saxophone; Brian Drye, trombone; Mary Halvorson, guitar; Michael Blanco, bass; Tomas Fujiwara, drums.

Ordering info: cdbaby.com



Javier Santiago *Phoenix*

ROPEADOPE 411

★★★★½

Javier Santiago's Ropeadope debut is an otherworldly pastiche of electronic music and jazz rhythms, stemming from the mythical theme of the Phoenix. Santiago's keyboard style moves from synthesized alliterations to the sound of his Rhodes, making the album diverse, but not disjointed.

The collection, according to the bandleader, came as a response to his experiences dealing with death. So, Santiago called on Dayna

Roger Kellaway Trio *New Jazz Standards Vol. 3*

SUMMIT 716

★★★★½

Pianist Roger Kellaway's playing is technically perfect and pleurably melodic, with playful prestidigitation. His protean personality cheerily adapts to rag, stride, swing, new-age, avant-garde. Jazz is the acme of Kellaway's avatars: Potent improvs, composing and arranging skills have enriched sessions with Duke Ellington, Sonny Rollins, Carmen McRae, Ben Webster and Clark Terry. His *Cello Quartet* (1979) sets a high bar for chamber jazz, and his transcendent duos with clarinetist Eddie Daniels enchant to this day.

On *New Jazz Standards Vol. 3*, Kellaway—alongside bassist Jay Leonhart and drummer Peter Erskine—showcases tunes by Carl Saunders, veteran lead trumpeter in Bill Holman's edgy, cool juggernaut big band. The prolific Saunders has written his own fake-book of 400 pieces he'd like enshrined as "new jazz classics."

The material? Frankly, ordinary. Its interpretation? Flawlessly inventive. Listeners hear this top-flight trio play the heck out of a baker's dozen anodyne pop-era ditties. It's like commissioning Frank Gehry to build your garage or asking Maurizio Pollini to wax Carl Czerny

Stephens, Nicholas Payton, John Raymond and Corey Fonville, to help fully realize the music.

Phoenix is an album that defies any hint of conformity as "River Song" begins with experimental sound design, before revealing remnants of a jazz aesthetic. Listeners might be fooled into believing *Phoenix* is going to tell a story through synthesized ornamentation, but as the album moves forward, Santiago unfurls his jazz chops. The fourth cut on the album, "Gaia's Warning," begins with a quiet, shimmering introduction. It's an opening that doesn't intimate Nir Felder's brilliant guitar playing or Ben Flocks' exciting tenor saxophone solo are on the horizon.

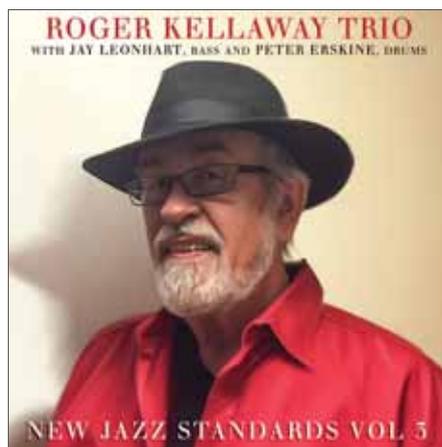
Featuring a handful of notable players and a number of thematic overtures that take the listener on a strange sonic journey, *Phoenix* is a work that puts Santiago's intelligence, vision and ability to tell a mythical musical tale on full display. But the album, as personal as it is, lacks the ability to connect with a casual listener who might not have tremendous insight into the bandleader's thoughts, emotions and familial history.

—Jordannah Elizabeth

Phoenix: River Song; Autumn; Phoenix; Gaia's Warning; Tomorrow; Abyss (Light); Autumn (Reprise); Alive. (46:11)

Personnel: Javier Santiago, piano; Fender Rhodes, synthesizers, trumpet, vocals; Corey Fonville, drums; Zach Brown, bass (4, 6), electric bass (2, 3, 7); Nir Felder, electric guitar (3, 4, 5, 6); Dayna Stephens, tenor saxophone (4), EWI (3, 6); Ben Flocks, tenor saxophone (1, 3, 4), soprano saxophone (1, 2, 7); John Raymond, flugelhorn (5); Nicholas Payton (8); Omar AbdulKarim (4), trumpet; J. Hoard (1), Proper-T (1, 2, 7), vocals; Adrian Suarez, percussion (6).

Ordering info: ropeadope.com



études. The pros spin it out with wit and dash: clean, crisp, takes of so-so stuff. Leonhart camps, sings, bows. Erskine brushes, shuffles, trades eights. And the bandleader sprinkles magic dust over all, sparks ballads with scintillating embellishments—even Bill Evans' two-track counterpoint—shifts gears and feints with joy and lightness, and the date goes swimmingly. California classic.

—Fred Bouchard

New Jazz Standards Vol. 3: Prudence; Dees Blues; Calming Notion; Noodlin'; Short & Sweet; Walking On Air; Is That Asking Too Much; Valtzing; Sweetness; Hurry Up & Wait; A Verse; Minor Infraction; Forever Again. (74:58)

Personnel: Roger Kellaway, piano; Jay Leonhart, bass; Peter Erskine, drums; Buster Williams, bass (15); Santo Savino, drums (15).

Ordering info: summitrecords.com



Jeff Denson *Outside My Window*

RIDGEWAY 009

★★★★½

Outside My Window, the 12th studio release by bassist Jeff Denson, is an innovative hybrid, featuring four tribute songs alongside four original compositions that combine steadfast straightahead jazz concepts with a taste of the new and experimental.

Accompanied by saxophonist Danya Stephens, percussionist Ronen Itzik and keyboardist Kari Ikonen, the bandleader's vocal work is the focal point of the album, as Denson sings with a frequency he hasn't put on wax before. The opening track, "Grace," sets the tone with intricate synths bumping up against double bass, underscored by Stephens' rich alto. Of all the tunes on *Outside My Window*, the opener does the best job of transitioning seamlessly from analog to digital sounds, foregrounding the theme of new versus old.

The compositions, arranged by Denson, are of great quality, but their cohesion across eight tracks is tough to recognize, leaving the listener wanting something to bridge the gap.

Most of the bassist's originals highlight the album's accompanying artists. Moments like the two-minute improvised bridge on "Fell On Black Days" embodies the spirit of the genre. Here, Denson's ability as a bassist is confirmed, yet again. However, the improvisation gets a bit left-of-center during the hyper-experimental moments, as on the clunky "Have We Really Gone This Far?" The placement of the offbeat composition interrupts the flow of the album, as it falls dead-center at track four.

The project as a whole is a reinvention, and a successful expression of who Jeff Denson is today, while still offering a glimpse of what might be ahead.

—Alma Hill

Outside My Window: Grace; In Your Eyes; For A Brand New Day; Have We Really Gone This Far?; Through The Mist; Bird Alone; Fell On Black Days; Outside My Window. (50:02)

Personnel: Jeff Denson, bass, vocals; Dayna Stephens, tenor, soprano, baritone saxophone, EWI; Kari Ikonen, piano, Fender Rhodes, Moog; Ronen Itzik, drums.

Ordering info: ridgewayrecords.com

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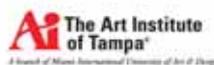
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*Artists Subject to Change

The Dan Divides Us

When Walter Becker, the guitarist, bassist, lyricist, composer and member of the award-winning Steely Dan, died of esophageal cancer last year at age 67, it marked the end of an extraordinary four-decade career and a 50-year friendship with pianist and composer Donald Fagen. Becker's unfortunate demise makes the publication of **Major Dudes: A Steely Dan Companion (Overlook Press)** an important and timely book.

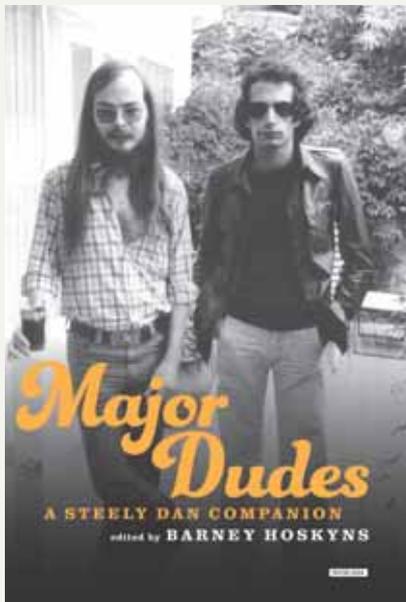
Edited by British music critic Barney Hoskyns—editorial director of the website Rock's Backpages and author of a number of books, including *Joni: The Anthology*—this collection consists of 40 reviews, interviews, profiles and essays published between 1972 and 2017 in publications ranging from The Los Angeles Times to New Music Express.

The book is full of insights into Becker and Fagen's career, especially their early years as songwriters at Manhattan's Brill Building (one of their songs, "I Mean To Shine," was recorded by Barbra Streisand); with the pop group Jay and the Americans; their first group in Los Angeles with guitarists Jeff "Skunk" Baxter, Denny Dias and early lead vocalist David Palmer; and their first albums, including *Can't Buy A Thrill*, *Countdown To Ecstasy* and *Pretzel Logic*, which gave the world the Latin-lilted "Do It Again" and the dreamy "Dirty Work."

A 1974 piece, originally published in CREEM magazine by Wayne Robbins, who went to school with Becker and Fagen at Bard College, yields a rare, first-hand assessment of their time as undergraduates.

"Whenever there was a social function that demanded a cheap rhythm section, we were there," Becker told Robbins with astonishing humility. But the influence of jazz was gaining ground in their music, as evidenced by The Horace Silver-basslined "Rikki Don't Lose That Number" and Phil Woods' alto madness on "Doctor Wu." Some were not pleased. Jonh Ingham wrote in his review of *Katy Lied* that he was "ambivalent" about it. In contrast, Ian MacDonald's review of *Pretzel Logic*, which included Duke Ellington's 1927 "East St. Louis Toodle-Oo," exerted that the recording "exhibits far more range, depth and flexibility than its forebears."

Of course, the jazz influence reached its zenith on the Dan's 1977 Grammy award-winning *Aja*, which featured Victor Feldman's deft Fender Rhodes improvisations on the funky opening number "Black Cow," the shifting, moody melody of "Deacon Blues" and the title track, with tenor saxophonist Wayne Shorter's galactic solo buoyed by Steve Gadd's vivid and volcanic drumming. In Dylan Jones' 2014 GQ piece, he praised the LP as "the best album of all time."



In cruel counterpoint, Rolling Stone reviewer Robert Palmer infamously wrote that the Dan's follow-up release, *Gaucho*, which yielded the funeral funky "Babylon Sisters" and the gospel-grooved "Time Out Of Mind," sounded like it was "recorded in a hospital ward." One could make the case that the taint of jazz and r&b in the Dan's music still divides fans and critics.

Because of Becker's personal issues—which fueled his move to Hawaii—the Dan was shut down, seemingly, for good. But after Fagen and Becker released solo recordings of their own, the group resurfaced in 1995 with *Alive In America*, chronicling their first tour in years. *Two Against Nature* followed in 2000 and was honored with a Grammy for album of the year. Their final release together was the prophetically titled *Everything Must Go*, released in 2003.

In David Cavanagh's obituary published last year in *Uncut*, Fagen described his late friend and collaborator as "smart as a whip, an excellent guitarist and a great songwriter ... and hysterically funny." Cavanagh aptly eulogized Becker as "one of the most fascinating individuals in post-war American music."

Indeed, as this compendium shows, Steely Dan's jazz-tinged melodies and harmonies, edgy themes, sarcastic lyrics and meticulous, marathon studio sessions stretched and reshaped the boundaries of pop, rock and jazz. And in doing so, the band became a unique force of its own, beyond categorization. **DB**

Ordering info: overlookpress.com



Kamaal Williams *The Return*

BLACK FOCUS 001

★★★★½

Kamaal Williams is the alter ego of Henry Wu, a Chinese-English keyboardist, drummer and producer who made waves in London's thriving jazz scene with Yussef Kamaal, his jazz-funk duo with drummer Yussef Dayes. After releasing just one album, *Black Focus* (Brownswood), Dayes and Williams parted ways. *The Return* picks up where Yussef Kamaal left off, with bassist Pete Martin and new drummer Josh "MckNasty" McKenzie pushing Williams' hip-hop influences into the foreground, while keeping a firm footing in the fusion elements that earned his earlier project accolades.

Williams wields the Fender Rhodes to dreamy, seductive effect on cosmic-minded tracks "Salaam," "Situations" and "Medina." But *The Return* is more exciting when the keyboards dart, rather than drift, allowing his excellent rhythm section to stretch out and syncopate. "Broken Theme," as its name implies, revives the stuttering rhythms of the London broken-beat scene of the late '90s, while "Catch The Loop" toggles between frenetic Head Hunters fusion and slower passages that nod equally to *Bitches Brew*-era Miles Davis and J. Dilla's beat science.

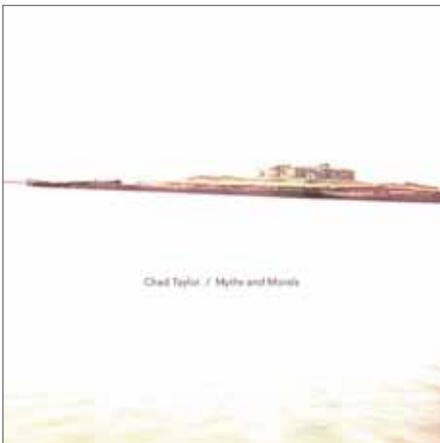
A fiery, zig-zagging solo from guitar prodigy Mansur Brown, known for his London-based group Triforce, provides a welcome jolt on "LDN Shuffle," before Williams sends the proceedings back to outer space with the sighing synths of "Aisha," *The Return's* graceful closing track. It's a confident, tasteful set, sometimes a little too enthralled by its influences, but regularly redeemed by the prodigious chops of its players, as well as Williams' gift for comps and melodies that simultaneously sound nostalgic and futuristic.

—Andy Hermann

The Return: Salaam; Broken Theme; The Return; High Roller; Situations (Live In Milan); Catch The Loop; Rhythm Commission; Medina; LDN Shuffle; Aisha. (44:47)

Personnel: Kamaal Williams, keyboard; Pete Martin, bass; Josh "MckNasty" McKenzie, drums; Mansur Brown, guitar (9).

Ordering info: blackfocusrecords.bandcamp.com



Chad Taylor *Myths And Morals*

EARSE&EYES 18-072

★★★★

Drummer Chad Taylor thrives in minimal surroundings. He has been recording for more than 20 years, usually alongside just one or two instrumentalists who share his resourcefulness and imagination—from cornetist Rob Mazurek starting in the late 1990s to guitarist Marc Ribot and saxophonist James Brandon Lewis. Last year, Taylor recorded *Myths And Morals* at Chicago's Experimental Sound Studio as a solo performance, reaffirming his ability to unleash

myriad compelling ideas on his own.

Taylor's compositions add up to a strong narrative that runs throughout the album. Essentially, he uses his instrument's melodic possibilities to create different shapes in a shifting dialogue with silence. Indeed, in engaging with such quietude, he takes on an especially formidable partner. That approach comes across compellingly in varying ways, such as how he bows across the cymbals during the introduction to "Carnation," before building up the dynamics. Taylor tells other stories on the spirited "Abtu And Anet," which seems to trace West African rhythmic patterns as they flowed into the Caribbean and early 20th-century New Orleans. As he introduces the Zimbabwean mbira (thumb piano) on "Gum Tree" or percussive sounds that resemble Indonesian gamelan on "Arcadia," *Myths And Morals* feels like its creator's global vision might just be beginning.

While Taylor is the sole instrumentalist, contributions by engineer Alex Inglizian should be noted, especially in processing the electronics that add layers of commentary to the music here. That becomes especially clear when these effects, and the drummer's responses, reshape "Island Of The Blessed." —Aaron Cohen

Myths And Morals: Arcadia; Phoenix; The Fall Of Babel; Carnation; Gum Tree; Abtu And Anet; Island Of The Blessed. (41:07)
Personnel: Chad Taylor, drums, percussion, mbira.

Ordering info: earsandeyesrecords.com

Craig Brann *Lineage*

STEEPLECHASE 31847

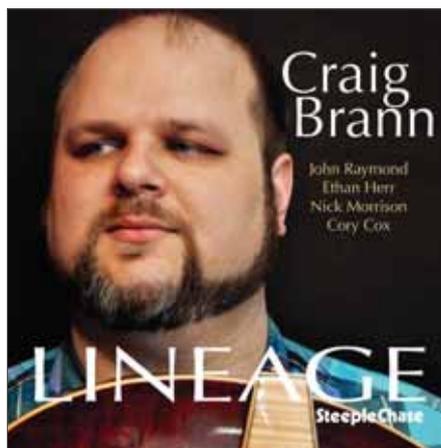
★★★★

No hard math available at press time to back up this theory, but based solely on its emotional content, there's undoubtedly a difference between music created by hired professionals and that made by close friends.

When one listens to the latest work by guitarist Craig Brann and his quintet, it's easy to pick up the vibe of comradery within the 65 minutes of soulful, electric jazz on *Lineage*. And each member of this quintet—trumpeter John Raymond, pianist Ethan Herr, bassist Nick Morrison and drummer Cory Cox—brings his own distinctive voice to this album, which is Brann's fourth release as a leader on the SteepleChase imprint.

Much of the material stems from influences the performers have shared with one another as friends, utilizing their respective instruments to initiate deep conversations about rapper/producer J Dilla ("Dilla Daze"), pianist Thelonious Monk (the "Evidence"-inspired "Verdict"), guitarist John Scofield ("Dozen The Swan's Hound (Lie Kiss Coat Hewn)") and saxophonist Mark Turner ("Empty").

Elsewhere, Brann's dynamic stringwork valiantly dances between jazz and blues to reflect his



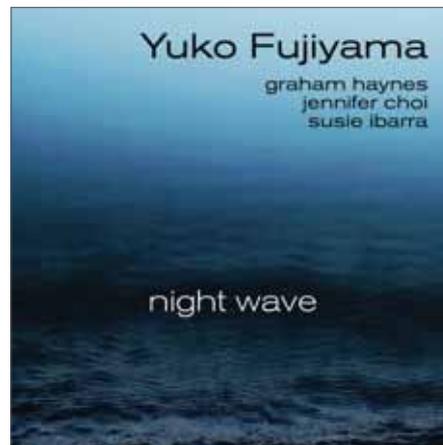
own life through the sweet and playful "Teely-Teely," as well as on arguably the record's finest cut, "Five Percent Of My Life Thus Far," which was written when the guitarist was 21 years old back in 1999.

Good bros playing great tunes, *Lineage* is a luminous clinic on the importance of what a solid friendship among musicians can do for the strength of any project. —Ron Hart

Lineage: Dilla Daze; Basso Continuo; Copy; Teely-Teely; Für Beccah; Good Intentions; Verdict; Reinventing Something Round; Dozen The Swan's Hound (Lie Kiss Coat Hewn); Five Percent Of My Life Thus Far; Empty. (65:03)

Personnel: Craig Brann, guitar; John Raymond, trumpet; Ethan Herr, piano; Nick Morrison, bass; Cory Cox, drums.

Ordering info: steeplechase.dk



Yuko Fujiyama *Night Wave*

INNOVA 995

★★★★

The quaint, poetic bits of text that pianist Yuko Fujiyama includes with each song on her new album, *Night Wave*—"The song of autumn in the distant sound of bells," "Leap! To the right, to the left, higher, freely"—suggest something New Age-y or twee. But what she and her collaborators, including drummer Susie Ibarra and violinist Jennifer Choi, have created is something far more daring and impactful.

The first clue is that in the album's acknowledgments, Fujiyama talks about the music of Cecil Taylor inspiring her to leave Japan for New York. And the appropriately titled "Up Tempo" and "Fireworks" find her setting little cluster bombs of notes within Choi's discordant scrapings.

Surrounding those tracks, Fujiyama either breaks off on her own or separates the quartet into segments, duetting with one player or removing one element. On the haunting "Beyond The Sound," that means a lot of empty space that she, cornetist Graham Haynes and Ibarra (here playing xylophone) tentatively drop little splashes of sound into. The mood can get downright dreamy as a result, as heard on the short but sweet "Romance" or the title track, as it evokes the danger and mystery of an evening ocean through gentle chords and Choi's swooping tones.

Fujiyama's most impressive feats, though, come via the few solo pieces here. Her most Taylor-like expressions come as she kicks off the album with a fragmented blast and ushers listeners toward the album's conclusion with a bumpy ballad, "Starlight." As great as Fujiyama's work with her band is, a full solo album from this remarkable talent is long overdue. —Robert Ham

Night Wave: Woven Colors; Up Tempo; Romance; Clash; Premonition; Indignation; Fireworks; Beyond The Sound; Waltz Of The Shadows; Autumn Whispers; Floating On A Breeze; Leap; Starlight; Night Wave; Tale Of The Old Tree. (51:01)

Personnel: Yuko Fujiyama, piano; Jennifer Choi, violin; Graham Haynes, cornet, flugelhorn; Susie Ibarra, drums, percussion.

Ordering info: innova.mu

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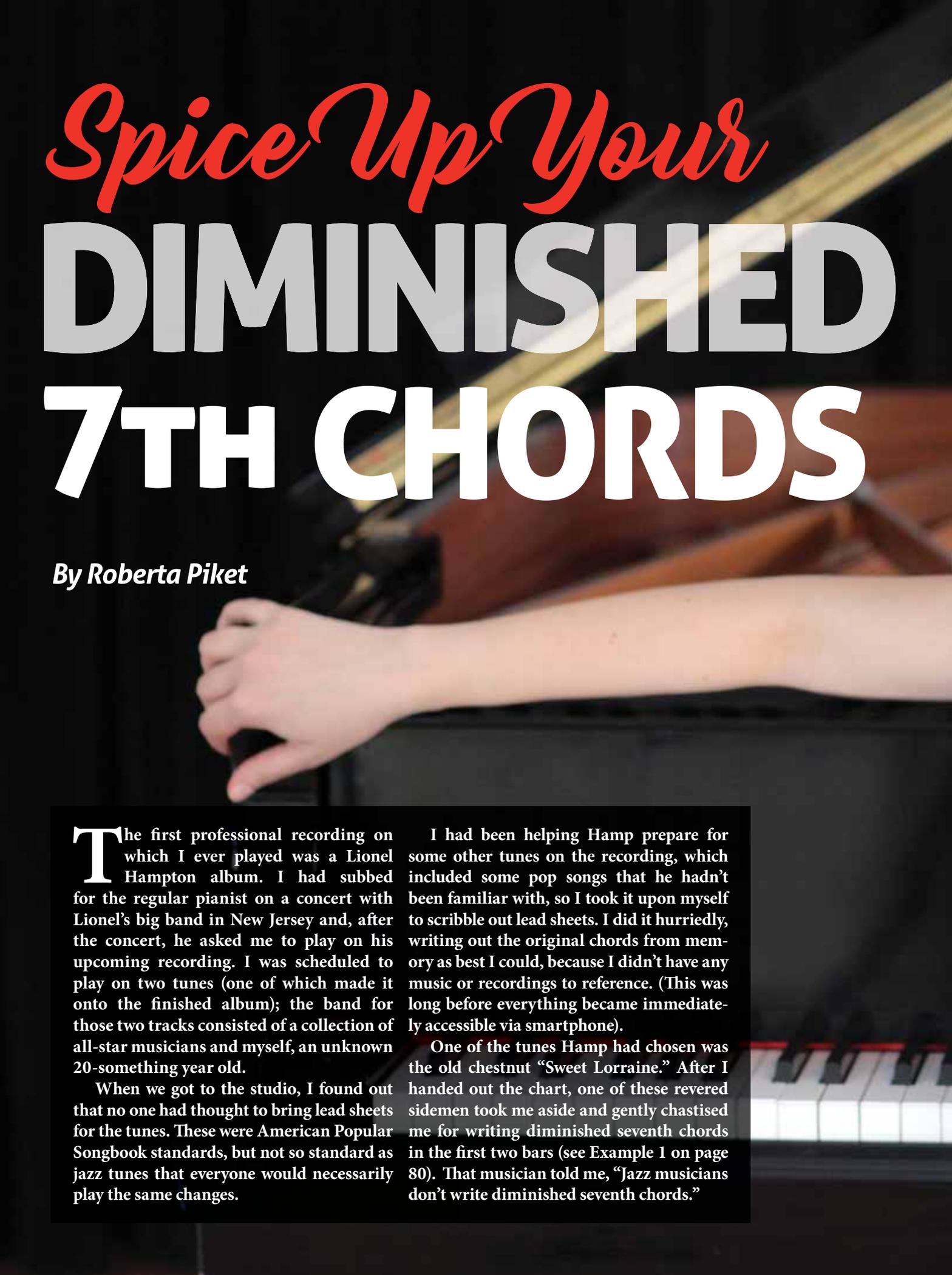
Roberta Piket on Diminished 7th Chord Substitutions

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Spice Up Your **DIMINISHED** **7TH CHORDS**

By Roberta Piket

The first professional recording on which I ever played was a Lionel Hampton album. I had subbed for the regular pianist on a concert with Lionel's big band in New Jersey and, after the concert, he asked me to play on his upcoming recording. I was scheduled to play on two tunes (one of which made it onto the finished album); the band for those two tracks consisted of a collection of all-star musicians and myself, an unknown 20-something year old.

When we got to the studio, I found out that no one had thought to bring lead sheets for the tunes. These were American Popular Songbook standards, but not so standard as jazz tunes that everyone would necessarily play the same changes.

I had been helping Hamp prepare for some other tunes on the recording, which included some pop songs that he hadn't been familiar with, so I took it upon myself to scribble out lead sheets. I did it hurriedly, writing out the original chords from memory as best I could, because I didn't have any music or recordings to reference. (This was long before everything became immediately accessible via smartphone).

One of the tunes Hamp had chosen was the old chestnut "Sweet Lorraine." After I handed out the chart, one of these revered sidemen took me aside and gently chastised me for writing diminished seventh chords in the first two bars (see Example 1 on page 80). That musician told me, "Jazz musicians don't write diminished seventh chords."



Example 1

FMaj7 F#dim7 Gm7 C7 C#dim7 Dm7

Example 2

F#dim7 F7b9 (flat 9th)

(root)

Example 3

F#dim7 Adim7 Cdim7 Ebdim7

Example 4

F#dim7 Adim7 Ab7b9

Example 5

F#dim7 Cdim7 B7b9

Example 6

F#dim7 Ebdim7 D7b9

When you hear something like that directly from a living jazz legend, you pay attention. That day I resolved never to write or play a straight diminished seventh chord again.

Since then I've spent quite a bit of time thinking about different ways to approach those nagging diminished seventh chords that show up in old sheet music or vocal charts, and even occasionally in modern instrumental compositions.

An important thing to remember about the diminished seventh chord is that structurally it is almost identical to the dominant seventh chord a half step below. So, I can take the root of any diminished seventh chord (for example, F#dim7), add a bass note a half step below the root and create a dominant seventh chord (in this case, F7). The note that was the root of the old chord is now the b9 of the new chord, as shown in Example 2.

For purposes of clarity, I've written out these chords in their most basic form. I've also chosen to use the same spelling for notes that sound identical, even if this means they are not enharmonically correct. Finally, it will help you to grasp these concepts if you play these examples on the piano, even if you're not a pianist.

Thinking of diminished chords in terms of their relationship to dominant seventh chords opens up many harmonic possibilities, because diminished seventh chords are symmetrical, built entirely on the interval of a minor third. So, for example, an F#dim7 chord has the same notes as Adim7, Cdim7 and Ebdim7. See Example 3.

As you can see from the lines connecting the same notes, all four of these diminished chords are the same; they are interchangeable. Here's the important part: If the four diminished chords are interchangeable, then the dominant seventh chords a half step below each of these roots also are interchangeable.

There are four possible dominant seventh chords that, theoretically, can be substituted for any diminished seventh chord. As an example, if you see F#dim7, you can think of it as Adim7. So, you can also substitute an Ab7b9 chord (the dominant seventh chord a half step below Adim7). See Example 4. F#dim7 also is identical to Cdim7, so, choosing the root a half step below C, we can substitute B7 for F#dim7. See Example 5. Finally, since F#dim7 is also the same chord as Ebdim7, we can choose the root a half step below Eb and substitute D7b9. See Example 6.

If you know your tritone substitutions, you already know that if F7 works, there's a good chance B7 will work, and if Ab7 works, the same goes for D7.

Similarly, Gdim7 is identical to Bbdim7, Dbdim7 and Edim7; and Abdim7 is interchangeable with Bdim7, Ddim7 and Fdim7. So, in reality, there are not 12 diminished seventh chords, only three.

Getting back to the "jazz crime" I committed in that recording session long ago: Example 7 shows how I originally wrote out the beginning chord changes to "Sweet Lorraine." When I finally had a chance to look at the original sheet music,

it turned out that the second chord in the first bar, which I wrote as F#dim7, was actually a D7 in the sheet music. See Example 8.

As jazz musicians, we've seen this chord progression of I-VI7-ii-V7 countless times. We can also look at the D7 chord as a dominant chord substitution for E♭dim7 (which is interchangeable with the F#dim7 chord that I had used).

Let's look at some other options I could have chosen. Since Cdim7 is the same chord as F#dim7, I could have substituted the dominant seventh chord a half step below C, which is B7. See Example 9.

This works nicely with the A in the melody, but B7 doesn't lead very well to the next chord (Gm7). It works better if I substitute a IV chord (B♭maj7) for the ii chord of Gm7. See Example 10. Normally, in jazz we substitute ii chords for IV chords, but in this case the root motion is smoother if we use the IV chord.

Now, let's look at the C#dim7 chord in the second bar. Remember that C#dim7 is the same chord as B♭dim7. We can substitute the dominant seventh chord a half step below, which is A7. This gives us a nice chromatic root motion from the third beat of measure 1 through measure 2. See Example 11.

The changes are starting to sound a little more interesting and modern now. A7 is a secondary dominant leading to Dm7. Inserting a ii before this temporary V7 chord adds a little more harmonic interest. See Example 12.

An important consideration in any reharmonization is the melody. In Example 13, we substitute A♭7 for F#dim7. I left out the melody in this example—if you try to play the tune over these chords, you'll quickly hear why. This substitution would work for soloing, however. In fact, it might lead you to some choices that you wouldn't have made otherwise. See Example 14.

The possibilities are endless. I've recorded a sample reharmonization of George Gershwin's tune "Embraceable You." At the following link, you can hear that recording, as well as download a lead sheet showing the dominant seventh substitutions I've used to replace the diminished seventh chords: tinyurl.com/RobertaDim.

You don't have to play a chordal instrument to make use of these substitutions. You can do so as a soloist as well. You might be concerned about an unrehearsed situation where the rhythm section may or may not go with your substitutions. Hopefully, you're playing with musicians who are aware of these concepts or have good ears and will play something appropriate. But the nice thing about this method of substitution is that it will generally work—even if the bassist plays the original diminished seventh chord.

For additional examples of how to spice up diminished seventh chords, visit the following page on my website: robertajazz.com/spicy. **DB**

Roberta Piket is a pianist, organist, composer, arranger and educator based in the New York area. Her most recent CD, *West Coast Trio* (Thirteenth Note Records, 2018), with drummer Joe La Barbera, features jazz and songbook standards, as well as original compositions. Visit Piket online at robertajazz.com.

Example 7

Example 8

Example 9

Example 10

Example 11

Example 12

Example 13

Example 14

Deanna Witkowski



JASON GARDNER PHOTOGRAPHY

Making Hearts and Voices Sing: Creating Jazz Hymns

As an arranger, I love to make familiar tunes new, whether working with a Cole Porter tune or an 18th century hymn. In both cases, lyrics—regardless of whether or not the arrangement will include vocal—always play a part in my decision-making.

The text may influence where I choose to make harmonic changes, extend phrases or alter rhythms (whether within a melodic line or the overall feel). Working with text is a large part of why I enjoy arranging hymns.

Since much of my work involves integrating

jazz and communal religious liturgy, I'm always thinking about how to compose or arrange for group singing, which is much different than writing for a soloist. While a church congregation may vary in size from 20 to 2,000 people, whenever I work as a guest church music leader, I need to present music that invites group participation right away. Since hymns are the "standards" of church music, and thus provide an accessible way to invite group singing, jazz hymn arrangements have become an important part of my catalog.

In tandem with my 2017 trio recording, *Makes The Heart To Sing: Jazz Hymns* (Tilapia Records), I created a corresponding e-book of lead sheets and piano scores for each of the album's 14 hymn arrangements. The book was made as a response to church music directors who specifically asked how they could learn to play these arrangements themselves. Since many church musicians aren't necessarily jazz players, I created fully notated piano scores (with chord symbols) for each hymn. As of this writing, at least 100 churches around the country are using these arrangements in their services.

How do I approach creating these hymn arrangements? How are they different from straight instrumental arrangements (even if they're played instrumentally)? And how can they work when non-jazz musicians are singing—or, in some cases, playing—them? Here are a few points to consider when arranging a hymn.

KNOW THE ORIGINAL FIRST

Before arranging anything—be it a hymn or Great American Songbook tune—it's imperative to know the original melody, text(s) and form first. Here are a few characteristics specific to hymns, and ways to consider modifying them in your arrangements:

- **Meter/Text:** If you crack open the back of a hymnal, you'll see different indices: an index of common first lines of text; a tune name index with strange-looking words in all capitals; and a metrical index. This last index is extremely important, because it shows the number of lines of text and the number of syllables per line as the meter of the text itself (which is *not* the same as the meter of the music).

The text of "Amazing Grace" is a great example. Its meter is 86.86, which is known as "Common Meter," or "CM." Simply count the number of each syllable in each line, and you'll get the 8–6–8–6 meter. The familiar pentatonic tune that is usually sung with this text is called NEW BRITAIN, and will be listed—along with

many other tunes that have the same meter—under “CM” in the metrical index. If the theme to *Gilligan’s Island* were included in hymnals, it would be listed under “CM.” (Sing “Amazing Grace” to this tune and you’ll see that it works.) See Example 1.

Why is this important? If you love a particular hymn *text*, and want to create a hymn arrangement that sets that text, you’ll need to decide which hymn *tune* that you want to arrange. While some hymn tunes will work with different hymn texts, not all will work equally as well. Be sure to speak and sing the text to understand which syllables are stressed. This becomes important when you’re considering where to change the harmony, extend a phrase or add syncopation within the melody.

- **Harmony:** Hymns are often written in four-part harmony. While this facilitates congregational singing, many times it is simply the case that the sheet music you see in the hymnal is written for organ playing. You might see a chord inversion on every one-to-two beats—even though there may only be three-to-four chords in the entire tune. Consider opening up the harmonic rhythm: Look at the text and melody to decide where you want to “land” or what particular word you want to emphasize. In my arrangement of the Welsh hymn HYFRYDOL, which usually consists of F major and C dominant seventh chords, I use the F as a pedal before landing on—and extending—an E7#9 on bars 5–7 and 14–16. (See Example 2; hear the track online at deannajazz.bandcamp.com/track/hyfyrdol-love-divine-all-loves-excelling.)

- **Form:** Most hymns are strophic: i.e., they have short, repeated verses that are often 16 bars in length. They may have an AABA structure, which is sometimes followed by a refrain. There are often very few places to breathe—or, at the very least, rests are not written in to visually see where to breathe. Consider extending a phrase by one-to-two bars. This simple idea gives the congregation a chance not only to breathe, but to experience a sense of resting inside of whatever harmony is being played or word is being sung. This is again the case in HYFRYDOL, where measures 5–7 and 14–16 extend the first and third four-measure bars to six bars.

- **Tempo:** There are usually standard tempos that are used with each particular hymn tune. There won’t be a metronome marking in the hymnal, so try to familiarize yourself with standard tempos before creating your arrangement. If your arrangement requires a change in tempo, be aware that this in and of itself is going to be something new to a singing congregation. Be sure to sing the text to make sure that your arrangement isn’t just workable for instrumentalists—you want the congregation to be able to sing with you.

In my arrangement of the hymn LASST UNS ERFREUEN (“All Creatures Of Our God

Example 1

Meter of text: 86. 86 (CM, or “Common Meter”)

A-maz-ing grace! How sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me!

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
1 2 3 4 5 6
I once was lost, but now am found;
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
was blind, but now I see.
1 2 3 4 5 6

Tune: Anonymous, 1829; Text: John Newton, 1779.

Example 2

Jazz waltz- loose feel
♩=150
arr. D. Witkowski

A F D \flat /F B Δ 7/F E7(#9)

Love di - vine... all loves ex - cel - ling.

7 G \flat A7(#11) E \flat A7(#11) D \flat A7(#11) G \flat ...

Joy of heav'n, to earth... come down!

11 E \flat 7(SUS) E \flat A7(#11) E \flat -7 E7(#9)

Fix in us... thy hum - ble dwell - ing.

17 G \flat A7(#11) E \flat A7(#11) D \flat A7(#11) C7(SUS) F(SUS) F

all thy faith - ful mer - cies crown.

Tune by Rowland H. Prichard, 1830; Text by Charles Wesley, 1747.
Music arrangement © 2013 Deanna Witkowski/Tilapia Tunes/BMI. All Rights Reserved.

And King”), I changed the tempo, the feel and the time signature (see Example 3; you can hear the track at deannajazz.bandcamp.com/track/lasst-uns-erfreuen-all-creatures-of-our-god-and-king). The original tune is usually in a triple meter (3/2), with one measure in 4/2, and is sung fairly quickly (half note equals 96). In my arrangement, the half note equals 66, and the meter becomes cut time.

EASY-TO-LEARN ALTERATIONS

Remember that the group you are leading will usually have sung a hymn many times in a certain way. This means that any alterations you make to rhythm or harmony need to be easily learned. Some congregations may only be seeing the words. Others may want to see every single syncopated rhythm you add because they are accustomed to reading everything that they sing.

RHYTHMIC CHANGES

If you want to change the rhythm of the melody, and especially if you add any syncopation, be as consistent as possible in where you place the syncopations. In my arrangement of “All Creatures” (Example 3), the syncopation on the “and” of beat 4 occurs in bars 1, 5, 13 and 17 (the first measure of each of these phrases). The dotted-quarter-plus-eighth-note rhythm that begins on beat 1 also occurs in measures 1, 5, 9, 13 and 17. By virtue of repetition, this gives the congregation many chances to internalize the new rhythm of the melody.

Changing the rhythmic accompaniment of a hymn is a great way to add forward movement to a tune. A hymn like FOUNDATION that consists solely of half notes and quarter notes and is in a duple rhythm can easily be overlaid with a reggae feel or a baião without needing to alter the rhythm of the melody. (See Example 4; hear the track at <https://deannajazz.bandcamp.com/track/foundation-how-firm-a-foundation>).

LEAD THE FLOCK

When you’re leading your arrangement, sing or play the entire first verse all the way through before inviting the congregation to sing. Or, teach the arrangement to the choir and have them sing the first verse. If you are extending phrases—as in HYFRYDOL—it can help to have a song leader visually show where one phrase ends and the next begins.

If you are the one playing your arrangement while a congregation sings, be sure to play any interludes between verses the same way each time. This gives the congregation confidence on subsequent verse re-entry. If an instrumental solo is part of the arrangement, have the last phrase state the melody clearly to cue the congregation as to where to enter for the next verse. Be sure to look at the congregation and not at your music or your instrument. You are the conductor.

If you only have one chance for a congregation to sing your material, send an audio file and a piano score or lead sheet to the music director in advance. That way, your arrangement can be introduced in advance of your visit.

Leading a community as they sing your hymn arrangement can be a refreshing, life-giving experience for both the congregation and yourself. Enjoy the experience. **DB**

Deanna Witkowski is a pianist, composer and vocalist based in New York City. Her 2017 trio album, *Makes The Heart To Sing: Jazz Hymns*, features 14 of her jazz hymn arrangements alongside a companion sheet-music book. Her catalog includes 80 sacred music originals and arrangements, including two jazz Masses. As a 2018 Sacatar Institute Fellow, Witkowski spent eight weeks in Itaparica, Bahia, Brazil this past spring doing research for her upcoming project, the *Nossa Senhora Suite*, which will merge Afro-Brazilian expressions of the Virgin Mary with new composition for jazz quartet, percussion and four vocalists. Visit Witkowski online at deannajazz.com.

Example 3

$\text{♩} = 66$
halftime pop feel
arr. D. Witkowski

All crea - tures of our God and King,
lift up your voic - es, let us sing: Al - le -
lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia! Bright
burn - ing sun with gold - en beams, pale
sil - ver moon that gen - tly gleams, Al - le -

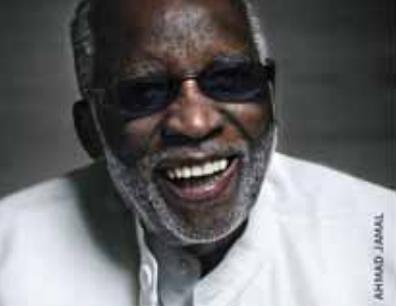
Tune from *Auserlesenen Catholische Geistliche Kirchengesang* (1623)
Text by Francis of Assisi (1182-1226); tr. William H. Draper (1855-1933)
Music arrangement © 2000 Deanna Witkowski/Tilapia Tunes/BMI. All Rights Reserved.

Example 4

Baião
 $\text{♩} = 88$
arr. D. Witkowski

How firm a foun - da - tion, ye saints of the Lord, is
laid for your faith in God's ex - cel - lent word! What

Tune: American folk melody. Text: Author unknown.
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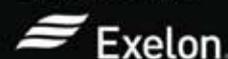
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Dr. Bruce Dudley



Reharmonization Lessons from the Masters

In June 1991, I was fortunate to study with jazz pianist and educator Dr. Billy Taylor during Jazz in June at the University of Massachusetts. Besides receiving coaching from him in a small ensemble format, I, along with six or seven other pianists, sat with Billy around the piano in a sort of group lesson format on a daily basis for five days. He shared stories about his experiences of moving to New York in the 1940s as a young aspiring jazz pianist and quickly hearing, meeting and sitting in at jam sessions with the likes of

Art Tatum, Thelonious Monk, Ben Webster and many other outstanding jazz musicians.

Besides embodying living history, Dr. Taylor discussed and showed us by example many wonderful elements of jazz piano playing, including bebop melodic vocabulary, chord voicings, ways to build a solo, rhythmic aspects of the music and more. But for me, the moment of epiphany came one day when he sat down at the piano and played 12 different chords, all with the same top note (melody) and 12 different bass notes. In the span

of less than 12 seconds he demonstrated how any melody note can be harmonized with any bass note. He simply kept the top note the same while he dropped down the bass note by half steps, reconfiguring the inner voices (as many as four or five, and sometimes as few as three) to create a good-sounding chord. The qualities often were dominant sevenths, but also included major sevenths, minor sevenths, half-diminished and fully diminished seventh chords, including extensions and altered tones, and inverted chords.

Example 1 shows this concept with the melody note C, using mainly dominant seventh chords. By the eighth, eleventh and twelfth chords in the sequence, other qualities of seventh chords are introduced.

Dr. Taylor proceeded to move the melody up one half step to D \flat , and do it all over again. I sensed that the sequence of chord qualities, while similar to those that he had played with C in the melody, were a bit different in terms of the actual quality of each chord, as if deciding on a whim, in the spur of the moment, what quality chord to insert between the static melody note and the moving bass line. In Example 2, I have used D \flat as the melody note and I introduce other chord qualities, including major 13th and half-diminished chords.

My takeaway from that lesson with Taylor was to continue doing this with all 12 pitches acting as the static melody and to experiment with various functional chord qualities that were compatible with the outer voices. In Example 3, I introduce additional chord types, such as a dominant suspended ($\flat 9$) chord, a fully diminished seventh chord and an inverted chord, all harmonized over the melody note D.

As you continue with this exercise upwards in half steps, you can transpose the qualities shown in Examples 1–3, or make up your own. Things to listen for include inner voices that move by step, sometimes parallel to the bass, sometimes in contrary motion to the bass; inner voices that remain common (like the melody note); parallel motion of the same chord quality; and changes in chord quality that seem pleasing to the ear. Try harmonizing each of the 12 chromatic pitches with each of the 12 chromatic bass tones to create a varied montage of chromatic harmony.

The next step in utilizing the ability to harmonize any melody note with any bass note is to apply the concept to an actual melody. The application of this is what made great jazz pianists such as Art Tatum, Oscar Peterson, Hank Jones and George Shearing so colorful in their interpretations of standards. It also is

an underlying principle found in the writing and playing of modern jazz pianists such as Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock and Chick Corea.

Examples 5 and 6 show two different ways of harmonizing the first four measures of “There Will Never Be Another You” by Harry Warren and Mack Gordon. Example 4 shows the original melody and chords.

Example 5 is a realized reharmonization of every melody note using mainly chromatic movement in the bass, both ascending and descending, as well as bass leaps of an ascending major third, minor third, ascending perfect fourth and ascending whole step. Dominant quality chords lead well by half step (either ascending or descending), as do minor seventh chords. One of the most important things to remember in reharmonizing a given melody is that all such embellishing chords serve to enhance the original harmonic landmarks. The D7(+9) chord on the downbeat of the third measure and the G7(b5) on beat 4 of measure 4, along with the Cm7 on the downbeat of measure 5, all are original harmonic landmarks that have not been abandoned.

Example 6 is a second realization of reharmonization of every melody note using a different bass line. Note the use of parallel major seventh chords (measure 2) and parallel minor seventh chords (measure 3) that move beneath the held-out melody note F, and a diminished seventh chord (beat 4 of measure 4). Admittedly, I did circumvent the D half-diminished chord of the original progression in measure 3 by moving up a half step from the previous chord, C₆ maj9, to Cm11. However, the diatonic/parallel sequence of minor seventh chords that follows leads to Fm7, which is a related pre-dominant chord to the subsequent G7. I then substituted Bø7 for G7 in measure 4, postponing that dominant functioning diminished chord until beat 4.

As you begin to try reharmonizing melodies on your own, here are a few guiding principles you might keep in mind:

- Begin with a bass line that creates an interesting counterpoint against the melody.
- In choosing the bass line, do not be afraid to venture well outside the established diatonic key of the melody, as long as you lead to the next main harmonic event within the phrase.
- Fill in the gap between the melody and bass with dominant seventh, minor seventh, major seventh or diminished seventh chords. The practice that you’ve done first of harmonizing one melody with 12 different bass notes will help you solve almost any harmonic challenge.

To close, I encourage you to visit my website (brucedudley.com) and check out my transcription of Shearing playing the opening eight measures of “Happy Days Are Here Again” (by Milton Ager and Jack Yellen), as played on the pianist’s 1974 recording *My Ship*. He reharmonizes every note of the melody using the following principles: chromatic bass movement (ascending and descending); bass movement of descending fifths (measures 2, 4 and 7); and bass movement by whole steps (measure 7). Note Shearing’s adherence to the original harmonic framework, with the tonic chord beginning the piece and returning in measures 3 and 7; the functional subdominant ii7 chord in measure 5; and the functional dominant V7 chord in measure 6 (albeit delayed until the beat 4). **DB**

Dr. Bruce Dudley is Associate Professor of Music at Belmont University and Adjunct Professor of Jazz Piano at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. As a pianist and composer, his most recent recordings, *Mostly Monk* and *The Solo Sessions*, feature original compositions, jazz standards and songs from the Great American Songbook. His transcriptions of Phineas Newborn Jr. are available online at phineasnewbornjr.org. Visit Dr. Dudley’s website at brucedudley.com.

Example 1

Chords: C⁷ B11(+9) Bb13 A7(+9) Ab13 Gm9 Gb13(+11) Fm13 E7(+9) Em13 Dm11 Dm13(+11)

* = Denotes optionally, bass note can be played an octave higher.

Example 2

Chords: D9 C13(+9) Cb13 Bm7 add11 Am7 Gbm7(b5) add11 add11 Gm9(b5)F#m9 F+7(+9) Eb13(+11) Em11 Dm13(+11)

* = Denotes optionally, bass notes can be played an octave higher.

Example 3

Chords: D+ Cbm7(b9) Cm7 Bm7(b5) Bbm7(b5)Am13 Gbm7(b5) G13 Dadd9 F7add11 Eb+7(+9,+11) Dm7(b9)

* = Denotes optionally, bass notes can be played an octave higher.
 ** = Chords of different inversions can also be utilized for variety and interest.

Example 4

Chords: Dm7 G7 Cm7

Example 5

Chords: Cm7 Eb6 E7 F7 Abm6 Gm7 Gb13 Cb9(+11) Dm9

Chords: D7(+9) Eb9 Eb13(+9) F7 Gb7(+9) G7(b5) Ab9 G7(b9) G7 Cm7

Example 6

Chords: E7(add9) Eb6 D7 Dm9 D7(+9) Em9 Gbm9 Dm9 Cm9

Chords: Cm11 Dm7 Ebm9 Fm7 Gm7(add9) Abm7(add11) Fm7 Bb7add9 Cm9



Chick Corea

HYOU VIEG

Chick Corea's Keyboard Solo on 'Got A Match?'

The Chick Corea Elektric Band turned a lot of heads when it hit the scene in the mid-1980s, and one song in particular, "Got A Match?"—a 16-bar bebop-style song from their eponymous debut album—has become a semi-standard. We're going to take a look at Corea's keyboard solo from that original GRP recording.

Corea takes five choruses, and one thing that stands out is the symmetry of his phrasing. His first lick starts as a pickup on beat 3, and he favors beginning his phrases on this beat (see measures 3, 5, 27, 37, 39, 42 and 67). There's also a phrase that starts on the "and" of 3 (measure 65), similar to the previously pointed-out

phrases, but a bit late—a way of creating variation. There are other variations where Corea creates the same effect of starting a phrase before the downbeat, but not on beat 3. One of these is to start on beat 4 (bars 24 and 48).

But to always start his phrases anticipating the downbeat, even though it provides consistency, would be predictable. So, for contrast he sometimes starts after it, as in bars 10, 18, 20, 22, 52, 59 and 74. There's even one instance where he starts right on the downbeat (measure 7). Of particular note is not just that Corea uses phrase beginnings to create diversity, but that he also groups them to create further continuity. His first three lines all start

on beat 3, but starting at measure 10, we have five phrases in a row starting on the "and" of 1. And, again, beginning at bar 27 we hear four consecutive phrases starting on the 3 again. So, within the continuity there's diversity, and within that diversity, continuity.

Another means Corea uses to create continuity and diversity is with his phrase lengths. His first three phrases are all exactly three beats long (with five beats of silence separating each of them). But his next lick is a little over two bars, and the next spans almost seven. So, he's disrupted the consistency of the opening five measures. But continuity returns with the next three licks, which are rhythmically almost identical, which makes sense, as they are the same lick played in different keys. So, the consistency isn't just rhythmic, but intervallic.

After a couple more long phrases (akin to the fourth and fifth) Corea plays three more that start on beat 3 (like the first three), the first two of which are only a beat longer than those opening licks. This is especially poignant considering these are toward the beginning of his third chorus. Playing a few licks that start on the same beat, are almost the same length and occur at a similar point in the form, adds a lot to the sense of development. In fact, the first licks of his final chorus (bars 65 and 67) also start on beat 3, or close to it, making this sort of a motif.

Corea also uses melodic motifs, such as the three licks starting at measure 18, to create this same sense of development. Some are subtle, such as how his first and third lines both end on a descending minor third to the root of the chord (bars 2 and 6), or in bars 10 and 11, where he moves the first two notes up and the last two notes down when repeating the figure, making them the same but different. Some are not so subtle, such as the lines from bar 18 mentioned above, or the descending sixths in bars 43–44, or the half step down played in ascending semitones in bars 59–63. Notice how this last example is not just repeated intervallically; Corea also plays the same rhythms, but changes partway through. Also worth noticing: It starts out as a three-against-four polyrhythm (hemiola), but at the end of bar 60 morphs into a five-against-four. The first rhythm (two eighth notes followed by an eighth-note rest) reappears in measures 75–77. Once again, material is being recycled, making the improvisation sound more composition-like, rather than just a bunch of licks. **DB**

Jimi Durso is a guitarist and bassist based in the New York area. Visit him online at jimidurso.com.

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0:37 $\text{♩} = 152$ Dm A7/C# Dm/C Gm

7 D7/F# Gm/F Em7 A7 Fm7 Bb7

12 Ebmaj7 Em7 A7 Dm7 Em7 A7

16 Dm7 Dm A7/C# Dm/C

21 Gm D7/F# Gm/F

25 Em7 A7 Fm7 Bb7 Ebmaj7

29 Em7 A7 Dm7 Em7 A7 Dm7

33 Dm A7/C# Dm/C Gm

39 D7/F# Gm/F Em7 A7 Fm7 Bb7 Ebmaj7

45 Em7 A7 Dm7 Em7 A7 Dm7

50 Dm A7/C# Dm/C Gm

55 D7/F# Gm/F Em7 A7

59 Fm7 Bb7 Ebmaj7 Em7 A7 Dm7

63 Em7 A7 Dm7 Dm A7/C#

68 Dm/C Gm D7/F#

72 Gm/F Em7 A7 Fm7 Bb7 Ebmaj7

77 Em7 A7 Dm7 Em7 A7 Dm7

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Nord Stage 3

Major Upgrades Distinguish a Worthy Successor

The Nord Stage series has become a gold standard for keyboard players during the past several years. Now, with the introduction of the Stage 3, many professional players are discovering that the newest iteration lives up to the legacy.

As would be expected from Nord, the build quality is excellent, with sturdy metal casing and wooden endpieces. One major upgrade is the inclusion of an OLED screen in the center, which is much more readable than the previous LCD screen, and an additional OLED screen in the synth section, which gives you more feedback on synth parameters than ever before. I play-tested the 88-key version of the Stage 3, which has an excellent weighted action. Also available are a 76-key version with Nord's lightweight hammer action keyboard and a 73-key model featuring a waterfall organ-style keyboard.

Under the hood, there are some major advances. The architecture is largely the same, with three separate tone-generating sections—Organ, Piano and Synth. There is also an effects section, as well as an amp simulator, compression and reverb—all of which have been upgraded.

The Organ section features Nord's C2D fully polyphonic organ engine, upgraded to the latest algorithms. The B-3 sounds are wonderful, and with different models to choose from, you can get the sound you want for sure. The Leslie simulator has been upgraded, with greater control of acceleration for horn and low rotor. The 88-key model uses the same virtual drawbars as past versions, but the smaller units have hardware drawbars.

The Piano section has doubled its memory, allowing for more sampled

pianos from the Nord Piano Library. The pianos (grand and upright) sound great, as do the electric pianos, clavs, harpsichords and a new “layers” section. I'd like to see some bigger/better Rhodes samples in future updates.

The most impressive change comes in the Synth section. With the Stage 3, Nord switches over from the previous Nord Lead engine to the much more capable Nord A1 synth engine. The polyphony has expanded from 18 to 34 voices, and the sample RAM also has been increased. The whole architecture is different, starting with the oscillator section, which now offers single and dual oscillator functions, both of which can be based on basic, pitch and shape (sample) waveforms.

I was glad to see a noise generator included this time around, too. The filter section offers two low pass, a high pass, a band pass, an LP/HP and a new “Classic” filter, which bears close resemblance to the Moog ladder filter. There is still only a single LFO. It has five different shapes, including S/H, but can only be routed to either modulation of the oscillators or filter cutoff. Nord treats vibrato LFO separately, but it is global. There are also unison and mono modes, which can really fatten up the sound, as well as an arpeggiator and portamento. All this being said, the synth sounds great: It can be very lush or super edgy, and everything in between.

There are dozens of other upgrades, but suffice it to say that the Stage 3 is a worthy successor to previous models. It offers enough enhancement that current Stage 2 owners likely will want to upgrade—even though there is no backwards compatibility.

—Chris Neville

nordkeyboards.com

Kawai Novus NV10

Grand Piano Action Meets Premium Digital Sounds

The new Novus NV10 hybrid digital piano from Kawai sounds so good to the ear, and feels so real under the fingers, it could fool a pro in a blindfold test.

The Novus NV10 sounds so good because it uses Kawai's SK-EX Rendering piano sound engine—which blends multi-channel, 88-key sampling with cutting-edge resonance modeling technology—and a premium amplification system developed in collaboration with Onkyo. Its most magnificent tone of all is a rendering of Kawai's flagship Shigeru Kawai SK-EX full concert grand piano, an instrument prized for its tonal clarity and exceptional dynamic range. Multi-channel sampling has captured the sound from different points of the SK-EX, allowing a broad

range of tonal characteristics to be reproduced and providing a more lively, authentic response to changes in dynamics. The sound is enriched by resonance algorithms that physically model the complex tonal interactions produced by the strings, dampers and various other parts of an acoustic piano, giving players the impression that they're sitting at a living, breathing instrument.

The Novus NV10's high-fidelity sound comes from a seven-speaker output system that's designed to reproduce the three-dimensional sound field of an acoustic grand. Bass frequencies are transmitted from the underside of the instrument via a large woofer, while midrange frequencies are projected outward using four top-facing speakers that are calibrated

ed to expand the depth of sound beyond the instrument itself while still providing a feeling of proximity for the player. Two dome tweeters located behind the upper board ensure crisp, clear treble frequencies. The system allows the Novus NV10 to resonate like an acoustic instrument, with thundering lows, a sweetly solid midrange and sparkling highs. It also sounds amazing through headphones—players who want to practice “silently” can take advantage of the onboard Discrete SpectraModule headphone amplifier, which combines with Kawai’s Spatial Headphone Sound technology.

The reason the Novus NV10 feels so realistic is because it uses Kawai’s concert grand piano action with extended spruce key sticks. Strong, stable ABS Carbon components replace the traditional felt hammers of an acoustic piano; high-precision optical sensors read the subtle movements of each hammer, essentially taking the place of a piano’s metal strings.

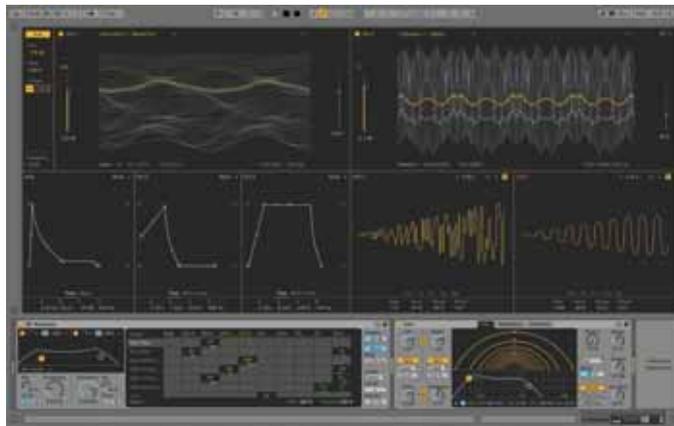
The Novus NV10 also incorporates a real grand piano damper mechanism. Although there are no strings to require physical damping, this feature replicates the true weighting of a grand piano damper pedal while also easing the keyboard action’s “touch weight” as the pedal is pressed—just like on a real concert grand. The damper function is part of a three-pedal setup that also includes “soft” and “sostenuto” functions.

In addition to a variety of incredibly realistic acoustic piano sounds, the Novus NV10’s 88 instrumental voices include a range of electric pianos, organs, strings, vocals and harpsichord. All of the sounds and settings are accessible from a 5-inch LCD color touchscreen that’s embedded discreetly within the left cheekblock and doesn’t detract from the instrument’s beautiful cabinet design (in ebony polish finish).

In addition to USB and MIDI jacks for connecting to computers and other instruments, the Novus NV10 features integrated Bluetooth technology that allows it to communicate with supported smart devices wirelessly. This feature makes it super easy to access the NV10’s “virtual technician” for fine-tuning 19 different parameters, including temperament, touch curve, damper noise, string resonance, cabinet resonance, decay time and key-off effect.

With the Novus NV10, Kawai gets down to the nitty-gritty of a realistic piano-playing experience, one that brings one of the world’s top concert grands to your ears and fingertips. Special thanks to Cordogan’s Pianoland in Geneva, Illinois, which generously granted DownBeat access to the instrument for play-testing. —Ed Enright

kawaius.com



Ableton Live 10

Living Up to the Legacy

Ableton Live, which has become ubiquitous in music production, has been upgraded to version 10, available in three flavors: Intro, Standard and Suite. I had the Live 10 Suite for this review, and will mention a lot of the Suite-only features. There’s plenty to like in this upgrade for Standard users, too, but the Suite continues to offer the best value—it includes 15 software instruments versus Standard’s five, many more audio and MIDI effects, and a whopping 70GB of content.

The first thing you notice when opening Live 10 is the stunning upgrade to the user interface. While the layout has not changed noticeably from Live 9, everything has been cleaned up immensely. Thinner lines, a new font and a sleek new color scheme really make this version stand out.

There are numerous usability upgrades in Live 10. The reworked browser section adds a “collections” feature that allows you to set up filtered groups of resources that you define and can access directly with one click. Adding and subtracting things from these groups is a keystroke away, so this feature really speeds up your work. Here you also will find a new batch of curated content, and you now can manage, download and upgrade your Live packs from within the program itself.

The Arrangement View has gotten a lot of love. Automation tracks are now hidden until called forward, which makes editing your tracks much simpler. MIDI events now can be edited with up to eight on a single piano roll—great for making sure your drum and bass lines are lining up properly. You can time-stretch clips and shift audio position within them with a simple modifier key. And you finally can nest groups of tracks, which makes managing large-scale mixes a breeze—granted, this is a feature that other DAWs have had for a long time, but it’s good to see Live catch up.

Live always has been about the immediacy of performance combined with recording, and the new Capture feature embraces this to a new degree. Live now captures all incoming MIDI information, whether you are recording or not, and you can recall it at will—a great way to make sure that cool idea makes it into the tune before you forget what you did.

No major update like this can be just about iterative improvements. Where are the toys? Well, there are some good ones. Wavetable is Live’s newest synth, and it’s a beauty. It’s driven by wave-table synthesis (à la the PPG Wave), but this interface is easy to navigate. Echo is Live’s new delay effect, combining analog and digital delay properties in one effect. Pedal is the new stomp box distortion modeler, and it has enough grit and grunge to make anyone happy. Drum Buss is the new effect designed specifically for making your kit sound exactly as you imagine.

Live 10 is a monster of a program. While it still does not work quite like other DAWs, and there are some features that I wish were here (comps, anyone?), there are enough things it does better than any other software to make it a must-have.

—Chris Neville

ableton.com

1. Digital Upright

The VIVO H1 from Dexibell is a digital home piano with 88 weighted, hammer-action keys in an upright form. Offering 24-bit/48kHz high-definition tone, the VIVO H1 has the same sound engine and many of the same features as Dexibell's flagship VIVO H7 and VIVO H3 series—making this a highly accessible option for students, teachers and professionals. VIVO pianos are designed to achieve acoustic realism and respond to subtle nuances of the player's touch. All Dexibell instruments are compatible with SoundFont, a large and growing library of sounds available for download.

More info: dexibell.com

2. Stand Extender

The GFW-KEY-5100XT from Gator Frameworks provides a third tier add-on for the GFW-KEY-5100X keyboard stand. Designed to handle up to 60 pounds, the accessory arms are especially suitable for small controllers and keyboards. Rubber bumpers prevent gear from sliding around or being damaged by scraping.

More info: gatorframeworks.com

3. Semi-Modular Synth

Pittsburgh Modular Synthesizer has released the Microvolt 3900. The analog audio engine of the Microvolt 3900 feeds a set of timbral wave-shapers crafted for harmonic shaping, allowing a layer of additive synthesis alongside the classic synthesis waveforms. The semi-modular synth includes a 39-point Eurorack format-friendly 1/8-inch jack patchbay for signal routing control over a full complement of audio and modulation options.

More info: pittsburghmodular.com

4. Portable Protection

SKB's waterproof iSeries keyboard cases with Think Tank-designed interiors feature dense, Velex-Covered foam blocks in different sizes with a hook-and-loop that provides secure attachment to the base and lid of the case—creating a custom fit for virtually any portable keyboard. A built-in wheel system provides easy and reliable mobility.

More info: skbcases.com

5. Programmable Polysynth

Building on the advances of the minilogue and monologue, the Korg prologue polyphonic synthesizer is fully programmable. Its powerful analog circuits, combined with a newly developed digital multi-engine and DSP-based effects, expand the variety of sounds and the possibilities for user customization.

More info: korg.com

6. Piano-Organ-Synth

The 88-key Numa Compact 2x from Studiologic carries forward all the professional technology of the Compact 2 controller keyboard while expanding the control panel and adding three independent sound engines and USB audio. It comes with 88 factory sounds—including concert pianos with string resonance—and 1GB of flash memory. Sounds can be tweaked and saved in one of 99 user preset slots.

More info: studiologic-music.com



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Guest trombonist John Fedchock performs with TCU Jazz Ensemble I at last year's 40th Annual TCU Jazz Festival.

TCU Fosters Strong Network

IT'S NO SECRET THAT COLLEGE FOOTBALL is nearly a religion in Texas, but who knew Texans' devotion to the sport could have a positive impact on jazz education?

On Jan. 1, 2011, the Horned Frogs from Texas Christian University capped off a perfect regular season by defeating the University of Wisconsin Badgers in the Rose Bowl, before a crowd of 94,000 and a television audience of millions.

"Appearing in the Rose Bowl was a huge boost for us," said Joe Eckert, who teaches saxophone and has directed the jazz studies program at TCU since 2011. "That really gave our school a profile that we didn't have [previously]."

Founded in 1873 as a "values-centered" institution, TCU has more than 10,000 students on its Fort Worth campus. About 350 students are enrolled in programs for one of seven degrees in music performance and education, or in a piano pedagogy degree that is offered at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Although TCU music students currently cannot focus solely on jazz, Eckert hopes to change that in the future.

"Currently, we try to give our students a really solid background in music through exposure to a broad variety of material," Eckert said. "In terms of jazz, our aim is to provide a deep understanding of the lineage of the music." Among the seasoned jazz artists who have come to TCU to work and perform with students are trumpeter Randy Brecker and drummer Peter Erskine.

Many students who pursue jazz studies at TCU go on to teach music at either the middle school or high school level. Much of the focus is on the big-band canon, which is not surprising given Eckert's 20-year tenure with the U.S. Air Force Band's Airmen of Note and his background with the One O'Clock Lab Band at the University of North Texas. Participation in the TCU marching band is compulsory—hence the broad exposure to the Rose Bowl audience—and

a number of jazz students also perform classical music.

"All that means that our music students are very busy," said Eckert, "but it makes for a very close-knit community." Add to that the fact that TCU freshmen and sophomores are required to live on campus, and you have an unusually vibrant student body.

"The community at TCU is strong," said Joey Carter, a TCU alumnus who teaches jazz piano, percussion and theory. "I think it's good for the current students in that they have a solid support system while they are in school and then have a tight network of alumni to network with when they get out."

A relatively low student-to-teacher ratio (15:1) also sets TCU apart, and Carter said a lot of the teaching he does is one-on-one—just as it was when he was a student in the program.

"Students don't study with a graduate student at TCU; they see a faculty member," Carter explained. "I was hired as an adjunct immediately after graduating; the relationships I developed with the faculty obviously paid off."

The emphasis on building community also extends to potential future students, principally through the annual TCU Jazz Festival. Since its inception in 1978, the festival has played host to more than 20,000 high school musicians, featuring bands from as far away as Hawaii.

When it comes time to audition potential jazz students, academic standing plays as big a role as musical talent. In fact, students must be accepted to TCU as a whole before applying to the music school. "The university prides itself in maintaining a very high academic standard," Eckert said. "Prospective students have to be both musically and academically talented."

The music school might not grab as many headlines as the university's football team, but it's clear that this campus values excellence in many forms, including academic, musical and athletic.

—James Hale



Anna Hinkley (left), Robin Margolis, Kevin Macauley and Adriana P. Cuervo of the Institute of Jazz Studies pose with Count Basie artifacts, including awards and clothing.

Count Basie, Collected: The Count Basie Collection, which includes the composer's pianos, organ, photos, letters, papers, clothes, Grammy and DownBeat awards and more, now is a part of The Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University–Newark in New Jersey. The collection, which contains about 1,000 items, is said to cover the latter portion of Basie's life particularly well and includes material related to Catherine Basie, his wife. newark.rutgers.edu

Workshop Scholarships: The Berklee Global Jazz Workshop at the Newport Jazz Festival offers vocalists and instrumentalists a chance to participate in a five-day intensive program under the direction of pianist Danilo Pérez and managing director Marco Pignataro. Through \$70,000 in scholarships this year, 45 students from 10 countries—including Panama, Chile, South Africa, Israel, Argentina, Costa Rica, the Netherlands and Australia—will participate in master classes, rehearsals and performances July 30–Aug. 3 at Salve Regina University and the festival. Established in 2016, the program has counted more than 150 participants and allocated about \$210,000 in scholarships. berklee.edu

Jazz on the West Coast: The California Jazz Conservatory, an independent college located in Berkeley, California, has appointed a new director of philanthropy. Elizabeth M. Williams' post was announced by the school on June 26. She comes to the position with more than 30 years of experience in fundraising for higher education and the arts. cjc.edu

The Next Generation: The Monterey Jazz Festival has announced the members of its Next Generation Jazz Orchestra for 2018. Twenty-one musicians from across the nation have been selected to perform July 21 at Coventry Grove Amphitheatre in Berkeley, California; in Noto, Japan, at a festival-hosted event July 28; at the Tokyo Tuc club on Aug. 1; at a free Sept. 20 performance at MJF's Jazz Legends Gala in Monterey; and a Sept. 23 performance at the festival in Monterey with artists-in-residence Tia Fuller and Ingrid Jensen. montereyjazzfestival.org

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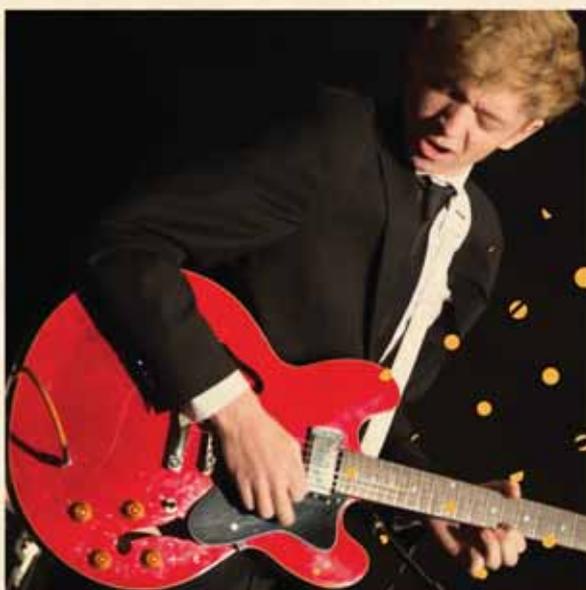
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Allan Harris

Following his acclaimed pair of *Black Bar Jukebox* albums, singer and guitarist Allan Harris' new album, *The Genius Of Eddie Jefferson* (Resilience), is a bebop-centric tribute to the king of vocalese. This is Harris' first Blindfold Test.

New York Voices and Bob Mintzer Big Band

"I Get Along Without You Very Well" (*Meeting Of Minds*, MCG, 2018) Peter Eldridge, lead vocal; Darmon Meader, Kim Nazarian, Lauren Kinhan, vocals; Bob Mintzer Big Band.

Very difficult song. That's Peter and the New York Voices. Their flavor is different than Manhattan Transfer, who are very adventurous—strong, powerful, the next stage of what Lambert, Hendricks & Ross would have done. But the New York Voices sing with such a melodic tone. They can scat and do all that stuff. Pleasantly surreal, and they make it sound so easy. I love the arrangement. I hear the Ashbys all up in there, Pittsburgh guys. 4½ stars.

Charenée Wade

"Ain't No Such Thing As A Superman" (*Offering: The Music Of Gill Scott Heron And Brian Jackson*, Motéma, 2015) Wade, vocals; Brandon McCune, piano; Dave Stryker, guitar; Lonnie Plaxico, bass; Alvester Garnett, drums.

She's letting the drummer take charge. Wonderful. Only a few modern vocalists can move into a slick, swinging Dinah Washington thing, and keep it modern. René Marie? Charenée? Good for her. If Nina Simone had been treated nicely and appreciated more, she would sound like Charenée Wade.

That's a hell of a band; they're all focused on making Charenée sound good, laying down a template that she can just walk across. 5 stars.

Freddy Cole

"They Didn't Believe Me" (*My Mood Is You*, High Note, 2018) Cole, vocals; John DiMartino, piano; Randy Napoleon, guitar; Elias Bailey, bass; Quentin Baxter, drums.

I come from the school that this man is the school—with his brother. It's beyond rating. I'm still working out this "I'm trying to impress you" thing, but hopefully one day I'll get to a position where I'm singing a song just for the sake of telling my audience a story.

That's all he is—a storyteller telling his story. Every song he sings is a gem, and there's continuity between them. He's beyond the point of teaching you. You have to live as long as he has to do what he does.

José James

"Lover Man" (*Yesterday I Had The Blues: The Music Of Billie Holiday*, Blue Note, 2015) James, vocals; Jason Moran, piano; John Patitucci, bass; Eric Harland, drums.

José James doing Billie Holiday. He's strong, very manly in his sound—and adventurous. He brings hip-hop chops to the jazz vernacular, and it works. He takes liberties. I once heard him do "Strange Fruit" with a looping machine, where he sang alongside himself, which was brilliant. His voice is haunting—deep and charming, like an r&b version of Arthur Prysock, but less affected than Arthur was. And what a band. Even without the vocals, you could listen to it. 4 stars.

Dominique Eade/Ran Blake

"It's Alright, Ma, I'm Only Bleeding" (*Town And Country*, Sunnyside, 2017) Eade, vocals; Blake, piano.

Patricia Barber? Lea DeLaria? It's not Dena DeRose. It's definitely a songwriter, a lyricist—a brilliant one at that. [*She didn't write the lyric.*] Wow, she's delivering it well. I believed it. I understood it. She wasn't playing piano, was she? For the accompanist to feed her the chords and chase her back and forth while the lyrics flow off her tongue ... they've played



Allan Harris

SANDRINE LEE

together for a while. 4 stars. [*after*] They played this at the ending of [the TV series] *Billions*; it made a poignant point, too. She put her own personality into it. That's hard with a Dylan song.

Lizz Wright

"Stars Fell On Alabama" (*Grace*, Concord, 2017) Wright, vocals; Chris Bruce, Marvin Sewell, acoustic guitar; Marc Ribot, electric guitar; David Piltch, bass; Jay Bellerose, drums.

Lizz Wright. She understands and was taught to sing the melody correctly, the way it's supposed to be sung, before you go off into your own world. She rarely goes off, although she can—I've heard her do it. She has such a warm, husky, pretty voice.

I like that the producers gave her a platform in which they just let her sing. The guitar player is staying in the same framework. Marvin Sewell? He plays Americana guitar the way it's supposed to be. 5 stars.

Cécile McLorin Salvant

"You're My Thrill" (*Dreams And Dragons*, Mack Avenue, 2017) Salvant, vocals; Aaron Diehl, piano; Paul Sikivie, bass; Lawrence Leathers, drums; Catalyst String Quartet.

I hear someone singing a movie track and inviting me into it. Cécile is moving in the direction of the film noir singers—Julie London, Doris Day, Anita O'Day. But she can go where Sarah Vaughan can, and they can't.

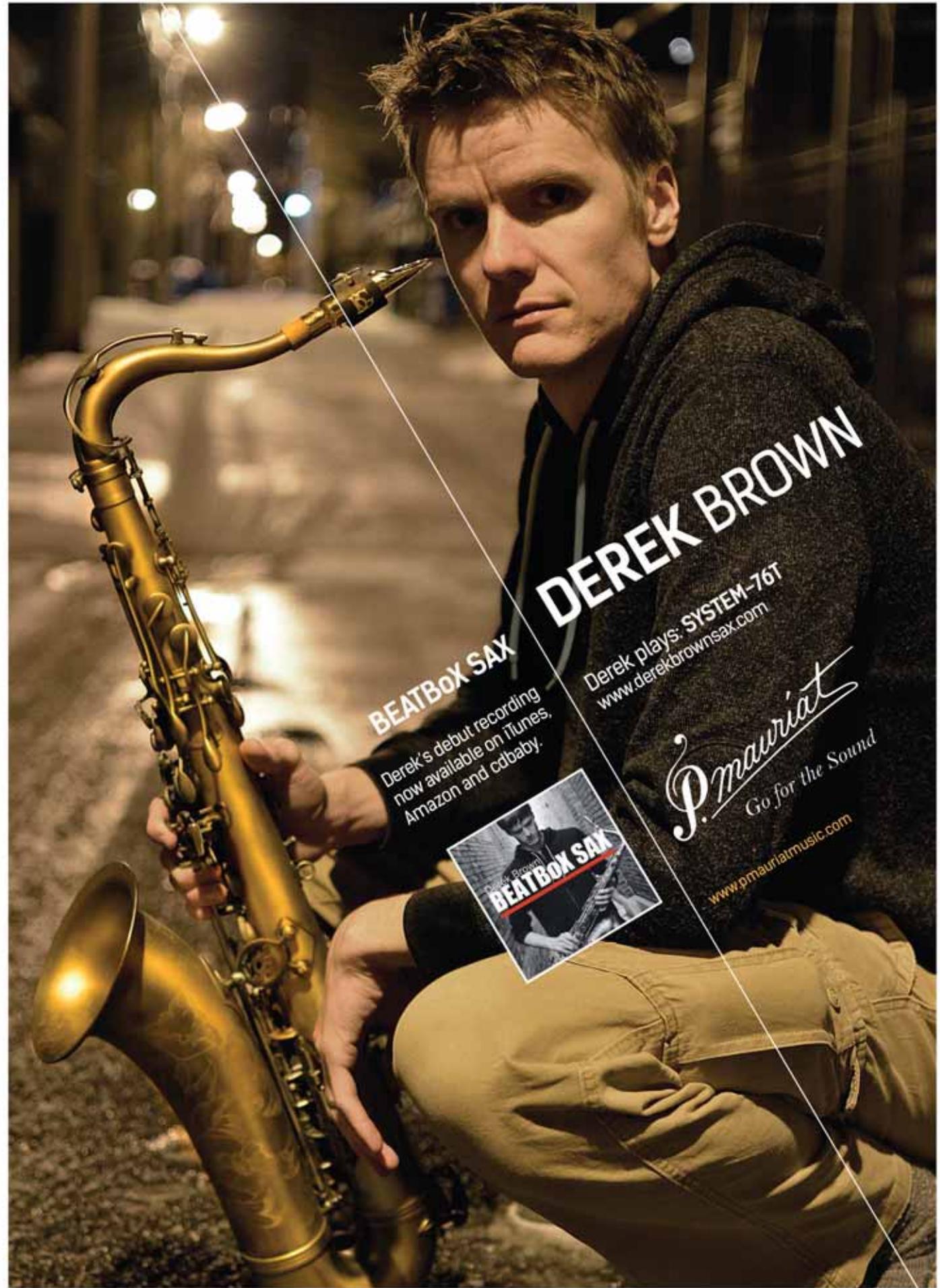
You can tell that the band is under her tutelage. She's saying, "I'm going here with my voice; I want you to bend with me." Look at the space they give between each lyric before they come in. Beautiful. That's seasoning. She's so young to have that seasoning, too. 5 stars.

Jamison Ross

"My Ship" (*All For One*, Concord, 2017) Ross, vocals, drums; Chris Pattishall, piano; Barry Stephenson, bass; Cory Irvin, background vocals; Rick Lollar, guitar.

Jamison Ross. I feel the same listening to him as I did when I first heard Peabo Bryson and Donny Hathaway. Jamison has married r&b with jazz—he plays drums, too, which is amazing—in such a wonderful way, not for effect, but because that's just the way he sings. He's not trying to entice you. He just wants you to listen to his voice. 5 stars. **DB**

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



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