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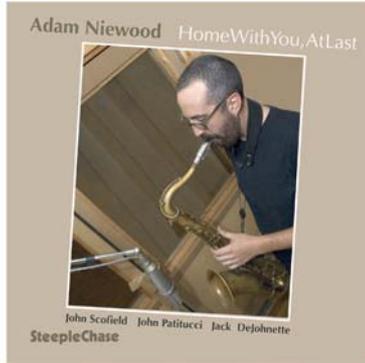
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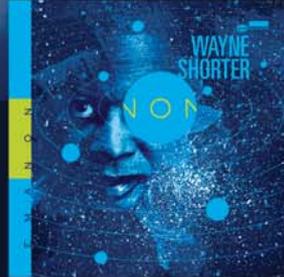
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KENDRICK SCOTT ORACLE A WALL BECOMES A BRIDGE

Drummer and composer **KENDRICK SCOTT** returns with a 12-track song cycle titled, *A Wall Becomes A Bridge*. Produced by **DERRICK HODGE**, *A Wall* is a musical and metaphorical journey exploring many themes: innocence ("Archangel"), acceptance ("Windows"), and insecurity ("Voices"). Scott is joined by his **ORACLE** band: pianist **TAYLOR EIGSTI**, bassist **JOE SANDERS**, guitarist **MIKE MORENO**, and saxophonist/flutist **JOHN ELLIS**.



WAYNE SHORTER EMANON

A **GRAMMY-WINNING** musical & visual experience, *Emanon* is **NOW AVAILABLE DIGITALLY** or as a box set. The triple-album features **THE WAYNE SHORTER QUARTET** & 34-piece **ORPHEUS CHAMBER ORCHESTRA** and was named **#1 JAZZ ALBUM OF 2018** by *NY Times*, *NPR Critics Poll*, and *Billboard*. *Rolling Stone* hailed, "Shorter's ideas have always been bigger than jazz; what *Emanon* shows is that they've also been bigger than music itself."



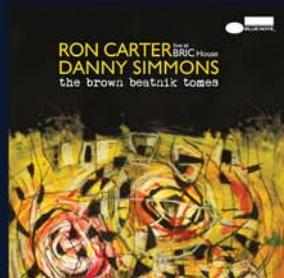
NORAH JONES BEGIN AGAIN

On April 12, nine-time GRAMMY-winning singer-songwriter **NORAH JONES** will release *Begin Again*, a collection of singles that gathers seven eclectic songs that Jones has recorded over the past year with collaborators including **JEFF TWEEDY** and **THOMAS BARTLETT**.



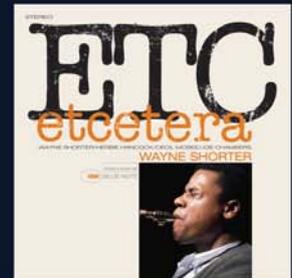
JOEL ROSS KINGMAKER

An impressive debut album from an incredible young artist who has been omnipresent on acclaimed recent albums by **MAKAYA MCCRAVEN** (*Universal Beings*), **WALTER SMITH III** (*In Common*), **MARQUIS HILL** (*Modern Flows, Vol. 2*), and **JAMES FRANCIES** (*Flight*). Now Joel carries the Blue Note vibraphone legacy into the future on an album that finds him exploring the formative stuff that made him the man he is, first and foremost, family.



RON CARTER AND DANNY SIMMONS THE BROWN BEATNIK TOMES – LIVE AT BRIC HOUSE

A unique and powerful collaboration between the artist and poet **DANNY SIMMONS** and legendary jazz bassist **RON CARTER**. This live recording from BRIC House in Brooklyn captured Simmons reading poetry from his collection of prose *The Brown Beatnik Tomes* with projections of his own striking Abstract Expressionist paintings providing the stage backdrop while Carter performed solo accompaniment along with instrumental interludes from his fleet trio.



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For our 80th anniversary we've reissued *Etcetera*, a quartet session from 1965 that's been considered one of Shorter's finest studio albums.

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'The Will To Be Flexible'

BY PHILLIP LUTZ

DownBeat catches up with the prolific clarinetist, who continues to raise her profile as an ambitious, versatile bandleader. The Anat Cohen Tentet's sophomore album is *Triple Helix*, a collaboration with composer and producer Oded Lev-Ari.

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JIMMY & DENA KATZ

Anat Cohen

Cover photo of Anat Cohen (and portrait above) shot by Jimmy & Dena Katz at The Jazz Gallery in New York on April 4. In'o for this venue is at jazzgallery.nyc.



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STEVE MUNDINGER/HERBIE HANCOCK INSTITUTE OF JAZZ

Herbie Hancock in Sydney during the 2019 International Jazz Day events

Nonstop Hancock

FEW ARTISTS REPRESENT THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF jazz the way that Herbie Hancock does. As jazz fans, we treasure his rich, extensive catalog, we eagerly await news on his latest projects, and we applaud all the work he does as an educator, mentor and jazz ambassador.

In this issue of *DownBeat*, the iconic pianist/keyboardist pops up a few places—which is hardly surprising. In our special section *We Love Vinyl* (starting on page 46), we have an article detailing the ways that Blue Note Records is celebrating its 80th anniversary. The Blue Note 80 Vinyl Reissue series includes new pressings of Hancock’s *Takin’ Off* (1962) and *Inventions & Dimensions* (1963), and the Tone Poet Audiophile series includes Wayne Shorter’s *Etcetera* and Sam Rivers’ *Contours*, just two of the dozens of classic albums to which the pianist contributed.

Elsewhere in this issue, we’ve got two articles on International Jazz Day (in *The Beat* on page 13 and in *Jazz On Campus* on page 86). Herbie and musicians from the Herbie Hancock Institute of Jazz were quite busy during multiple Jazz Day events in Sydney and Melbourne, Australia, where they performed, delivered master classes and shared optimistic messages about the democratic, inclusive nature of jazz. During the trip, Hancock served as a judge for a young composers competition, where the winners were ages 9 and 12. This generous act of “paying it forward” helps ensure that jazz will thrive for generations to come.

Also in *The Beat*, on page 19, we’ve got coverage of the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, where Hancock performed.

So, what’s next for Herbie? First, he’ll tour Australia and New Zealand from May 31 to June 10. Then, in July and August, he’ll tour North America with saxophonist Kamasi Washington, in a billing of two artists from different generations who’ve inspired hordes of rock fans to embrace jazz. According to his website, some of Hancock’s concerts this summer will feature an all-star, multigenerational band: drummer Vinnie Colaiuta, bassist James Genus, guitarist Lionel Loueke and multi-instrumentalist Terrace Martin. (Plan your travel schedule accordingly.)

Meanwhile, the world awaits a new studio recording from Herbie. We know that during the past couple of years, he has invited a rotating cast of musicians to jam and record with him. But as of press time, a release date had not been set for a new project. Hancock—who’s 79 but treks around the globe like he’s 29—has shown a knack for connecting with fans and musicians of all ages. We can’t wait to see (and hear) what he does next. **DB**

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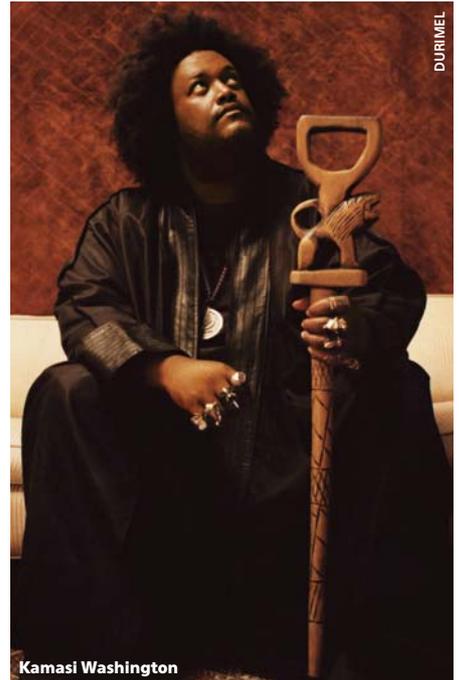
Chords & Discords >

Examinations of Originality

Bobby Reed's article "Borrowing Ideas" (First Take, May) caused me to ponder this question: When is it OK to steal? I would like to ask that question about jazz saxophonist Kamasi Washington and, in particular, the track "Change Of The Guard" on his 2015 album, *The Epic*.

The influence of John Coltrane on this piece by Washington is clear to me. Coltrane's "Equinox" might have a different tempo, but elements of the harmony and melody are evident in "Change Of The Guard." This is the kind of "stealing" that Branford Marsalis refers to in the cover story of your May issue. It is not a copy or an imitation; it is one artist's use of an idea or element from the work of another, in order to create something new.

There is another piece of music that "Change Of The Guard" brings to mind. The 1985 album *The Saxophone Shop* by The Odean Pope Saxophone Choir includes the track "Heavenly." It was composed by Eddie Green and arranged here by Pope. I would be keen to know if anyone else hears similarities between these two pieces of music. To me, they have similarities in tempo, melody and harmony. Is this the same kind of "stealing" that Marsalis spoke about, or is it crossing that blurry line between influence and theft? I would love to be proven wrong, but it seems to me that this might be a



Kamasi Washington

case of going beyond the mere "borrowing" of ideas or elements from another artist.

MOMO VUCAK
MOMO.VUCAK@GMAIL.COM

The Past Fuels the Future

In your June issue, the Chords & Discords letter from Lance Martin had this headline: "Is Jazz Too Snobbish?"

Jazz cannot be snobbish—but perhaps a person who plays it can be. To play the old songs of jazz is like a symphony orchestra playing Bach, Beethoven or Brahms. One plays it to keep it alive. Not everyone enjoys it, but this genre deserves to live forever as America's music. Perhaps the music of Shaggy, Bruno Mars and Cardi B will also live forever.

L.M. BOURNE
VESTAL, NEW YORK

Fond Memories

I enjoyed the DownBeat Jazz Education Hall of Fame article on master educator Jerry Coker in your June issue.

While in the Navy, I was stationed at the Army Language School at the Presidio of Monterey. There, I took a night course in jazz that was informal and educational. There were often guest musicians who performed and told stories. I'll never forget Lee Konitz's pithy remembrances of Charlie Parker.

LARRY HOLLIS
LHOLLIS@COX.NET

Bassist's Homeland

In your June issue, in The Hot Box review of *Invincible Nimbus* by Anne Mette Iversen's Ternion Quartet, critic Paul de Barros erroneously wrote that the bandleader is Dutch. Actually, she is Danish.

ALLAN SOMMER
COPENHAGEN, DENMARK

Corrections

- In the June issue, a student's name was misspelled multiple times in the results of the DownBeat Student Music Awards. In the category Engineered Studio Recording, the Graduate College Winner is Michael Bevers from Middle Tennessee State University. Bevers also received an Outstanding Recording honor in the category Engineered Live Recording.

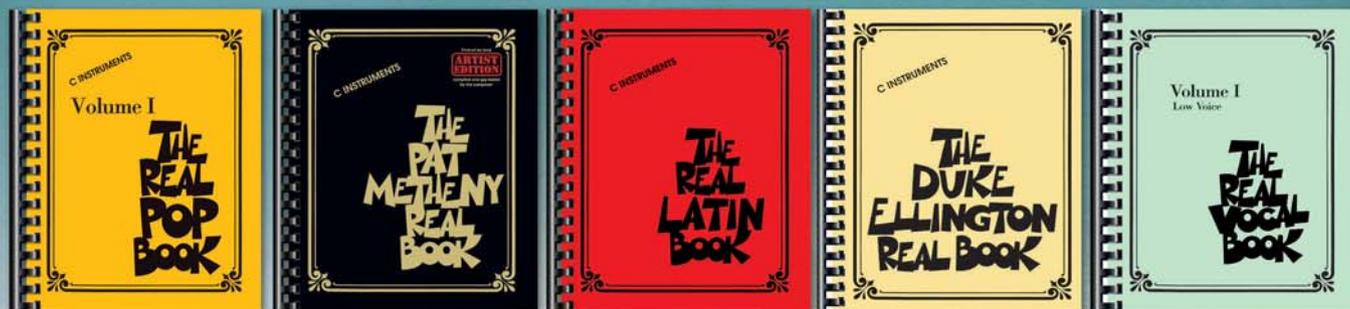
- In the May issue, in the Historical column of the Reviews section, the sixth paragraph contains a misspelling of the surname of drummer Franklin Kiermyer.

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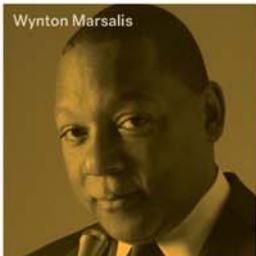
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celebrate the 25th Anniversary

of *Close Your Eyes*

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Dianne Reeves *Beleza Brazil*

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Beat

Jazz Day's Cultural Exchange

Acknowledgments of Australia's indigenous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were peppered throughout the 2019 International Jazz Day celebrations in the host cities of Melbourne and Sydney.

Before beginning several educational workshops and cultural tours, Australian spokespersons—regardless of ethnicity—gave voice to specific indigenous nations, sometimes alluding to the country's original sin: the establishment of Australia as a penal colony by the Dutch, Spanish and British in 1788, which led to the deaths, displacement and marginalization of indigenous people who had occupied the land well before their arrival.

After the April 30 main concert inside Arts Centre Melbourne's Hamer Hall, William Barton, a didgeridoo virtuoso of the Kalkadunga nation and one of several esteemed Australian musicians featured on stage, contextualized the acknowledgments beyond IJD festivities: "[The acknowledgments] are becoming more mainstream in Australian culture. [It] lays a new foundation for our identity. Our identity is our most important thing; it's what keeps our people and cultures alive."

Much of these newfound official statements honoring Australia's indigenous people were spurred by the 2001 establishment of Reconciliation Australia, a nongovernmental organization aimed at promoting unity among the country's indigenous and nonindigenous communities. During the concert, Barton acknowledged his Aboriginal heritage and reconciliation with Australia's European citizens through music when he commenced the evening in a duet with trumpeter and trombonist James Morrison, the concert's co-artistic director. As if they were summoning ancestral spirits, Barton crafted slow rhythmic pulses, hypnotic drones



James Morrison (left) and William Barton perform April 30 at Arts Centre Melbourne's Hamer Hall in Australia.

and evocative swooshes alongside Morrison's equally coruscating passages.

Multicultural musical collaborations have been the philosophical anchor for IJD since its launch in 2011 by UNESCO and the Herbie Hancock Institute of Jazz (formerly the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz). Musicians at the 2019 main concert also represented Japan, Russia, Brazil, Lebanon, Israel, Mexico, England and the Netherlands.

Hancock, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador and IJD's other co-artistic director, proclaimed jazz "the universal language of peace" while conveying the music's global appeal, reminding the audience that 195 countries around the world participated in celebrating the event.

"For eight years, April 30 is now recognized as a day for people of all ages, genders and ethnicities to come together and prove that our similarities are stronger than our differences," he enthused.

Unsurprisingly, works from Hancock's songbook sprang forth: a spirited reading of his 1960s post-bop classic "One Finger Snap" featuring organist Joey DeFrancesco instead of piano, as

well as his sublime mid-1990s arrangement of Peter Gabriel's "Mercy Street."

Singers Somi and Lizz Wright elevated the concert with sets comprising material from more recent albums. Somi channeled much of Miriam Makeba's electricity on "Lady Revisited," an original from her 2014 album, *The Lagos Music Salon*. And Wright exhibited Southern gospel roots and passionate blues-soaked sensuality on her mesmerizing makeovers of Nina Simone's "Seems Like I'm Never Tired Lovin' You" and Sister Rosetta Tharpe's "Singing In My Soul," both from her 2017 album, *Grace*.

The concert's overall feel-good vibe—including its closing, all-hands-on-deck reading of John Lennon's "Imagine"—epitomized the hospitality that permeated Sydney and Melbourne. And one could argue that feel-good songs can be just as effective at fostering meaningful cultural exchange and reconciliations—inside Australia's multicultural ecosystem and worldwide—as incendiary sociopolitical statements that give voice to social change.

—John Murph



Dave Samuels (1948–2019)

MICHAEL PARENTINO/COURTESY YAMAHA

In Memoriam: Dave Samuels, an educator and musician whose primary instruments were vibraphone and marimba, died April 22 in New York, following a long illness. He was 70. A recipient of Grammy and Latin Grammy awards, Samuels had a long association with Spyro Gyra, and was a co-founder of The Caribbean Jazz Project, as well as Double Image. Samuels taught at Berklee College of Music and New England Conservatory.

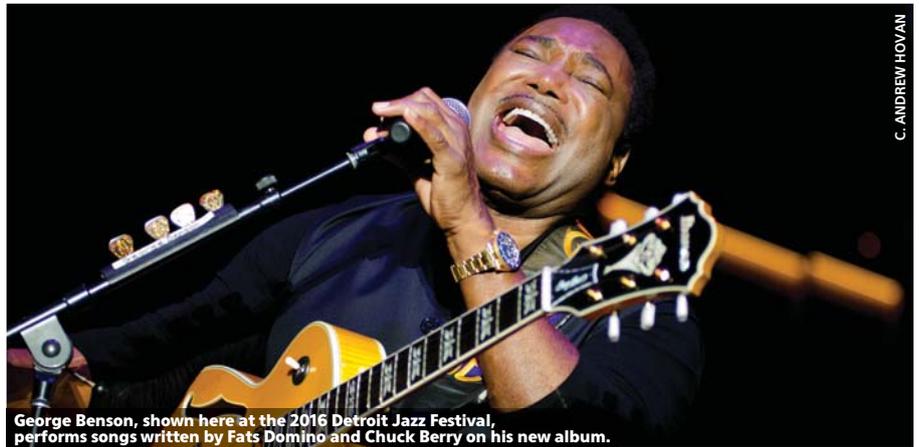
Seriously SASSY: The 8th annual Sarah Vaughan International Jazz Vocal Competition, also known as the SASSY awards, is accepting applications through Sept. 9. The competition, which is part of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center's TD James Moody Jazz Festival, is open to vocalists 16 years old and up who are not signed to a major label. Five finalists (to be announced on Oct. 15) will perform for a panel of judges that includes Dee Dee Bridgewater, Christian McBride, Jane Monheit, Gary Walker and Matt Pierson on Nov. 24. To compete for the \$5,000 grand prize, applicants can submit three songs via the competition website.

sarahvaughancompetition.com

Bayou Restrictions: CGI Rochester International Jazz Festival, which runs June 21–29, reaches well beyond genre restrictions as The Steve Miller Band and Patti LaBelle are set to perform. But along with those rock- and soul-oriented acts, saxophonist George Coleman, vocalist Veronica Swift, pianist Harold Mabern, guitarist Bill Frisell and rising-star vibraphonist Sasha Berliner are set to perform at the event in New York State.

rochesterjazz.com

Final Bar: Eddie Tigner, a Georgia native born in 1926 who was a member of The Ink Spots, died April 18 in Atlanta. After Tigner's stint with the band, he later became affiliated with the nonprofit Music Maker Foundation, which in 2014 issued a compilation that included the pianist performing the classic "Route 66."



George Benson, shown here at the 2016 Detroit Jazz Festival, performs songs written by Fats Domino and Chuck Berry on his new album.

C. ANDREW HOVAN

Benson Salutes Rock Pioneers Berry, Domino

FOR HIS NEW ALBUM, GEORGE BENSON turned to the past. On *Walking To New Orleans* (Provogue), the jazz guitarist/singer pays tribute to two rock 'n' roll icons: Fats Domino and Chuck Berry, both of whom died in 2017. Featuring Domino classics like 1956's "Blue Monday" and Berry's 1959 hit "Memphis, Tennessee," Benson's 45th outing as a leader might be his first unabashedly rocking album. It also represents his coming full circle—back to his rock 'n' roll roots as a precociously gifted kid growing up in Pittsburgh.

"I had a band called George Benson & His All-Stars, and we played rock 'n' roll," he recalled over the phone from his home in the Phoenix area. "We played whatever was on the jukebox, and both of those guys were on the jukebox all the time. So, making this record was relatively easy, because I remembered so many of those tunes. But I also knew better than to try and copy those icons. There's only one Chuck Berry and only one Fats Domino. Both guys had their own distinctive character, their own vibe, their own sound."

Recorded at Ocean Way Studios in Nashville with a group of first-call session players, *Walking* doesn't have the typical elements Benson fans might expect, such as long segments of fiery fretwork with precisely picked 32nd notes. "We tried to keep it simple," he explained. "It's like each song is telling me what I should be playing. My job was to sing the song and not get in the way, because this whole project was about storytelling. All I can do is try to create a mat for those stories to rest on, and that requires a simpler approach to playing."

Benson does, however, get in some of his signature solo licks on two tracks—Berry's 1964 single "Nadine (Is It You?)" and Domino's hit "Ain't That A Shame," which topped the r&b charts in 1955. "The bassist on the session, [Alison Prestwood], told me, 'I was waiting for you to do that. Now, I hear George Benson!' But I was trying to stay away from that because we didn't want to get the attention away from what we were try-

ing to accomplish, which was to bring back the beauty of the '50s ... And I didn't want the audience to lose that vibe. They've heard me play; they know what I can do. But to stay somewhere in the ballpark of the originals would be a major coup."

On his previous recording, 2013's *Inspiration: A Tribute To Nat King Cole*, Benson saluted an artist who began his career as a jazz pianist before earning widespread popularity as a vocalist. Cole was an obvious role model for Benson, who gained notoriety as a hotshot young sideman in "Brother" Jack McDuff's organ group before debuting as a leader, at age 21 on Prestige, with 1964's strictly instrumental *The New Boss Guitar Of George Benson*. Columbia producer John Hammond then signed Benson to a deal with the label under the condition that he sing at least two songs per album. "It was part of my deal," Benson recalled. "CBS Records told John Hammond, 'We don't need another guitar player.' So when he told them I also sing, they said, 'If he's a singer, we'll sign him.' That's how that came about."

On the heels of his Columbia signing, the guitar great delivered soulful vocal renditions of "Summertime" and "A Foggy Day" on 1966's *It's Uptown* and "All Of Me" on 1967's *The George Benson Cookbook*. His singing was prominently featured on his 1970 Beatles tribute, *The Other Side Of Abbey Road* (A&M), and on his 1976 smash, *Breezin'* (Warner Bros.), which earned him three Grammy awards, including a Record of the Year honor for his rendition of Leon Russell's "This Masquerade."

And Benson still is in particularly good voice on *Walking*. "We did the whole session with just the band live in the studio, and the atmosphere was genuine," he said. "When you hear them play, it's part of their lifestyle, it's who they are. They made me feel so comfortable, man, like this is what we should be doing. So, I'm going to have a lot of fun with this record when I go on tour."

—Bill Milkowski

Chou Tells Story of 'Comfort Women'

EVEN THOUGH SHE EXCELLED AS A MATH major at Columbia University, Stephanie Chou had already looked ahead to a saxophone career, having played alto and soprano since she was 10. The native New Yorker studied the Western classical canon and then expanded her knowledge by exploring the city's competitive improvisational circles. But Chou truly found her voice as a saxophonist and vocalist when she embarked on a journey into the rich folkloric music of her Chinese heritage.

At the release party last year at Lincoln Center's David Rubenstein Atrium for her sophomore album, *Asymptote* (DouMiao-Haricot), Chou sang in English and Mandarin while easing into her emotive alto lines. At the end of the set, Chou introduced a new piece, "Manchurian Girl," based on a 1938 Japanese hit pop tune that also was released in China. The song was a part of a larger work the bandleader was developing, in which she examines the inhumane treatment of Chinese "comfort women," who were enslaved for sexual pleasure by Japanese soldiers in World War II.

Thanks in part to a commission from the American Composers Forum, Chou wrote and arranged her first long-form suite. She premiered

the 90-minute *Comfort Girl* on March 29 at Joe's Pub at the Public Theater in New York with a five-piece ensemble and plans to release a recording of the suite by the end of this year.

The historical background for *Comfort Girl* largely has been hidden, Chou explained at her premiere, saying that about 400,000 women were abducted by the Japanese army controlling China beginning in 1938. Some tried to escape but were caught and beaten or killed. Some were killed in camps. Others were released at the end of the war, but some weren't accepted by their families and friends when returning home. "I didn't want this piece to be all depressing or overly dramatic," Chou said. "I wanted to tell a story to get a message out there."

During the *Comfort Girl* premiere, Chou and her band—which included vocalist Orville Mendoza, pianist Kelly Lin, drummer Kenny Wollesen and Andy Lin on erhu, viola and violin, as well as narrator Peregrine Heard—told the story of a young woman who is excited about her upcoming marriage to a childhood friend; but then she's kidnapped by soldiers during her wedding ceremony. The happier moments of the tale explore young love and feature the lush, harmonic intertwining of alto saxophone and vio-



lin and then later, erhu accompaniment. At the wedding celebration, the music turns from joyful celebration to horrific clash with Wollesen's thunderous drums and Chou's shouting vocals painting an image of terror.

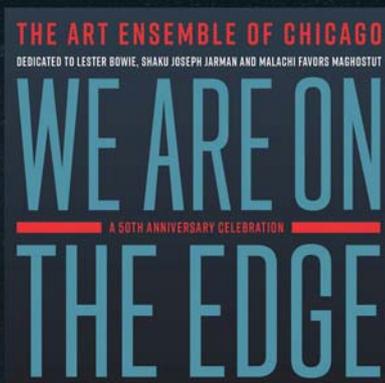
The most powerful piece was a jazz-fueled song of escape that Chou sang with a confident urgency: "I'm fighting back, and I'm stronger than you. ... I won't be silent anymore." When the persona escapes and finds her way home, she sees her fiancé in the fields, and is left with the poignant question: "Who's the person left in there?" The suite ends with that question, one that's echoed through the decades. —Dan Ouellette

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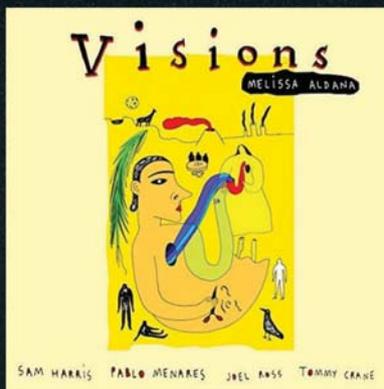
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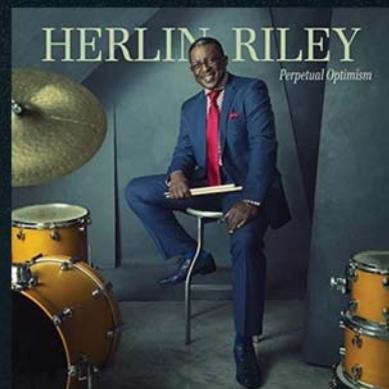
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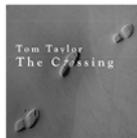
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The Business of Listening

"For me, as well as for many other people of my age, a record store has always represented a meeting place, where besides buying records you could get in touch with other people," said Italian percussionist Fabrizio Spera. In the years before he became an international figure in progressive rock circles, and later, free-jazz and improvisation, record shops have been a second home to him.

Beginning in 1992, Spera worked at a series of iconic, but now shuttered, record shops in Rome—Disfunzioni Musicali and Rinascita—as the buyer of jazz and experimental music, even as his schedule as a performer grew increasingly busy. By 1995, he cofounded the experimental electro-acoustic trio Ossatura with guitarist Elio Martusciello and accordionist Luca Venitucci, a combo heavily informed by the Rock in Opposition movement heralded by England's Henry Cow. Even in collaboration with Henry Cow's Tim Hodgkinson on its 1998 debut album, *Dentro* (ReR), Ossatura has practiced a more abstract strain of exploration, with improvisation exerting a greater input.

When Rinascita closed its doors in 2009, Spera began working for the Italian distribution company Goodfellas, curating its international free-jazz and experimental music catalog, but still yearned for the social connection of a record store. So, in 2011, he and a couple of colleagues opened Blutopia in Rome's Pigneto neighborhood, which shared a space with an upstairs bookstore, Satellite.

"We considered Blutopia also as a space for other activities, such as gigs, meetings, discussions, workshops and films about music and other topics," Spera said. Indeed, not only is Blutopia one of Rome's most important retail sources for adventurous music of all stripes, it's been one of its most crucial live music venues, albeit on micro level. "Over the years and through these kind of activities, a community of people began to grow slowly but gradually around the shop," he continued.

Since Blutopia opened, it's hosted concerts on a near-weekly basis, cramming listeners into a tiny performance area. During the last eight years, just about every notable Italian improviser has played in the store, as well as an impressive roster of international artists, including Axel Dörner, Tomeka Reid, Ben Goldberg, Michael Moore and Ava Mendoza. Although there are Roman venues that present top-quality jazz, like Casa del Jazz, musicians outside of the mainstream have struggled to find playing opportunities, especially since the long-running free-jazz festival Controindicazioni—started in 1988 by the legendary saxophonist Mario Schiano and codirected by Spera during its final eight



Fabrizio Spera

ELEONORA CERRI PECORELLA

years—ended in 2007, when the city stopped contributing funds.

While Spera grew up attracted to progressive rock, his innate curiosity eventually led him to a deep engagement with jazz; these days, he comfortably straddles multiple disciplines. Most notable in recent years is his free-jazz quartet Roots Magic, whose two excellent albums on the Clean Feed label explore the profound connections of early Delta blues with the music of African-American composers like Sun Ra, Marion Brown and Henry Threadgill.

"After many years of exploring the more abstract sides of music, I felt the need to go back to a more 'basic' approach," the drummer said. "On the other hand, this is also a work of love for the music of people like Julius Hemphill, Marion Brown, John Carter, music that I literally grew up with, while my relationship with early country blues came later, especially through my encounters with [English expat guitarist] Mike Cooper.

"In fact, it was with him that I first experimented a way to connect my experience in free-jazz and improv with the music of people like Fred McDowell or Skip James."

That connection was recognized last year when the group unexpectedly was invited to perform at the Juke Joint Festival in Clarksdale, Mississippi.

Spera continues working with Roots Magic and Ossatura, which veered toward a more melodic direction on its pristine 2016 album *Maps And Mazes* (ReR) and in ad hoc improvisational groupings with Cooper, saxophonist John Butcher and pianist Alberto Braidà. But when he's not on the road, adventurous listeners still can find him behind the counter at Blutopia, eager to share recommendations or to listen together, all to fortify community. **DB**

On 'Carib,' Sánchez Explores Haitian Rhythms

DAVID SÁNCHEZ'S MUSIC PROJECTED AN immaculate sense of clarity and purpose when he previewed music from his new album, *Carib* (Ropeadope), in mid-February at Washington, D.C.'s Kennedy Center. He showcased a new ensemble that featured percussionists Jhan Lee Aponte and Markus Schwartz, and drummer Obed Calvaire. They coalesced various folkloric Haitian and Puerto Rican rhythms with modern jazz momentum, while pianist Luis Perdomo, keyboardist Edward Simon and bassist Ricky Rodriguez augmented Sanchez's lyrical tenor saxophone improvisations, which unraveled with astonishing fluidity.

The musicians who performed with Sánchez at the Kennedy Center (except Simon) contributed to the recording sessions for *Carib*, the band leader's first bona fide leader date since 2008's *Cultural Survival*. But a key link to the new album is Sánchez's groundbreaking 2000 disc, *Melaza*, which explored Puerto Rico's various folkloric African music and culture.

On the new album, Sánchez shifts his focus to Haitian music, particularly rhythms like *petwo* and *kita*, then connects the dots in between with rhythms from other Caribbean nations, such as Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Colombia and other places in the United States, such as New Orleans and the Sea Islands off the coast of South Carolina. He sees *Carib* as a contemporary pan-African project, consisting of original modern jazz compositions.

"But I wanted to start it with Haiti, because it was the second sovereign country in the Americas," Sánchez explained backstage at the Kennedy Center before his performance. "The African slaves freed themselves in 1803; and in 1804 Haiti became a formal country. Also, Haiti has influenced a lot of places throughout the Caribbean. Haiti was a way for me to get to my own roots, because slaves were being brought [to Puerto Rico] almost as the Haitian Revolution was happening."

In part, Sánchez's late wife, Karla, inspired him to investigate Haitian culture. So, in 2016, the saxophonist visited the country's capital, Port-au-Prince, providing him with an eye-opening experience into how Haitians survive amid devastating poverty.

"I think everyone should take the opportunity to go there to get a greater appreciation of some of the things that we have," Sánchez said. "A lot of things that we take for granted—like clean water, bathrooms and electricity—people there simply don't have them. That visit inspired me to do something to help Haiti, even in small steps, like telling others about their difficult sto-



DANIELA MURILLO

David Sánchez investigates folkloric music from Haiti on his new album, *Carib*.

ries. I can help create greater awareness."

While Sánchez sensed the pervasiveness of indigenous music there, he noted that it's challenging to hear live music in gig-oriented settings. "They don't play music because they have gigs somewhere; they play music because it's important to them. They play music at various crucial times in their everyday lives. That alone was inspiring," he recalled.

While Sánchez was working on *Carib*, though, tragedy intervened: Both his wife and his father, Dimas, became ill around the same time. His wife passed away in August 2017, and in July 2018, his father died. The impact of losing those two people influenced the recording.

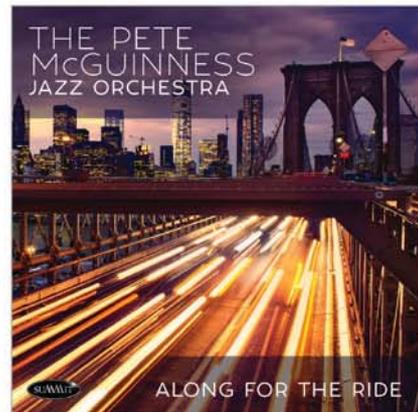
"The project wouldn't have been the same if we hadn't gone through that," Sánchez said. "But even while you're struggling through some of life's challenges and changes, music always gives you refuge. I'm still in the process of losing my dad and wife. We carry that grief until our last days. The grief just changes. But I feel like I'm in a really good place. I have people and family who are still here who love me. So, I'm putting more of my energy on that than the loss."

With newfound determination, Sanchez sees his latest recording as the impetus for additional pan-African musical explorations.

"I've been really checking out the culture in South Carolina and the Sea Islands," he enthused. "I don't know where I'm going next, but *Carib* is the start of a whole new journey."

—John Murph

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Meza Highlights Human Connections



Pat Metheny is a touchstone for Camila Meza, who covers the guitarist's collaboration with David Bowie on *Ámbar*, her latest recording.

SINGER-SONGWRITER CAMILA MEZA jumped at the opportunity to attempt her own hybrid when bassist Noam Wiesenberg suggested arranging Elliott Smith's "Waltz #1" for their own group, augmented by a string quartet. The resulting video worked so well that they decided to record an entire album.

Released on Sony Masterworks, *Ámbar* concentrates on Meza songs alongside material by Antônio Carlos Jobim, Milton Nascimento, Chico Buarque, Tomás Méndez and others.

Over coffee at a Brooklyn cafe, Meza, who first played alongside strings in pianist Fabian Almazan's band, speculates that growing up as a "classical music nerd" in Santiago, Chile, finally has paid off. "At the beginning of my musical life, maybe because I was rebelling against my dad

or something, I didn't want to hear any classical music," she said. "But now, I really love it."

A peak moment in Meza and Wiesenberg's collaboration occurs midway through the new album's opening track, "Kallfu," which means "blue" in the language of southern Chile's native Mapuche people. The song was inspired by a trip the singer took to Patagonia as a respite from ongoing political traumas in the States. Meza's clear, cool voice drops out and a string quartet suddenly conjures up birds of various species bursting into song.

"We got that idea from aleatoric writing," explained Wiesenberg, "which is from the classical world, but perfect for jazz. You give each musician options to choose from, five notes they can use in any order or length. It ended up being real-

ly cool, because it's different at every show."

Meza and Wiesenberg each cite eclectic pop star Björk's string arrangements as a point of reference, with Camila adding Nick Drake's recordings and Laura Mvula's 2013 soul-jazz debut, *Sing To The Moon* (RCA).

Ámbar follows the guitarist's 2016 release, *Traces* (Sunnyside), in focusing on her original compositions. "Atardecer," "Fall" and the title track (a tribute to her late grandfather) were among the first songs she wrote upon arriving in New York a decade ago. "They're explorations that waited for the right circumstance to bloom," Meza said. "I was way more judgmental about my work back then, but that attitude has changed."

These songs, Meza said, speak to the human connections that might yet redeem us. "All Your Colors," the program's sophisticated jazz-pop centerpiece, likewise was "born from the feeling of intense love of a person, but also the acknowledgement that love needs effort, it needs work. You can fulfill the potential of really loving when you realize that it's a work of art."

"All Your Colors" also suggests the sense-shifting phenomenon of synesthesia, which Meza experiences—"but in a strange and personal way," she said with a laugh. "Some tonalities or chords are colors for me: G major is blue, D major is orange and B minor is totally yellow."

Like her songwriting, Meza's guitar playing and singing have also been evolving. "My singing has made my playing more lyrical," she said, "and less 'guitaristic.' It was important to me to be able to reach the same level of expression on guitar as with my voice."

On the other hand, her guitar helps her explore less intuitive musical ideas: "They teach each other."

Pat Metheny remains a touchstone for the bandleader, who, at his invitation, arranged a medley of his compositions performed last year by five guitarists at his NEA Jazz Masters induction ceremony at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. On *Ámbar*, Meza delivers an emotionally searing version of Metheny and David Bowie's "This Is Not America."

Playing in trombonist Ryan Keberle's politically engaged band Catharsis has "definitely amplified my own ideas about music and message," the 34-year-old said. As the daughter of two journalists, she was surrounded by commentary on current affairs as a youth: "I had so much news in my house as a teenager that I didn't want to know anything about the world."

But nowadays, things definitely have changed. "It would be easy and comfortable to not talk about what's going on in the world," she said. "But I feel an inherent responsibility. Let's open up our hearts and really heal ourselves as a society."

—Richard Gehr

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Branford (left), Wynton, Delfeayo and Jason Marsalis perform during a New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival set honoring their father, Ellis, who played piano with the ensemble.

ERICA GOLDRING

memorable performance, his set focusing on cerebral funk, turning in tricky rhythms and cascades of deep grooves with a strong assist from Cliff Hines' guitar and modular synth oddities.

The first weekend's top jazz draw was a Marsalis family reunion, honoring 84-year-old pianist, composer and educator Ellis Marsalis and featuring his sons Branford, Wynton, Delfeayo and Jason alongside their father. Such reunions and tributes can come off as contrived; this one was anything but. From the opening bars of "Crescent City Strut" to the parade the band led offstage at the end of their performance, the show was a study in blazing-hot horn solos that dovetailed into Ellis' steady, warm elegance at the piano.

The final day of the festival served up a hat trick of sorts, with Irma Thomas echoing the positive messages of Mahalia Jackson in her annual gospel set. Herbie Hancock's like-minded sidemen helped update the vibe of their bandleader's heady space-fusion bliss and "Chameleon"-era hits. And finally, local soul favorites Maze stuck around well past the end of their designated time on the Congo Square Stage, bringing the day to a close with line dances, singalongs and a breeze swaying beneath pink-and-white clouds—a proper conclusion to a well-rounded and soulful 50 years of music.

—Jennifer Odell

Locally Focused Spirit of NOLA Fest Persists

IN 1970, MAHALIA JACKSON SURPRISED attendees of the first New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival by jumping in on vocals when she found the Eureka Brass Band parading across the grounds near the lone stage. It was an organic moment borne of the musicians' shared cultural heritage.

As the festival geared up for this year's 50th anniversary edition, those humble beginnings

seemed somewhat locked in the past, given the event's current size (12 stages, eight days), scope (Katy Perry was among the headliners) and cost (\$85 a day, with a one-day discount for locals). But one of the crowning achievements of Jazz Fest, which ran April 26–May 5, is that the inclusive, locally focused spirit of that 1970 Eureka parade remained largely intact.

Trumpeter Nicholas Payton delivered a

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Tomita, Ratkje Interpret Works of Literature

ARTISTIC DISCIPLINES INFORM ONE ANOTHER, CROSS-POLLINATING inspiration and conception. In recent years, poetry has emerged as a preferred vehicle among musicians who have collaborated with noted contemporary writers Dr. Sonia Sanchez, Aja Monet and scores more.

Intrigued by the idea of drawing musical inspiration from literary works, but finding minimal pull toward poetry, bassist and composer Fumi Tomita settled on a collection of stories by fiction writer Haruki Murakami. He'd read *The Elephant Vanishes* years ago, and envisioned recording an original album with the same title.

"There were relationship problems—no communication," Tomita said, detailing Murakami's short stories. "There was anger with direction in life—a feeling of going nowhere. I thought I could turn those [literary] themes into musical ones."

Initially, Tomita anticipated creating a musical reference that could bubble up in every tune. But that concept would prove challenging as he sat with the music. So, he changed trajectory and found that the stories lent themselves to "more general themes" he could express just as potently in his compositions.

"For the feeling of desolation, negativity and frustration, for example," the bandleader said, "I used a descending bass line, a descending melody."

While Tomita gathered much of his research from the stories themselves, he allowed certain critical responses to infiltrate his creative process. One passage in particular resonated with the bassist's own interpretations of the texts: "One guy described [Murakami's story structure] as a house. There was the reality, which was the rooms in the house. But there's a subconscious part of Murakami's works, and he called that the basement or the attic—you don't know what's there, but you can feel its presence."

Tomita returned to this interpretation as he worked through his com-



ELLEN LANDE GOSSNER

Maja S. K. Ratkje uses Knut Hamsun's novel *Sult* as a starting point for her latest recording.

positions, opting to have soloing over changes represent the rooms, while open sections would serve as the basement or attic. Guitarist Mike Baggetta's use of whammy bar throughout offered further thematic rumination. "It was just a reference to the blues," the bassist said. "I read Murakami's stories as being modern blues stories."

Dreamlike quality among characters also helped shape how Tomita handled the music, but approaching other facets of Murakami's style proved trickier. "The unusualness—the humor of his works—that was pretty difficult to translate into music," he said. Tomita found using rhythmic motifs helpful in connecting compositional elements in a way that reflected interconnectedness among the stories. "There was a general philosophy that was being communicated."

Allowing existing works to inspire compositions has the potential to overwhelm the creative process. In contrast to Tomita's more literal translation of Murakami's works, keyboardist and composer Maja S. K. Ratkje's music intentionally departs from the literary inspiration for *Sult*. Composing music inspired by Knut Hamsun's groundbreaking novel of the same name, originally for the Norwegian National Ballet, the Norway-born singer and multi-instrumentalist recently translated her compositions into a full-length album on the Rune Grammofon imprint.

Her intention, and that of choreographer Jo Strömgen, was to value personal expression throughout the creative process. "Neither Jo nor I stayed true to Hamsun's work," said Ratkje. "The performance of *Sult* was a very loose interpretation of the text."

Use of pump organ, an instrument she mastered specifically for the project, offered a clear, if dissonant, vehicle for that interpretation.

"It was so charming, the way it was out of tune," Ratkje said. "I thought it could give the performance a genuine quality in the music ... that would relate to the sound-world of the time *Sult* was written." To exact the inspired sound, Ratkje fortified the organ using large PVC tubes, a stool "drum," hanging tubes, metal objects, a wind machine and an old butter churn that functioned as percussion.

Her decision to keep the translation of Hamsun's narrative open-ended jibes with Ratkje's philosophy of craft. A master at balancing structure and spontaneity, she allowed the work to reveal itself in process and performance.

"Music as expression is so rich and nuanced," she said. "I don't want to make music that says only one thing, or one thing at a time. I want music to be ambivalent, and not so clear it its intention."

Releasing *The Elephant Vanishes* and *Sult*, both Ratkje and Tomita extend an interdisciplinary tradition that ebbs and flows. But wherever inspiration emerges, ultimately the work's the thing.

"Most often, my intention is just focused on the musical material itself," Ratkje said. "It's up to the listener to add their own emotional or intellectual response."

—Stephanie Jones

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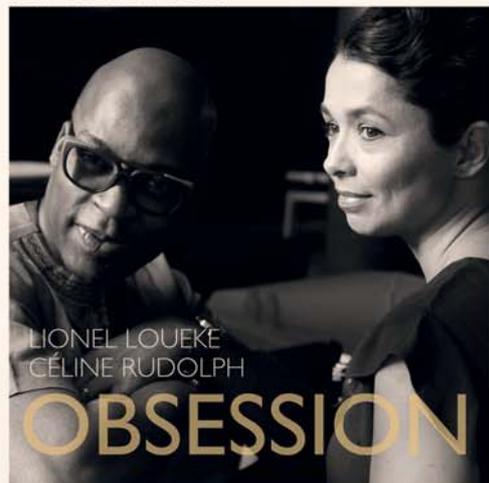


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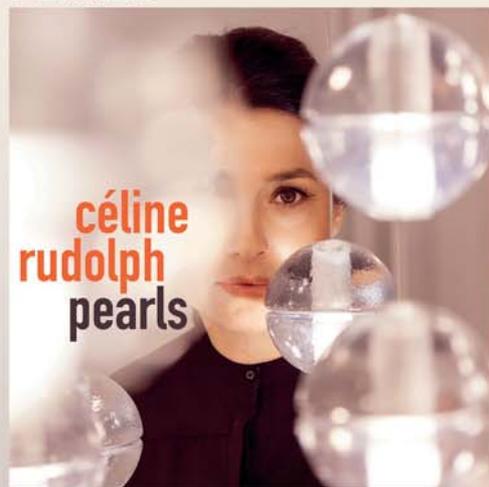


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CHRISTOPHER DRUKKER

Trombonist John Fedchock leads a quartet, a sextet and the New York Big Band.

Fedchock Stays in Demand

JOHN FEDCHOCK HAS FORGED A DISTINCTIVE career fueled by enormous talent, hard work and an entrepreneurial spirit.

The trombonist's latest album, *Reminiscence* (Summit), represents just one facet of his livelihood. The new disc is a follow-up to 2015's *Fluidity* (Summit); both sessions were culled from a live 2013 performance by Fedchock's quartet with pianist John Toomey, bassist Jimmy Masters and the late drummer Dave Ratajczak.

Fedchock's 2015 New York Big Band album, *Like It Is* (MAMA), received a Grammy nomination for his arrangement of "You And The Night And The Music," adding to an earlier Grammy nod for his arrangement of Joe Henderson's "Caribbean Fire Dance" from his 2003 album, *No Nonsense* (Reservoir). A former arranger and music director for the late clarinetist Woody Herman and his renowned big band, Fedchock now views his work on Herman's two final albums—*50th Anniversary Tour* and *Woody's Gold Star*—as particularly formative.

"I was his chief arranger and musical director from 1980 to '87, the last seven years of his life," Fedchock recalled. "After that, my charts for big bands, colleges and music professionals were published. That fueled interest to do clinics at universities, talking to students about arranging, improvisation and the music business or to perform with the university ensembles."

Reminiscence and *Fluidity* are stellar examples of Fedchock's trombone mastery. With a golden tone and powerful delivery, he leads the quartet through standards and originals, delivering a timeless brand of hard-bop that's free of cliché.

Fedchock's work ethic has borne fruit in 10 albums as a leader, as well as sideman recording sessions with Gary Smulyan, the Maria Schneider Jazz Orchestra, Kim Pensyl, Linda Eder and others.

"John is such a unique player," pianist Toomey said. "John's feel, his sound, his tone and his improvisational ability are extraordi-

nary. Trombone is not an easy instrument to get around on, and he makes it sound stress-free. His tunes flow and make a beautiful statement; the changes make sense and it's something that audiences can identify with."

Adding to his busy schedule as a touring artist, Fedchock has designed trombones in collaboration with XO Professional Brass. He described his XO 1632GL-LT model and the new XO 1634 model as being "very lightweight, warm and relaxed sounding." He added, "When I'm playing lead in my big band, I can really make the horn pop. [These designs have] changed the way people think about how to put a trombone together."

Fedchock taught trombone as an adjunct professor at Temple University (2010–'12) and SUNY Purchase (2006–'14), during which time he met his future wife, trombonist Jennifer Wharton. In addition to producing and mixing Wharton's new album, *Bonegasm* (Sunnyside), Fedchock wrote four arrangements for the project, which features a four-trombone front line of Alan Ferber, Nate Mayland, Wharton and himself, accompanied by pianist Michael Eckroth, bassist Evan Gregor and drummer Don Peretz.

"Jennifer has performed in Broadway pits and jazz clubs and concert halls for years," Fedchock noted. "With *Bonegasm*, she's receiving invitations for new work, such as appearing with the Bucknell University Jazz Band as a guest soloist. She'll be featured at the 2019 International Women's Brass Conference and the International Trombone Festival this summer."

For all his trombone prowess and demand as a clinician, Fedchock's heart remains on the road at the many small local clubs he still calls home.

"I really enjoy playing with different musicians," Fedchock said. "That's the original reason I wanted to be involved in music. I've been chasing that my whole life, and I don't expect to ever stop chasing that. It's a feeling you can't get anywhere else but onstage, playing." —Ken Micallef

Barkan, Wiedmaier Team for Keystone Korner Baltimore

THE WORLDWIDE CELEBRATION OF International Jazz Day on April 30 included the grand opening of a club bearing an iconic name: Keystone Korner. Far removed from its original location in San Francisco, the new venue and restaurant is perched on the eastern edge of the Inner Harbor in Baltimore, Maryland.

"It's a city with a need for a full-time jazz venue like this," said Todd Barkan, the National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Master fellowship recipient, producer and impresario who owned the original Keystone Korner from 1972 to 1983.

This new venue is a collaboration between Barkan and Robert Wiedmaier, a Michelin-starred chef who owns 10 other seafood-oriented restaurants in the Washington, D.C. area. The space formerly housed his Mussel Bar & Grille, which closed in April 2018.

Keystone Korner's grand opening featured veteran bassist Ron Carter, a longtime friend of Barkan's, who led his Golden Striker Trio during a three-night run.

But the venue's creation began in April 2018,

when Barkan—then living in New York—traveled to Washington for a ceremony marking his becoming a NEA Jazz Master. During a banquet at Marcel, Wiedmaier's flagship D.C. restaurant, Barkan and the chef met for the first time. They became fast friends, and immediately talked about working together. Tentative plans for a D.C. jazz club fell through, so they began discussing other locations.

Two weeks prior to the NEA banquet, the Baltimore location of Mussel closed for several months, due to area construction that had impeded access to the restaurant. It was still closed in January, when it occurred to Wiedmaier that he might already have the ideal location for a new jazz club on his hands. Barkan was in the middle of a mentoring workshop in New York when the chef called him: "He said, 'Todd, I've got some great news. I want to turn this place into the new Keystone Korner,'" Barkan recalled.

While forthcoming headliners include Kenny Barron and Eddie Palmieri, Barkan also plans a healthy program of area musicians.



MICHAEL WILDERMAN

Ron Carter performs on April 30 at Keystone Korner Baltimore.

"I think [this club] will open the scene up a lot more," said vibraphonist Warren Wolf, a lifelong Baltimorean who played at the venue's soft open. "Artists who talk about playing the East Coast will hit Philadelphia, then skip down to Washington. Now, Keystone Korner will give them an opportunity to play for the people of Baltimore, and maybe take a new look at the city." —Michael J. West



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JOHN ABBOTT

John Scofield (left), Jack DeJohnette, Franco Ambrosetti, Uri Caine and Scott Colley at the recording session for *Long Waves*.

Ambrosetti Recruits Icons for 'Long Waves'

IN A 1987 INTERVIEW, MILES DAVIS SAT down with a German journalist and discussed the differences between black and white jazz musicians. As expected, Davis had very strong opinions on the matter of phrasing, while commenting on the merits of Keith Jarrett, David Sanborn, Joe Wilder and others. And then he said, "There's a good trumpet player in George Gruntz's band I heard at the Berlin Jazz Festival. He can play his ass off. If I was picking a trumpet player, I would pick him. He can play anything."

Davis was talking about Franco Ambrosetti, the renowned Swiss trumpeter, now 76. Still swinging after all these years, Ambrosetti's recent projects include a memoir and a new album, *Long Waves* (Unit), his 28th as a lead-

er. Accompanied by an all-star band—guitarist John Scofield, pianist Uri Caine, bassist Scott Colley and drummer Jack DeJohnette—the disc is a crowning achievement in Ambrosetti's long career. Recorded at New York's Sear Sound Studio, Ambrosetti's dream team reveals rare chemistry on a sublime reading of the poignant ballad "Old Folks" and a burning "On Green Dolphin Street," along with Ambrosetti originals like his tango-flavored "Milonga" and two swinging numbers named for his wife of 22 years, "Silli's Waltz" and "Silli's Long Wave."

"I felt like I played with this group for the last five years," the trumpeter said during a break in the late-January recording session. "We are playing together, listening and react-

ing. It's not that everybody is playing his own thing, no. It's more like a constant dialogue."

"I thought this was the most successful thing that I've done with Franco," added Scofield, who played on Ambrosetti's popular 1987 album, *Movies*, and the 1988 sequel, *Movies Too*, and also on 2018's *Cheers* (Enja). "I have a real affinity with Franco's playing. The stuff that he chooses to play, in terms of the lines and the rhythm, feels like home to me."

Born in Lugano, Switzerland, on Dec. 10, 1941, Ambrosetti inherited his love of jazz from his saxophone-playing father, Flavio, who founded the first jazz club in his hometown, organized the first jazz festival in Lugano and also played opposite Charlie Parker at the 1949 Paris Jazz Festival. "Jazz is in my DNA," Ambrosetti said.

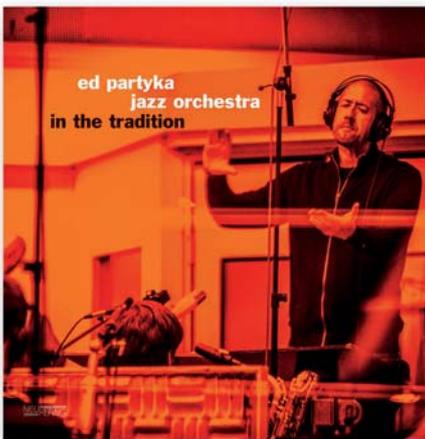
Beginning in 1962, when he joined his father's band, Ambrosetti toured frequently throughout Europe before playing his first concert in the United States at the 1967 Monterey Jazz Festival with the Flavio Ambrosetti All-Stars, featuring pianist George Gruntz, drummer Daniel Humair, bassist Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen and violinist Jean-Luc Ponty. Through the '70s, he led his own groups, while most of his recordings during the '80s and '90s were done in New York with a long list of esteemed players on the Big Apple scene.

In 2008, Ambrosetti participated in a Quincy Jones jubilee held at the Montreux Jazz Festival, where he recreated classic Gil Evans-Miles Davis collaborations with a sublime take on "My Ship" (from *Miles Ahead*) and a soulful muted trumpet reading of "Summertime" (from *Porgy And Bess*). And while he might have patterned himself after bop trumpeters Clifford Brown and Lee Morgan in his formative years, the influence of Davis' singular trumpet playing was evident in Ambrosetti's emotive performances on these two pieces (captured in multiple formats on *Quincy Jones: The 75th Birthday Celebration*), as well as on his lavish orchestral project from 2018, *The Nearness Of You* (Unit).

"From listening to Miles, especially on ballads, I learned how to really play a melody," he said. "Miles showed me how you stretch the notes out, like you're really singing or crying. And I think I can express my feelings better that way."

Though he was engaged for decades in various aspects of the family business—the Ambrosetti companies have been involved in manufacturing steel wheels for cars and landing gear for aircraft—Franco never put his horn on the shelf. "Trumpet is an instrument that you have to practice every day or your chops are gone," he said. "There are trumpeters who practice four, five hours a day, which I think this is too much. But I do manage to play every day of my life."

—Bill Milkowski



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FRANK THOMAS KOCH

Janning Trumann 6 performs at the jazzahead! festival and trade fair in Bremen, Germany, which ran April 25–28.

ON A TRAIN TRAVELING FROM HAMBURG to Bremen, Germany, a Scott Joplin rag tumbles out of a passenger's cell phone, announcing an incoming call. Between April 25 and April 28, the music almost was inescapable in Bremen during the 14th annual edition of jazzahead!, a music festival and trade fair.

That kind of connection to the music meshed with the unknown as thousands of people poured into the northwestern German city. And on Thursday, the Norwegian Night showcase featured a batch of performers, ranging from The Espern Berg Trio's still-maturing take on the format to avant-garde experimentation and investi-

gations of the Scandinavian nation's folk tradition. But at the Kulturzentrum Schlachthof—a music venue adjacent to the trade fair and two other performance stages—the Hedvig Molstead Trio dispensed sludgy jams that sounded a bit like Blue Cheer and Cream stuffed into a room with some mid-'70s Miles.

Traffic picked up considerably Friday at the trade fair, as attendees visited scores of booths dedicated to individual scenes from nations across Europe (and North America). "We're working on attracting new people year-round. We go to other conventions ... but [word-of-mouth] is our best friend," said Sybille Kornitschky, jazz-

ahead! project manager. "Our live recordings do a huge amount of this. They help us promote jazzahead! worldwide ... To be honest, our aim is not to attract more people, but to increase the quality of people attending."

During Saturday's German Jazz Expo, trombonist Janning Trumann assuredly led a sextet through left-field acoustic groove, and later that evening at the Schlachthof, bassist Linda May Han Oh's New York-based quartet showcased material from the bandleader's two most recent recordings. Their bands might not have shared many sonic similarities, but distinctive personalities gathering at a single location every year ideally enables the music—and the organizations that support it—to be smeared and smudged into new and surprising colors and shapes.

"I was working at the Women in Jazz Organization table, and there were a lot of women coming up saying, 'We're doing this isolated thing in our country. How can we all connect with each other?'" New York saxophonist Jessica Jones recounted. After attending her first jazzahead!, would the bandleader make a return trip to Germany?

"Definitely," Jones said. "I feel like I just lifted the corner of the rug." —Dave Cantor

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ANAT COHEN

‘The Will To Be Flexible’

By Phillip Lutz | Photo by Jimmy & Dena Katz

Poised at the kitchen counter in her Brooklyn apartment, Anat Cohen assumed the role of solicitous host. Tall, with waves of cascading hair softening her otherwise commanding presence, the clarinetist reeled off a selection of teas and coffees in such precise detail it would have made a barista’s head spin.

She’s like that: an artist given more to abundance than austerity, who, after 20 years negotiating the chaotic New York scene, is more than able to juggle a multitude of affairs—musical and nonmusical alike. By all indications, she’s happiest when doing so.

Pouring the drink—green tea was chosen, with an obligatory water chaser—she recounted her performance dates of recent weeks: St. Louis and Detroit with her quartet, Boston and Santo Domingo with the MIT Wind Ensemble, Ecuador with Trio Brasileiro and São Paulo with Jazzmin’s Big Band. In between, she squeezed in her regular Tuesday teaching gig at The New School in New York.

But it was her next stops—Switzerland, Italy and the U.S. West Coast, where she would be touring with her namesake tentet off and on from April through August—that seemed to engage her the most. The tentet, she said, was formed in an effort to “find the most flexible large ensemble,” and it has emerged as a prime vehicle for expressing Cohen’s eclectic sensibility.





Cohen's long musical relationship with Oded Lev-Ari has resulted in "Triple Helix: Concerto For Clarinet And Ensemble," which premiered in January at Carnegie Hall.

The tenet, which had its debut at New York's Jazz Standard in April 2016, has since performed at clubs, concert halls and festivals, from Newport to Monterey. The new dates represent the ensemble's most concentrated touring since its round of shows in support of the group's first album, 2016's *Happy Song* (Anzic).

The album revealed a new level of expressivity for Cohen—bringing fresh colors to her catholic tastes, on tracks ranging from the contemplative "Valsa Para Alice," a Cohen original influenced by Brazilian rhythms; to the upbeat "Oh, Baby!," a swinger associated with Benny Goodman; to the moody "Trills And Thrills," a work by the tenet's musical director for the project, Oded Lev-Ari, whose compositional brushstrokes move from the abstract to the concrete with ease.

Now, a new album by the tenet ups the

ante—arguably to a career high for Cohen—thanks to Lev-Ari's "Triple Helix: Concerto For Clarinet And Ensemble." The first concerto written for Cohen, it exceeds in scope, complexity and, perhaps, emotional impact, anything the tenet previously had tackled. The concerto that anchors the new album, *Triple Helix* (Anzic), is a model of efficient authorship—capturing the clarinetist's wide-ranging predilections in one sweeping and powerful statement.

"I've always played a lot of different things," Cohen said, "from Brazilian *choro* to the music of Benny Goodman to Louis Armstrong to Jason Lindner's big-band modern jazz. The concerto also represents that."

The piece—commissioned jointly by Carnegie Hall (where it had its premiere in January) and Chicago Symphony Center

(where it had a follow-up performance in February)—is classical in form, with a slow movement bounded by two lively movements. To an extent, the content matches the form, its heavily notated passages requiring Cohen to call on her early training with Eva Wasserman, onetime principal clarinetist with the Haifa Symphony Orchestra in her native Israel.

At the same time, the piece has long open sections in which the score intentionally is spare: Reading a bit like a standard lead sheet sprinkled with idiosyncratic directives, it sketches a framework filled by the heavy backbeat of the drummer, Anthony Pinciotti, and improvised backgrounds from the rest of the band—save for the soloist, who is given plenty of space to wail above the churn. At one point, the score encourages the electric guitarist, Sheryl Bailey, to marshal her rock chops, its instructions reading: "Shred!"

In other spots, the piece summons harmonies that by turns recall Ravel or Brahms—conjuring a romanticism weighted with unabashed emotional intensity. On hearing the second movement played in rehearsal the first time—that movement, titled "For Anat," is a public declaration of dedication, unlike the first and third movements, which simply are titled "first" and "last"—the clarinetist was brought to tears as the history she shared with Lev-Ari came rushing back.

"I got so emotional—all those years of knowing Oded," she recalled.

Drummer Pinciotti—who has been friends with Cohen for 20 years and witnessed the teary moment in Michiko Studios off Times Square—said that the feelings it conveyed encapsulated a deep relationship between player and composer that "goes beyond some guy writing for an ensemble. It's about a musical life spent together."

The shared history dates from the early 1990s, when Cohen and Lev-Ari were students in the fledgling jazz program at the Thelma Yellin High School of the Arts in Tel Aviv. Assigned to school-security duty together, they quickly developed a personal relationship that turned musical, leading to extracurricular activities like four-hands piano sessions and restaurant gigs with their combo *So What*.

More than 25 years later, the duo's friendship and musical partnership remain phenomenally strong and fruitful. Lev-Ari—who is married to singer Amy Cervini—has established a reputation as a skilled composer, arranger and producer who's worked on numerous Anzic releases.

"Oded knows me," Cohen said, eagerly displaying a photo of the two together, smiling and arm in arm, taken in the spring of 1993 for their high-school graduation. "He knows my playing, how much challenge I can handle,

how much pressure, when to push me when needed, when to let go.”

Describing his enduring simpatico rapport with Cohen, Lev-Ari said: “We’ve always had this nucleus of understanding musically. In high school, a lot of [our] musical tastes were shaped. We both have a wide, inclusive view of music. It fits this overall general sensibility we share.”

The ties were nurtured when they left Israel for college. Both landed in Boston—she at Berklee College of Music, he at New England Conservatory—where they and Cohen’s two brothers, saxophonist Yuval and trumpeter Avishai, lived among a larger contingent of Israeli music students sharing loose communal quarters.

The Israeli connection, it turns out, offered more than a practical means of securing living space. It gave rise to deeper principles for organizing their professional lives and establishing their aesthetic goals—principles reflected in the desire to explore, and the need to adjust to, a wide range of situations.

“I can’t say it for a fact, but in my two cents of it, there’s something in the history, the DNA of the Jewish people, that we have no choice,” she said. “I have the flexibility to be here, or to be here, or to be here. Not everybody has the will to be flexible.

“There were always a lot of things I wanted to do. But then I said, ‘Wait, which one? Who am I? You know what? Music is music. So, I’m going to play everything I can. Everything I learn is going to be part of my music path and become part of my own DNA.’ And that’s what I’ve always done.”

For Lev-Ari, cracking Cohen’s genetic code, musically speaking, came down to applying a process of “activating and deactivating different parts of your DNA based on your environment—in this specific case, the interplay between Anat, the ensemble and myself, the composer.” They, in other words, are the constituent elements of the triple helix, and the concerto’s ecosystem is the metaphorical key that activates the code.

The tentet might be the most robust expression of that code, but it has something of a precursor. In 2007, Cohen and Lev-Ari released *Noir* on their young label, Anzic. The album also featured a large ensemble, dubbed the Anzic Orchestra, populated by like-minded musicians (Cohen’s brothers among them) playing material that ranged widely, from a Luiz Bonfá samba to a Johnny Griffin bebop number to ballads associated with contrasting personalities like Frankie Laine and Sun Ra.

On its own terms, the music—arranged with characteristic stylishness by Lev-Ari—was a critical success and a favorite with audiences. But, Cohen said, the orchestra was never intended to be a touring unit, and while

she was satisfied that the album represented who she was at the time, its musical limitations, in light of the tentet’s capacities and her personal growth, have become clearer.

“The way I play,” she said, “I may have made other choices. I may have gotten better as an instrumentalist. With the tentet, there’s more interaction. I’m not afraid of the unknown. There’s more spontaneity. We can play *anything*. We can play classical, we can rock the house. It’s something I wasn’t exploring back in 2007. I didn’t have the vision, but I

definitely have the courage now.”

It took some time, in fact, for Cohen to muster the courage to concentrate on the clarinet. As late as 2007, she still frequently was playing saxophone—she deployed tenor, alto and soprano on *Noir*—though the sense that she might first and foremost be a clarinetist had dawned on her eight years earlier when, at a jazz party in Clearwater, Florida, Stanley Kay, producer of the DIVA Jazz Orchestra, told her to ditch her tenor and retrieve her clarinet.

“I ran to my room while the music was

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"With Benny [Goodman] and the big band, there's something about knowing how to take a song and not be afraid to make it your own," Cohen said.

STEVEN SUSSMAN



'EVERYTHING I LEARN IS GOING TO BE PART OF MY MUSIC PATH AND BECOME PART OF MY OWN DNA.'

still playing. I came back and played two choruses with my clarinet. While I'm playing, Kenny Davern taps me on the shoulder. He pulls me back between him and Buddy DeFranco. I was a young girl from Israel. What did I know? I think about the swing era as a style and here I am with these people—they *are* the swing era, they are the style, and I'm playing this music with them. It's kind of like I got a blessing."

In the years that followed, the reality of that defining moment became clearer as the demand for her clarinet became stronger—not least onstage with the the DIVA Jazz Orchestra. Nadjé Noordhuis, who plays trumpet with the tentet, recalled their playing together in DIVA about a dozen years ago: "She had this big clarinet feature that would bring the house down every time she played it."

As Cohen raised her profile and eventually became a perennial winner of the Clarinet category in both the DownBeat Readers and

Critics polls, she realized that the instrument could help feed her penchant for eclecticism. "With the tenor, it's so iconic with jazz," she said. "With the clarinet, I can improvise, but it doesn't have to be called jazz." She could, she found, move easily from playing the music of Louis Armstrong at Birdland to playing the music of folkloric traditions in far-flung spaces. "It was the ease I had with the instrument. I realized I can be part of different musical settings."

Her Brazilian connection in particular has flourished, most recently during a March trip to Ecuador Jazz 2019, where she reunited with Trio Brasileiro—percussionist Alexandre Lora, seven-string guitarist Douglas Lora and mandolinist Dudu Maia—with whom she had made the album *Rosa Dos Ventos*. That collection and the album *Outra Coisa: The Music Of Moacir Santos* with seven-string guitarist Marcello Gonçalves simultaneously were released by Anzic in 2017. Both earned

Grammy nominations.

Last year saw the release of the duo album *Live At Healdsburg* (Anzic), a celebration of musicality and wit recorded at the 2016 Healdsburg Jazz Festival in California with pianist Fred Hersch, a prized musical partner. And in March of this year, but in a totally different vein, Cohen marked the premiere of the second concerto composed for her, "Concerto For Clarinet And Wind Ensemble." Written by Tony award-winning composer/orchestrator Jamshied Sharifi, the piece was performed with the MIT Wind Ensemble, first at the Kresge Auditorium in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and later at the National Conservatory of Music in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

As this sampling of her collaborators suggests, they are a disparate and distinguished group. But those seeking an antecedent for her artistry might look to DownBeat Hall of Famer Benny Goodman (1909-'86). Cohen, who played the legendary clarinetist and bandleader's parts in Jazz at Lincoln Center's January 2018 recreation of his historic 1938 Carnegie Hall concert, cites Goodman as her "first clarinet introduction to jazz." She considers him a role model of sorts.

"With Benny and the big band, there's something about knowing how to take a song and not be afraid to make it your own," she said. "You make a song iconic and you play it. He could play forever 'Memories Of You.' I can play forever 'Memories Of You.' It's the emotional goal, not the notes; it's where it takes

you and what it expresses.”

Echoing Goodman, who also had concerti written for him, Cohen expresses emotion with consummate control, her rich timbre and precise articulation allowing single notes to soar and their accumulation to speak volumes as she pushes the limits of the instrument. Though Cohen’s musical language draws on the most modern vocabulary, she, like Goodman before her, mines a range of sources, invoking specific gestures, like those of klezmer, that Goodman employed throughout his career.

The big-band leader inspired an entire Cohen album—*Clarinetwork: Live At The Village Vanguard* (Anzic)—a collection of popular standards recorded on the Goodman centennial in 2009 and released the following year, with Benny Green on piano, Peter Washington on bass and Lewis Nash on drums. Goodman also inspired Cohen to include vibraphone in the tentet, with James Shipp holding down the equivalent of the Lionel Hampton chair.

Shipp and trumpeter Noordhuis have a duo together, just one of the tentet’s smaller cells whose existence has helped the larger group coalesce into a living organism with remarkable ease. According to Noordhuis, that process began to take hold during the first engagement, the week at Jazz Standard.

“What was amazing about that run,” she said, “was that every gig we did, the band evolved. It only took a week, and we had this band sound.”

Noordhuis, a native of Sydney, Australia, also attributed the ease of coalescing partly to the nature of the sets, which, executed with interludes between tunes, compelled the musicians to maintain an active stance at all times to sustain the natural flow.

“We played solidly for an hour, and each tune morphed into another, even if it was a completely different genre,” Noordhuis said. “It sort of seamlessly weaved in and out. So, by the end of that week it was like, OK, we’re ready.”

The diverse nature of the musicians and music also played a part. “Everybody brings their personality to the table,” Noordhuis said. “It’s a blend of cultures—Brazilian, American, Australian, Israeli. The eclecticism of the repertoire is incredibly unique, a leading feature. And the way it’s presented—it’s a one-act show, it hits hard. Onstage, we’re all laughing. There’s a feeling of togetherness.”

Cohen’s leadership fosters that togetherness, her cues to the musicians—a raised clarinet, a fleeting glance, a turn of musical phrase—subtly sculpting the tentet’s sound with a mix of assertiveness and generosity. “There are times,” Pinciotti said, “where we’ll be playing some open sections and she’ll

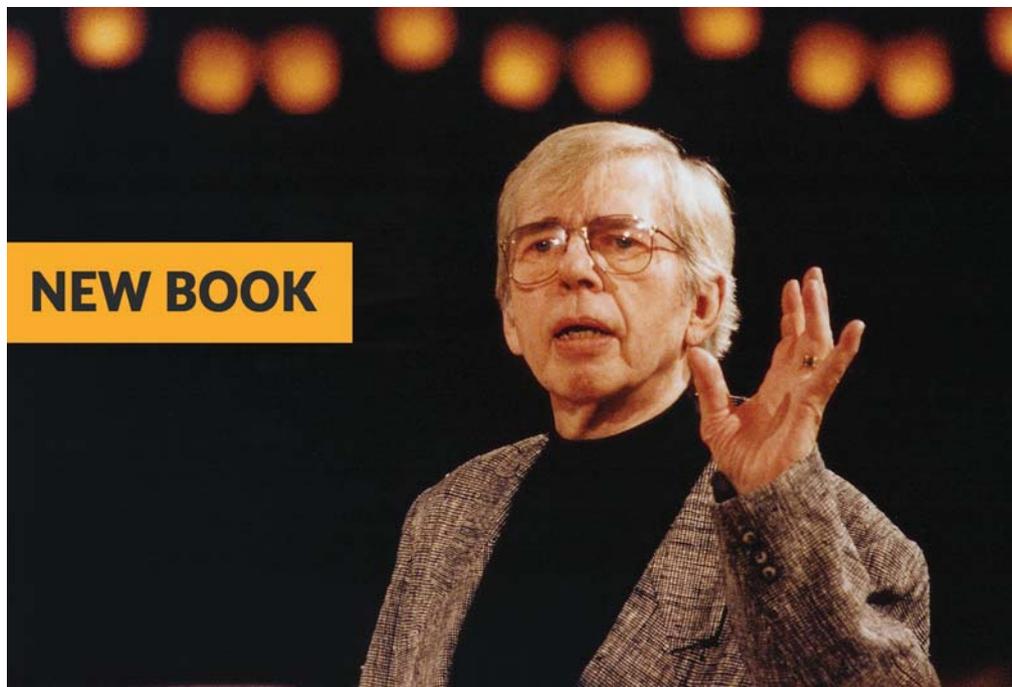
lead them into improvised background figures, or she wants them to improvise something behind her. But she always wants people to solo and play; it’s not just people playing figures for her to solo over and maybe one cat gets four bars a night.”

Such leadership qualities, Cohen argued, are only as successful as the personnel allow. So, her search for the right players for the tentet was a diligent one: “You look for teamwork, detail, compatibility; for pushing each other, support, having fun; for excitement, profes-

sionalism, positive attitude. You look for the way you feel the music together, the pace—and the trust you build with the band.”

Ultimately, the diligence paid off, yielding the kind of ensemble—integrated yet consisting of individuals—she hadn’t foreseen. “Originally,” Cohen said, “the concept was to show a lot of the things the clarinet can do, to play all the styles from all the regions of the world, from klezmer to classical. But it became less a history lesson than what the band could do with these personnel.”

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Roscoe Mitchell



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Famoudou Don Moye



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ART ENSEMBLE OF CHICAGO

'THE MUSIC

IN RECENT YEARS, THE **ART ENSEMBLE OF CHICAGO'S** GLOBAL FAN BASE HAS MISSED HEARING NEW MUSIC FROM THE ICONIC COLLECTIVE. BUT LAST OCTOBER—15 YEARS AFTER ITS PREVIOUS STUDIO SESSION AND ABOUT A DECADE AFTER ITS LAST COMMERCIALY RELEASED LIVE PERFORMANCE—THE AEC OBSERVED ITS GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY BY RECORDING THE DOUBLE ALBUM ***WE ARE ON THE EDGE: A 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION (PI)***.



TOM COPI

The Art Ensemble of Chicago in 1979: Lester Bowie (left), Moye and Mitchell are standing; Malachi Favors and Joseph Jarman are seated.



MICHAEL WILDERMAN

The Art Ensemble of Chicago in concert on Nov. 27, 1982



NATHAN ZUCKER

Mitchell (on saxophone) and Moye (second from right, on percussion) performed with the AEC at the 2019 Big Ears Festival in Knoxville, Tennessee.

NEVER LIES'

BY TED PANKEN

It consists of a three-day studio session and subsequent concert by a 16-musician edition at Edgewise in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where, at another festival 46 years before, the “classic” AEC lineup (Roscoe Mitchell, Joseph Jarman, Lester Bowie, Malachi Favors and Famou Dou Moye) played a stunning set that entered the canon on *Bap-Tizum*.

Bowie and Favors passed away in 1999 and 2004, respectively, and Jarman died on Jan. 9; *We Are On The Edge* is dedicated to their spirits. The studio album includes Bowie’s elegiac “Villa Tiamo,” on which trumpeters Fred Berry (who played in Mitchell’s quartet circa 1964–’65) and Hugh Ragin (a member of various Mitchell units since the late 1970s) refract different elements of Bowie’s ironic, incisive tonal personality. The set’s live

album pivots around bassist Favors’ “Tutankhamun”—a band staple since the Roscoe Mitchell Art Ensemble recorded it on *Congluptious*, in 1968, a year before the members moved *en bloc* to Paris, consummating the marriage by renaming themselves the Art Ensemble of Chicago. The song receives a thunderous three-bass treatment from Silvia Bolognesi, Junius Paul and Jaribu Shahid, interacting with a percussion ensemble consisting of Moye, Congolese drummer Titos Somba (with whom Moye studied 50 years ago in Paris) and percussionist Enoch Williamson (Moye’s close colleague in different contexts since Moye moved to Chicago in 1971).

Channeling Jarman—whose evocative poems, stirring recitations and theatrical proclivities were an essential component of the Art Ensemble’s



©BARBARA BAREFIELD

The Art Ensemble of Chicago collective in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 2018. Row 1: Roscoe Mitchell (left) and Famoudou Don Moye; Row 2: Nicole Mitchell, Jean Cook and Christina Wheeler; Row 3: Jaribu Shahid, Stephen Rush, Fred Berry, Enoch Williamson, Junius Paul, Hugh Ragin and Tomeka Reid; Row 4: Titos Somba, Edward Yoon Kwon and Silvia Bolognesi.

musical production—is Philadelphia-based poet-soundscape artist Moor Mother, whose palimpsestic text provides the album’s title. She sustains momentum on “I Greet You With Open Arms” and “Mama Koko” with an incantatory freestyle delivery, at once raw and refined.

The other repertoire oscillates, as cellist Tomeka Reid noted, between Mitchell’s “more through-composed, new-music type pieces in combination with free-improvisation parts” and Moye’s “more riff-like melodies with much more percussion involved—a combination of their personalities.”

A third-generation AACM member who joined the Art Ensemble when the group reconvened in 2017 after a long hiatus, Reid is one of five female instrumentalists on the project, a first for the AEC, which, in an earlier era, only included women in the mix as singers. In addition to Reid and Bolognesi, Nicole Mitchell plays various flutes; Christina Wheeler plays electronic mbira, theremin, autoharp, Q-chord and sampler—and sings; and Jean Cook plays violin.

“I’ve always been inspired by the Art Ensemble,” Nicole Mitchell said. “The expansive representation on this project shows its resilience and flexibility to connect with 21st century perspectives on how people assert their individual concepts of identity and embrace difference within the musical context. In general, gender equity makes things lighter, more humorous and playful. There was a very open vibe in the rehearsals, with no sense of hierarchy. Just as an opportunity to be challenged on all aspects of my own playing abilities, it was a positive, satisfying experience.”

“There was a very high level of musicianship—incredible players who can play in any genre,” Berry remarked. “I was impressed by

the level of professionalism, their ability to negotiate Roscoe’s music, which was meticulously arranged and orchestrated and very difficult to play, with improvisation evolving out of what was in the ensemble.”

These attributes (and the ministrations of conductor Stephen Rush) enabled the members to deploy the global array of sounds at their disposal with a finesse and musicality that evokes the extraordinary simpatico that defined phase one of the AEC—five virtuosos who, as Bowie once said, “allowed for each other’s egos and pulled together to make a cooperative venture, musically and socially.” The group was not unlike such 1920s and 1930s “commonwealth” bands as the Blue Devils, who divided proceeds equally and made collective decisions.

“We’ve seen the example of what happens when people work together for a long time,” Roscoe Mitchell said. “With the Art Ensemble, it was like going to school every day, because we were all individuals. I’m a big fan of that. I think we function better that way. You can’t learn anything from anybody when everybody is trying to be the same.”

In a 1978 conversation with a French journalist cited in Paul Steinbeck’s 2017 book, *Message to Our Folks* (University of Chicago Press), Jarman described the classic AEC using the metaphor of a cake made from five different ingredients—“remove one of the ingredients and the cake no longer exists.” He continued: “The Art Ensemble is much more than any one individual whose personality you manage to isolate. All of the experiences we went through together, our emotional experiences, positive or dramatic, all of the situations we found ourselves in collectively and individually—all of this has brought us closer together

er to the point that now we are of one mind.”

Establishing that chemistry circa 2018 without three constituent “ingredients,” Moye said by phone from his home in Marseille, France, was “a matter of calling the right people who know what to do in the improvisation. The hardest aspect of improvising is dealing with people you don’t know—or even people you do know. You can deal off pure talent, but sometimes just jumping out there isn’t enough. Different improvisational elements have to be controlled, to make sure everyone is on the same page, so they interpret the whole piece and don’t just use a bunch of licks.”

“Long-lasting musical relationships are essential to stay on top of what you’re developing,” Mitchell said from his Oakland home near Mills College, where he has been on the faculty since 2007. He discussed his contribution to increasing the pool of people “who know what to do” with techniques developed over decades of teaching improvisation to “inexperienced improvisers.”

“I’ve created cards with information about what’s going to be played, with the possibility of manipulating that information, so it becomes a scored improvisation,” Mitchell explained. “That gives people an opportunity to create inside the improvisation for longer periods, which helps them develop concentration. I tell people that to be good improvisers, they need to study composition and improvisation in parallel. I have different cards that address all these different situations, so I can pull out a set of cards and generate compositions.”

As an example, Mitchell discussed his M.O. for generating the raw materials that guided Moor Mother—whom he’d met when both were performing at a festival in Riga, Latvia, in October 2017—in creating her poem for the Ann Arbor sessions. “I was producing a piece called ‘Songs From The Card Catalogue,’” he said. “When I got to a part on the trumpet, it had a rhythm that went [*sings*] dee dah, bomp-bah-bah, bah. I thought about what I could do with that, and decided to turn it into a loop. Then I thought of Moor Mother, sent her that loop, and asked if she would speak over that. She came up with ‘We Are On The Edge.’ The first part is all notated, then Moor Mother’s part with the loop, and the last part is notated. It carries you on a musical journey by connecting these elements.”

“My job as a poet was to tap into their quantum reality as a band,” Moor Mother said two weeks after performing “We Are On The Edge” with the Art Ensemble at the 2019 Big Ears Festival in Knoxville, Tennessee. Her Philadelphia-based Irreversible Entanglements opened for the AEC at the November 2018 Berlin Jazz Festival, where she also performed a duo with Roscoe Mitchell on her as-yet-unrecorded poem “The Black Drop.” She cited the AEC’s drum-centric 1970 album *Chi-Congo* and Jarman’s poem “Odawalla” on Favors’ “Illustrum”



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Jean Cook (left), Edward Yoon Kwon, Tomeka Reid and Nicole Mitchell at a sound check for the concert documented on the double album *We Are On The Edge*

from the programmatic *Fanfare For The Warriors* (1973)—“so free and beautiful, dripping with tradition and history”—as key signposts in her AEC experience.

“The text has a lot of improv,” she said. “For Big Ears, I had to relisten and write down what I did. There’s a part where I say the names of talented people I grew up with whose performance only came to life at a block party, or a sunny day where everyone’s outside, listening to music, singing and dancing. The family atmosphere in the studio made me feel like I was with a bunch of my aunts and uncles—it helped me incorporate that freeness in the poetry. That’s what the Art Ensemble is—this master class in this freeing way. So many lessons.

“Each time I’ve played with Roscoe or the Art Ensemble, I feel myself growing in this fiery way. Don Moye is beautiful, too. He’s no-nonsense, not trying to dumb anything down, gives you the straight truth.”

For Reid, a key lesson gleaned from her AEC experience is what she described as a sense of “freedom to explore, of self-determination.” She added, “Their experiments with different textures, forms, instruments, clothing, are a bright, shining example of possibility. ... Roscoe isn’t letting anyone define what the Art Ensemble is. His energy and drive are inspiring. He doesn’t want to recreate the past. He’s interested in pushing onward, looking forward. No two performances are alike. He and Moye want you to be your true, authentic self, to state your own voice.”

Reid introduced Bolognesi into Mitchell’s orbit in 2014, when Here in Now, their collective string trio with violinist Mazz Swift, joined him for lunch at his Oakland home. They stayed in touch, and Mitchell invited Here in Now to do a short 2017 tour with his sextet, with Junius Paul and drummer Vincent Davis. Then, that October, Moye invited the trio to play with the Art Ensemble in London at Café Oto, preparing Reid and Bolognesi to participate in the *We Are On The Edge* sessions.

“On the first sextet gig, I was impressed with

the incredible amount of energy that Roscoe releases—you have to do something to respond to that energy,” said Bolognesi. “Moye has given me a great deal of information—things to listen to, different rhythms and instruments. On stage, he’s very clear. His drumming is so melodic, and as he moves from the drum set to congas to bongos to percussion instruments, it changes the musical vibe.”

In Ann Arbor, Bolognesi continued, “The music was beautiful and difficult. We rehearsed the pieces in the studio, and everyone focused on making it work as well as possible. You’re in this river of music changing—of colors, intention and emotion, from jazz to totally improvised, with references to African rhythm—like a wave of sound from a single entity. It’s beyond categories, which makes me happy when I play with them, because it’s exactly what I always wanted from music. I can use the skills I grew up with in my classical conservatory in Italy, and swing at the same time.”

The live album captures the Ann Arbor concert verbatim, while the studio recording was sequenced in post-production. Asked about the process, Mitchell said, “I let it unfold in its own natural way, going back and forth with Moye and trying out different songs in different orders.”

Moye fleshed out the details in ways that illuminated the interpersonal dynamics by which the AEC has functioned during its half-century. “We adjusted, shifted and shuffled, did a lot of beginnings and endings, and then finally, after about a week of talking every day, came up with the sequence,” he said. “It was a long process, as it always is, but longer this time, because there were so many different elements. In the end, you respect what people are doing in a given period. We evolved to a conclusion. Not necessarily an agreement, just a conclusion. With the five minds of the Art Ensemble in its classic form, we often came to conclusions a lot quicker, just because of the familiarity. Amazingly, we never had major issues.

“This record is a continuing extension of

how the band’s sound and concept evolved over the years—total encouragement, inclusion of everybody’s ideas and visions after serious debate of all the issues, no holds barred. Now, ‘serious debate’ is what we call it. Somebody else might have said, ‘Man, them cats are gettin’ ready to kill each other.’ I always liked the part at the end of the day, ‘Hmm, how did we finally agree to do it like that? Not bad.’”

In moving forward—call it staying on the edge—within the AEC’s new reality, both Moye and Mitchell draw inspiration from memories of their departed brothers. “I always thought Joseph was much further advanced than I was,” Mitchell said. “He had a real sound on soprano [saxophone], which influenced me, and is why I’m spending a lot of time on soprano now. Lester always wanted you to think out of the box, which also influences what I’m doing now.”

“Jarman was the philosopher,” Moye said. “Lester was the general, Favors was the spiritual element, Roscoe was the burning force. When we traveled, Roscoe and I would be together in one vehicle. He was always guiding me through different nuances of the way they rolled on the road in Europe and the States. When we got back to Chicago from Europe, we stayed at his parents’ house. His father said, ‘You can eat and you can sleep—and you are going to work.’ That was one month of hard labor. In many ways, that’s part of Roscoe’s character, because he doesn’t miss, as far as consistency, getting up early, working a project through to the end. I can see very clearly where that aesthetic came from.”

Moye is, however, adamant that nostalgia is not an option.

“The worst thing is to be a parody of yourself,” he said. “With the shock and then acceptance of our comrades for three decades being gone, we had to evaluate, evolve and pull back awhile. Also, I had a ruptured Achilles tendon and hip operations in 2009 and 2012, so I was partially immobile for six or seven years. Roscoe needed space to do his thing at Mills. You say, ‘Damn, was it that long?’ Time flies, and the music never lies.”

“I think when people commit to something, then they follow through all the way,” Mitchell said bluntly. “That’s the way it goes. We were committed to this idea, and we will be committed to it until we can’t do it any more.

“It’s a very special period in music, almost like the ’60s all over, with a different content. You’ve got the mature improvisers, people who have kept working on their music all these years. Then you have this brilliant set of young musicians, coming from all different sides of the music, who want to know more about improvisation. It’s a special time for composers who can actually write pieces that help these people become improvisers. There’s no time to be laying back dormant.”

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INDISPUTABLE COMMAND

BY SEAN J. O'CONNELL | PHOTO BY ANNA YATSKEVICH

IN THE FALL OF 2013, T.S. MONK WAS HOLLERING INTO A HOT MICROPHONE ON THE KENNEDY CENTER STAGE: "THEY GAVE YOU THEIR HEARTS. THEY GAVE YOU THEIR SOULS. THEY GAVE YOU EVERYTHING!"

More than a dozen young saxophonists filed out to the exuberant proclamation. That year, tenor saxophonist Melissa Aldana, two months shy of 25, eventually would be declared the winner of the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz International Saxophone Competition—the heartiest and most soulful of the saxophonists battling it out that long September afternoon in Washington, D.C.

Almost six years later, Aldana tends to downplay her victory. "It can really get in your head," she said of her experience, sitting in the rec room of a bustling, century-old hotel in downtown Los Angeles a couple hours prior to her gig at the Walt Disney Concert Hall as a member of the Monterey Jazz Festival on Tour all-star sextet. "It's like checking social media too much. What I prepared for that day when I stepped on the stage was to have fun. That was all I was trying to work on. My performance was a mess, but I did have fun."

The house band (drummer Carl Allen, bassist Rodney Whitaker and pianist Reggie Thomas) was on its 39th tune of the day when Aldana threw the

trio a curveball with a seemingly straightforward original. Her first two tunes, the Jerome Kern standard "Long Ago (And Far Away)" and Thelonious Monk's "Ask Me Now," were delivered with confidence and maturity. She opened the Monk tune with a solo flight of rapid-fire turns and fluttering filigrees, leaving her stamp on the day's proceedings, a burst of applause encouraging her playful decisions. Her final tune, "M&M," was a jagged melody propelled by Thomas' thundering left hand.

"I was the last one to play," Aldana recalled. "Everybody was tired. I didn't know what was going to happen, and the trio got lost on the last tune. It brought me back to Earth—just worry about finishing together." She could hear the tune was falling apart and commanded the veteran rhythm section with unflinching confidence, wielding her horn like a giant brass baton and finishing strong. The lack of perfection in the sound was counteracted with a sense of determination worthy of the prize.

"The judges [included] Jimmy Heath, Wayne Shorter, Branford Marsalis—people who have seen everything," she says. "So, I'm not going to go over and bullshit for them."

Raised in Santiago, Chile, Aldana studied straightahead jazz with a dedicated fervor. Her father,





Micha Thomas (left), Joel Ross, Rick Rosato, Melissa Aldana and Kush Abadey perform at SubCulture during Winter Jazzfest in New York on Jan. 5.

Marcos, stoked that passion, having taken a swing at the Monk saxophone competition himself back in 1991, when she was an infant. (Joshua Redman won that year.) Studying masters like Sonny Rollins and Don Byas, she took off for Berklee College of Music as a teenager and never looked back. In Boston, she met saxophonist Greg Osby, who offered her a recording contract on his Inner Circle record label.

A recording contract with Concord Records was one of the primary perks from the Monk competition win. Aldana wasted no time in getting her band into the studio, releasing an album the next year with her group Crash Trio. The disc, which opens with “M&M,” highlights Aldana’s striding horn amid the authoritative rhythms of drummer Francisco Mela and the sturdy swing of bassist Pablo Menares. Each member contributed a few tunes to the program, which features a subtle take on Harry Warren’s 1931 song “You’re My Everything.” A high-profile release that was smart and spare, the album showcased Aldana’s indisputable command of her instrument—and she’s become an even better musician in the ensuing years.

Aldana is an old soul behind the microphone. “You can really tell how strong a musician is when it comes to ballads,” she said. “You can hear the depth of musicianship. I’m very attached to ballads. Maybe when I’m older I’ll do a full trio album of ballads.”

In the trio format conquered by Rollins’ late-1950s strolling excursions without benefit of chordal support, a lot hinges on the dialogue between the tenor saxophone and upright bass. “Playing trio taught me a lot about what I’m looking for as a musician,” she said. “It’s more than just having someone who plays well.”

Menares has been a reliable anchor throughout Aldana’s professional career. They met as

children in Chile, but didn’t really collaborate until they were both working in the States. His unwavering support and piquant solo lines provide the perfect complement to Aldana’s simmering tone. “I’m used to the space and the freedom and the openness of the music,” he said. “I like to have someone who is looking at the bigger picture.”

Following a win in the 2015 DownBeat Critics Poll (Rising Star–Tenor Saxophone) and the release of a second trio record, 2016’s *Back Home* (Wommusic), Aldana shifted her artistic direction. Her focus on the bigger picture entailed a larger band and a deep dive into the work of artist Frida Kahlo (1907–’54).

“When I was young, I used to transcribe Frida Kahlo’s paintings,” Aldana said. “The thing that always attracted me to her art was that it was personal. It was related to her experience, her art, her beauty, her relationships, her condition.”

A commission from The Jazz Gallery in New York further sparked Aldana’s inspiration. With a performance expected in June 2018, she dug into Kahlo’s work during the yearlong residency, composing a suite, *Visions: For Frida Kahlo*. By the time Aldana premiered the work, she had expanded her rhythm section and added two more horn players: her husband, Jure Pukl, on alto saxophone and trumpeter Philip Dizack.

“At some point, I started feeling that I wanted something different,” Aldana recalled. “I heard more piano, and vibraphone is an instrument I have always loved. I wanted to develop my writing more and start incorporating richer harmonies.”

Not long after the premiere of the suite, Aldana spent two days in a New York studio, recording nearly a dozen tracks for her

new album, *Visions* (Motéma). Joining Aldana and Menares for the sessions were pianist Sam Harris, vibraphonist Joel Ross and drummer Tommy Crane.

Aldana feels that Harris—whom she first encountered in New York within days of graduating from Berklee—has helped her artistry evolve.

“I wanted someone to inspire me and push me to different places,” Aldana said. “I haven’t heard somebody else who sounds like Sam. Every time I play, it is an opportunity to grow. If we play something super killing one day, I want him to go the complete opposite direction the next night. He lets me do my thing and is willing to change it up.”

Ross is only 23, but already has made a splash as a pliant firebrand on vibraphone. Before lighting up the marquee with his Blue Note debut, *KingMaker*, earlier this year, he played vibes alongside Harris for several tracks on *Visions*. “I’m looking for musicians who will kick my ass and make me grow,” Aldana said with a laugh. “Sometimes Joel makes me feel so old.”

Aldana makes room for everybody on “La Madrina,” part of her suite and the third track on *Visions*. Harris pushes a steady right hand, his left in tandem with Menares. The bandleader shares a unison melody with Ross at times, his grace notes brightening the musical picture. The tune’s formidable momentum wouldn’t be possible without Crane, who builds patiently alongside Aldana’s intensifying solo.

On “Elsewhere,” the quintet gets a little more jagged. Crane bashes hard on a Latin-flavored beat, making way for Harris to stretch out. Again, Aldana and Ross fly in natural tandem, driving toward the same destination, but in different lanes, always meeting at the light.

There is a lone standard on the album:

“Never Let Me Go.” Aldana starts alone, breathy and measured. It’s a delicate, candlelit pace. Aldana floats over the slow-moving ship, the titular phrase returning with regularity. “My constant struggle is, ‘How can I get better and be myself?’ Consistency. Focus. That’s what I’m always trying for. Ballads teach that.”

Visions marks the end of one period and the beginning of another for Aldana, now 30. “All this music is music that we’ve been playing this last year,” she said. “I wanted to develop and grow and then just move forward.”

When she met with DownBeat, Aldana and the Monterey Jazz Festival on Tour band were at their 16th venue in 21 nights. The sextet, under the direction of pianist Christian Sands, spans continents—bassist Yasushi Nakamura is a native of Tokyo, and trumpeter Bria Skonberg is from British Columbia—and includes a couple of other Monk competition winners: drummer Jamison Ross (2012) and vocalist Cécile McLorin Salvant (2010).

“The tour has forced me to focus on practicing,” Aldana explained. “I can squeeze in two or three hours every day. Even though everything is focused towards that hour-and-a-half that we are playing, if I have short-term goals, I can really improve and try different things.”

Aldana steadily has been touring the past few years, and is set to traverse Europe with her *Visions* band this summer. “I’ve been in different all-star bands,” she said. “It’s just amazing to see how everybody comes from so many different places. The audience is different, too. It’s not necessarily my audience. You can have a different point of view, but how you work it out is where the music starts growing.”

Prior to accepting the invitation to become a part of Monterey band, Aldana joined what would eventually be dubbed Artemis, a collective that includes Salvant, trumpeter Ingrid Jensen, clarinetist Anat Cohen, pianist Renee Rosnes, bassist Noriko Ueda and drummer Allison Miller. The bandmates bonded during several festival appearances, vowing to record together when schedules permit.

“She’s not only really dedicated to the music, but creates this inspiring environment,” said Salvant, who joined Aldana midway through her interview. “She’s always encouraging us: ‘Let’s try to make something worthwhile. Let’s put ourselves in risky situations and listen to each other.’”

That night on the Disney Concert Hall stage, the band huddled in a tight circle. Following a set by the SFJAZZ Collective—which stretched from one side of the stage to the other—the Monterey band appeared quite intimate. They just as easily could have set up in the freight elevator. But each band member was given ample space to shine, having first played together on the Monterey Fairgrounds rodeo-ready stage the previous summer.

At the festival, Aldana was part of a roundtable discussion on gender equity in jazz. “There has been a greater acknowledgement of women’s contributions to jazz recently,” Aldana told roundtable participants and attendees. “Promoters are trying to incorporate it. I don’t want people to call me because I am a female. As an artist, it is your essence that you are presenting, the mind. If anything, I’d love to inspire younger girls to just be strong about what you have to say.”

In addition to being Aldana’s bandmate, Salvant has collaborated with the saxophonist in a different medium. Aldana commissioned her to create visual artwork for The Jazz Gallery residency, and one of Salvant’s drawings serves as the cover art for *Visions*. Aptly, the work nods to Kahlo’s famous 1939 painting *The Two Fridas*. Salvant’s riff on the masterpiece seems to incorporate a cosmic flow of energy amid a yellow sunburst, resulting in a bold gem full of unexplained mystery.

“Melissa pushes us,” Salvant said. “She doesn’t let us get lazy with our shit. I think it ends up bringing out the best in everybody that’s around her. She makes us realize how terrible it is to be complacent.”

DB

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THEO CROKER 'CATALYST FOR ACTION'

BY GARY FUKUSHIMA

PHOTO BY STEVEN SUSSMAN

IT'S A WEDNESDAY NIGHT. AND A CAPACITY CROWD HAS FILLED MR. MUSICHEAD. A SPACIOUS GALLERY ON THE SUNSET STRIP IN HOLLYWOOD OWNED BY SAM MILGROM. WHO IN ANOTHER LIFE WAS A WELL-KNOWN JAZZ PROMOTER IN DETROIT.

On the walls around and above the rapt throng are photographs of musicians—Bob Marley, Herbie Hancock, Jimi Hendrix, Joni Mitchell, even Gene Simmons sans makeup. In a corner are a number of rare prints from famed jazz photojournalist Herman Leonard (including his iconic shot of Dexter Gordon).

Yet the artwork goes unnoticed, because at this moment, all eyes are drawn to the back of the gallery, where a slender fellow with tinted spectacles is spewing fire from his trumpet. The tune is "A Shade Of Jade" by Joe Henderson, delivered gracefully at a brisk tempo by the band, whose members all call Los Angeles home. As the

song concludes, trumpeter/bandleader Theo Croker receives the type of ovation normally reserved for artists who visit the City of Angels from New York. He lives here now, having paid plenty of professional dues in New York and Shanghai, China, where he spent the better part of a decade honing both his trumpet chops and his business acumen, eventually becoming something of an entertainment mogul. That success allowed for a triumphant return to America, thanks in no small part to singer Dee Dee Bridgewater, who met Croker while traveling in Asia and hired him to be her musical director, and whose endorsement of him paved the way for a record deal with Sony.



Theo Croker with Gary Bartz

Coker's performance at Mr. Musichead included material from *Star People Nation* (Sony Masterworks), his fifth album overall. Adding to the stack of hats the accomplished trumpeter now wears are those of a versatile multi-instrumentalist, genre-blending producer, influential entrepreneur and astute commentator on racial identity. The development of the album—the first in which he has sole producer credit—involved an 18-month journey to both U.S. coasts and multiple recording studios, where he played auxiliary keyboards and synths, crafted electronic and acoustic beats and other percussion, incorporated samples and wrote lyrics to be sung by himself and his special guests, Los Angeles-based vocalist Rose Gold and Jamaican reggae artist Chronixx. The program offers a virtual candy store of sonic flavor and color, illuminating Croker's ability to blend layers of music and lyrics with the deft touch of a hip-hop producer and the spontaneity of a jazz trumpeter.

Some of that ability could be genetic: Croker is the grandson of Adolphus Anthony "Doc" Cheatham (1905–'97), a legendary trumpeter and early jazz pioneer to whom he subtly bears a resemblance. That innate talent was honed by Croker as a student at Oberlin College and Conservatory in Ohio. His early mentors included trumpeters Marcus Belgrave and Donald Byrd, as well as saxophonist Gary Bartz.

"Theo's always been a go-getter—he's always been a catalyst for action," said drummer Kassa Overall, who met Croker at Oberlin, joined him on tour with Bridgewater and contributed to *Star People Nation*. Back in his Oberlin days, Croker called Overall out of the blue months ahead of the start of classes, wanting to ensure his combo included the best drummer on campus. "You gotta be creative on and off the stage," Overall said. "Theo [frequently] was getting ready to put something out, a project or a band, booking shows, making things happen, putting things together."

Overall elaborated, noting that Croker's sense of initiative has had an impact on him as a bandleader, composer and producer: "What you bring to music, you have to take that same creativity and bring it to everything if you're going to make it happen ... I've taken a lot away from [observing Croker], working with him and watching how he deals with people."

DownBeat caught up with Croker on a sunny April afternoon at the Gallery Bar in the Millennium Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles. Below are edited excerpts from the lively, wide-ranging conversation.

LET'S START WITH YOUR FAMOUS GRANDFATHER. WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER ABOUT DOC?

I remember him being a really sweet dude. Very patient. Always humming and singing. He moved very slow; he was so old. Musically, I remember seeing him play six or seven times. I remember seeing him play at Sweet Basil [in New York]. I must have been like 7 or 8 ... But just from seeing him play, I remember how flawless he was. He was so crystal clear, his ideas, his tone, his sound, he was, like, this super old man, super slow, skinny, but when he would play, it's kinda like that didn't matter.

WHAT GOT YOU TO THINKING ABOUT LEAVING NEW YORK AND MOVING SOMEWHERE ELSE?

We would tour so much: One time we toured with Dee Dee for almost four months. So, just look at the bills you pay to say you live in New York ... New York can make you feel like you're barely making it—not the music scene, just New York itself. Now, I have a rent-control apartment in New York, so it wasn't as bad as it could be, but eventually I decided I needed a different type of lifestyle. I needed a higher-quality lifestyle.

WAS THERE A MUSICAL REASON TO RELOCATE TO L.A., TOO?

Eventually, yeah. When I got here, first of all,

I realized there were a lot of cats living in L.A. who I thought were still living in New York. Chris Dave is my neighbor. Gerald Clayton lives out here. I don't want to put people on blast who don't announce it ... but all of a sudden, we're like, "You live in L.A.?" We needed a Rolodex of cats in L.A. who were living in New York.

IT'S ALMOST LIKE A LITTLE BUBBLE OF NEW YORK THAT'S HERE NOW.

Exactly. It's tricky, 'cause once you get embedded in the jazz scene in New York, there's very few places on that level, for jazz. So, I didn't come to L.A. to be like, "Yeah, I'm going to play in the jazz scene." I need something different. I'm interested in visual arts, in performance art. There's just a lot more going on out here.

WHAT'S YOUR OVERALL TAKE ON THE SCENE HERE?

Technically, I live here, and I've started to perform here. I'm not on the scene, in the sense that I'm not out here hustling for gigs. If something dope comes about, I'll do it. [L.A. has] got a vibe. It really started when I met Chris [Dave] in China in 2017. His band was playing at the same festival as me, so we were both there for a week, in the same hotel. [Later, in L.A.] I just ran into him at a show. He was like, "You came into town and didn't call me!" I was like, "I'm in L.A.; I live here!" He was like, "I live here, too." Find out we're neighbors. He calls me all the time: "Yo, we're goin' to so-and-so's studio." He really showed me the studio scene. A lot of the hang started with people outside of jazz.

SO, CHRIS DAVE KIND OF GOT YOU INTO SOME OTHER CIRCLES HERE?

Yeah. I remember I had a conversation with him once: I was like, "Man, I don't know if I'm feelin' L.A. I'm kinda bored." He was like, "Oh, no, we're changing that! The next day he called me at 8:30 or 9 in the morning: "Yo, meet me at this time. We're going to the studio. Pino Palladino's working on the record, and it's being produced by Blake Mills." I ended up playing on a song, just cause I'm there. Those kinds of things started happening. You know, walking into the studio at 3 in the morning, there's ... Om'Mas Keith, Anderson .Paak. It's like, "Whoa, Chris is pulling me into a whole 'nother [scene]." Then, some of those people started calling me. That made me stay in L.A.

WHERE DID THE TITLE FOR *STAR PEOPLE NATION* COME FROM?

Star People is the legend of—I believe this stuff, but some people call it a myth or whatever—the sentient beings that come from the Sirius Galaxy, that taught the Dogons the stars, the knowledge that spread through all of Africa, throughout North American indigenous people, the Aztecs, Mayans, all these ancient civilizations, where they learned about the stars. And they all reference Star People.

So, that's the spiritual aspect, the historical aspect. But really, it's meant to be a nation [of artists]. Justin Emeka [a professor of theater and Africana Studies at Oberlin] wrote poetry to the album. Bob Power, who is one of the sonic architects of hip-hop, mixed and mastered the album. The photographer, Donna Ferrato, shot the cover and all the photographs involved in the album. She's a friend. Jack Harper did all the graphic design, and he works for a company called A-Cold-Wall. It's a huge brand, a fashion-forward brand.

And then, of course, all the musicians involved. My normal band—Mike King, Eric Wheeler, Kassa Overall, Irwin Hall—were the core musicians who worked on the album. And that's the band I assembled to tour with Dee Dee for years. And then I started pulling in guest artists who were impactful for me. People like Anthony Ware, featured on some stuff, tenor sax player. [Drummer] Eric Harland is featured on a track. I played him "Alkebulan," which at that time was only kalimba. He was like, "How about me and Kassa do a duo over this with you and a bass player?" I was like, "Sounds great." Of course, that took months to find a date where Eric was available. I brought in Eric Lewis, ELEW, to play on "The Messenger," cause I was like, "Man, this song's really about Elvin Jones." [In the 1990s, ELEW performed with Jones.]

WAS THE FIRST LAYER OF STUFF THAT YOU DID THE LIVE STUFF?

Yeah, usually what happens is ... I don't want to give away too much of my process, but, yeah, it's mostly live tracking. And then there's layers added later. And then I usually go to another studio that I work out of a lot, and I block it out for a week, and I start to choose what to use. I'll literally have a band do a take, do another take on top, do another. Then, I'll go in and sit down and turn it up and listen to it, and either use it or take it out. Whereas most people add a lot of things, I get as much as possible [first] and take things out to get the clarity.

IN A PRESS RELEASE FOR THE NEW ALBUM, YOU SAY, "I'M EMBRACING MY OWN MULTICULTURAL-NESS WITHIN MY BLACKNESS." CAN YOU TALK ABOUT SOME OF THE ISSUES YOU'VE DEALT WITH REGARDING YOUR CULTURAL IDENTITY?

Growing up—being a musician, and being a nerd, having parents who were educated, both with master's degrees, in social work and psychology—I had advantages, which made me fit into being more than just being black. My grandfather was a world-traveling musician who came out of a black-Native American family, so of course we were exposed to all sorts of things. Some of the difficulties are being too nerdy. That's not cool in the black community. Reading books ain't cool, which is a fallacy. That's part of a systematic deterioration of a culture.

Having a father, as a young black man, who was present, who raised me, along with a mother. Having an older brother who was taught to protect and nurture me as a younger brother, not be put against me. In other words ... being too white for the black kids and too black for the white kids. Having my light-skinned, very Native American-looking mother pick me up from school, and having my black father drop me off. You'd get those kinds of looks.

So, when I made this album, I wasn't going to shy away from anything thematically. The inspiration is [from] a lot of the themes I dealt with

myself. "Portrait Of William" is a tribute to my father, but also to my parents in general. "Have You Come to Stay" is me exploring spirituality. I'm speaking to my higher self: We're going to rock from here on out as my higher self, not my lower self. "Wide Open" is about love and romance. "Subconscious Flirtations And Titillations" is about sex. Dealing with sex in jazz. When did jazz become this thing that's not sexual? Jazz used to be so punk. Jazz used to be so revolutionary. Now, it's very safe, watered down. No judgment, just saying that's kind of been removed from it. I'm like, "Nah, man, this is dirty music." **DB**

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PHOTO BY EMMA-LEE PHOTOGRAPHY LINE-UP SUBJECT TO CHANGE

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Alfred Lion (left), Dexter Gordon and Francis Wolff

Courtesy, Blue Note Records



Don Was, president of Blue Note Records

ROMEO MUSICONICO

Blue Note Celebrates with Vinyl Reissues

The avid resurgence of jazz vinyl continues, and Blue Note Records, which is celebrating its 80th anniversary this year, is leading the charge.



As label president Don Was told *DownBeat* in a recent phone interview from his office in the Capitol Records Building in Hollywood, Blue Note's vinyl revival is two-pronged, involving both new products and reissues.

"About half of our new records come out on vinyl," he said, noting that other releases are available digitally and/or on CD. Among the label's recent vinyl releases are albums by Norah Jones, Gregory Porter, José James, Charles Lloyd & The Marvels, Nels Cline and the all-star collective R+R=NOW.

On the reissue front, Blue Note has launched multiple series of reissues to mine gems from its illustrious catalog, which includes titles by Art Blakey & The Jazz Messengers, Herbie Hancock,

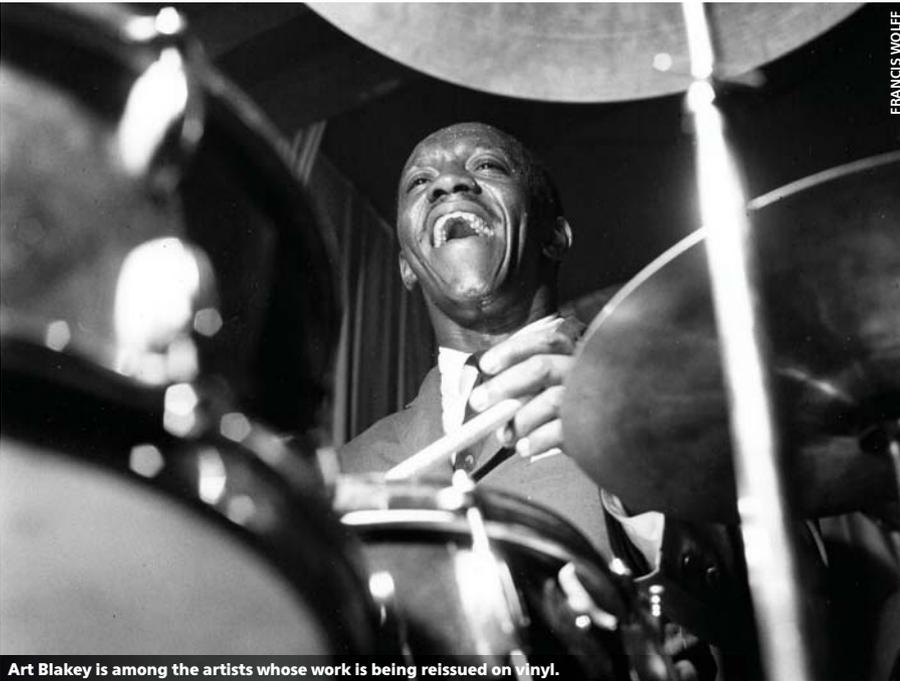
Joe Henderson, Robert Glasper, Elvin Jones, Lee Konitz, Jackie McLean, Lee Morgan, Sam Rivers and John Scofield.

It took more than great artists, however, to make Blue Note a great label. The company was founded in 1939 by two jazz-loving German immigrants, Alfred Lion and Francis Wolff, both fleeing the Nazis in the late 1930s. They attracted and retained the best musicians in New York by offering them respect and consideration, working around their schedules. They also provided great-sounding recordings, with the legendary Rudy Van Gelder engineering many of the sessions between 1953 and 1972, as well as exceptional photography (often by Wolff), cover art (by Reid Miles) and liner notes to produce glo-

rious packages worthy of the music. All the elements combined into what became known as the Blue Note aesthetic.

Besides the profusion of vinyl reissues, the 80th anniversary celebration includes a new documentary, *Blue Note Records: Beyond the Notes*, by director Sophie Huber; a series of limited-edition canvas art prints of classic album covers; a limited-edition G-STEEL men's wristwatch; expanded Blue Note classic playlists on Spotify and Apple Music; and an U.S. tour this fall by saxophonist James Carter, pianist James Francis and singer/keyboardist Kandace Springs—all current Blue Note artists

But why launch *four* different series of classic Blue Note reissues? "Each has a unique purpose,"



FRANCIS WOLFF

Art Blakey is among the artists whose work is being reissued on vinyl.

Was explained.

The Tone Poet Audiophile Vinyl series is all-analog, curated by Joe Harley, of the audiophile vinyl label Music Matters, and mastered from the original master tapes by Kevin Gray, of Coherent Audio. The LPs are housed in deluxe gatefold packaging. Titles include *Introducing Kenny Burrell* (1956), Andrew Hill's *Black Fire* (1963), Dexter Gordon's *Clubhouse* (1965) and Cassandra Wilson's *Glamour* (2003).

The Blue Note 80 Vinyl series, curated by Was and Blue Note staffer Cem Kurosman, is midpriced, with standard packaging, and it's organized according to themes, like "Blue Note Debuts," "Great Reid Miles Covers" and more. Like the Tone Poet series, the BN 80 series is pressed on 180-gram vinyl. LPs in this series include Freddie Hubbard's *Hub-Tones* (1962), Donald Byrd's *Ethiopian Knights* (1971) and Tony Williams' *Foreign Intrigue* (1985).

Additionally, there's an exclusive six-title series issued by audiophile record company Vinyl Me, Please; and the Blue Note Review, a vinyl box set subscription series that includes exclusive content.

"Joe Harley's Tone Poet series—that's just the highest-quality vinyl experience I think you can have," Was said. "When we started doing hi-res audio mastering, I kept going back to those Music Matters releases, because I couldn't figure out what he was doing to make them sound so good. I found out that it's a little bit of everything, not just one thing you do in the mastering. ... I got to know Joe while we were working on the Charles Lloyd record together. I invited him to come do it at Blue Note and throw our full resources behind

it, rather than just licensing the masters.

"The first two releases, Wayne Shorter's *Etcetera* and Chick Corea's *Now He Sings, Now He Sobs*, are in their third pressings already. They outsold everybody's wildest guesses. They just sound amazing."

Something that Was discovered while working on the vinyl reissues was that mastering off the original analog tapes "makes a huge difference." Even in the lower-priced Blue Note 80 series (about \$25), the projects were mastered using the original masters.

The Vinyl Me, Please offering—a 1,000-set series that aims to present the story of Blue Note in six albums—sold out a mere three hours after it went on sale, Was said. The series includes Horace Silver's trio debut and projects by Ambrose Akinmusire, Lou Donaldson, Dexter Gordon and Bobby Hutcherson. According to Was, the sales success "shows that if you present it right, people love this music so much, and there's still a great audience for it."

The Blue Note Review, available by subscription, is a box designed to "step up the tactile experience" of owning the music, Was said. In addition to four LPs, the second volume contains lithographs of Reid Miles covers, a magazine, a book on drummers, trading cards and a record-cleaning brush. A third volume, focusing on the Blue Note legacy, is in the works.

Aesthetically speaking, putting out vinyl on a Blue Note artist in the digital age is not a hard decision—but the financial factor is another matter. "I think the vinyl sounds incredible. I love the sound of it," Was said. "People my age, that's how we know that music. It's a warm, pleasing sound.

It's not necessarily the most accurate—there's a certain distortion that vinyl brings as well. It brings the back wall of the mix forward, gives it more immediacy and presence. It's not a neutral color. But people like it. I think we'll probably sell 100,000 Tone Poet records this year."

But there's something else about vinyl, Was said, that makes the experience of music special. "I remember showing the turntable to my kids for the first time. We sat in a circle looking at the turntable and listening to music. There's action going on—it's like a fireplace," he said with a chuckle. Then, more thoughtfully, "It's a very physical experience. And there's an element of ritual to it that impacts human behavior at a really deep, primordial DNA level. You have to pull it out of the sleeve and treat it right. To be able to hold something physical, and to be able to read the print on the back."

Another fan of vinyl is saxophonist Marcus Strickland, whose latest Blue Note album, *People Of The Sun*, is available as an LP. "I like everything about vinyl," he said by phone from his Brooklyn home. "The sound, the size and shape, the way it showcases the artwork. And it is still in primary use in DJ culture, which is a great way of dispersing the music. ... I feel like most of the people who would like the record would be the kind who go to hear DJs at a club and like to hear all kinds of different sounds. So, I made the record that way, with short cuts that would fit on two sides. And having the vinyl at the gig is very key to selling. They're great for signing."

Deciding which albums to release in the vinyl format a challenge, though. "It's a little arbitrary," Was conceded. "Ultimately, we have to go through a process where we feel it's going to sell enough copies to justify the expense. It's a business; it's a combination of aesthetics and practicality."

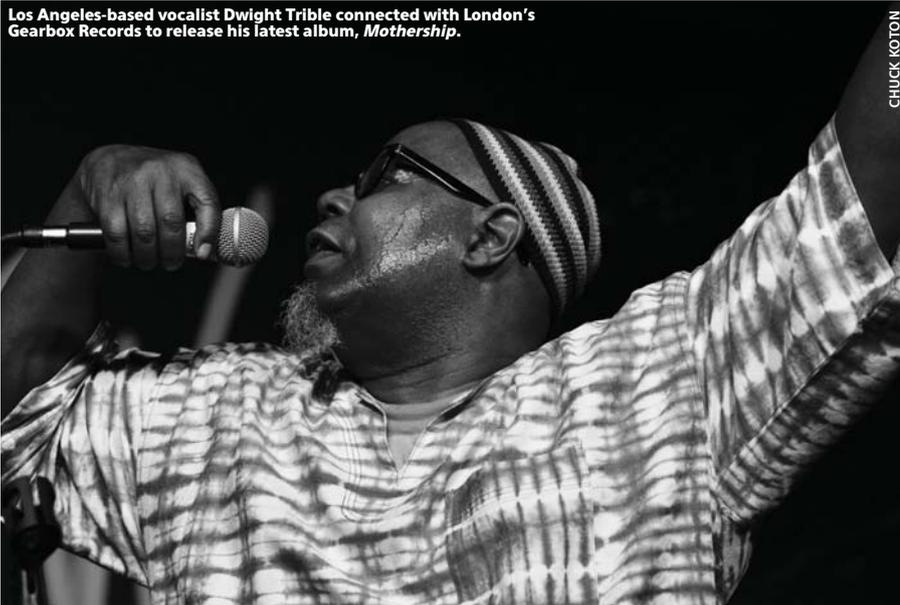
Both the label's decision to manufacture vinyl and the fans' decision to buy it comes down to a philosophy that "music is worth owning and appreciating," as employees at Vinyl Me, Please like to say. Was and the label share that philosophy. "I've been making records for a long time and have seen every type of goofy situation you can imagine between record companies and artists," Was said. "The best way to make great music is to work with artists you believe in and let them be who they are."

That's also a good business plan, Was noted. "I've never told any artist at Blue Note what to do—ever. If they want an opinion, I'm happy to offer one. But if they have something in mind, I want them to pursue it. I believe that's the way you build the kind of catalog that Alfred Lion built, and Bruce Lundvall continued. Just try to help great musicians make the best music they can make."

—Allen Morrison



Los Angeles-based vocalist Dwight Tribble connected with London's Gearbox Records to release his latest album, *Mothership*.



Gearbox Runs on Adoration of Music

Nestled among the industrial but gentrifying outskirts of Kings Cross, North London, is an audiophile haven: the Gearbox Records headquarters.

Stationed behind an unassuming brick facade is the home of the label and analog mastering studio that has helped lead the London jazz resurgence during the past five years, releasing the debut record for saxophone-drum duo Binker and Moses, as well as recordings from percussionist Sarathy Korwar and tuba player Theon Cross.

Venture into the studio and you'll likely find its founder, Darrel Sheinman, in a workman's coat, tinkering with a reel-to-reel tape machine, surrounded by vinyl stock and working on at least three things at once. An ex-punk drummer, Sheinman founded the label in 2009 with the ethos of "releasing music to create the best possible sound." He believes that "if you record and master something beautifully, you can convince people to enjoy it much more."

It's a conviction that's paid off for Sheinman, who has taken his label from releasing a small selection of BBC archival jazz recordings to selling out a newly discovered

Thelonious Monk live set last year, as well as producing sessions for Butcher Brown and Nitin Sawhney.

"In the last year, something has changed and we're not quite sure what," Sheinman said in his London drawl. "People approach us more and we're selling a hell of a lot more records. It's nice to be recognized for some of the stuff we've been doing; I've always been very straight with the artists: We have a 50/50 profit share and we were early doing this, so I'm proud now that we're making a difference."

With the vinyl-buying resurgence starting to pay dividends for Gearbox, it's investing further in the local jazz scene, as well as expanding into the folk and electronic worlds.

"We have the new Binker Golding Quartet record coming, which will be this 'cool' Michael Brecker sound, and then we also have a new drum-and-bass producer releasing with us, as well as the next one from Abdullah Ibrahim," Sheinman said.

One look at Gearbox's eclectic catalogue and it's easy to see that the label runs on the adoration of music, not just the pursuit of profit.

"The music we release has always had to be music that I love, because I feel if I love it, someone else will too," Sheinman said. "And luckily, my tastes have developed organically with what audiences want now, which is how we've found ourselves—somewhat unwittingly—at the center of this London jazz scene. I try to run an ego-less label, one where we're all here on passion and loving what we do."

This passionate, music-first attitude has seen Gearbox increasingly pop up on the radar of new talent, as well as that of established performers—namely, Los Angeles-based vocalist Dwight Tribble, whose latest album, *Mothership*, is the imprint's most recent release.

"I've always been a fan of UK music," Tribble said in a booming baritone over the phone. "And Gearbox seemed like the perfect embodiment of a fresh sound with an open, non-jazz-specific ethos, so I sent them an email. They liked what they heard and the rest wasn't difficult at all. In fact, it felt incredibly natural and beautiful, a coming together that was meant to be."

The result is one of Tribble's most wide-ranging records to date, encompassing the legacy of his mentor and Pan-African People's Arkestra leader Horace Tapscott, as well as showcasing the future generations of West Coast jazz on collaborations with Kamasi Washington and Mark de Clive-Lowe.

"This record is honoring a lot of people I love," Tribble said, "and I love the fact that we recorded it all analogue, collaboratively with Darrel in L.A. at Sunset Sound studio."

For such an audiophile, recording in the renowned Southern California studio was "a dream come true" for Sheinman, and an experience he's working to recreate at his own headquarters.

"What little labels like us really need is more funding," he said. "We don't have the pockets to do half the stuff we'd want to do: [We'd like to] give the artists better advances, make better products and make people stars."

With plans underway to celebrate 10 years of Gearbox through the release of a box-set, an exhibition of cover art and a spate of live shows, it seems this star-making potential might be ascendant.

"Music is so subjective, no one really knows what will do well. You just have to follow your ear and have hope," Sheinman said. "But it does feel like we're at a particularly exciting time now, and I can't wait to see what the next 10 years will bring."
—Ammar Kalia

CONGRATULATIONS EMMET!



On April 6 Emmet Cohen was named winner of the 2019 American Pianists Awards and Cole Porter Fellowship in Jazz. Emmet performed with Kurt Elling and the Buselli-Wallarab Jazz Orchestra in the Gala Finals, hosted by Dee Dee Bridgewater. He follows previous winners Sullivan Fortner (2015), Aaron Diehl (2011), Dan Tepfer (2007), Adam Birnbaum (2004) and Aaron Parks (2001).

For concert video, touring calendars and news about Emmet and previous winners visit [AMERICANPIANISTS.ORG/DOWNBEAT](https://www.americanpianists.org/downbeat)



Smashed Plastic Record Pressings' John Lombardo (left), Steve Polutnik and Andy Weber

CHUCK KOTON

A Vinyl Renaissance

Vinyl is back, and that might be the best news jazz recordings have had in a long time.

According to Nielsen Soundscan, 16.8 million LPs were sold last year, up from 14.6 million the year before, and marking the 13th consecutive year of growth for vinyl sales—a figure doubly impressive in an industry that generally has seen declines in sales. Overall, LPs counted for 12 percent of album sales last year, an astonish-

ing figure considering that the format widely was considered to be nearly extinct at the turn of the century.

More significantly, jazz recordings accounted for 4.3 percent of sales of new vinyl recordings last year. That might not seem much on the face of it, but according to the Record Industry

Association of America, jazz's share of the album market (CDs, LPs, downloads, etc.) last year was a mere 1.1 percent, a figure that suggests that jazz is hitting well above its weight in the vinyl market.

But that's only based on sales of new recordings. As *Forbes* pointed out earlier this year, the vinyl market is even bigger if used album sales are included. Of course, the RIAA doesn't bother to do that, because, as the magazine's Bill Rosenblatt pointed out, "no revenue from used sales goes to record labels, artists or songwriters." But using data provided by eBay and online retailer Discogs, plus estimates based on indie retailers and specialty stores like Urban Outfitters, Hastings and Hot Topic, the financial magazine estimated that the actual sales figures for vinyl are "about 2.5 times what the RIAA reports."

Jazz's share of that figure also likely is under-represented.

"Jazz sells extraordinarily well," said Blair Whatmore, an assistant manager and vinyl buyer for the Toronto record store Sonic Boom. "We sell an insane amount of used vinyl at this store. We put out 200 used records every single day of the year into our 'Recent Arrivals' bins, so there are constantly people hunting for gems from the past."

And, he said, the demand for jazz is unquenchably strong: "If we could get our hands on more jazz records, we would see more sales. There is a bit of, 'you can only get so much of it in.'"

Impressively, this sales surge isn't driven solely by collectors' hankerings for classic vinyl, but also by fans looking for new albums or newly reissued rarities. Nor are the hottest titles always the obvious titles.

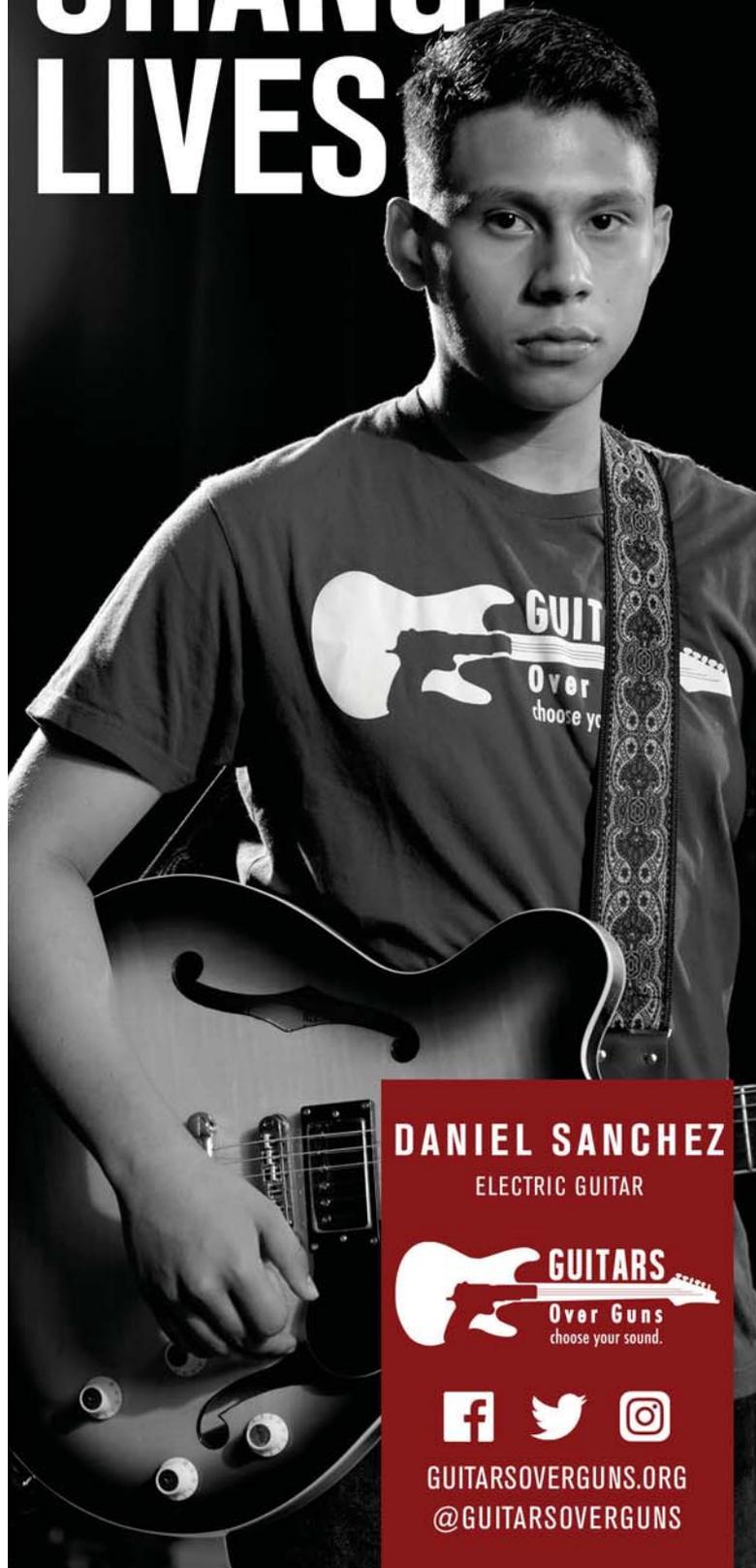
"There were a bunch of Japanese jazz reissues that came out last year—really obscure records that were impossible to find here for years," Whatmore said. "And all sorts of people were really excited to get pre-orders in for them."

But why?

"A lot of that success is based on context," said Steve Lowenthal, whose Black Editions imprint released those Japanese jazz albums, as well as a run of heavy psych reissues by folks like High Rise and Keiji Haino. As he explains it, when listeners develop a sense of trust for a label with a clear aesthetic, they're more likely to take a chance on a new release.

"We just released a record by a guy named Makoto Kawashima, who's a contemporary saxophone improviser from Japan," Lowenthal said. "He's a fairly unknown player in the world of improvised jazz, but we were able to run through our first pressing almost immediately,

MUSIC CAN CHANGE LIVES



based on the context of it being in Black Edition, and being placed in the context of Japanese underground music in general.”

As Lowenthal sees it, part of that interest stems from there being a desire in “rediscovering a lot of 20th century culture that wasn’t celebrated the first time around. Like, if you had told me five years ago that Alice Coltrane would be the biggest thing of 2018, I wouldn’t have been able to make that call. But here we are, and the Alice Coltrane catalog is like the hippest thing going.”

It also helps that the manufacturing standards for vinyl are much higher now than they were in the pre-CD era. Back then, record companies were focused on mass-production and cost-cutting. These days, the industry is full of small boutique plants that take an almost artisanal approach to pressing vinyl LPs.

“The amount of care that everybody’s putting in right now is so much different from what it was,” says Andy Weber, one of the co-founders of Smashed Plastic, a vinyl pressing company that opened in late 2018 on Chicago’s West Side. “The consumer’s demanding it. Vinyl, in our day and age, is a way for someone to slow down. It’s, ‘I’m going to sit here and listen to this record for the next 45 minutes.’ So, you want to make sure that what’s coming out of my plant, or any other plant in the country, is going to sound good, and is going to have that thickness to add longevity to the product.”

From the musician’s side of things, there’s a generation of players who, until recently, were denied the opportunity to cut LPs.

“I grew up on vinyl,” said saxophonist Gregory Tardy. “My parents were both opera singers, and so our house was always filled with the sounds of Bizet, Puccini and Saint-Saëns. But we’re also a black family, so I also heard plenty of James Brown, Otis Redding, anything that was on Stax records. When I became a jazz fan/musician, my record collection became filled with Monk, Trane, Stitt and all the greats.” But his own output has been mostly digital. “I’ve heard a rumor that there is a vinyl copy of my Impulse! release *Serendipity*, only available in Europe,” he said. “But I have never seen one myself.”

Things are about to change, however, thanks to an album he recorded with Bill Frisell for the vinyl-only subscription label Newvelle. Frisell was booked for a performance with the Knoxville Jazz Orchestra, and because Tardy had played in the guitarist’s band years ago, they arranged for a duo recording, which went exceptionally well.

“Since Bill knew the folks at Newvelle, he introduced me to Elan Mehler, and it came together very quickly,” Tardy said. “The fact that this was going to be on vinyl made me even more excited, because I wanted to make an emotionally deep and heartfelt project. I knew the vinyl would help take it there.”

How so?

“I have always felt that vinyl sounds deeper, more dynamic and warmer than digital,” he said. “I know that scientifically digital is supposed to be better, and digital definitely is clearer. But I have always felt that vinyl has more of a vibe, and that vibe makes the music sound more soulful to me. That’s not just for jazz, but for music in general.”

Tardy isn’t alone in thinking that: “The analog experience in general is what listeners use to separate the wheat from the chaff, in terms of whether you’re a serious listener or a casual listener,” Lowenthal said. “It’s also about collecting culture, and about tangible items in the digital world. With digital music and streaming, there’s such an ephemerality to it. Hard drives crash, passwords get reset, and all of a sudden you could be locked out of everything.

“That’s not an issue when it comes to records. It’s simpler in a lot of ways.”

—J.D. Considine

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DESMOND WHITE

Pianist Fabian Almazan (center) explores the jazz-classical divide on his latest trio recording, *This Land Abounds With Life*.

Fabian Almazan Trio *This Land Abounds With Life*

BIOPHILIA 0015

★★★★

Fabian Almazan’s remarkable piano virtuosity began to draw attention when he joined trumpeter Terence Blanchard’s band in 2007, but surfaced with a striking suddenness around 2011 with his first trio album. It’s a virtuosity that belongs more to a classical temperament than to jazz: Rather than swing spontaneously, Almazan expresses a romantic impressionism that is negotiable on both sides of the divide, wherever that might be.

The 12 selections here were inspired, more or less, by a recent return to his native Cuba, from which he escaped as a child. They are a needlepoint of personal memories, cultural homages and even political allusions—“Benjamin” refers to a character in George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*—all explained in notes for those who wish to decode the programmatic. But a piece of music is not a narrative. It relies on the abstractions of mood, melody and move-

ment, leaving the listener to infer meaning.

Almazan toys with dynamics much of the time, occasionally in slow, layered climbs; other times, in steep downturns of sweep and tension. The effect is a roller coaster of contrasts in tempo and intensity, played with the fullness of an orchestra. Bassist Linda May Han Oh weaves comfortably into the piano lines, often achieving a careful contrapuntal balance, more than just a solo spot. Their dialogues on “Ella,” “Uncle Tío” and “Folklorism” have a thoughtful equilibrium to them.

But Almazan begins with an uncharacteristic bang. “Benjamin” is a fast, finger-buster of a ride up and down the keyboard. Played in a rolling surge of precise eighth notes, broken every few bars by dissonant speed bumps, it swings with the bracing formality of a fugue.

“The Everglades” is a lagoon of soft, lyric chords, swept by winds and waves in the middle, and ends as a still life. “The Poets” is quietly ruminative with no strong theme, then gathers a percussive weight and force before evaporating.

Where there is a theme, it tends toward

simplicity. “Forklorism” seesaws modestly back and forth between two notes, but finds swirling fortissimo power before resolving back into its minimal motif.

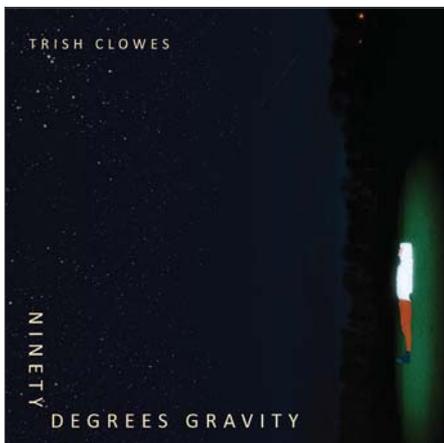
The trio is augmented by a string quartet for “Bola De Nieve,” a pre-Castro piece by Carlos Varela. Its chamber intimacy moves from sonata-like grace to broad, arching columns of authority and back again. “Jaula,” an homage to Nelson Mandela, has the lush textures of a piano concerto that conceal its essential simplicity. Finally, after a whopping 85 minutes, Almazan closes with a lovely surprise. “Music On My Mind” by the great Harlem strider Willie “The Lion” Smith conveys an old-fashioned elegance of pure melody that seems at first out of place. But it’s just Almazan’s way of saying he’s a proud Harlem resident.

—John McDonough

This Land Abounds With Life: Benjamin; The Everglades; The Poets; Ella; Songs Of The Forgotten; The Nomads; Jaula; Bola De Nieve; Folklorism; Uncle Tío; Pet Steps Sitters Theme Song; Music On My Mind. (85:32)

Personnel: Fabian Almazan, piano; Linda May Han Oh, bass; Henry Cole, drums; string quartet (8).

Ordering info: biophilirecords.com



Trish Clowes *Ninety Degrees Gravity*

BASHO 56

★★★★½

Since poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow claimed that “music is the universal language of all mankind” in the early 19th century, the phrase has struck a chord with musicians and audiences. For tenor saxophonist Trish Clowes, it’s a utopian idea, a synonym for the act of improvisation itself.

For her fifth album, *Ninety Degrees Gravity*, Clowes takes this idea as her inspiration, prompted by Denis Villeneuve’s sci-fi film *Arrival*, which centers around human-alien communica-

tion. This all might sound too involved for a seven-track quartet record, but the result is satisfyingly restrained and engaging.

Tracks like “Abbott & Costello,” the names given to Villeneuve’s two nonverbal aliens, showcase a playful back-and-forth between Clowes’ ascending lines and pianist Ross Stanley’s interspersed keys—a question-and-answer phrasing if ever there was one. While “Free To Fall” and “Dustlings” are more spacious, each prioritizes the silence between phrases as much as the musical interjections.

When Clowes pushes far into the ether, though, her compositions become too fluid and lose their structure, as on “Arise” and “I.F.,” where the thread of meaning is obscured. Yet, the will to “speak” to the listener is ever-present. On “Lightning Les (Live),” Clowes displays her measured intensity, meandering around drummer James Maddren’s cymbal strikes and Stanley’s organ to create a beguiling 12-minute track.

Ultimately, listeners might not understand all of what Clowes tries to communicate on *Ninety Degrees Gravity*, but like any meaning worth heeding, it expands during each statement.

—Ammar Kalia

Ninety Degrees Gravity: Eric’s Tune; Abbott & Costello; Free To Fall; Arise; I.F.; Lightning Les (Live); Dustlings. (50:42)

Personnel: Trish Clowes, saxophone, vocals; Chris Montague, guitar; Ross Stanley, Hammond organ, piano; James Maddren, drums.

Ordering info: bashorecords.com

Angélique Kidjo *Celia*

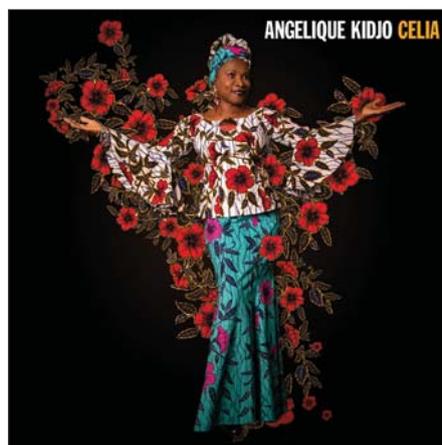
VERVE 00602577444982

★★★★½

Some LP-length albums seem incomplete, but Angélique Kidjo’s 36-minute tribute to Celia Cruz is such a delightful dervish of a recording that its runtime seems completely apt.

Funneling Cruz through Afrobeat guitar, vocal choruses and unison brass shouts might seem sacrilegious given the reverence reserved for the Queen of Salsa, but Kidjo and arranger David Donatien manage to get at the West African essence of Cruz’s music without disregarding the source material. In fact, *Celia* succeeds not just because it blazes from start to finish, but because it sends you back to Cruz’s originals to understand which elements fueled the transformation.

A case in point: “Bemba Colora,” Cruz’s 1966 anti-racist song, which later became her signature piece. Cruz’s version is a rumba, heated to be sure, but nothing approaching where Kidjo takes it in league with UK saxophonist Shabaka Hutchings and his Sons Of Kemet. In their hands, the song is a hardcore blast of blatting tuba, skittering percussion and careening tenor that threatens to derail at any second. With Kidjo growling out the lyrics, the performance has the slightly woozy anthemic delirium of the British post-punk band



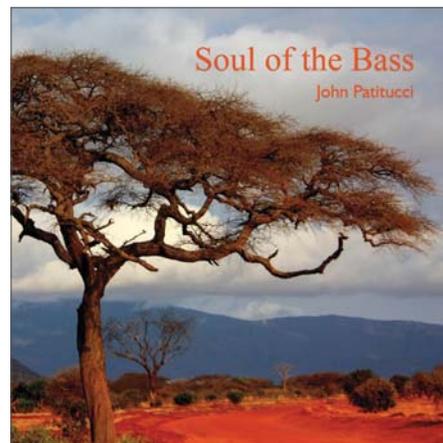
Rip Rig + Panic. Even when she slows the pace on a sultry version of “Oya Diosa,” the grit in her voice and the complementary cello of Clément Petit ensure that this is anything but a mere tribute to a legend; it’s a complete reimagining of Cruz’s legacy that carries the Cuban singer back to Africa.

—James Hale

Celia: Cucala; La Vida Es Un Carnaval; Sahara; Baila Yemaja; Toro Mata; Elegua; Quimbara; Bemba Colora; Oya Diosa; Yemaja. (36:21)

Personnel: Angélique Kidjo, vocals; Amen Viana, guitar, backing vocals (1, 5, 6); Dominic James, guitar (1, 2, 5); Shabaka Hutchings, saxophone (2, 5, 8); Julien Duchet, bass saxophone (5, 7); Gangbé Brass Band; Theon Cross, tuba (2, 8); David Donatien, organ (2, 8, 9); guitar (1, 2), bass, percussion; Xavier Tribolet, organ (2, 3), piano (3); Meshell Ndegeocello, bass (1, 2, 5, 7); Clément Petit, cello (3, 9); Tony Allen, Tom Skinner (8), Eddie Hick (8), drums; Crespin Kpitiki, agomé (4–7); Benoit Avihoué, shekere (4–7).

Ordering info: vervelabelgroup.com



John Patitucci *Soul Of The Bass*

THREE FACES

★★★★½

Amid all the slippery, capricious action of Wayne Shorter’s famous quartet, you might be tempted to say that John Patitucci’s bass serves as the ballast. It’s a logical construction: steady bassist, liberated band. But really, it’s the other way around. It’s precisely Patitucci’s comfort in midair that allows the rest of the quartet—his main concern during the past two decades—to fly freely.

Soul Of The Bass is a solo-bass record, with a few exceptions, but its main assets are the same: Patitucci’s effortless range of motion, and his ability to create a feeling of coherency without staying inside any bounds.

On his earliest leader albums, Patitucci played a broadly sourced fusion, typically on electric bass, often writing his own tunes. Despite the now-dated aesthetic, it was surprisingly convincing stuff, drawn from Afro-Latin, Romantic and post-bop influences. Then, in 1992, he abruptly went another way with *Heart Of The Bass*, featuring a concert orchestra and string quartet playing Patitucci’s suites and short-form pieces with indeterminate grace.

Some 28 years later, he’s out with *Soul Of The Bass*, an album that’s not quite the mirror image of its predecessor. It seems more personal and, ultimately, more engaging. Some of *Soul*’s most memorable moments take place with Patitucci alone on upright, playing a winsome, arpeggiated melody on the title track or using a bow to explore the instrument’s full tonal range on “Mystery Of The Soul.” And his fluency on the electric is a marvel, especially a reading of Bach’s “Allemande In D Minor,” with the six-string bass creating entire microclimates of airy harmony and bubbling melody.

—Giovanni Russonello

Soul Of The Bass: Soul Of The Bass; Seeds Of Change; Morning Train (Spiritual); The Call; Mystery Of The Soul; Morocco; Elvin; Earth Tones; Seeds Of Change Reprise; Allemande In D Minor; Sarab; Trust; Truth. (37:39)

Personnel: John Patitucci, six-string electric bass, electric bass, piccolo electric bass, bass; Nate Smith, drums (4, 9); Greisun, vocals (11); Isabella Patitucci, vocals (11); Sachi Patitucci, cello (13).

Ordering info: johnpatitucci.com

The Hot Box

Critics	James Hale	Ammar Kalia	John McDonough	Giovanni Russonello
Fabian Almazan Trio <i>This Land Abounds With Life</i>	★★★½	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★
Trish Clowes <i>Ninety Degrees Gravity</i>	★★★½	★★★½	★★★	★★★½
Angélique Kidjo <i>Celia</i>	★★★★½	★★★	★★★½	★★★½
John Patitucci <i>Soul Of The Bass</i>	★★★★	★★★½	★★★	★★★½

Critics' Comments

Fabian Almazan Trio, *This Land Abounds With Life*

The cinematic scope is broad, but the recording's aspirations rob it of some needed focus. This sounds like the "director's cut"; less of an auteur approach would have sufficed. —James Hale

Almazan charges through this musical anthology of his first trip back to Cuba in 23 years, resulting in an emotionally charged and fiercely outspoken record on migration and identity. —Ammar Kalia

Almazan's Herculean command and supersonic swiftness are well served by a newfound focus on dynamics and topography, resulting in his most satisfying work yet. —Giovanni Russonello

Trish Clowes, *Ninety Degrees Gravity*

With crisp drumming and an attractive combination of guitar and organ that nods to The Tony Williams Lifetime, Clowes' well-tuned quartet treads a line between vintage sounds and contemporary approaches. —James Hale

A generally dry reserve and veiled vibrato give Clowes' tenor a coolish aura of intellect. It's an impression the quirky compositions tend to confirm—sometimes staccato, sometimes twisty. —John McDonough

This high-intensity, mercurial workout provides further evidence that Clowes is an improviser to be reckoned with, and a bandleader with original ideas about how to carry forward some thwarted legacies of the 1960s and '70s—fusion, free-jazz, Third Stream. —Giovanni Russonello

Angélique Kidjo, *Celia*

Kidjo takes on the catalog of Cuban legend Cruz with mixed results. Cruz's vitality is present on the undulating groove of "La Vida Es Un Carnaval" and channeled through Shabaka Hutchings' saxophone on "Toro Mata." Yet, the sanitized production papers over the joyous energy of the originals. —Ammar Kalia

A lot of Cuban firepower combusts here as Kidjo amplifies Cruz's Afro-Cuban pop legacy. Her gritty authority dominates the relentless pump of background vocals, instrumental vamps and layers of poly-percussion that can turn a concert into a revival meeting. —John McDonough

A testimony of love becomes a parade of joy—and a reminder that Kidjo, like her idol, knows how to pull an ensemble into transcendent rhythmic repartee. —Giovanni Russonello

John Patitucci, *Soul Of The Bass*

Patitucci's bass mastery flows down many paths. The ensemble funk stings and the solo flights soothe, and they combine for one of the most compelling bass-focused recordings since the debuts of Jaco Pastorius and Stanley Clarke. —James Hale

Patitucci squeezes in much soul, meandering from the skin-on-strings vibrations of "Seeds Of Change" to the electric charge of Nate Smith's drumming on "The Call." This change of instrumentation and genre can be jarring, though; Patitucci is better off sticking to solo compositions. —Ammar Kalia

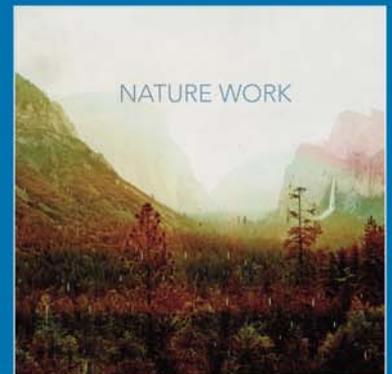
An honorable, though indulgent, effort from a great player. Solo bass recitals have their precedents, but Patitucci sounds isolated and empty on the eight solo pieces here. —John McDonough



MATT SLOCUM SANCTUARY

with GERALD CLAYTON & LARRY GRENADIER
SSC 1547 - IN STORES May 31

On *Sanctuary* drummer/composer Matt Slocum unleashes lovely, inspiring missives that could compel you to imagine a world in which peace, kindness and solace prevail — his music comes from an unswayed place, where the music is all that matters. And, he has a sound! An inviting, burnished sound as pure and effervescent as water streaming from high peaks that reveals itself as much through his compositional output as it does through his choices behind the drums.



NATURE WORK

JASON STEIN-GREG WARD-ERIC REVIS-JIM BLACK
SSC 1554 - IN STORES June 21

Nature Work was born out of the desire of two talented musicians to work together more closely. Jason Stein and Greg Ward boldly added the incomparable talents of Eric Revis and Jim Black to give their ensemble an unpredictable and intriguing blend of strength, intelligence and adventure, which can be heard on the new recording, *Nature Work*.

There is a place in improvisation where it is in the service of the music to shut off the conscious mind and let the subconscious takeover. Bass clarinetist, composer, and improviser Jason Stein thinks of the work of the subconscious as a natural expression and, thus, considers the act of playing and composing as "nature work." There might not be a better example of this process than with Stein and saxophonist/composer Greg Ward's collaborative ensemble, *Nature Work*.



Sunyside

www.sunysiderecords.com





Mark Guiliana

BEAT MUSIC! BEAT MUSIC! BEAT MUSIC!

MOTÉMA 0322

★★★★

The mustard-yellow optics of the cover, the single-word track titles in caps and the repeated exclamations of the album's name all lead to the attention-grabbing sonic expanse of Mark Guiliana's *BEAT MUSIC! BEAT MUSIC! BEAT MUSIC!*

On the third release of Guiliana's dynamic Beat Music, the team assembles dense layers of live drumbeats, bass lines, keyboards and elec-

tronics. Throughout the album, recorded voices are sprinkled on for added effect, from quotidian one-way phone conversations, to poetic eulogizing and Guiliana's son spinning cute stories. It's almost as though listeners progress through the levels of ever-changing live and looped music, traversing landscapes of futurism, euphoria and the imaginary, the boxy and pixelated lettering of the album cover underscoring the distinct 8-bit video game aesthetic.

But the grand scale means that uplifting anthemic moments find their home in numerous spots: the handclap soundalikes and anticipatory breaks in the swelling shuffle of "BLOOM" or in the meticulously laid-back melody of the dub-inflected "BUD." The changing frequencies of the recorded voices, the textured timbres of the bass lines, the crunch and pop of the electronics, and the satisfying detail and precision of Guiliana's playing are bolstered by repeated shifts and tweaks of his beats throughout each track. Sometimes it's slight and sometimes radical, each introducing a new mode, highlighting each work's own in-the-moment individuality.

—Tamar Sella

BEAT MUSIC! BEAT MUSIC! BEAT MUSIC!: GIRL; BONES; BUD; BULLET; HOME; ROAST; HUMAN; BLOOM; STREAM. (45:27)
Personnel: Mark Guiliana, drums, synthesizer; Chris Morrissey, Stu Brooks, Jonathan Maron, Tim Lefebvre, electric bass; Jason Lindner, BIGYUKI, Jeff Babko, keyboards; Nate Werth, percussion; Troy Zeigler, Steve Wall, electronics; Cole Whittle, Jeff Taylor, Gretchen Parlato, Marley Guiliana, vocals.

Ordering info: motema.com

Brian Krock

liddle

OUTSIDE IN 1902

★★★★

If you're a fan of Brian Krock's inventive and idiosyncratic large ensemble debut, *Big Heart Machine*, it might be tempting to assume that *liddle* is just a scaled-down sibling. But it's not. Not quite. Yes, there are fewer players while the overall sound is flavored by a similar blend of metallic guitar and bumpy, oblong rhythms. But Krock plucked the name of his group from the opening pages of James Joyce's magnum opus, *Finnegans Wake*, and as Joyce scholars remind us, "liddle" is both an approximation of how a small child might say "little" and an allusion to Alice Liddell, Lewis Carroll's inspiration for *Alice in Wonderland*.

Perhaps that's why there's a through-the-looking-glass quality to much of the writing here, as Krock and his mates repeatedly take the compositional ideas and turn them inside-out. "(Flip)," for example, opens with a six-note alto phrase that, as Krock elaborates on it, has the rhythm section stumbling purposefully to match the melody's rhythmic variations.

That's the big difference with *liddle*—as strong as the writing is, it's the playing that carries the album, with arrangements designed to



give players the room they need. Guitarist Olli Hirvonen makes particularly good use of his space, developing solos texturally in addition to melodic and rhythmically (his long solo on "Knuckle Hair" is a masterpiece of aural muscle flexing), while pianist Matt Mitchell's fondness for crisp, single-note lines works brilliantly against the drums and bass on Anthony Braxton's avant-bop "Opus 23b."—J.D. *Considerine*

liddle: (Flip); Knuckle Hair; Memphis (Intro); Memphis; Saturnine; Heart Machine; Opus 23b; Spondulics; Please Stop. (54:24)
Personnel: Brian Krock, alto saxophone, bass clarinet; Olli Hirvonen, guitar; Marty Kenney, bass; Nathan Ellman-Bell, drums; Matt Mitchell, piano; Simon Jermyn, electric bass.

Ordering info: outsidemusic.com



Mary Stallings

Songs Were Made To Sing

SMOKE SESSIONS 1903

★★★★

One of the most accomplished jazz singers of her generation, Mary Stallings is having a late-career renaissance that finally should result in the respect and popularity she deserves. At 79, her newest recording on Smoke Sessions, like her entire catalog, embodies time-honored jazz virtues: authenticity, rather than breathless artifice; concise, rather than overlong, solos; and a deep immersion in the blues, which never goes out of style.

She's backed here by an exemplary quintet, including the impeccable pianist David Hazeltine, who also arranged; her old friend, veteran trumpeter Eddie Henderson (they went to high school together in her native San Francisco); altoist Vincent Herring; bassist David "Happy" Williams; and drummer Joe Farnsworth. Throughout, her voice remains supple and inviting, her interpretations deeply informed, and her occasional scatting both natural and inventive.

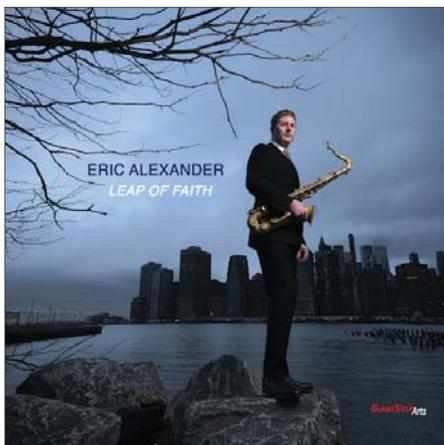
The songs on this outing were chosen to represent different chapters in her life, and she sings them with conviction and a survivor's rueful wisdom. Among the highlights: an exquisitely torchy, bluesy reading of Harold Arlen and Ted Koehler's "Ill Wind" with a lyrical trumpet turn by Henderson; an uptempo, deeply swinging version of Duke Ellington's "Prelude To A Kiss"; and Alec Wilder's immortal ode to the fleeting joys of youth, "While We're Young." In the latter, Stallings makes a minor, but telling, modification to the title phrase that utterly changes the song's perspective, turning it into a wistful and moving reminiscence: "Songs were made to sing while you're young/ Every day is spring while you're young."

—Allen Morrison

Songs Were Made To Sing: Stolen Moments; Lover Man; Blue Monk; Ill Wind; While We're Young; Lady Bird; When I Close My Eyes; Prelude To A Kiss; Third Time Is The Charm; Round Midnight; Soul Mates; Give Me The Simple Life; Sugar. (67:37)

Personnel: Mary Stallings, vocals; Eddie Henderson, trumpet; Vincent Herring, alto saxophone, tenor saxophone; David Hazeltine, piano; David "Happy" Williams, bass; Joe Farnsworth, drums; Daniel Sadownick, percussion (2,6).

Ordering info: smokesessionsrecords.com



Eric Alexander
Leap Of Faith
 GIANT STEP ARTS 003

★★★★½

Eric Alexander has established an impressive career as one of today's most solid post-hard-bop torchbearers. His extensive discography admirably showcases his improvisational prowess on the tenor saxophone, his indisputable command of modern bop's vocabulary and his respect for the idiom's lodestars (mostly through his longstanding work with pianist Harold Mabern).

The idea of Alexander being an adventurer who'll sometimes explore the outer reaches of modern jazz seldom pops up in people's minds. That might change, though, with his absorbing new disc, *Leap Of Faith*.

As the title suggests, the bandleader forgoes a little of his safety net by soaring inside a piano-less trio (except for one track where the bandleader adds piano). The lack of harmonic support certainly frees him up and allows listeners a greater sense of his combustible tone, aggressive rhythmic attack and near-flawless sense of melodically cogent improvisations.

While there's nothing on *Leap Of Faith* that immediately recalls Albert Ayler or Archie Shepp, this is Alexander at his most avant-garde. Captured live in August 2018 at New York's Jazz Gallery, drummer Johnathan Blake and bassist Doug Weiss create protean spaces for Alexander to roam freely, as well as prompting him to engage in more discreet interplay.

Shades of John Coltrane and George Coleman never are far away when Alexander plays. Influence of the former, though, seems more apparent on *Leap Of Faith*, particularly in some of Alexander's corkscrew passages, searing wails, atonal cries and barreling velocity. The most obvious illustration of

Coltrane's towering influence on the disc is the 13-minute closer, "Second Impression," a genre-deflecting homage to Trane's "Impressions."

But Alexander jumps the furthest from his usual template on the probing "Magyar," a silhouetting duet with Weiss' haunting arco bass lines, and on "Frenzy" as his saxophone lines dart across the terrain, marked by rumbling bass and plowing drums. Even after the rhythm section establishes a hard-swinging forward momentum, a sense of devilish agitation prevails. Then there's the glowing "Mars," a slow-moving piece that ebbs and flows with the spiritualized tension and release of a Baptist minister.

The best moments on *Leap Of Faith* occur on the ballads. Alexander's "Big Richard" is simply a thing of modern jazz beauty as he unravels a luxurious melody across Blake's subtle brushstrokes and Weiss' sauntering bass counterpoint. Alexander also stuns on the reflective "Corazon Perdido," during which he plays brief antiphonic interjections on piano alongside a billowing melody atop Blake's evocative tom work. —*John Murph*

Leap Of Faith: Luquitas; Mars; Corazon Perdido; Hard Blues; Frenzy; Big Richard; Magyar; Second Impression. (57:12)
Personnel: Eric Alexander, tenor saxophone, piano (3); Doug Weiss, bass; Johnathan Blake, drums.

Ordering info: giantsteparts.org

The Vampires
Pacifica

EARSHIFT 026

★★★★★

Those unfamiliar with this Australian band might wonder about the origin of its name. But the mystery's quickly resolved with a cursory listen: the utilization of an array of interesting ostinato bass patterns by Sydney native and current Los Angeles stalwart Alex Boneham, buoyed by Alex Masso's crisp grooves, and overlaid with spacious melodies and harmonies from trumpeter Nick Garbett and saxophonist, label-runner and otherwise alpha-bat Jeremy Rose.

In a head-bopping nod to the obvious, The Vampires play vamps. Yet, these are no ordinary vamps. Written and improvised melodies are beautiful and flawless, and the harmonies between the three voices (woodwinds, brass, bass) ring with pitch-perfect sonority. There is a sublime pacing to each of the tunes here, with strategic shifts in texture, tonality, rhythm or intensity twisting the narrative of each hypnotic groove into an ever-unfolding and irresistible arc. For the most part, the band sticks to its chordless quartet and judicious use of long-tail reverb. Yet, The Vampires' greatest appeal is how it manages to be artful, not haughty. Unlike the band's namesake, these killer players won't put listeners in mortal peril, choosing instead to slay with impeccable wit and relentless congeniality. —*Gary Fukushima*



Pacifica: Tofik; Little Mountain; Don Pacifico; The View From Fez; Liberty?; West Mass; Numer Domu 66; Lahinch; Annica; Overnight; Aeon; Adrianek; Vampage; Little Dip. (44:45)
Personnel: Jeremy Rose, saxophone, bass clarinet, piano; Nick Garbett, trumpet; Alex Boneham, bass, electric bass; Alex Masso, drums, percussion.

Ordering info: earshift.com

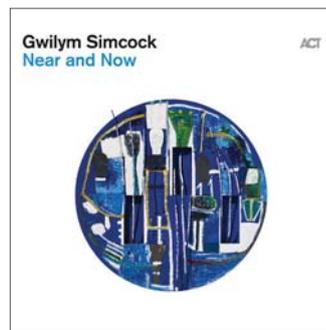
Gwilym Simcock
Near And Now

ACT 9883

★★★★½

Pianist Gwilym Simcock regularly can be seen on international stages, touring as part of Pat Metheny's quartet. But he sounds stronger by himself at his Berlin home, where he recorded this self-produced second solo album, blending modern chamber music's compositional techniques with quick-thinking improvisation.

Part of what makes Simcock's approach so distinctive is how he can bring such a broad scope to the keyboard, but then segue into gentle movements in ways that never sound abrupt or obvious. His tone and dynamics are especially assertive on the two three-part suites, "Beautiful Is Our Moment (For Billy Childs)" and "Many Worlds Away (For Egberto Gismonti)," being built up from a series of contrasts. On "Our Moment," he plays heavy and light passages off one another, as well as dark rumbling chords and lighter high-note lines. The pianist outwardly honors his heroes through each piece's dedications, connections sometimes vividly being made between his work and theirs. But then Simcock takes singular turns during his improvisations, including emphasizing blues phrases and repeating single-note, low-register lines. Ultimately, these tributes serve more as touchstones than reflections, since Simcock produces a sound that's his alone. —*Aaron Cohen*



Near And Now: Beautiful Is Our Moment (For Billy Childs), Parts I–III; Before The Elegant Hour (For Brad Mehldau); You're My You (For Les Chisnall); Inveraray Air (For Russell Ferrante); Many Worlds Away (For Egberto Gismonti), Parts I–III. (58:53)

Personnel: Gwilym Simcock, piano.

Ordering info: actmusic.com

Trios, the Fulcrum of Sound

Traditionally, but with clear exceptions, the success of a jazz performance depends on the three musicians at the fulcrum of the sound—the pianist, bassist and drummer. Whether as a standalone group or a rhythm section for a larger band, this unit conveys the values that the composing mind holds dear.

Nowhere are these values more starkly apparent than in a discrete, three-person ensemble. Through his eponymous trio, for instance, pianist Ahmad Jamal introduced the notion of sound quality over quantity, turning away from the speedy, complex bebop riffing of his day. Later, Bill Evans refined the trio sound, setting a new standard for small jazz ensembles. And today, contemporary groups like The Bad Plus push the tradition one step further with its use of modern jazz idioms and popular music sources.

Drawing inspiration and ideas from precedents like these, several jazz trios have released albums that add new dimensions to the format. Each of these groups—all piano-based, though not necessarily piano-led—speak with a unique, commanding voice.

On drummer **Jeff Williams's** fifth record for Whirlwind, **Bloom (4737; 60:28 ★★★½)**, he joins with bassist Michael Formanek (a longtime colleague) and pianist Carmen Staaf to turn out 10 originals and one standards redux. On the record, the group crackles with energy, thanks to Williams' flinty playing, Staaf's inventive chord changes and Formanek's deep feeling. To hear how assertively the trio tackles a groove, listen to Williams' "Scrunge/Search Me" with its insistent 7/8 pulse. For straight-up improvisation and melodicism, check out Staaf's blues tune, "New York Landing." Then chase all of this down with Formanek's "Ballad Of The Weak," the most contemplative piece of the lot.

Ordering info: whirlwindrecordings.com

The Tel Aviv group **Shalosh**—which means "three" in Hebrew—works as a collective, sans leader. Its latest album, **Onwards And Upwards (ACT 9885; 66:20 ★★★½)**, displays a similarly inclusive attitude toward style—its repertoire draws on diverse sources from the worlds of rock, classical and world music. This eclecticism plays out intriguingly in their work. Pianist Gadi Stern, bassist David Michaeli and drummer Matan Assayag give as much attention to form and building tension as their rock and classical brethren, but don't sacrifice improvisatory ethos.

Ordering info: actmusic.com

As the translation of its title implies, **Guillaume Cherpitel Trio's Choc (Self Release; 52:39 ★★★)** is about disrupting



VEGARD MELLESDAL BYE

the complacent. On *Choc* ("shock" in English), French pianist Cherpitel and his modern jazz trio barely pause for breath as they cycle through a decade's worth of original compositions.

Throughout the album, Cherpitel impels his trio in relentless movement—sometimes electric, sometimes rolling, but always forward. While he revels in stunningly symmetrical comping, drummer Alexandre Ambroziak and bassist Jean-Luc Déat provide some syncopated contrast.

Ordering information: guillaume-cherpitel.com

The aptly named **Briotrio** (drummer Arne Skørpe Sjøen, pianist Ingrid Øygard Steinkopf and bassist Thomas Linde Lossius) positively sparkles on its debut release, **Briotrio (AMP 36; 46:55 ★★★)**. The recently formed acoustic group, based in Bergen, Norway, gravitates toward light, cool swing and amusing stories—this record contains not one somber moment.

The upbeat, simply stated "Første Vals" pokes fun in 3/4 time; "Kor E Du?" bounces with a Latin vibe; and the unexplained "???" shows off the players' well-honed ensemble skills. In a word: charming.

Ordering information: ampmusicrecords.com

At 150 recordings strong, pianist **Bill Mays** had no shortage of material for last year's Celebration of the Arts festival in Delaware Water Gap, Pennsylvania. The live recording from that gig, **Live At COTA (No Blooze 3; 55:45 ★★★)**, reunites Mays with bassist Martin Wind and drummer Matt Wilson for their first trio release in a decade.

As hard-swinging as ever, the three players can displace atoms with their combined fire. They made room for some poignant homages, though: "Goodbye, Mr. Evans," for Bill Evans; "Sun Of The East" for pianist/composer Lennie Tristano; and "Nothing Like You" for pianist/composer Bob Dorough. **DB**

Ordering info: billmays.net



Masha Art & LRK Trio *Anesthesia*

LOSEN 217

★★★★

The last song on Masha Art & LRK Trio's *Anesthesia* carries the title "Into The Sea (RIP My Sister Anya)." Those mourners among us, forever marked by some private tragedy, might recognize in the song's denouement the language of disconsolate grief. Above a wash of rolling percussion and listing bass, pianist Evgeny Lebedev interlaces a soaring major-scale harmony with its inverse. For a brief moment, bright hopeful chords clash against discordant chaos until the album closes with the low hum of abandoned strings vacantly vibrating.

It's a dramatic moment on the group's third release, its first widely available outside Russia. The album, for the most part, offers listeners the opportunity to hear a tightknit group nail saxophonist and bandleader Masha Art's compelling compositions. However, Lebedev's contributions stand out. Like "Into the Sea," "Painless" displays his uncanny ability to render emotions that, on impact, feel almost painfully personal. It opens with a slow, staccato refrain. Art goes first, articulating notes purposefully, letting them resonate. Her solo luxuriates in the song's melancholy. Lebedev follows and opens with a few expansive chords before charting a simple melody that unfolds with the logic of a folksong or a lullaby. Then, as Ignat Kravstov's percussion tightens around him, he reveals these grey-washed, pastoral chords. They arrive like the previous melody's solemn shadow.

The writing and performances on *Anesthesia* make it worth a listen, but Lebedev's contributions make it an even rarer find. It's an album with a lot to say, but even more to show.

—Andrew Jones

Anesthesia: Flow; Lavanda's Dream (Dedicated To My Dog); 8th Of November; Trees Speech; Painless; Take Him; Into The Sea (RIP My Sister Anya). (36:10)

Personnel: Masha Art, alto saxophone; Evgeny Lebedev, piano; Anton Revnyuk, bass; Ignat Kravstov, drums, metalophone; Maria Kulakova, harp (1, 2, 5–7).

Ordering info: losenrecords.no

Matt Slocum

Sanctuary

SUNNYSIDE 1574

★★★★

Matt Slocum has been building a rep on the New York scene during the past decade. And on *Sanctuary*, his fifth leader date, Slocum joins bassist Larry Grenadier and the refined and swinging pianist Gerald Clayton, his onetime USC classmate and frequent collaborator. A musical drummer rather than a chopsy basher, Slocum underscores the proceedings with a deftly understated yet highly interactive touch in the spirit of Roy Haynes' conversational playing on Chick Corea's 1968 *Now He Sings, Now He Sobs*.

Sanctuary kicks off with what sounds like an outtake from Grenadier's recent solo bass outing, *The Gleaner*. A minute into his solo-bass excursion on the intimate waltz-time opener, "Romulus," pianist Clayton enters gracefully as Slocum sets the tone with delicate brushwork. The trio's treatment of this poignant Sufjan Stevens melody recalls the way Keith Jarrett's Standards Trio treats Gershwin, Kern, Porter or Berlin—alluding to the melody while exploring its unique group-think.

Slocum's simmering rhythmic presence fuels some adventurous stretching by Clayton and Grenadier on "Consolation Prize," the drummer's swinging contrafact of Irving Berlin's "The



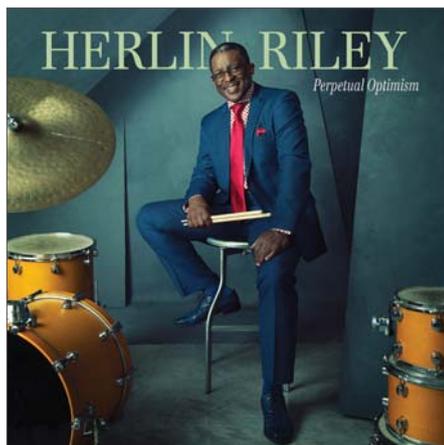
Best Thing For You," while his gift for composing affecting melodies comes across on the lovely "Aspen Island" (based on Chopin's "Prelude In E-Minor") and his relaxed brushes ballad, "Star Prairie." The jaunty swinger "Days Of Peace" showcases some animated call-and-response between drums and bass, and Slocum's penchant for probing darker terrain is represented by sparse rubato number "A Dissolving Alliance." An exceptional outing.

—Bill Milkowski

Sanctuary: Romulus; Consolation Prize; Aspen Island; Star Prairie; A Dissolving Alliance; Days Of Peace; Sanctuary; Anselmo. (42:07)

Personnel: Matt Slocum, drums; Gerald Clayton, piano; Larry Grenadier, bass.

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com



Herlin Riley

Perpetual Optimism

MACK AVENUE 1136

★★★½

A sumptuous gumbo of melody and rhythm underscores drummer Herlin Riley's *Perpetual Optimism*, an album that, for the most part, can be heard as an encore to the group's initial offering, *New Direction*.

On most of the tunes here, Bruce Harris' trumpet is spicy and spikey, and when it blends with Godwin Louis' carefully and soulful-phrased tonality on alto saxophone, a pleas-

ant and comforting calm is exuded, something that's clearly evident on "Be There When I Get There."

By the time the ensemble arrives at "Borders Without Lines," Riley takes charge and the reputation he earned during those days in the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra is showcased: An extended solo with a variety of shifting tempi finds the bandleader moving effortlessly from drum to drum. He's a master time-keeper and grooves here—and elsewhere—with an innate gift for improvisation. His vocal skills surface, too, on Willie Dixon's "Wang Dang Doodle" and during a little rap repartee on "Twelve's It."

Pianist Emmet Cohen brilliantly illuminates "Stella By Starlight," and his tender transparency is all bassist Russell Hall needs to give the timeless standard a fresh veneer. Of course, Riley's brushwork provides the finishing touches.

What's immediately obvious with this recording is that calls will follow for another session or two, so that the quintet can hone the tones, and rather than filing them down, sharpen their edges.

—Herb Boyd

Perpetual Optimism: Rush Hour; Be There When I Get There; Borders Without Lines; You Don't Know What Love Is; Perpetual Optimism; Touched; Wings And Roots; Wang Dang Doodle; Stella By Starlight; Twelve's It. (60:18)

Personnel: Herlin Riley, drums, vocals; Emmet Cohen, piano; Godwin Louis, alto saxophone; Bruce Harris, trumpet; Russell Hall, bass.

Ordering info: mackavenue.com



Ralph Moore – Three Score

Ralph Moore – Tenor Sax

Eric Reed – Piano

Gerald Cannon – Bass

Willie Jones III – Drums



Justin Robinson – At First Light

Justin Robinson – Alto Sax

Sharp Radway – Piano

Ameen Saleem – Bass

Jeremy 'Bean' Clemons – Drums



Rick Germanson – Turquoise Twice

Rick Germanson – Piano

Gerald Cannon – Bass

Willie Jones III – Drums



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Decades of Pain, Pleasure

Mitch Woods, *A Tip Of The Hat To Fats* (Blind Pig 5170; 40:36 ★★★★★) Woods holds court as one of the leading exponents of New Orleans r&b-blues piano, even though he doesn't have a permanent address in the Crescent City. (He hangs his Panama hat in San Francisco when not touring the world or visiting Louisiana.) Saluting Fats Domino and Professor Longhair on his new release, Woods pounds the 88s to high heaven in front of an approving crowd at last year's New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival. Yet, no matter how ecstatic he gets with all those triplets and boogie patterns, Woods retains the control of a master. As a singer, his robust voice and strutting, confident style project the lyrics of, for example, "Crawfishin'" and "Jambalaya." The hand-picked local band, brimming with joyful pleasure, includes saxophonists Roger Lewis (Dirty Dozen Brass Band) and Amadee Castenell. Mitch is no Fats, of course, but he's tons of fun.

Ordering info: blindpigrecords.com

The Texas Horns, *Get Here Quick* (Severn 0075; 51:35 ★★★½) Presenting just its second album since forming as an Austin-based band in the mid-1990s, Mark "Kaz" Kazanoff (tenor saxophone), John Mills (baritone saxophone) and Al Gomez (trumpet) render a specialized synthesis of Lone Star State blues, Southern soul and jazz. The band soulfully imprints its musical personality on 10 originals (five of them spirited instrumentals) and on two by renowned tunesmith Gary Nicholson (the Texan sings both, decently). One standout is Mills' "Guitar Town," with Gary Forsyth applying tender strength to his task of singing. Another is "Sundown Talkin'," in which the excellent vocalist Curtis Salgado, recorded remotely from Oregon, reaches the light/dark emotional core of the Mills opus.

Ordering info: severnrecords.com

Kenny "Beedy Eyes" Smith & The House Bumpers, *Drop The Hammer* (Big Eye 0005; 51:17 ★★) Drummer Smith has one foot in modern blues and the other planted in the classic Chicago style championed by his father, "Big Eyes" Willie, of Muddy Waters Band fame. Disappointingly, Smith's album is of limited interest, more tedious than intriguing. The bandleader's voice lacks nuances of tone and provides few sparks of expression. The tunes are lightweight, so even skillful playing by Smith, guitarist Billy Flynn and other Chicagoans isn't enough.

Ordering info: bigeyerrecords.com

Big Daddy Wilson, *Deep In My Soul* (Ruf 1259; 44:34 ★★★★★) Based in Germany the past quarter century, Wilson only recently returned to the South to make his first



Big Daddy Wilson

American album, produced by Jim Gaines in Memphis and Muscle Shoals' FAME Studios. He sings the words of soul-blues songs with a warm tone, refined phrasing, good diction and an emphasis on natural, levelheaded expression. This graybeard has duende, a rare cool. Simpatico support, especially at medium tempos, comes from Bay Area guitarist Laura Chavez and first-call Memphis studio regulars.

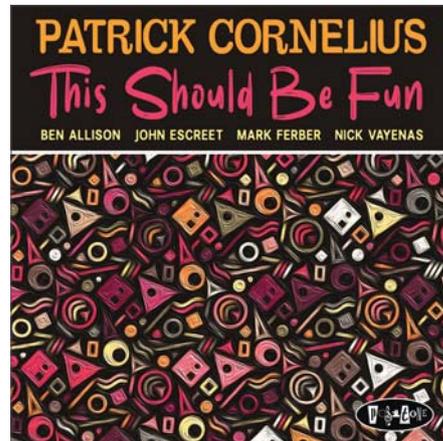
Ordering info: rufrecords.de

Bob Corritore & Friends, *Do The Hip-Shake Baby!* (SWMAF 13; 49:26 ★★★★★) The 14th entry in Corritore's discography finds him in the company of 40 friends from around the country at eight sessions held during the past three years. Funneling a deep sense of blues harmonica history into his music, while getting the right mix of bravura and steadiness, is second nature to this Arizonian. Whether in party-hearty or downhearted moods, Corritore and various groupings of friends knock the dust off well-selected old r&b and blues numbers, like Jimmy Reed's "Bitter Seed" and Hank Ballard's "The Twist." Not pretending to be a singer, Corritore counts on legit vocal practitioners Alabama Mike, Mighty Joe Milsap and, among others, Sugaray Rayford. The latter unleashes a ferocity worthy of Howlin' Wolf on "Keep The Lord On With You," a profane Rayford "prayer."

Ordering info: swmaf.org

Yola, *Walk Through Fire* (Easy Eye Sound 008; 41:17 ★★★½) On her debut, the ironclad honesty of Yola's outstanding voice connects lyrics on heartache to her largeness of spirit. The Brit's singing has the personalization and emotional intensity of a fine blues singer, even as producer Dan Auerbach points her in a neo-soul direction. Country music touches don't flatter her. **DB**

Ordering info: easyeyesound.com



Patrick Cornelius *This Should Be Fun*

POSI-TONE 8195

★★½

This Should Be Fun, the seventh leader date by alto saxophonist Patrick Cornelius, is a departure from his more recent work. The New York-based bandleader has spent the majority of his recording career navigating a vision of mainstream and modern jazz with a strong bop twist. And his most recent handful of records have been intriguing explorations into thematic works for large ensembles—like 2016's *While We're Still Young* by his octet.

This Should Be Fun finds Cornelius scaling back to a quartet, bolstered on half the tracks by longtime collaborator Nick Vayenas, a trombonist playing hard-bop in the vein of Art Blakey and his Jazz Messengers dating back to the 1950s and '60s, but updated with a bit more modern harmonic sense. Beyond that, there's the clear reverence for the bandleader and palpable enjoyment the performers here seem to get from playing these songs, the ensemble's giddy physicality almost audible in the undeniable bounce and swing of the title track and others like the penultimate "One Shy Of A Dozen." Even when the mood is less bubbly, there's still a jovial and noteworthy ease when the band slides into the rolling bop of "Telescope" or the Caribbean undertones of "Restless Willow." Cornelius' alto flies not-so-far overhead, sprightly and spirited, but still earthy and full in his preference of the horn's midrange.

All of this is to say that, yes, the record is fun. But *This Should Be Fun* almost can't help coming off that way; an amusing thought-experiment or a playful jam session among friends and colleagues.

It's clear that Cornelius and company do have fun playing this music, but they don't go much deeper than that. —Jackson Simmenberg

This Should Be Fun: Big Pictures; Leaving Paradise; This Should Be Fun; Precious Souls; Telescope; Dissolution; Restless Willow; Like Kenny; One Shy Of A Dozen; For Morgan. (57:34)

Personnel: Patrick Cornelius, alto saxophone; John Escreet, piano; Ben Allison, bass; Mark Ferber, drums; Nick Vayenas, trombone.

Ordering info: posi-tone.com



Karina Corradini *Bridge To Infinity*

SELF RELEASE

★★★★½

Before moving to Los Angeles in 1999, Karina Corradini already was one of the best-known jazz vocalists in Argentina, a regular at the top venues in Buenos Aires.

But she moved to Los Angeles to learn how to sing like Ella Fitzgerald, and on six of the tracks on *Bridge To Infinity*, she uses arrangements by Erich Bulling, the man who collaborated with Fitzgerald on *Ella Abraça Jobim*. The others were arranged by bassist Christian McBride, who co-produced the record with Corradini. While the singer leaves plenty of room for the backing band to stretch out, it's her vocal presence that captures listeners' attention.

She plays with tempo on "Until I Met You (Corner Pocket)," singing new lyrics and adding grace notes that stretch and compress the words to make them dance over Mahesh Balasooriya's mischievous piano. "What A Difference A Day Makes" becomes a bolero, with Corradini whispering several verses in Spanish, as Munyungo Jackson adds percussion accents. Corradini sings "Doralice," Dorival Caymmi's tale of hopeless love, in Portuguese, against a gentle bossa nova pulse. Midway through the take, the tempo accelerates and her vocals turn the lyrics into a celebration, happy to be leaving the doomed relationship behind.

The set closes with a wild, double-time reading of "Lover, Come Back to Me," McBride and drummer Marvin "Smitty" Smith sending the beat into overdrive. Corradini's vocals swing just as hard, breaking the melody into staccato fragments that match Zane Musa's blazing saxophone solo with their animated power. —*j. poet*

Bridge To Infinity: You Turned The Tables On Me; All Of You; What A Difference A Day Makes; Like Someone In Love; I Could Have Told You; I'm Gonna Lock My Heart (And Throw Away The Key); Doralice; Cai Dentro; If You Went Away (Preciso Aprender A Ser Só); Você E Eu (You And I); É Com Esse Que Eu Vou; Tu Mi Delirio; Until I Met You (Corner Pocket); When The Time Is Right; Lover, Come Back To Me. (64:41)

Personnel: Karina Corradini, vocals; Mahesh Balasooriya, piano; Christian McBride, Rene Camacho (2–4, 5, 10, 13), bass; Marvin "Smitty" Smith, drums; Munyungo Jackson, percussion; Zane Musa, saxophone; Nolan Shaheed, trumpet.

Ordering info: karinacorradini.com

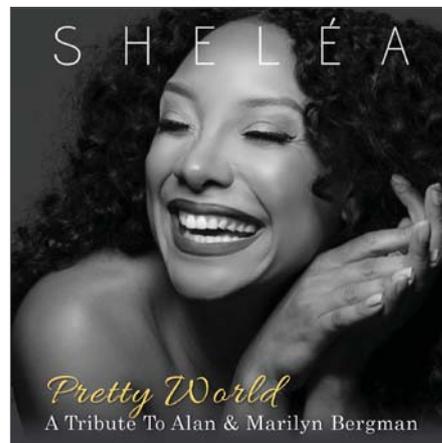
Sheléa *Pretty World: A Tribute To Alan & Marilyn Bergman*

BREATH OF LIFE/BUNGALO 2018015

★★★★½

Base a first impression of Sheléa on the sonic aesthetic of her sophomore album, *Pretty World*, and it'd be understandable to think of '90s r&b artists like Whitney Houston or Janet Jackson. When modest Rhodes swings with Sheléa's carefree, confident delivery, the expectation of bold singing akin to these icons only grows.

Yet, the connection dissipates as *Pretty World* reveals a variety of tones, rhythms and careful arrangements that lean toward soulful gospel ("Love Makes The Changes"), swinging jazz fit for an intimate lounge ("Make Me Rainbows") and showtunes best suited to the soundtracks of classic Disney fare ("What Are You Doing The Rest Of Your Life"). Resonance with Disney's love-laden musical repertoire isn't entirely surprising, given the creative legacies of songwriters Alan and Marilyn Bergman. Their song selections for Sheléa here include the likes of an emotive Ennio Morricone ballad and the orchestrally lavish confessional "Will Someone Ever Look At Me That Way." That said, Sheléa is able to disguise the common time signature of "Like A Lover" with the subtlest vocal actions, accent-



ing lyrics on various fourth beats of the chorus to create an unexpected rhythmic pull.

Ceding control of song selections won't immediately reveal artistic identity, but Sheléa's performances here still make *Pretty World* plenty worth listening to. —*Kira Grunenberg*

Pretty World: A Tribute To Alan & Marilyn Bergman: *Pretty World*; Like A Lover; Will Someone Ever Look At Me That Way; What Are You Doing The Rest Of Your Life; Make Me Rainbows; Love Makes The Changes; I Knew I Loved You; Moonlight; I Won't Believe My Eyes; You're Not Alone; The Easy Way. (39:34)

Personnel: Sheléa, Stevie Mackey (7), vocals; Reggie Hamilton, bass; Gary Novak, drums; Eric Jackson (1), Ramon Stagnaro (2), Robert "Chalo" Ortiz (6), guitar; Raul Ferrando, strings (1); Kirk Wahlum (8), Brandon Fields, saxophone (4); Marcus Hodge (6), organ; Faus to Cuevas III (8), percussion; Justin Wilson (2, 6, 8), Alan Steinberg (9), Greg Phillinganes (11), piano; Stevie Wonder, harmonica (1).

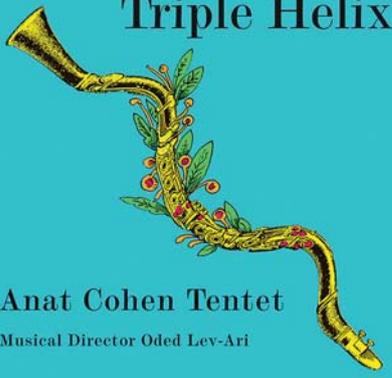
Ordering info: sheleamusic.com

Anat Cohen Tentet

"...a musician transformed."
 "...a meticulously composed score...a work of considerable expressive reach"
 - *Chicago Tribune*



Triple Helix



Anat Cohen Tentet
Musical Director Oded Lev-Ari

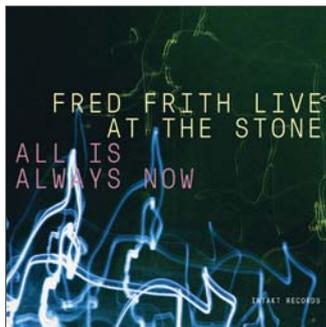
Coming Out 6/14
anatcohen.com

Fred Frith *Live At The Stone: All Is Always Now*

INTAKT 320

★★★★

Duos, trios and one quartet are featured on this retrospective sampling of 2006–2016 performances by guitarist Fred Frith at iconic New York venue The Stone. It's an understatement to say that there's a lot to process on this three-disc set, and as with any endeavor, some pieces will mesmerize or delight more than others. The entirety of the program falls under the free improvisation banner with textures, colors, tones and pitches at the heart of most of the pieces; electronics and effects dominate. Normal, Frith's duo with junk master Sudhu Tewari, churns out disturbing soundscapes; and "Identity Crisis" finds Jessica Lurie's lyrical saxophone added to a trio and pitted against Frith's liquefied guitar. Interestingly, collaborations with the best-known artists here usually are not as compelling. But there still are moments to savor, including the ominous "Slipping," which pairs Frith with avant-gardist Ikue Mori and trumpeter Nate Wooley. —Alain Drouot



Live At The Stone: All Is Always Now: Disc one: Another Ship Moves In; Identity Crisis; A Complicated Path; Strife And Soil; Limited Strike; Silver Lining; Slipping; World Of Grief And Doubt. Disc two: Concussion Suit; From The Backstretch; Shrug At Truth; Reasons To Dream; What Gets Left Behind; Like Animals; A Measure Of Solace. Disc three: Deter And Degrade; Of Finest Silver; Veils; Held Again; Flare; Hero Of The Space Age; Devoted To A Failed Approach; Evidence. (66.47/65.28/66.32)

Personnel: Fred Frith, electric guitar, acoustic guitar, piano, vocals; Laurie Anderson, violin, keyboards, electronics; Amma Ateria, Ikue Mori, electronics; Sylvie Courvoisier, Annie Lewandowski, Else Olsen Storesund, piano; Nava Dunkelman, percussion; Jordan Glenn, drums; Shelley Hirsch, Clara Weil, vocals; Jason Hoopes, bass, electric bass; Jessica Lurie, Evan Parker, saxophone; Miya Masaoka, koto, electronics; Pauline Oliveros, accordion; Gyan Riley, electric guitar; Sudhu Tewari, recuperated junk; Theresa Wong, cello, vocals, electronics; Nate Wooley, trumpet.

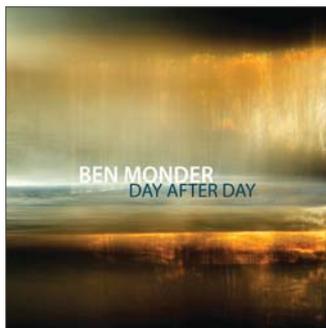
Ordering info: intaktrec.ch

Ben Monder *Day After Day*

SUNNYSIDE 1549

★★★★

The unpredictable Ben Monder delivers a double-disc set of covers, interspersing profundity and mischievous curveballs. The guitarist's wide breadth of sources almost is amusing: Jazz standards sit alongside an Olivier Messiaen choral interpretation, and numbers by Bob Dylan and The Carpenters. But the breathtaking solo set is the gem here. Overflowing with ideas, the predominant tone is meditative and ethereal, colored by Monder's bold soloing. A highlight is "Emily," where Monder employs his astonishingly independent finger-picking technique, creating restless, layered counterpoints beneath the gently stated melody. A seismic shift begins to rumble on disc two, beginning with Jimmy Webb's "Galveston," when bassist Matt Brewer and drummer Ted Poor groove in a satisfying, stripped-down backbeat. By mid-tune, the troupe abruptly erupts into distorted power-trio mode for some well-placed shredding. But after things seem to get cozy during the easy bounce of Bread's "The Guitar Man," Monder closes the disc with an utterly unrecognizable take on Badfinger's "Day After Day," reimaged as drone metal. It's a rewarding roller coaster, one best experienced in sequence. —Jeff Potter



Day After Day: Disc one: Dreamsville; Emily; O Sacrum Convivium; My One And Only Love; The Windows Of The World; Never Let Me Go; The Midnight Sun Will Never Set. Disc two: Galveston; Dust; Long, Long, Long; The Guitar Man; Goldfinger; Only Yesterday; Just Like A Woman; Day After Day. (45.11/50.54)

Personnel: Ben Monder, electric guitar, acoustic guitar, Matt Brewer (Disc two: 1, 2, 4–7), bass, electric bass; Ted Poor (Disc two: 1–7), drums.

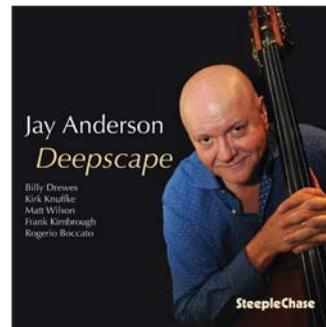
Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com

Jay Anderson *Deepscape*

STEEPLECHASE 31870

★★★★½

Humility isn't a quality jazz musicians tend to exhibit, encouraged as they are to show off their chops or push their way into the spotlight with a solo. That's what makes Jay Anderson's latest album such a rare and precious thing. The bassist spends the entirety of the liner notes heaping praise upon the players who join him here and those who've helped him along the way. His humbleness extends to the performances, and on the pair of solo bass tunes featured here. The title track is dominated by melodic drones and squalls with the main melody bouncing into view with calm restraint. And his take on Billy Joel's "And So It Goes" is serene, making great use of the creak and groan of his instrument. When the rest of his ensemble arrives, Anderson happily resides in the shadows, throwing in details and shadings that bring a sense of wholeness to the sonic picture they're creating. That's especially remarkable on "Tennessee Waltz," a country standard played as a duet with Frank Kimbrough on harmonium. Even as Anderson takes the lead, he finds a way to drift into the ether, comforted by the decades-old melody. In aiming to be little on an album that bears his name, Anderson becomes great. —Robert Ham



Deepscape: Deepscape; Shades Of Jazz; Rothko Chapel (5th Movement); Southern Smiles; And So It Goes; Time Of The Barracudas; Sweet And Lovely; Momentum; Witchi-Tai-To; The Mighty Sword; Tennessee Waltz. (60:59)

Personnel: Jay Anderson, bass, Tibetan singing bowl (3); Billy Drewes, alto saxophone, soprano saxophone, bass clarinet; Kirk Knuffke, cornet; Matt Wilson, drums; Frank Kimbrough, harmonium (3, 9, 11); Rogerio Boccatto, percussion (3, 6, 7, 9).

Ordering info: steeplechase.dk

Shauli Einav *Animi*

BERTHOLD/OUTSIDE IN

★★★★½

The instrumentation on Shauli Einav's *Animi*, his sixth album as a leader, might put you in mind of Dave Holland's quintet, which features the unique combination of saxophone, trombone, vibraphone, bass and drums. Einav doesn't exactly descend from the bassist's aesthetic lineage—he seems less interested in repeated vamps and slick polyrhythms—but seems to have borrowed from Holland in at least one way: He treats the band as if it were its own instrument.

The record's an exercise in smartly arranged group interplay, and Einav, who plays soprano and tenor, takes advantage of the opportunity to create interesting new sounds and textures. Drummer Guilhem Flouzat and bassist Yoni Zelnik keep the music lively with elastic rhythms, but the voicings stand out the most. On "Premonition" and "Pathways," saxophone, trombone and vibes all state the quick, twisting melodies in unison—an inspired layering of sound. And while this is Einav's first album with a vibraphonist, Tim Collins doesn't disappoint. His splashy chordal accompaniment sometimes recalls Bobby Hutcherson, but for the most part his touch is distinctly his own—crisp and with a short decay. Across *Animi*, Einav has created a sturdy group sound, and hopefully he'll explore it further on future albums. —Matthew Kassel



Animi: Premonition; Pathways; Dodo; Hasela Ha'Adom; One Step Up; Kumzits; Si Lu; Cod Attack; Circadian Mishap; Healer Sue; Awake. (61:29)

Personnel: Shauli Einav, tenor saxophone, soprano saxophone; Andy Hunter, trombone; Tim Collins, vibraphone; Yoni Zelnik, bass; Guilhem Flouzat, drums; Fayçal Salhi, oud (5).

Ordering info: berthold-records.de; outsideinmusic.com

Ed Partyka Jazz Orchestra *In The Tradition*

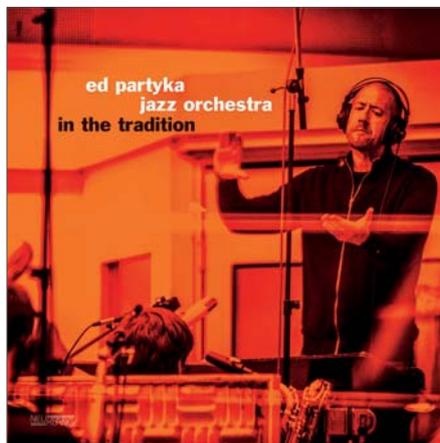
NEUKLANG 4181

★★★★★

Originally from Chicago, multi-instrumentalist Ed Partyka has been based in Europe since the early 1990s, and has contributed to recordings by Lalo Schifrin, Bob Brookmeyer's New Art Orchestra and Carla Bley. He's also led his own orchestra since 2007 and chairs the Jazz Institute in Graz, Austria. Although Brookmeyer was his mentor, Partyka's writing is more conventional than the elder's classical-inspired later work. And on *In The Tradition*, Partyka's six charts often feature dense and crowded works played by the 11 brass, six reeds and three rhythm musicians.

The music always swings.

"Charlie Chan" opens the set with shouts from the ensemble, some drum breaks and a tenor solo over the band's stop-time rhythm. The momentum never slows during the trumpet, trombone and tenor improvisations; unfortunately, the soloists go unidentified. "Photographs" features singer Julia Oschewsky, whose voice Partyka surrounds with picturesque colors. "Sophisticated Lady" shows off the leader's writing at its best, with the French horn playing the melody and an altoist soloing over brass backing. Partyka's "Trouble & Woe" has a soulful and infectious theme that the



Don Ellis or Buddy Rich orchestras (circa 1970) could have a fun time with. Oschewsky returns for a rousing rendition of "The Great City," and the program closes with "3 O'Clock Blues," a joyous lowdown piece with muted trumpet and preaching alto at the forefront. —*Scott Yanow*

In The Tradition: Charlie Chan; Photographs; Sophisticated Lady; Trouble & Woe; The Great City; 3 O'Clock Blues. (42:28)

Personnel: Ed Partyka, conductor; Felix Meyer, Benny Brown, Gerhard Ormig, Jörg Engels, Martin Auer, trumpet, flugelhorn; Simon Harrer, Lukas Wyss, trombone; Robert Hedemann, bass trombone; Jan Schreiner, bass trombone, tuba; Linus Bernoulli, French horn; Oliver Leicht, alto saxophone, flute, clarinet, alto clarinet; Florian Trübsbach, alto saxophone, alto clarinet; Malte Schiller, tenor saxophone, clarinet; Florian Leuschner, baritone saxophone, bass clarinet; Katharina Thomsen, baritone saxophone, bass saxophone, bass clarinet, contrabass clarinet; Kirsty Wilson (2), English horn; Hendrik Soll, piano; Paul Imm, bass; Reinhold Schmöler, drums; Julia Oschewsky, vocals.

Ordering info: neuklangrecords.de

On softer tracks like "Mixed Blessing" and "Christiania," the combination of fingerpicked guitar and Santiago Arias' bandoneon can feel like dinner music at a sidewalk café. Other pieces, like "Étude" and "Bicycle," have an intensity almost worthy of a rock band. Mike Lindup's synths are mostly in the background, though he does take a brief, progish solo on "Bicycle." On the two-minute "La Petite Reine," Manu Katché's toms seem to come up from the core of the earth, booming under a delicately plucked guitar figure, and on "Ombu," his playing is slow and patient, but at times positively thunderous. The piece breaks down into something that's not quite a drum solo, but definitely puts him in the lead spot, with the band responding to his phrasing. As it all winds down, bassist Nicholas Fiszman heads into a dub zone, locking in with Katché for a deep, but tantalizingly short, groove passage.

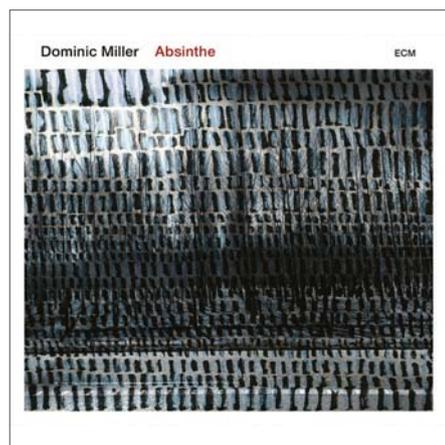
It's doubtful that Miller's looking to give up that Sting gig anytime soon in favor of stepping out on his own full-time, but an album as strong as *Absinthe* makes it clear that he could.

—*Philip Freeman*

Absinthe: Absinthe; Mixed Blessing; Verveine; La Petite Reine; Christiania; Étude; Bicycle; Ombu; Ténèbres; Saint Vincent. (41:44)

Personnel: Dominic Miller, guitar; Santiago Arias, bandoneon; Mike Lindup, keyboard; Nicholas Fiszman, bass; Manu Katché, drums.

Ordering info: ecmrecords.com



Dominic Miller *Absinthe*

ECM 2614

★★★★★

Argentine-born guitarist Dominic Miller is probably better known as a Sting sideman than a solo artist, though he has more than a dozen albums to his name.

His first ECM disc, 2017's *Silent Light*, primarily was a solo effort, with only a percussionist joining him on five of its 11 tracks. But for *Absinthe*, a collection of pieces that conjure all sorts of moods, Miller's assembled a full band.

ACT



Edmar Castañeda Grégoire Maret *Harp vs. Harp*

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Elkhorn Twists Psych, Folk

You might not think guitar music informed by the psychedelic '60s and folk traditions originating a century or more before that could offer anything new in 2019. But instrumental duo **Elkhorn** expands the genres with its latest pair of releases, *Sun Cycle* and *Elk Jam* (**Feeding Tube 425; 71:42 ★★★★★**).

The group, which is based in New York and Pennsylvania, is centered around the decades-long friendship between 12-string acoustic guitarist Jesse Sheppard and electric guitarist Drew Gardner, who began making music together as high school students in New Jersey. Gardner relocated to the West Coast after college, where he became enmeshed in San Francisco's free-jazz scene as a drummer, but reconnected with Sheppard when he moved back east in the late '90s.

In 2013, the pair started performing as Elkhorn, and in 2016 released a self-titled debut on the Beyond Beyond Is Beyond imprint. The material reflects the pair's mutual interests in a wide variety of styles, including American Primitive, roots, jazz, prog, classic rock and sundry international forms. Elkhorn merges these elements in open-ended arrangements grounded by Sheppard's acoustic rhythms and layered with guitar improvisations.

"We don't do pastiche," Gardner said. "We just have certain things we like and we respond to emotionally. And our way of getting a unique sound is based on just trying to play the most sincere thing that we can think of."

Elkhorn's music also is steeped in the intuition and trust borne from years of collaboration.

"The thing about playing with someone for a long time is that you actually don't think about it all that much," Sheppard continued. "You start to get to places where thinking is kind of secondary, and that's actually a very musical place."

In Elkhorn's case, it's also been a very fruitful place: the band followed its debut with 2017's *The Black River* and 2018's *Lionfish*, before heading into Black Dirt Studio in southwestern New York to record *Sun Cycle*—emerging with a double-disc set, instead of just a single album.

The bandmates described the session in terms similar to how they discuss their songwriting process: Start with loose structures and concepts, and see what naturally evolves.

"Experimentation is an intrinsic part of our music," Sheppard explained.

They invited fellow guitarist Willie Lane and percussionist Ryan Jewel to make guest appearances on *Sun Cycle*, and were



Jesse Sheppard and Drew Gardner

so pleased with the result, that once those four songs were complete, they decided to open things up to explore a group-based dynamic.

"There's a lot of improvisation throughout *Sun Cycle*, but some songs have different parts, where the sense of arrangement has been worked out over time, and we're getting into different areas we want to explore," Gardner said. "But we also have another side of us, where we like to spontaneously improvise, where there's no arrangement set beforehand, or it's minimal, like, 'Hey, let's do this mode' or 'Hey, let's switch from this to this,' and we compose as we're improvising. So, the tone of *Elk Jam* is kind of a folk-rock quartet, but also improvisation."

When the albums are played back to back, these two distinct approaches create a striking balance. Where the music on *Sun Cycle* is airy, deliberate and reflective, *Elk Jam* skews toward more full-bodied sounds and urgent pacing. And as far out as Elkhorn's experiments take them on either set of songs, there's always something familiar enough that practically any listener can find them appealing. ("Our moms like it," Gardner quipped.)

"When I was first listening back, I thought the improvised sessions were sort of like the darker sister of [*Sun Cycle*]," Sheppard said. "But over time, the way the material developed in my mind is sorta like 'left brain, right brain.' One doesn't stand above the other. They're equal—like two different ways of thinking about the same exact thing." **DB**

Ordering info: feedingtuberecords.com



Five Play Live From The Firehouse Stage

SELF RELEASE

★★★★½

Recorded at an upstate New York club dear to drummer and DIVA Jazz Orchestra founder Sherrie Maricle, the 10 tunes on *Live From The Firehouse Stage* are accessible, swinging and even surprising as the orchestra's rhythm section is joined by two soloists.

Bracketed by Maricle's roadhouse blues "T-Bone Special" and her "The Time Being," a bop-pish showcase for Janelle Reichman's tenor saxophone, the album also includes pianist Tomoko Ohno's dramatic "The Pilot," Reichman's balladic "Unexpected" and a heartfelt, improbably fresh take on "I Can't Give You Anything But Love." The group also updates Duke Ellington's rakish "Just Squeeze Me" with verve and just enough respect. But the originals are noteworthy, particularly bassist Noriko Ueda's "Uneven Pieces," a tune of shimmering power. Here, Maricle's cymbals lead to a sweet Reichman solo on a song that conjures a late-summer rain. Its voicings are supple, its melody inviting and ultimately triumphant as Reichman and trumpeter Jami Dauber wind it down. In a similar vein, "Nancy With The Laughing Face," a moody Jimmy Van Heusen character sketch, highlights Ohno's understated, but pointed, piano and Ueda's probing bass.

Five Play also can pour it on. Take Ohno's "Samba De Sorvete," which blasts from the start, distinguished by her toughest solo. Then Reichman's tenor enters in full wail, leading to a virtuosic Maricle turn replete with rimshot blasts. The band eventually restates the hard-bop melody, deconstructing it at the very end to give each soloist—including a downright percussive Ohno—one last shot.

—Carlo Wolff

Live From The Firehouse Stage: T-Bone Special; Samba De Sorvete; Just Squeeze Me; Uneven Pieces; The Pilot; Nancy With The Laughing Face; Circles; I Can't Give You Anything But Love; Unexpected; The Time Being. (67:23)

Personnel: Jami Dauber, trumpet, flugelhorn; Sherrie Maricle, drums; Tomoko Ohno, piano; Janelle Reichman, tenor saxophone, clarinet; Noriko Ueda, bass.

Ordering info: divajazz.com



Dann Zinn *Day Of Reckoning*

ORIGIN 82779

★★★★½

Day Of Reckoning is Dan Zinn's fifth album as a leader and lead it he certainly does. The reedist is very much at the forefront of this music, the band patter for his play.

There's a buoyancy to the music here, floating along with ease, the players seemingly having a good time. Most performances, though, are just warm, never scalding hot. "Continental Divide" gets enjoyably wild early on, until the tune shifts into a simpler gear, coasting like a straightahead tune that might even entice some smooth-jazz fans.

When Zack Ostroff takes his bass solo one-third of the way through the title track, it's a lively moment, but one that feels mathematically placed when contrasted with the rest of the recording. It's followed by a Taylor Eigsti solo, whose piano, too, seems carefully plotted on the penultimate song, "Don't Look Back," trading barbs back and forth with Zinn.

While the album offers glimpses of high-energy blowing, the vibe isn't exactly sustained across the entire 10-track offering. For the most part, *Day Of Reckoning* is pleasant, right down to its easygoing version of "Blame It On My Youth." Zinn has a clearly focused intent, a tight batch of compositions and collected the right folks to execute his ideas, giving the bandleader the backing necessary to shine.

Unfortunately, it also all feels too much like one man's ideas. And while there's no need to reinvent the wheel here, perhaps pulling more from the rest of the committee would have resulted in a more exceptional recording.

—Anthony Dean-Harris

Day Of Reckoning: Day Of Reckoning; Longing; Continental Divide; Blame It On My Youth; Brave New World; Family Reunion; Infinity Road; The Journey Home; Don't Look Back; Time's Up. (64:12)

Personnel: Dann Zinn, tenor saxophone, soprano saxophone, wood flute; Taylor Eigsti, piano; Zack Ostroff, bass; Mark Ferber, drums.

Ordering info: originarts.com

Cory Weeds Quintet *Live At Frankie's Jazz Club*

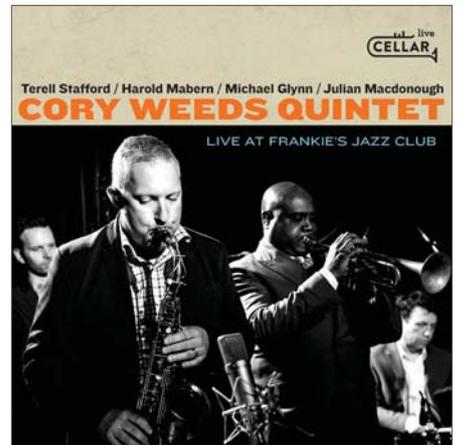
CELLAR LIVE 052618

★★★★

Hard-bop has proved remarkably resilient, outlasting nearly all of its 1950s-generation innovators and standard-bearers. Perhaps it's simply because hearing a well-constructed, soulful phrase come together never goes out of style. Certainly, the Vancouverite alto saxophonist Cory Weeds seems to have embraced that philosophy.

On *Live At Frankie's Jazz Club*, Weeds brings in a couple of ringers—trumpeter Terell Stafford and pianist Harold Mabern—to work with his stalwart rhythm section. As expected, they both add splendor to the music. Mabern is exquisite in both his extended intro and bells-like solo on the ballad "Fabienne"; the technical and imaginative brilliance of Stafford's six blues choruses on Lee Morgan's "Bluesanova" is jaw-dropping. But Weeds' hard-bop erudition rivals either of those two, and he's ready for them. Listening to his alto lines come together on "Mood Malody" or "Gypsy Blue" brings the pleasure of watching a master sculptor or craftsman at work.

There's a clear chemistry at play in this quintet, apparent in the deep-pocketed "Formidable" and "Up Tight's Creek." On both these



hard-chargers, the mutual respect of the three front-liners also is clear: After Weeds finishes on "Formidable," Stafford pauses, waiting for applause, then essentially picks up where the saxophonist left off. Weeds, meanwhile, doesn't try to follow the trumpeter's valediction on "Up Tight's Creek," instead forging a new beginning, leaving Mabern to bridge the solos with his marvelous ear for detail.

—Michael J. West

Live At Frankie's Jazz Club: Bluesanova; Mood Malody; Gypsy Blue; Consequence; Fabienne; Formidable; Up Tight's Creek; Tolyppo; The Three Minors. (65:16)

Personnel: Cory Weeds, alto saxophone; Terell Stafford, trumpet; Harold Mabern, piano; Michael Glynn, bass; Julian MacDonough, drums.

Ordering info: cellarlive.com

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COURTESY DOGTOWN RECORDS

Pianist **Jack Wilson** unfortunately is known better for his famous protégé, vibist Roy Ayers—whom he first met when they played together in Gerald Wilson’s Big Band—than for his own work, including a handful of classic Blue Note sides. The previously unissued live quartet performance captured on ***Call Me: Jazz From The Penthouse* (Century 67 003; 65:41 ★★★)** was taped in Seattle two weeks before most of the same players cut his 1966 *Something Personal*—which deftly imprinted an introspective gloss on soulful grooves. But since the band was working as the opening act for bawdy comedian Redd Foxx, it isn’t surprising that the music reveals a more mainstream vibe, with a preponderance of chill midtempo swingers and ballads. Still, there’s no missing his easy rapport with Ayers, finessing a sound that soon would grow more popular in jazz.

Ordering info: lightinthecat.net

Before her ’60s records for Cadet and Argo became a sampling favorite among DJs, **Dorothy Ashby** masterfully adapted the harp for jazz, laying down sweet vamps, sparkling arpeggios and overtone-rich solos with a guitar-like clarity in post-bop settings. ***In A Minor Groove* (Real Gone 0847; 39:43 ★★★½)** is the second of two 1958 albums she made with famed Count Basie reedist and flutist Frank Wess, and the agile rhythm section of drummer Roy Haynes and bassist Herman Wright. As the title suggests, all eight pieces are minor-key vehicles, mixing Ashby originals, like the spry “Rascality” and the brisk title track, with standards, like “Yesterday,” given a shot of lapidary brilliance thanks to the harpist’s crisp articulation.

Ordering info: realgonemusic.com

***Shades Of Bey* (Ko Ko 001; 55:49 ★★★)** was the second studio transmission from sublimely nuanced singer **Andy Bey** after a 22-year absence from recording, part of a stunning late-career revival revealing a new strain of contemplative beauty and undiminished range. Supported by a stellar cast including saxophonist Gary Bartz, the singer remakes a couple of standards in vocalese

treatments—flashing rhythmically fleet flexibility on “Get It Straight (Straight No Chaser)” and levitating sophistication on “The Last Night Of Evening (Blood Count).” His command of the blues on “Dark Shadows” conveys plenty of weight, but the performance itself is lighter than air. And it’s hard to top his gorgeous, string-swaddled take on Nick Drake’s “River Man,” which imbues the tune’s melancholia with soulful resplendence.

Ordering info: andybey.bandcamp.com

It remains startling that French pianist **Michel Petrucciani** was only 36 when he died in 1999 of a pulmonary infection. From a young age, he expressed an incredible maturity and sophistication in his playing, and his 1988 performance on ***One Night In Karlsruhe* (SWR JazzHaus 476; 77:35 ★★★)** in the company of bassist Gary Peacock and drummer Roy Haynes is no exception. Earlier that year the same rhythm section appeared on the pianist’s *Michel Plays Petrucciani*, a collection of original compositions, five of which are included here along with a few standards. The pianist’s romantic streak is on display throughout, with the snap and sensitivity of Haynes’ playing a bulwark against sentimentality.

Ordering info: swrmusic.de

Philadelphia’s **Sounds Of Liberation** toggled between free-jazz, funk and soul during its early-’70s existence, focusing more on bringing music to underserved parts of the local African-American community than to career development. The group included reedist Byard Lancaster, vibist Khan Jamal and criminally overlooked guitarist Monnette Sudler, and the session featured on the previously unissued ***Untilled* (Columbia University 1973) (Dogtown/Brewerytown Beats 02; 31:04 ★★★)** casts a broad net, starting with the warmly bubbling grooves and chattering three-way dialogue of “Thoughts” and concluding with the slinky r&b sermonette of “New Horizon (Back Streets Of Heaven),” as Lancaster comments with choruses of gospelized alto cries. **DB**

Ordering info: brewerytownbeats.com



Ralph Moore *Three Score*

WJ3 1021

★★★½

Three Score marks the return of tenor saxophonist Ralph Moore to the recording studio as a bandleader for the first time in years. During that hiatus, Moore performed as a member of *The Tonight Show* band for 15 years and gigged around the United States, Europe and Asia.

Evocative of the “blowing sessions” of the 1950s and ’60s, Moore’s quartet here provides lively straightahead backing. The four originals from the bandleader and three from pianist Eric Reed are fitting vehicles for individual and group features. The album’s title track, one of the session’s standouts, begins with a Gerald Cannon bass solo, the waltz allowing Moore’s quartet to engage in dynamic rhythmic interplay. During his solo, the bandleader intersperses compelling melodic development with longer bop-based lines, while drummer Willie Jones III generates a swirling “3” feel.

Featuring a greater amount of rhythmic diversity, the second half of the album finds the quartet demonstrating a wider swath of its abilities. “Una Mujer Muy Elegante” demonstrates a more subdued approach than previous tracks, opening with a piano intro by Reed, and Moore entering with the bright and joyous bossa nova melody. The bandleader’s “Blues Alliance” explores other feels, in addition to providing a more open harmonic environment, reminiscent of 1960s post-bop blues performances. All four band members solo, each with a contrasting atmosphere: Moore over a straight-eighth Latin-inflected groove, Reed over a driving swing, Cannon with sparse comping, and finally Jones trading with Moore and Reed.

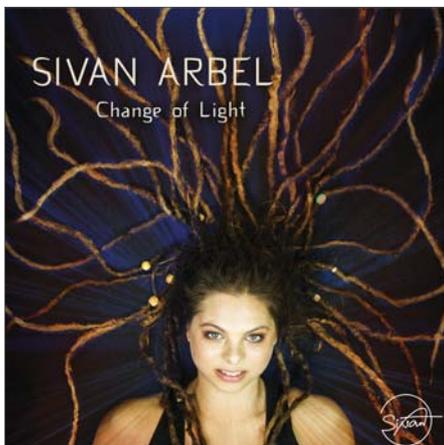
Though some of the performances on *Three Score* feel a bit restrained, opening up the conversation showcases the ensemble at its best.

—Jonathan A. Gómez

Three Score: Another Time; Donny; Reflections; Three Score; 623 C Street; Una Mujer Muy Elegante; Blues Alliance; Carol. (43:32)

Personnel: Ralph Moore, tenor saxophone; Eric Reed, piano; Gerald Cannon, bass; Willie Jones III, drums.

Ordering info: wj3records.com



Sivan Arbel
Change Of Light
SELF RELEASE

★★★★½

Three years after debuting with *Broken Lines*, Israeli-born vocalist, composer and bandleader Sivan Arbel returns with *Change Of Light*. The title itself answers the album's most soulful questions, shining the sun of fresh melodies, words and arrangements through the window of a maturing life. Standing firmly at the crossroads of Moroccan, Brazilian, Indian and Israeli influences, Arbel refines a genre-bending array of emotional ore in her image.

The lead-off anthem, "Change," showcases Arbel's songwriting abilities. Between her observational acuity and varicolored singing, listeners will find plenty to reward repeat listens, digging through the layers of colorful musicality laid down by her band. Notable shades abound, including Shai Portugaly's azure pianism on "Homesick" and the ochre pigments of the horn section, which provides floating accompaniment, sans rhythm section, on "Solitude."

"He Sees Her" is life-affirming, and lyrically moves through phases of light and darkness, shining a torch on the tenderest facets of the heart. Such impulses fibrillate even more noticeably on "Omri." Dedicated to her late friend, the tune balances medium and message as if it were a spiritual act, before the album closes with "Not Over Yet."

But at the heart of all this is "Water Song," an Israeli folk tune that speaks as much of branches as of roots, and tells its story in the language of groove. It's a brilliant summation of a genuinely creative spirit, hinting at Arbel's burgeoning ecosystem of musical ideas.

What starts as a change of light ends up a light of change.
—Tyran Grillo

Change Of Light: Change; Homesick; Solitude; Water Song; He Sees Her; Omri; Not Over Yet. (46:53)
Personnel: Sivan Arbel, vocals; Shai Portugaly, piano; Pera Krstajic, bass; Ron Warburg; trumpet; Jack Sheehan, alto saxophone; Ori Jacobson, tenor saxophone; Shai Wetzler, percussion (4, 5, 7); Meitar Forkosh (5), Audrey Hayes (5), violin; Yumi Oshima: viola (5); Terrence Thornhill, cello (5).

Ordering info: sivanarbel.com

Karl Denson's
Tiny Universe
Gnomes And Badgers

SEVEN SPHERES 3

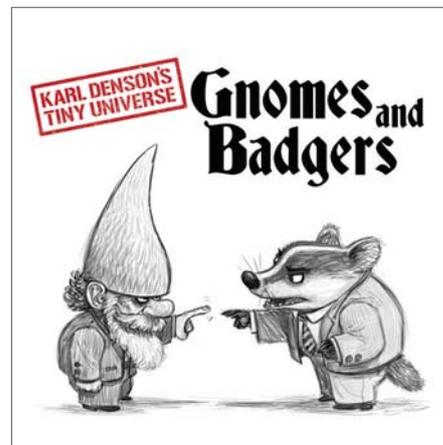
★★★★½

Jazz, funk and rock are at the root of Karl Denson's work, whether it was as a member of The Greyboy Allstars, during tours with the Rolling Stones or helping his Tiny Universe ensemble. And on *Gnomes And Badgers* the reedist hits on a perfect balance.

"What If You Knew"—hosting everything from Chris Littlefield's trumpet to David Veith's wah-distorted keys, Mike Dillon's percussive cornucopia and Denson's emphatic lead vocals—is a master class in scrupulous composing, performing and mixing. Once the parts come together, the dense combination of sounds might be contrasted with boldly ornate, but smartly designed, architecture: crowded, yet comprehensible.

Conversely, when "Time To Pray" leaves space for more individual spotlights, the Tiny Universe's edginess shines through, as DJ Williams' definitively rock-toned guitar solo contrasts with Denson's improvisatory flute solo, a turn that retains a foot in the modern-jazz world.

The delicate political territories that Denson



writes about, and the style-enhanced engine of this lineup make an intriguing pair. One casts the shadow of sadness and frustration, while the other bathes listeners in a musically gratifying light.

—Kira Grunenberg

Gnomes And Badgers: What If You Knew; Gossip; Change My Way; I'm Your Biggest Fan; Can We Trade?; Millvale, PA; Something Sweet; Falling Down; Time To Pray; Smart Boy; Just Remembered. (60:21)

Personnel: Karl Denson, saxophone, flute, percussion, vocals; DJ Williams, Anders Osborne (3, 6), Lukas Nelson (7), guitar; Seth Freeman, guitar, lap steel guitar; Zak Najor, Alan Evans (3, 6), drums; Chris Stillwell, bass; David Veith, Ivan Neville (3, 6), keyboards; Chris Littlefield, trumpet; Chuck Leavell, piano (10); Adrian Quesada (3), guitar, piano; The Brownout Horns (6, 10); Andy Geib, trombone (5); Gabe Wolf, trumpet (5); Matthew "Sweet Lou" Holmes, percussion (6); Greg Izor, harmonica (6); Rebecca Jade, Sonya Moore, Elvert Waltower, Jervae Anthony, vocals.

Ordering info: karldenson.com

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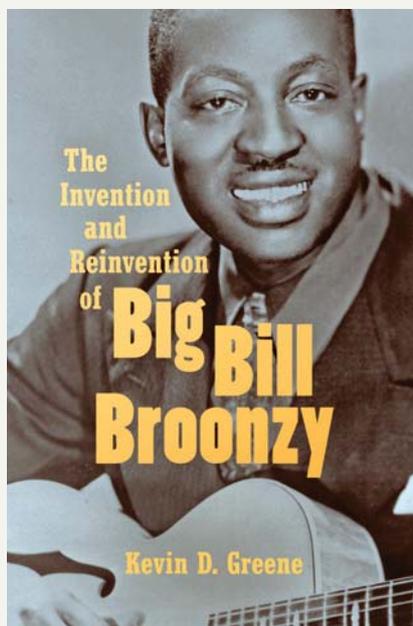
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Real and Imagined History

He couldn't read music and struggled with the written word, but the Chicago blues star who's depicted in ***The Invention and Reinvention of Big Bill Broonzy*** (UNC Press) possessed uncanny self-promotional skills. Author **Kevin D. Greene** hypothesizes that Broonzy not only was able to constantly change his music and image to appeal to new audiences, but spent his entire four-decade career anticipating shifts in the industry and society at large.

Like many African Americans who rose to prominence in the South during the early 1900s, Broonzy's backstory was murky enough that he could fill in the gaps as he saw fit. Even his name was an invention; it was probably Lee Conley Bradley. But Broonzy claimed he was born in 1893 in the Mississippi Delta, despite researchers citing evidence that his life began five to 11 years later near Pine Bluff, Arkansas. If true, that would mean that Broonzy, a masterful storyteller, almost certainly fabricated his Army service in World War I. By 1920, though, he joined the Great Migration to Chicago. Once there, Broonzy traded in his fiddle for a guitar and entertained homesick Southerners at rent parties and social events while toiling away at day jobs. Greene doesn't get bogged down by such details, which were painstakingly recorded in Bob Riesman's 2011 biography, *I Feel Good: The Life and Times of Big Bill Broonzy*. Greene, an assistant professor of history and director of the Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage at the University of Southern Mississippi, puts the times ahead of the life in his work.

Greene writes, "Quite successfully and without precedent, Broonzy transformed himself from a rural country musician to a black pop musician to a national and international icon for folk music enthusiasts and jazz aficionados. His career reveals a distinct path for black blues artists who carved out their celebrity among white audiences and found national and international acclaim." But at what cost? Did the artist feel alienated from those he left behind and, more importantly, from his core identity? Broonzy's solitary journey surely forced him to forsake his roots, but Greene only hints at the painful toll. Even in Broonzy's cleverly cultivated choice of friends and associates, he sought out those who could aid his quest for success: the music producer J. Mayo "Ink" Williams, the talent scout and publisher Lester Melrose and the folk music pioneers Win Stracke, and John and Alan Lomax. "To Alan Lomax," Greene writes, "Broonzy represented a completely new idea of the figure of the authentic black folk musician that rested



more on genre the repertoire." Lomax is depicted as an ardent supporter of Broonzy's music who introduced Big Bill to white audiences with a 1938 Carnegie Hall concert and provided a tremendous late-career boost by arranging 1950s tours of Europe. But it's instructive that an ethnomusicologist with no shared background who helped him "cross over" musically became perhaps Broonzy's most enduring friend.

Greene's argument that Broonzy calculatingly changed his image, his music and his cultural identity to woo new fans would be more persuasive had he found contemporaries to corroborate the hypothesis. But he came to the subject matter roughly a half-century after Broonzy's 1958 death, when his old running mates from Chicago's nascent blues scene were long gone. The closest Greene gets to firsthand source material is in interviews with Michael van Isveldt, the musician's only confirmed offspring. The product of Broonzy's affair with a Dutch woman during a '50s tour of Europe, van Isveldt has only a vague recollection of the father who returned to Chicago, where he wasted away from the throat cancer that killed him. His son does supply tender correspondence from Broonzy to his mother, Pim van Isveldt, although it was only after Pim's death in 2006 that Michael showed interest in preserving his father's legacy. It's fitting, then, that through his rich recorded legacy of songs like "Big Bill's Blues," "Saturday Night Rub" and "Just a Dream," Broonzy himself gets the last word. **DB**

Ordering info: uncpress.org



Teodross Avery *After The Rain: A Night For Coltrane* TOMPKINS SQUARE 5623

★★★

It's a long-established practice for musicians to tackle the challenging compositions of their forebears, but to adapt the work of John Coltrane takes guts. The legendary saxophonist's music was complex, sure, but his recordings also were as much about personal fire as compositional rigor.

Whether it was hubris or spiritual possession, something drove saxophonist Teodross Avery to tangle with six Coltrane-associated pieces for *After The Rain: A Night For Coltrane*. Luckily, Avery and his group take to the music with relish; it might not touch "the real thing," but they do the compositions justice, technically and emotively.

The sound from this live date is crisp and clear, the nuances of the space and the performance is well captured. The players have done their homework: Avery does an admirable job conjuring those signature sheets of sound, and while Jeff Chambers tends toward a more thundering bass than Jimmy Garrison, it serves the set, especially on the extended take of "Africa." Adam Shulman's piano and Darrell Green's drums are reverent to the Tyner/Jones diad without being wholly imitative. The song selection also warrants kudos for playing to this band's strengths, while avoiding obvious choices. Avery dodges the dense improvisational thickets of Coltrane's later work, but he also skips the hits: no "My Favorite Things," "Giant Steps," "Impressions." In lesser hands, his chutzpah might've yielded some disappointed customers, but it's hard to imagine disgruntled listeners walking away from the music here. And while *After The Rain* isn't as essential as the recordings of its primary composer, the album pays fitting tribute to a giant. That in itself is no mean feat. —Dustin Kratovich

After The Rain: A Night For Coltrane: Blues Minor; Bakai; Afro Blue; After The Rain; Africa; Pursuance. (59:30)

Personnel: Teodross Avery, tenor saxophone, soprano saxophone; Adam Shulman, piano; Jeff Chambers, bass; Darrell Green, drums.

Ordering info: tompkinssquare.com

**Dave Rempis/
Brandon Lopez/
Ryan Packard**
The Early Bird Gets

AEROPHONIC 021

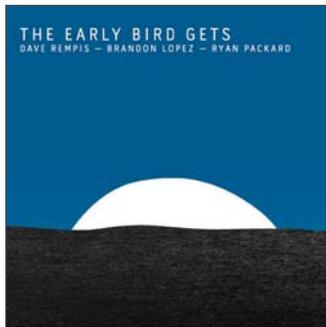
★★★★

By expanding his pool of collaborative constellations, Chicago reedist Dave Rempis has found a variety of contexts in which to explore his fiery improvisational aesthetic. And there's no shortage of heat produced on *The Early Bird Gets*, his first recording with the trio of New York bassist Brandon Lopez and Chicago percussionist Ryan Packard. On "Archae Opteryx," upper-register tenor cries braid with piercing bowed screeches over a distant bed of choppy electronic tones, courtesy of Packard. During his early days in The Vandermark 5, Rempis betrayed a Lee Konitz influence that seemed to vanish over the years, but it pops up here and there, singing bright-toned, boppish melodies on the closing track, "Gansus." And although his baritone lines at the start of "Raho Navis" are wonderfully brawny and jagged, there are moments of Serge Chaloff's mentholated cool that break through. Frequently, though, the trio privileges a rhythmically ferocious approach that leaves plenty of room for buoyant exchanges. On "Confucius Ornis," the band contracts and expands around the groove, embracing sleek propulsion and muscular stomp at the drop of a hat, reminding us that countless attacks are easily within reach. —Peter Margasak

The Early Bird Gets: Crypto Vo Lans; Raho Navis; Archae Opteryx; Confucius Ornis; Yan Ornis; Neo Aves; Gansus. (50:55)

Personnel: Dave Rempis, alto saxophone, tenor saxophone, baritone saxophone; Brandon Lopez, bass; Ryan Packard, drums, electronics.

Ordering info: aerophonicrocords.com



Ashley Pezzotti
We've Only Just Begun

SELF RELEASE

★★★½

Accompanied by excellent musicians, adding depth and color to the bandleader's whimsical voice, Ashley Pezzotti's ability to interpret lyrics and engage measured and apropos phrasing make *We've Only Just Begun* a noteworthy debut.

Pezzotti masters the art of storytelling with an aloofness that belies the profundity of the lyrics here, but also beckons us to ponder how with maturity her voice eventually will add a needed storehouse of emotion. After the opening bars of Emmet Cohen's piano on "I Hope You Find Her," Pezzotti's breathy voice sounds like its floating, until it descends to deliver the full import of unrequited love. And whether she's delivering "September In The Rain"—stacked with runs where listeners might not expect them—or mining her Dominican roots on "Solo Tu," the narrative of life, love and promise conjure the sensibilities of a bygone era, something particularly impressive for a 23-year-old vocalist.

A sound band, promising voice, and excellent song selection and writing mark Pezzotti as a performer to watch.

—Michele L. Simms-Burton

We've Only Just Begun: It Only Takes A Moment; We've Only Just Begun; Solo Tu; That Way; I Hope You Find Her; Nothing Good Happens After Midnight; September In The Rain; But Not For Me; Something I Dreamed Last Night; Drunk On Love; Just One Of Those Things; Darn That Dream; Jackie. (59:26)

Personnel: Ashley Pezzotti, vocals; Emmet Cohen, piano; Alex Weitz, tenor saxophone; Bob Bruya, bass; Kyle Poole, drums.

Ordering info: ashleypezzotti.com



**Akira Tana &
Otonowa**
Ai San San (Love's Radiance)

VEGA 0009

★★★½

Beginning his career as a sideman and then leading his own ensembles for about 25 years, drummer Akira Tana now has issued his third album with Otonowa, an outfit formed in 2012 to help raise funds to aid Japan in the wake of a 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

The opening run of compositions on *Ai San San (Love's Radiance)* comes off as pretty conventional jazz, Art Hirahara providing functional piano comping and Masaru Koga issuing robust tenor solos. The title track is delicate and tentative, with a shakuhachi flute solo and percussive taiko drum detail, but tends toward bland, rather than poignant.

Matters improve with the fourth track, where Shoko Hikage plays koto, flecks of tango being ground into the mix. "Habu No Minato" also is superior fare, abruptly speeding up, getting jazzier, invigorated by a flowing soprano solo. "Mura Matsuri" has a breezily Caribbean character, but with added bite, and "Tsunagareta Tairyō-bata" balances jazz and Japanese traditions, featuring an open-hearted flute solo. —Martin Longley

Ai San San (Love's Radiance): Antagata Dokosa; Ai San San; Hinokuni Ryojo; Habu No Minato; Mura Matsuri; Hamabe No Uta; Natsu; Taiyo Ni Hoero; Tsunagareta Tairyō-bata; Kando; Peace. (59:13)

Personnel: Akira Tana, drums; Noriyuki Ken Okada, bass; Art Hirahara, piano; Masaru Koga, soprano saxophone, tenor saxophone, flute, shakuhachi; Shoko Hikage (4), koto; Kenny Endo, percussion; Tetsuya Tatsumi (9), cornet.

Ordering info: akiratana.com



Cathy Segal-Garcia
Dreamsville

DASH HOFFMAN 1023

★★★½

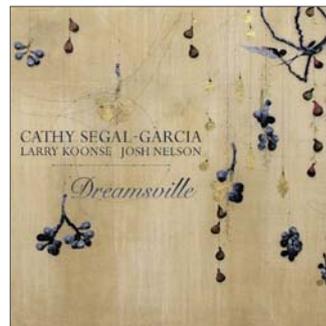
Colorful musings from guitar and piano take vocalist Cathy Segal-Garcia's ethereal scattling into highly charged emotional territory, but the throaty vocalist often strains to reach her upper range with ease.

Tenderly supportive, Josh Nelson's sinuous piano solos cascade chromatically alongside Larry Koonse's gentle guitar arpeggios, sweeping up the opening of the Henry Mancini title track, where Segal-Garcia emotes as a dramatic translator. Vibrato on the baroque "Scarlatti Sonata In B Minor L33" seems standard, but overuse of rubato and vibrato doesn't translate well on jazzier tracks, the interpretations often lacking inventiveness. The bandleader's vocals are folksy while relating impassioned lyrics about sisterhood, separation and loss on her "The Three Of Us." And with six slow-tempo tracks on the recording taking precedence, "Beyond The Years" extols the album's recurring lyrical theme of loneliness. Segal-Garcia's emotional performance is bolstered by poignant guitar on the heartfelt "Canto Triste," and the jazz waltz "Sometime Ago/Children's Song" finds the vocalist scattling in scalar fashion while Koonse tastefully toys with dissonance and Nelson adds playful spice to the trio's uplifting departure. —Kerilie McDowall

Dreamsville: Dreamsville; The Three Of Us; Canto Triste; Scarlatti Sonata In B Minor L33; September In The Rain; Lonely Woman; Zingaro; You Are There; Pensativa; Beyond The Years; Sometime Ago/Children's Song. (55:44)

Personnel: Cathy Segal-Garcia, vocals; Larry Koonse, guitar; Josh Nelson, piano.

Ordering info: cathysegalgarcia.com



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GUITAR SCHOOL

Building BLOCKS FOR SOLO Guitar MASTERY

BY MIMI FOX
PAGE 72

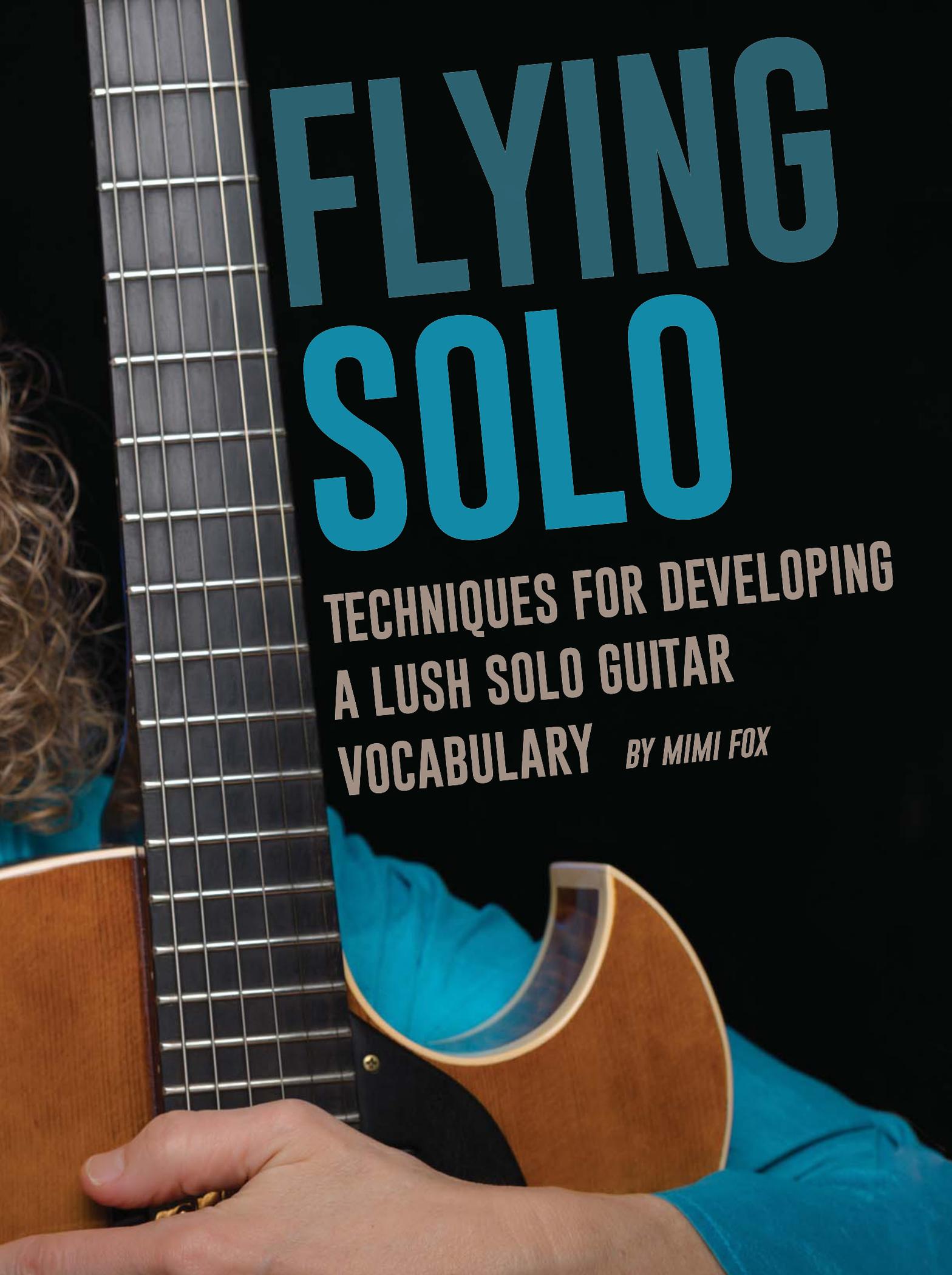
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FLYING SOLO

TECHNIQUES FOR DEVELOPING
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Virtuoso guitarist Mimi Fox has earned international renown as a live-wire performer and poised improviser.

Playing solo guitar is a challenging but extremely rewarding pursuit. It's also an important aspect of becoming a masterful jazz guitarist, because all of the skills that are required for solo guitar are essential to developing a complete understanding of the harmonic, rhythmic and melodic possibilities of this majestic instrument.

I found studying classical guitar for several years to be a great foundation for all of my subsequent solo jazz guitar development. In my practicing today, I still spend time playing through Bach, Villa Lobos, Vivaldi, Mozart, etc. This music is highly enjoyable to play, and it's a great way to develop your ear and your technique, as well as strengthening your sight-reading.

I have made four solo guitar recordings using a variety of guitars (hollowbody electric, acoustic steel string, 12-string acoustic, baritone acoustic). Using different instruments for recording and performance is a great way to create different aural textures and moods for the listener/audience. It's also a great way to discover new aspects of your own musicality.

I find switching from my hollowbody jazz guitar to an acoustic steel-string guitar requires a different touch (*finesse*) and also enhances my creative palette. More hand/finger strength and flexibility is required when playing a steel-string acoustic guitar, and this, too, influences what and how I play. The time spent exploring all of the different challenges that various guitars require is well worth the effort. The reward

will be the further development of your artistic voice with enhanced creativity and technical mastery.

For this article, I will use a B \flat blues of mine called "Blues For Two," as well as a few classics to demonstrate a myriad of devices that I use to create richness, excitement and breadth in my solo jazz guitar performances.

For further studies I recommend my TrueFire educational course, *Flying Solo: The Essential Improvisation Map for the Solo Jazz Guitarist*.

ARPEGGIATE YOUR WAY TO MASTERY

One of the best ways to begin to generate a compelling solo guitar voice is to outline the changes to a piece with arpeggios. The arpeggios clearly outline the notes in the chord and help create strong melody lines that can stand on their own without additional accompaniment. (For an in-depth study of arpeggios please see my book, *Guitar Arpeggio Studies On Jazz Standards*, Mel Bay Publications.)

I recommend using continual eighth notes and landing on the third of the new chord when possible. See Example 1 on page 76. In this first example, you'll notice that the last note of the first measure is an A \flat , which leads perfectly to the G (third) of the following chord, E \flat 7. The last note of the second measure is an E \flat , which again leads back to the D (third) of the B \flat 7 in measure 3.

In the fourth measure, you'll notice that I start on the fifth of the Fm7 chord instead of

the third. This works because the C (fifth) is a new note that is introduced and is not found in either the E \flat 7 chord that precedes it, or the B \flat 7 chord that follows it. While the third makes for the strongest resolution, other notes can work when necessary. Generally speaking, half-step resolutions work best (e.g., D \flat to D, A \flat to G) but they are not the only way to navigate the arpeggios. Using your ear is always recommended.

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE BASS

Once you have begun to play through a B \flat blues using arpeggios, the next logical step is to walk bass lines while simultaneously playing chords. This technique creates the impression of more than one instrument playing at the same time and is a necessity not only for solo jazz guitar playing, but also for backing up a vocalist or another instrumentalist. See Example 2 for a basic approach to walking bass lines over a 12-bar blues. This technique can be played fingerstyle, or with a hybrid technique that I use which involves using a pick and my middle finger to pluck the chords. In measure 2, you'll notice that the bass line I am playing with the E \flat 7 chord is simply a descending E \flat 7 arpeggio (E \flat , D \flat , B \flat , G). You'll also notice that the chords are played on the upbeats.

The walking bass lines used in this example are merely a starting point. Eventually, you will want to practice playing bass lines without chords, similar to what an actual bassist might play. This way, you will be able to integrate more sophisticated bass lines with the basic ones in this example. There is a big difference between what you can do when you are solely walking bass lines as opposed to walking bass lines and plucking chords at the same time.

Once you can play walking bass lines (with chords) through an entire 12-bar blues in B \flat , move this exercise to different keys. Then, try walking bass lines (with chords) through the changes to standard tunes in the jazz repertoire. The more you do this, the easier it will become and soon you will be adding more chromatic passing tones, varying the rhythms in new ways and creating fresh musical ideas along the way.

PEDAL TO THE METTLE

Pedal notes are another essential harmonic device for the solo jazz guitarist. As with walking bass lines, pedal notes create the illusion of two instruments playing at the same time. They also create a nice texture. When the pedal note is an open string, the note can sustain over a number of measures, enhancing the harmony and creating a sense of fullness. Please check out my arrangement of "Caravan" from my 2006 album *Perpetually Hip* (Favored Nations Cool). In this arrangement, I use a lot of pedal notes to render the melody. A great example of what I think of as an inverted pedal note is the Villa Lobos *Prelude #1 In E Minor*. In this piece, Villa Lobos keeps an

E minor chord on top as the pedal point (and constant harmony) and the bass notes below are shifting. In Example 3, I use the open G string as my pedal note and move the chords on top starting with a C minor. This can be used in measures 9–10 in the B \flat blues. The chords on top are all from the key of B \flat major, with the exception of one passing chord (B major) for color and slight tension. You might notice that these are not full chords, but rather just the third and fifth of each chord. Because the key area is pre-established, these two-note voicings work just fine.

Using two-note voicings (double stops) is also an effective technique for creating fullness within the confines of a solo guitar arrangement. In my arrangement of “Caravan” (see Example 4), I harmonize the descending chromatic phrase of the melody with major/minor seconds, which is a creative way to strengthen the line without cluttering it (by attempting to play chords with each note). Sometimes, I harmonize this line with the $\flat 5$ as well (see Example 5). Even one additional note adds a lot of texture and color, and helps to reinforce the melody and enlarge the sonic experience. In the third measure of Example 5, on beat 4, I change the bottom note from B to C for resolution. Because the top note (F) is held throughout, the feeling of fullness remains.

HARMONICS TO THE RESCUE

I love exploring all the different ways harmonics (naturally occurring and artificial) can be used to flesh out a song. Harmonics can be individual notes or entire chords. In Example 6, I am using the naturally occurring harmonics on the seventh fret to demonstrate some of the ways these notes can be used. In this example, I am using them as the turnaround chord (and tritone sub) in measures 11–12 of my piece “Blues For Two” from my 2010 album *Live At The Palladium* (Favored Nations). The F7#9 chord is followed by the seventh-fret harmonics that create a B7#9 chord. The notes are a fretted E \flat bass note followed by the harmonic notes A, D, F#, B. This chord is analogous to an F13,9#11 chord. The harmonics sustain over several measures, which adds a nice textural quality and fleshes out the sound. You can use these very same harmonic notes in myriad ways. For example, A, D, F# and B could also be used as a B minor chord, D6 chord, Em11 chord, Cmaj13#11 chord, etc. The possibilities are many and fun to discover.

PARALLEL/SYMMETRICAL MOVEMENT

The last idea I want to draw your attention to is what I call “parallel harmony.” Simply put, this involves taking one chord type and moving it into different keys (usually with a pedal tone in the bass for support). This creates some very hip dissonance. My arrangement of “America” from my 2019 album, *This Bird Still Flies* (Origin), makes use of both these concepts (moving triads and pedal notes). In Example 7 (which corresponds to measures 18–19 on the recording), I am playing a major triad that moves from B to C to D, all with a B pedal throughout. The D chord is played using harmonics (the exact same harmonics used in Example 60. Instead of serving as an F13,9#13 chord, it is simply a D triad. The moving triads and pedal note create a very full and lush sound.

SUMMATION

Decades ago, I approached Joe Pass when he was in San Francisco for a show. After a fair amount of arm-twisting, he agreed to give me a lesson the next day at his hotel. Joe spent many hours with me, which was an honor, and I’d like to share with you two of the most important things he said to me. First, he encouraged me to listen to string quartets. He explained that the two low bass notes on the guitar could be thought of as the cello, the two middle strings a viola and the top strings a violin. This proved very helpful to me, and I strongly encourage my conservatory students to do this as well. Another thing Joe said to me was that he was worried that I was practicing too much (yes, there is such a thing). For many musicians—because of our love of music—we can push ourselves too hard. So, I encourage all of you to take time to smell the pro-

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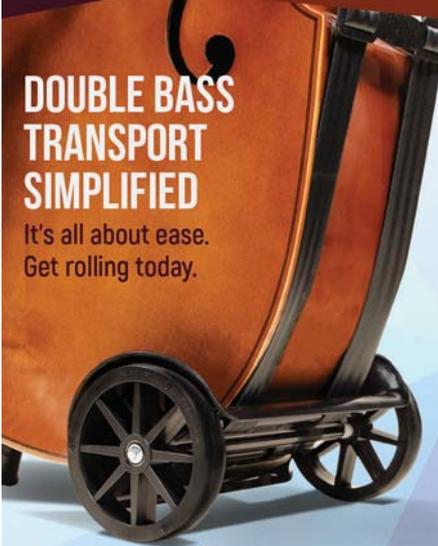
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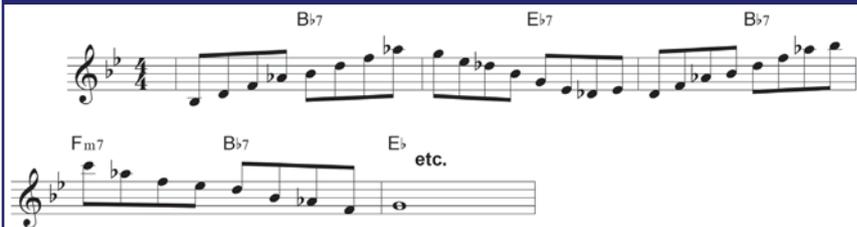
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verbal roses in order to avoid burnout. When you return to your studies, you'll feel refreshed and benefit more from your practice time. Finally, I would be remiss if I didn't mention one of the most essential building blocks for solo guitar mastery: Listen to all of the great jazz and classical guitarists. They are too numerous to mention here, but well worth seeking out. **DB**

Internationally renowned guitarist, composer and recording artist Mimi Fox was cited in six consecutive DownBeat Critics Polls and has been recognized as one of the most eloquent guitarists on today's scene. She has performed/recorded with fellow guitarists Charlie Byrd, Stanley Jordan and Charlie Hunter; saxophonists Houston Person and Don Lanphere; vocalists Tierney Sutton, Kevin Mahogany and Janis Siegel; and B-3 organ masters Joey DeFrancesco and Barbara Dennerlein. Fox is an associate professor of jazz studies at the California Jazz Conservatory. In a nod to her artistry, Heritage Guitars released the Mimi Fox Artist Signature model in conjunction with its 30th anniversary in 2015. Visit Fox online at mimifoxguitar.com.

Example 1



Example 2



Example 3



Example 4



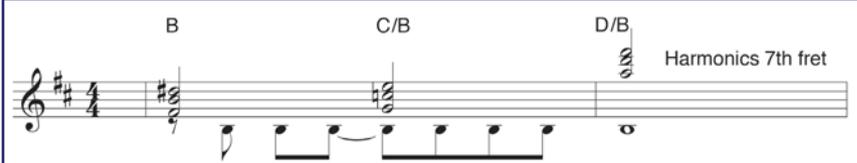
Example 5



Example 6



Example 7



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Lydian Mode Harmony: Useful & Versatile

Try this: Strike and sustain a C triad on your guitar or keyboard, and sing the F note that's a half step above the third (E). When I do this, I feel the strength and integrity of the C chord dissolve into mush. The mush is thanks to the dissonance of the fourth of the major scale (F) slamming up against the third (E). That's mode 1, the ionian mode, for you.

Now, strike that C triad again, but raise the sung F natural up to an F sharp. At one whole

step above the third of the chord, the raised fourth doesn't obscure the harmony, but adds a sense of energy and mystery. The overtone series indicates a note closer to F sharp, and that F sharp puts us in mode 4 of G major. Mode 4 is the lydian mode.

Jazz improvisers often avoid using the ionian fourth, or place it on a weak part of the beat, to avoid harmonic muddiness. But improvisers can and do use the lydian mode as an alternative to the major scale. With the

lydian mode, there are no notes situated a half step above a chord tone, as in the ionian mode with its clash of the fourth scale note against the third of the underlying chord. As we will soon see, the harmony created using the lydian mode also has some very useful properties.

Our modes are derived from the basic major scale, also known as the ionian mode. Although this system of Western tonality dates back to medieval times, it remains a vital organizing principle for jazz musicians today.

By starting a new scale on each tone of the major scale (ionian mode), seven discrete scales, each with their own properties, are embedded in every major scale. Major and minor scales result from where the half steps occur. C major is major because it begins with two whole steps, covering the distance of a major third: C–D–E. If we start on the second note of C major, a D, we get a scale (the dorian mode) that starts out with a whole step and a half step: D–E–F. That shorter distance is a minor third. That’s why Miles Davis’ “So What” sounds minor: It’s in the dorian mode.

The classical composers loved the ionian mode for its two symmetrical tetrachords (meaning four tones): C–D–E–F and G–A–B–C. Each tetrachord consists of a whole step, a whole step and a half step, which satisfied the composer’s urge for tonal symmetry in the development sections of 18th century music. Haydn and Mozart used the organizing principles of the day, centered on tonic–dominant relationships, to give us masterful symphonies and sonatas.

Such organizing principles have evolved significantly over the years. In the realm of modern jazz, I’d like to show you the usefulness and versatility of harmony created with the lydian mode.

In the key of C, the lydian mode starts on F, and its sharp fourth is B. The harmonic climate—an evocative term I first encountered in a Frank Zappa interview—of the lydian mode with its characteristic sharp fourth (or sharp 11th) can be expressed using any of the chords in the home key, as long as the bass sounds the tonic (F) of the lydian mode.

For example, the home key of “Take The A Train” (Ellington/Strayhorn) is C major. (The chords in the C major modal sequence are shown in Example 1). The bridge modulates for the first four bars to F; that’s the lydian mode. In the first four bars of the bridge, any chord in the C major modal sequence with an F in the bass can be used for comping and will provide the harmonic climate of F lydian. (See Example 2.)

Now, I enjoy the transparency of chords with no thirds, but missing thirds can be added with a simple scale color, such as the sixth on the I chord (Cmaj7), an added 11th on the iii (Em7) and a ninth on the V (G7), as shown in Example 3. In a combo, the bass should provide ample F notes, so the comping instrument is free to add or leave out the F. (See Example 4.)

This approach also works well with the relative minor of the lydian mode, the dorian mode. Put a D in the bass for all chords in C, and you get the chords in Example 5, which all express the harmonic climate of dorian mode.

What I’ve been describing is a method akin to pandiatonicism, another useful organizing principle. However, pandiatonicism is a scalar organizing principle, and my organizing principle is chordal—heck, I’m a guitar player. The instrument was built to play chords, and we guitarists and keyboard players have spent years building up a repertoire of favorite chords, with inversions, texture and spacing variations that become our own recognizable style.

In the heat of battle, on stage in front of an audience, you use whatever organizing principles are at hand. We could call this a device or a trick, but assuming you know multiple

voicings and inversions on your instrument for each chord you encounter, you’ll have an almost unlimited palette of comping choices at your disposal, which will prove extremely useful whenever and wherever you perform.

DB

Tom Taylor is an internationally known recording artist and guitarist whose music is a hybrid of jazz, classical, rock, blues and bluegrass. He studied composition with 20th century classical master Lou Harrison and learned jazz guitar from Joe Pass and Howard Roberts. Taylor has performed with such disparate talents as Bob Hope, the Coasters, the Platters, mandolin virtuosi Tiny Moore and David Grisman, and jazz artists Phil Woods and Bobby Shew. Taylor’s new CD, *LogRhythm* (Membrane Music), features Mark Rose on saxophone and Marc Neihof on bass; his past album releases have featured the Kronos Quartet and the Turtle Island String Quartet. Taylor is the jazz guitar instructor at Colorado College.

Example 1: Chords in the C major modal sequence

I	ii	iii	IV	V	vi	vii
Ionian	Dorian	Phrygian	Lydian	Mixolydian	Aeolian	Locrian
Cmaj7	Dmin7	Emin7	Fmaj7	G7	Amin7	Bmin7♭5

Example 2: F added to the bass for lydian harmonic climate

Cmaj7/F	Dmin7/F	Emin7/F	Fmaj7/F	G7/F	Amin7/F	Bmin7♭5/F
Sounds like Fmaj7 (9, #11) no third	Sounds like F6	Sounds like Fmaj7 (6, 9, #4) no third	Lydian!	Sounds like F6 (9, #4) no third	Sounds like Fmaj7 (9)	Sounds like F6 (#4)

Example 3: Third of F lydian added

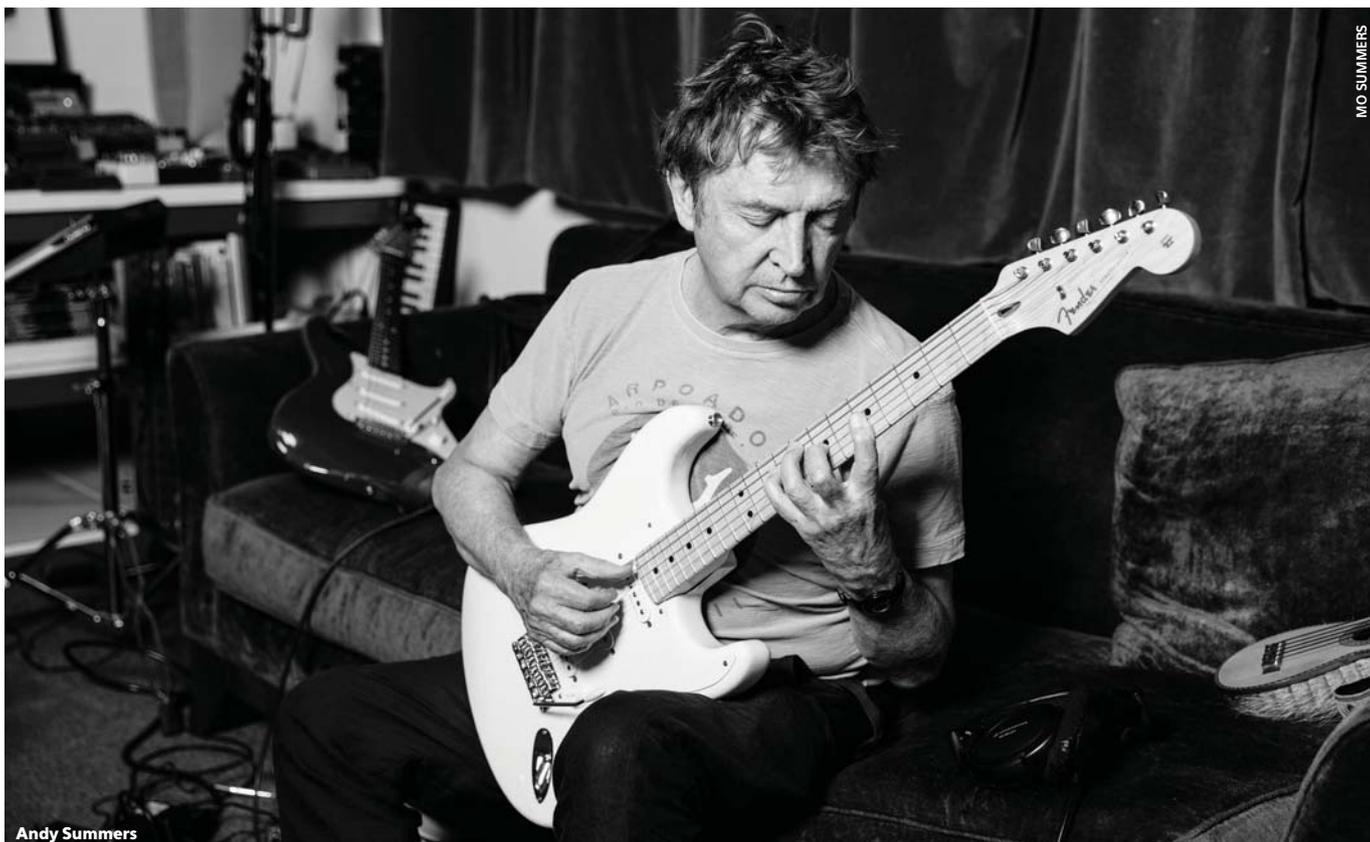
Cmaj7/F (6)	Emin7/F (11)	G7/F (9)
Sounds like Fmaj7 (9, #11)	Sounds like Fmaj7 (6, 9, #4)	Sounds like F6 (9, #4)

Example 4: Lydian comping on the bridge to “Take the A Train”

Guitar and bass sound one octave lower than written.

Example 5: D added to the bass for dorian harmonic climate

I	ii	iii	IV	V	vi	vii
Cmaj7/D	Dmin7/D	Emin7/D	Fmaj7/D	G7/D	Amin7/D	Bmin7♭5/D
Sounds like Dmin13 (9, sus4) no third	Dorian!	Sounds like Dmin6, (9, sus4) no third	Sounds like Dmin9	Sounds like Dmin6 (sus4)	Sounds like Dmin9 (sus4) no third	Sounds like Dmin6



Andy Summers' Guitar Solo on 'Parallels'

Having come into prominence as a member of '80s pop group The Police, guitarist Andy Summers has a long and varied musical history, including experience in the realm of jazz improvisation. This is amply demonstrated on his 2004 solo album, *Earth + Sky* (Golden Wire), where his playing on the balladesque "Parallels" showcases his skills in this realm.

Soloing on this song is certainly no cakewalk. There are enough slash-chords to challenge Pat Metheny, and the form is asymmetrical, with four 11-bar phrases followed by a seven-bar phrase. Adding to that, the harmony is nonfunctional, and due to this no key signature has been used. Also, as is traditional with guitar notation, pitches are written an octave higher than they sound.

Summers' playing tends to be inside the changes—which makes sense, as to play "outside" on a form like this only would obscure

its beauty. (Playing the changes here is challenging enough as it is, with keys shifting every measure or two). But within that, there are some options. Summers goes from arpeggios that state the harmony, to scales related to the underlying chord, to some more esoteric choices. Measures 12–16 show some of these in rapid succession. On the $E_b/maj7$ in bar 12, he plays a simple E_b triad, strongly stating the harmony. In the next measure, rather than following the chord down, Summers instead moves up and plays an Fm triad. This is especially effective, as not only does the Fm triad spell out the upper part of the $D_b/maj7$ (F , A_b , and C are third, fifth, and seventh of D_b), but it creates a counterpoint, with Summers' arpeggios ascending a step while the chord change goes down a step.

The next bar (measure 14) has Summers playing more of a scale, but the repeated note pairs he plays are interesting in that the first

note would be a chord tone with the chord the bass note implies, but the second note is an actual chord tone. He's obscuring the harmony without sounding "out." He takes this even further in the next measure, where against F/B_b he plays part of a B_b triad, never acknowledging the F chord. Summers revisits this technique elsewhere in his improvisation, as in bar 25, where he plays a D triad on the A/D chord, making it sound less A -like.

In measure 16, he's back to observing the harmony, with three-note licks that connect chord tones, but once again Summers does so in a contrapuntal manner, playing from seventh to fifth on the $Fm7$. When the harmony ascends to $Gm7(b5)$, he drops down to connecting fifth to third, keeping the same idea but moving in the opposite direction of the chord changes, as he had before.

Another motif Summers uses to create cohesiveness is rhythmic and simple. When

Summers plays strings of eighth notes, he exhibits a tendency to start these phrases on the “and” of 1. We hear this in measures 8, 10, 13, 24, 29, 30, 34, 41 and 45. The rhythmic material afterward might be quite different, but the way he starts phrases so often on the same beat creates a sense of development.

The use of rhythmic motifs is a simple way of creating continuity within the variation of note and scale choices. Another example is the quarter-note triplet that Summers tends to place in the second half of the measure, as in measures 5, 10, 28 and 42, though in this last instance he actually keeps the polyrhythm going into the next bar. Using the same rhythmic patterns, but varying the notes and inserting them within other rhythms, produces coherence, but

leaves room for variation as well (and prevents the improvisation from becoming either too stale or too scattered).

It’s also nice that he found room to put in some bebop phrasing, like the 16th-note triplets in bars 32 and 43, as well as the turns in bars 45 and 47, giving a nod to his jazz roots. In the latter, he displaces the rhythm by a half beat, another easy means of simultaneously producing continuity and variation. Being able to create in such a manner over a blues can be enough of a task, but for Summers to do all the above on this composition’s form and harmonies demonstrates a high level of improvisatory skill. **DB**

Jimi Durso is a guitarist and bassist based in the New York area. Visit him online at jimidurso.com.

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Godin Multiac Steel

Acoustic Tone, Electric Ease

Godin's new Multiac Steel is the latest evolution of the company's acoustic/electric series. The Multiac line first appeared in 1993 with the introduction of the Nylon SA model, a hybrid that offered classical guitar tone and feel in a thinline body with on-board electronics, allowing it to be amplified on stage with great tone and a high resistance to feedback.

The acoustic amplification system was a major step forward in guitar design, and the electronics, along with the guitar's chambered body design, have become the basic building blocks for the entire Multiac series. Godin currently offers 18 guitars in the line, which features nylon-string, steel-string and gypsy jazz models. Although the options might vary greatly, all these instruments share the common ability to produce an acoustic guitar tone, but with an electric-guitar feel.

According to Andy Dacoulis at Godin, the Multiac Steel model takes its inspiration from the company's Doyle Dykes model. "The design of Doyle Dykes was great, but we wanted something that would appeal to a wider audience," Dacoulis said. A magnetic pickup was added to the guitar, broadening the sonic options dramatically with the ability to blend both the acoustic and electric signals together. Godin refers to this as a "two-voice guitar," and it even allows you to output each voice separately.

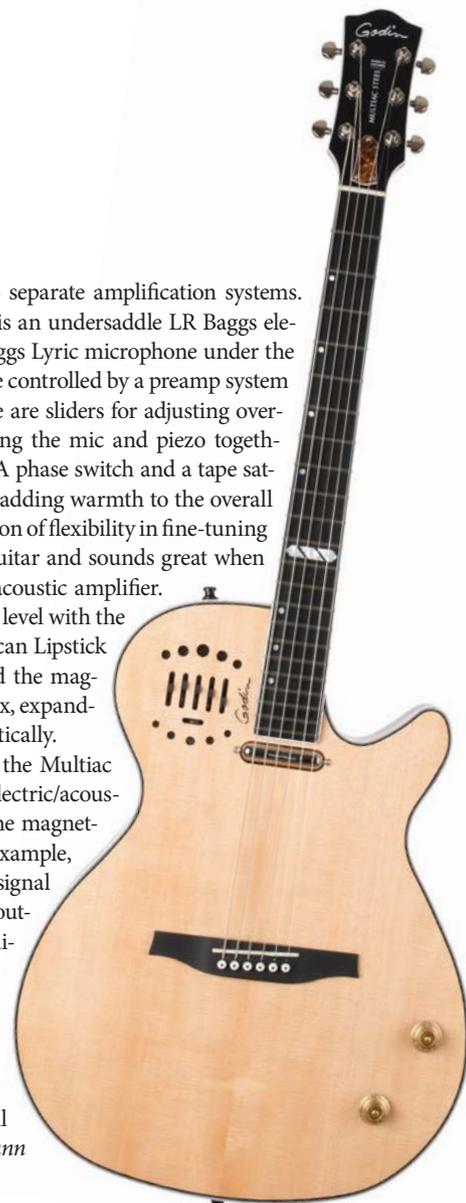
I could tell the Multiac Steel was a quality guitar the minute I picked it up. The workmanship is first-rate all around, and the high-gloss finish really shows off the mahogany body and spruce top. As with all Godin guitars, the Multiac Steel is manufactured in Canada using North American woods. Taking it for a spin acoustically, the guitar played smoothly with a perfect setup right out of the box. Its chambered body offers up a decent amount of acoustic resonance, so you can easily play it unplugged when practicing. As with Godin's other Multiacs, the fingerboard is Richlite and the bridge and nut are made from TUSQ. The guitar is comfortable to hold, either standing or sitting, with a body depth of 2.25 inches. Even the tuners are custom designed and add a cool "mod" look to the peghead.

The guitar features two separate amplification systems. On the acoustic side, there is an undersaddle LR Baggs element piezo along with a Baggs Lyric microphone under the bridge. These two signals are controlled by a preamp system designed by Fishman. There are sliders for adjusting overall volume, blend (for mixing the mic and piezo together) and three bands of EQ. A phase switch and a tape saturation slider are useful for adding warmth to the overall tone. The system provides a ton of flexibility in fine-tuning the acoustic sound of the guitar and sounds great when output directly to a PA or acoustic amplifier. Godin takes things to a new level with the addition of a Seymour Duncan Lipstick pickup, allowing you to add the magnetic pickup signal to the mix, expanding the sound palette dramatically.

There are two jacks on the Multiac Steel, one for the blended electric/acoustic signal and another for the magnetic pickup alone. So, for example, you can send your acoustic signal through a DI box while routing the pickup signal to a guitar amp.

The Multiac Steel is built upon a fundamental concept shared with its older brothers in the line, but it shines with a personality all its own. —Keith Baumann

godinguitars.com



Apitius J-Model Mandolins

Eight Strings That Really Swing

In contrast to its classical European roots, the mandolin has become best known in America for its appearance in bluegrass, country and string-band music. Over the years, the mandolin has flirted with jazz, and a select few players have attained recognition in the genre, but it has never been widely accepted as a jazz instrument. However, a growing interest in jazz mandolin is broadening the instrument's horizons and helping it finally earn its jazz credentials. Taking notice of this trend, luthier Oliver Apitius has introduced his new J-Model mandolins, a departure from traditional design built to meet the needs of the jazz mandolinist.

The mandolin has appeared in various forms throughout the years. Original European bowl-backed designs evolved into the American flat-backed and carved-top instruments pioneered by Orville Gibson and refined by Lloyd Loar. One of the main goals in flattening out the instrument was increased volume, so it could function in ensembles like the mandolin orchestras popular in the early 20th century. Most mandolins built today still are based on Loar's original designs, and although they're used

in numerous styles of music, they're still basically a "classical" instrument.

Since 1982, Apitius' main focus has been the bluegrass market, but he always has held a love for jazz. This started him on a mission to develop an instrument specifically designed for jazz. A chance meeting with mandolinist Don Stiernberg was the final spark of inspiration that put the wheels in motion. Stiernberg, who studied and performed with the legendary jazz mandolinist Jethro Burns, has become one of the world's most respected performers and teachers of jazz mandolin. Apitius drew inspiration from the classic archtops of the 1930s and '40s and utilized a guitar-shaped body instead of the typical A or F mandolin profiles.

Apitius offers two versions of his J-Model: The Club Jazz (\$6,200) and the Yorkville (\$8,200). Both instruments offer the same basic design and sound, but the Yorkville features highly figured woods and fancier appointments. The J-Models are tone bar-braced, and beside the shape, there are several significant variations that set it apart from traditional mandolins. The body chamber is 10 percent larger than a standard F5,

and it has a larger vibrating surface. This provides the instrument with increased warmth and longer sustain, perfect for the jazz idiom. Apitius also uses a proprietary technique to carve his tops. “I call it Apitius Arching, and it compensates for the weakness caused by cutting out the f-holes,” he said.

I had the opportunity to play an Apitius J-Model during a visit with Stiernberg, who owns a Yorkville. The instrument is striking in appearance and captures the art deco elegance of historic archtops. “There’s an awful lot to love about this instrument,” Stiernberg said. “I was first attracted to the beautiful appointments, but the real surprise was the increased amount of sustain and great balance across all strings compared to more traditional style mandolins.” This makes the instrument extremely well-suited to playing chord melody arrangements. However, it also performs wonderfully on single-note passages, rhythm work and even can throw out an impressive bluegrass lick or two. In addition, the J-Model can suggest the tonal characteristics of oval-hole mandolins, making it great for classical and Brazilian choro music.

The Apitius J-Model mandolins are impressive instruments that definitely have something to offer jazz mandolinists, or any player looking for a quality handmade axe. Although they might depart from tradition, the J-Models still retain the soul of a great mandolin.

—Keith Baumann

apitiusmandolins.com



Zoom GCE-3

Pocket-Sized, Unlimited Effects

Zoom’s GCE-3 is a USB audio interface for guitarists to access the company’s new and improved Guitar Lab 4.0 circuit emulation and effects software. The combination of the GCE-3 guitar interface with Guitar Lab provides the recording or rehearsing guitarist with dozens of amp modeling emulations, as well as all the effects you can imagine at your scrolling fingertips. Guitar Lab’s free management tools let you download new sounds and edit/save custom patches and effects chains to take on the go. Small and light enough to put in your shirt pocket or the side zip of your gig bag, the GCE-3 is just a bit larger than a deck of cards and weighs only 3 ounces.

The GCE-3 connects to your computer via USB-C and has a standard guitar instrument input boasting near-zero latency through its own digital signal processor, which prevents additional power drag or lag on your CPU. The digital signal processor in the GCE-3 handles both 24- and 32-bit processing with 44.1kHz sampling frequency. With a dedicated stereo headphone output and volume control, as well as an aux input, you can easily play along with music from your smartphone or external music source while only recording guitar, which is a great feature for practicing. With a suggested retail price of \$99.99, the GCE-3 includes a free license for Cubase LE music production software from Steinberg.

With purchase of the GCE-3 you also get a free download of Mac- or Windows-compatible Guitar Lab software, which contains and controls all of the unit’s amp emulation and effects processing. When you patch in the GCE-3, you gain access to all of the amp modeling and guitar effects that are available in Zoom’s complete lineup of pedals (G5n, G3n, G3Xn, B3n G1 Four, G1X Four, B1 Four and B1X Four), but without having to tote around bulky hardware.

The GCE-3 includes dozens of amp-and-cabinet emulations and digital effects, including distortion, overdrive, EQ, compression, delay, reverb, flanger, phaser and chorus. There are 75 customized “patches” of amp modeling, cabinet choice and effects pre-programmed to mimic the tones of popular guitarists, with titles such as “Jimi,” “ZepCat,” “Carlos,” “Hot Twin,” “Brit Grit,” “Texas Toast,” and even a few that utilize clean amp configurations combined with reverb and chorus for a suitable jazz tone.

Another 75 empty patch inserts allow you to drag-and-drop your own amp-and-effects combinations in the editor window of the Guitar Lab software. It is here that the player looking to hone in on that clean, punchy or smooth-jazz tone can really utilize the GCE-3 for recording. For rehearsal purposes, once you create a few patches that suit your taste, you can utilize the aux input to play along with Aebersold recordings or other types of chops-building backing tracks.

The GCE-3 is a miniature portal to all of the amp emulations and effects processing you’ll ever need for use in your home studio or on the go. —John LaMantia

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1. Magnetic Pedalboard

Rare Earth Music's Earthboard is a magnetically powered effects pedalboard for guitarists and bassists. The patented Earthboard design incorporates rare-earth magnets and a sturdy steel rail system. It features a long-lasting rechargeable battery that eliminates the need for wall electricity and provides a true isolated power source that removes noise interference, hums and grounding issues.

More info: earthboardmusic.com

2. Headstock Tuner

D'Addario Accessories has updated its NS Micro headstock tuner. With a display that offers 360-degree rotation and 90-degree screen orientation options, guitarists and bassists can dial in the ideal viewing angle. A full-color screen makes it easy to read, and the advanced piezo reduces ambient noise feedback.

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More info: solidgroundstands.com

4. Learning To Walk

Hal Leonard Jazz Bass Method by Matthew Rybicki includes lessons on walking basics, chords/scales, blues, "Rhythm" changes, string raking, soloing technique, chord substitution, pedal points and ostinato. The 138-page book includes access to online audio examples that are available to download and stream.

More info: halleonard.com

5. Pro Switchers

Morley has released the ABY Pro and ABC Pro selectors, based on the original Morley ABY and ABC switchers released in 1992. The new Pro versions include higher enclosures for easier access on crowded pedalboards, custom Ebtech transformers, silent switching, a reverse polarity switch and a ground lift switch to combat hum that commonly occurs when using switching devices on multiple amps.

More info: morleyproducts.com

6. Micro Rig

IK Multimedia's iRig micro amp is an ultra-compact 10-watt unit that combines analog channels with a high-quality digital connection for iPhone, iPad, Mac and PC. Analog channels include clean, drive and lead, with bass, mid, treble and gain controls to cover a wide range of tones. Derived from IK Multimedia's iRig HD 2 mobile guitar interface, the iRig micro amp's iOS/USB connection lets players process their tone with IK's AmpliTube Custom Shop app, in addition to their own favorite practice, performance and recording apps and software. The guitar signal is sent to the device for processing and the return input is sent directly to the amp's speaker.

More info: ikmultimedia.com



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Antonio Hart (right) works with students during a big band workshop at the Sydney Opera House in Australia.

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Jeff Denson

Jazz Day Clinics, Workshops Highlight Power of Listening

INTENSE LISTENING THAT RESULTS IN meaningful communication and a deep connection has been a touchstone for International Jazz Day since its inception in 2011. At the 2019 edition in the host cities of Sydney and Melbourne, the event's co-artistic directors—pianist Herbie Hancock and trumpeter/trombonist James Morrison—participated in workshops that emphasized the importance of active listening and cross-cultural dialogue.

“The fundamental thing about jazz—more than any other art form—is listening to the other person, then accept what they bring,” Morrison said at Melbourne Conservatorium of Music before engaging in a workshop co-led with Australian didgeridoo master William Barton titled “Improvisation: A Meeting Point for Jazz and Indigenous Culture.”

Bassist Emma Dayhuff, one of the visiting Herbie Hancock Institute of Jazz Performance Fellows, guided a group of the conservatorium's first-year jazz students in ensemble playing.

“Listening is about being selfless in the music,” Dayhuff said. “If 99 percent of your focus is listening to what everyone else is saying on their instrument, then what you say will make more sense. Whereas, if you're only playing and listening to and for yourself, you just get inside your world and are no longer part of the conversation. The conversation is what makes jazz music a collective art.”

Alto saxophonist Antonio Hart imparted similar wisdom during a big band workshop with the New South Wales Public Schools Stage Band inside the Sydney Opera House. Hart drilled the students on several concepts, including phrasing and tempo. He taught them how to make pianissimos softer, fortissimos louder and crescendos more dramatic.

“The most challenging thing for me was getting the dynamic range, because that's not something that we really factored into our rehearsals,” said Charlie Llewellyn, a 15-year-old alto saxophonist who took Hart's workshop.

While deconstructing a big band chart with the students, Hart told them that jazz was originally designed for dancing and that it often has an explicit or implied 6/8 feel. “The 6/8 meter comes from Africa, so jazz has a triplet feel,” Hart explained after his workshop. “When people look at sheet music, they see eighth notes. In early jazz, they played the dotted-eighth/sixteenth. That's all music notation. But it's all felt by the triplet 6/8 meter.”

Hancock participated in several workshops in Australia as well. At the Sydney Opera House, he led a class on the development and evolution of jazz, starting with Scott Joplin and Louis Armstrong, and concluding with his 1970s jazz-fusion staple “Actual Proof.”

Other events included a Generations in Jazz youth festival in Mount Gambier, South Australia, which featured Morrison, Lizz Wright, Kurt Elling and Joey DeFrancesco.

Organizers hosted a competition for young composers, with Hancock and Morrison serving as judges. The winners were trumpeter Flynn Poppleton, 12, and violinist Naomi Nogawa-Lewy, 9. The New South Wales Public Schools Jazz Orchestra performed a melodic hybrid of Poppleton's and Nogawa-Lewy's winning pieces. Hancock and Morrison not only wrote a big band arrangement of the music, but each of them had a role as a featured soloist.

“I've always loved every sort of music,” an ecstatic Nogawa-Lewy said following the performance. “But jazz really brings out my inner soul.”

—John Murph

Denson Named Dean: Dr. Jeff Denson officially will take on a new title and role as dean of instruction at California Jazz Conservatory in August. In addition to his duties as dean, the bassist, vocalist, composer and educator will continue teaching at the conservatory. He will maintain his schedule of tours and live performances, including a summer of educational and performance activities at CJC, where he will participate in a piano intensive headed by Susan Muscarella, a two-day vibraphone and bass boot camp, co-led by Denson and Philadelphia-based vibraphonist Tony Miceli, and a guitar intensive headed by Mimi Fox. cjc.edu

Film Scoring Master's: Berklee Online's new Master of Music in Film Scoring program officially will start in January 2020. Instructors are slated to include Jon Kull, John Whynot and Sean McMahon, and applications now are being accepted. The Master of Music in Film Scoring degree was preceded by Berklee Online's Master of Music in Music Production and Master of Arts in Music Business programs. online.berklee.edu

Honorary Doctorates: During commencement ceremonies held this spring, Butler University School of Music in Indianapolis presented saxophonist/composer Benny Golson with an honorary doctorate degree, and pianist Barry Harris received an honorary doctorate degree from Manhattan School of Music. butler.edu; msmny.edu

Final Bar: Pianist/keyboardist Frank Caruso, an in-demand performer and educator in the Chicago area, died April 22 at age 70. Caruso taught private lessons and served on the jazz studies faculty at Elmhurst College in Elmhurst, Illinois, for the past 15 years. His résumé also included stints teaching at Roosevelt University and the American Conservatory of Music in Chicago, and North Central College in Naperville, Illinois. Caruso graduated from DePaul University in 1968, then served in the U.S. Navy Band for four years. While in the Navy, he was a featured performer in Washington, D.C., at the White House's 70th Birthday Party for Duke Ellington. elmhurst.edu

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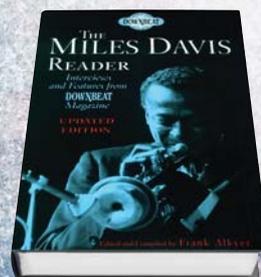
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Mike Clark

Sometimes called the “Godfather of Linear Funk” for his work with Herbie Hancock’s Headhunters in 1975–’77, Mike Clark describes himself as a “bebop and post-bebop drummer.” In addition to co-leading the band Wolff & Clark Expedition (with pianist Michael Wolff), he has appeared on albums by pianist Vince Guaraldi, trumpeter Eddie Henderson and drummer Lenny White. This is his first Blindfold Test.

Joris Teepe

“Multi-Kulti” (*In The Spirit Of Rashied Ali*, Jazz Tribes, 2018) Teepe, bass; John Betsch, drums; Johannes Enders, tenor saxophone.

Coltrane-esque. Was it Charles Lloyd? It’s out of time, and I can’t tell from the drum sound who it is, but I was thinking of Brian Blade. Tyshawn Sorey? I would approach it similarly. They were listening and playing together. I enjoyed it. I don’t listen to much stuff like this, but I did a lot during the ’60s. 3½ stars.

Jared Gold

“It Ain’t Necessarily So” (*Reemergence*, Strikezone, 2018) Gold, Hammond B-3; Dave Stryker, guitar; Billy Hart, drums.

That’s Jabali—Billy Hart—on drums. He’s one of our greatest improvisers. Dave Stryker always has the blues in his sound; he sounds great. Jared Gold sounds great, too. 5 stars. Billy’s musical conversation—the way he orchestrates his ideas according to what others are playing—is of the highest order. His feel is completely his own, and it swings. He listens to every note, and responds—or doesn’t respond—accordingly. He’s very centered, very grounded. You hear that he comes from Max Roach, but it’s like Max Roach on Neptune. He’s steeped in the tradition, and can take it to whatever degree one needs it to be taken to.

Dave Liebman

“Inferno” (*Fire*, Jazzline, 2018) Liebman, soprano saxophone; Dave Holland, bass; Keny Werner, piano; Jack DeJohnette, drums.

Dave Liebman. I played some with him many years ago in the Bay Area with Eddie Henderson, and his sound is in my brain. I like the drummer, who really digs Elvin, but I can hear by the drum sound and other things that it’s not. I have no idea who the bassist and pianist are. I know some of the drummers Liebman plays with, and I could take a wild stab, but I won’t. They were playing together, and understood the concept they were playing, where it was coming from. 5 stars.

Azar Lawrence

“Elementals” (*Elementals*, High Note, 2018) Lawrence, tenor saxophone; Benito Gonzalez, piano; Jeff Littleton, bass; Marvin “Smitty” Smith, drums; Munyongo Jackson, percussion.

They sure like Trane and McCoy, and the drummer was swingin’ his ass off. Of course, he reminds me somewhat of Elvin. At first I thought it was Tain, but as it unfolded, it was different. The cymbal was killing, the groove was killing. ... I loved it, man. It emotionally moved me right in my heart. I feel energized. 5 stars.

Larry Fuller

“Got My Mojo Workin’” (*Overjoyed*, Capri, 2019) Fuller, piano; Hassan Shakur, bass; Lewis Nash, drums.

Hell, yeah! 5 stars. Johnny Vidacovich? Herlin Riley? Jason Marsalis? Idris? No? Then I’m out the door. I love it—all of it. [*Why do you mention those New Orleans drummers?*] Well, the marching thing, the New Orleans beat, out-front to kick it off. I tried to think of guys I know who can play that style and also swing. The drummer was swinging great 4/4,



a lost art. He took some killin’ trades—great ideas. Soul, in the pocket and funky. The piano player was killin’ me just as hard as the drummer was. The drummer isn’t from New Orleans? I don’t know who it is.

Günter Baby Sommer

“Special Guest #1—Danny Boy” (*Baby’s Party*, Intakt, 2018) Sommer, drums; Till Brönner, trumpet.

I don’t know who it is, but they were playing with soulfulness, living the moment. It was heartfelt and expressive, and it got me. At one point, it sounded like a percussionist stepped in. The drummer had a great sound, a great flow, and wasn’t overdoing it. 4 stars.

Donny McCaslin

“Beast” (*Blow*, Motéma, 2019) McCaslin, tenor saxophone; Jason Lindner, Wurlitzer, synthesizers; Tim Lefebvre, electric bass; Mark Guiliana, drums.

The musicians were very good. Great drummer. 2½ stars. It didn’t knock me out. There were some elaborate moments as far as arrangement; they had some real drama going on. There wasn’t much interplay going on between the rhythm section and the soloist. Well done, but not particularly my cup of tea.

The Chick Corea + Steve Gadd Band

“Like I Was Sayin’” (*Chinese Butterfly*, Concord, 2017) Corea, keyboards; Carlitos Del Puerto, electric bass; Steve Gadd, drums.

The drummer is a nasty dog. I mean that with a lot of love. He sounds like Lenny White, but it’s not. Peter Erskine? Gary Novak? I like the phrasing. I like the vocabulary. A high-level musician. Being a nasty dog in this style is not the easiest thing to do, because the music doesn’t really lend itself to that. The drumming speaks to me more than anything else that’s going on. Was it Chick on keyboards? So, I was in the ballpark with Novak. 4 stars. [*after*] I never heard Steve Gadd play like that before. He’s the last person I would have thought of.

Emmett Cohen

“Concerto For Cobb” (*Masters Legacy Series, Vol. 1*, Cellar Live, 2017) Cohen, piano; Yasushi Nakamura, bass; Jimmy Cobb, drums.

It sounded a bit hesitant sometimes, like there was some pull on the groove—though it was groovin’ pretty good. 3½ stars. I don’t know who the drummer was. Kenny Washington? Rodney Green? It’s great to hear younger guys, especially the drummer, playing the tradition like that, coming out of bebop. These are certainly good players, but it didn’t floor me. [*after*] I’m glad I got that “young drummer” right. Glad I could give him some advice!

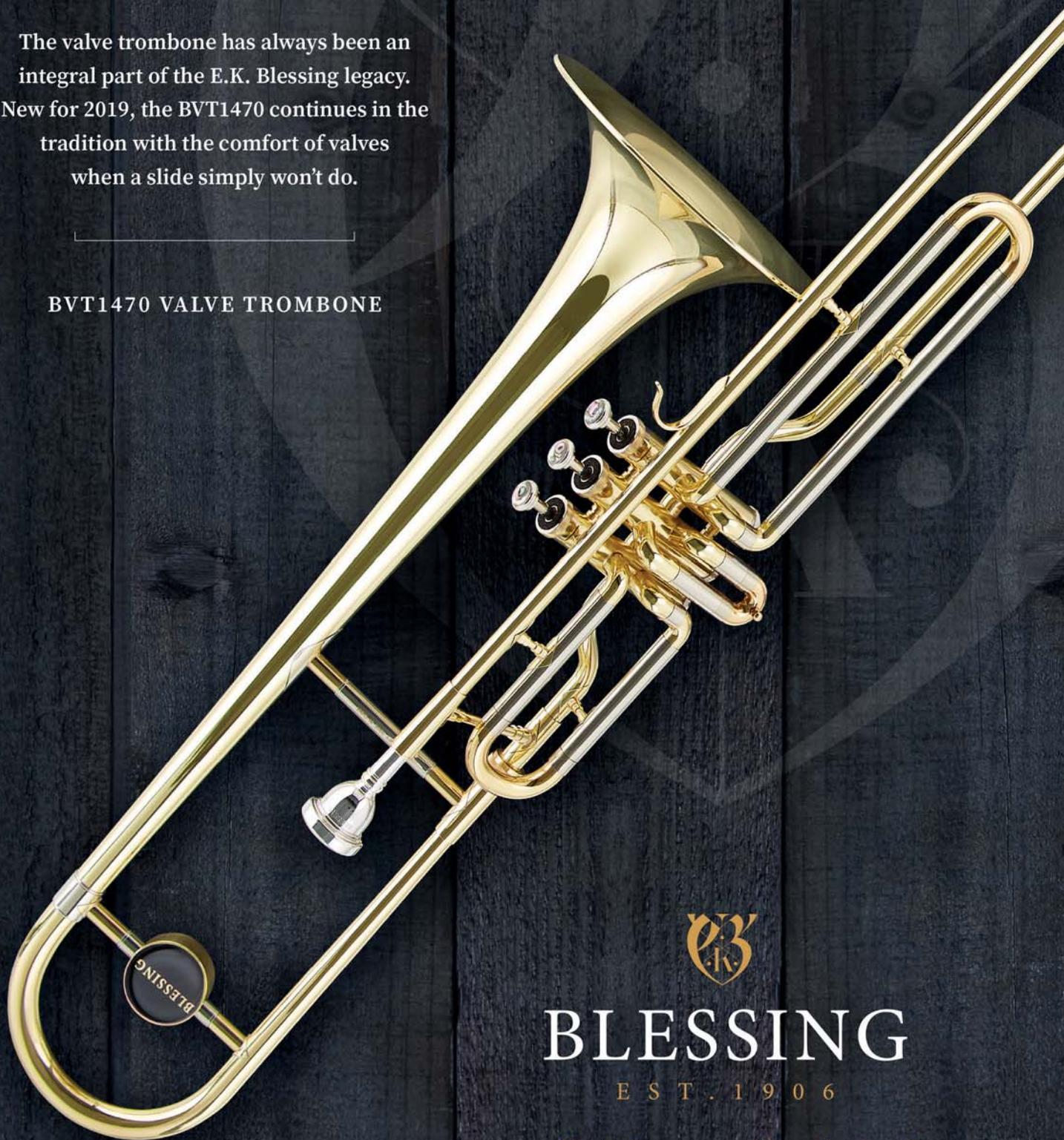
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The “Blindfold Test” is a listening test that challenges the featured artist to discuss and identify the music and musicians who performed on selected recordings. The artist is then asked to rate each tune using a 5-star system. No information is given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

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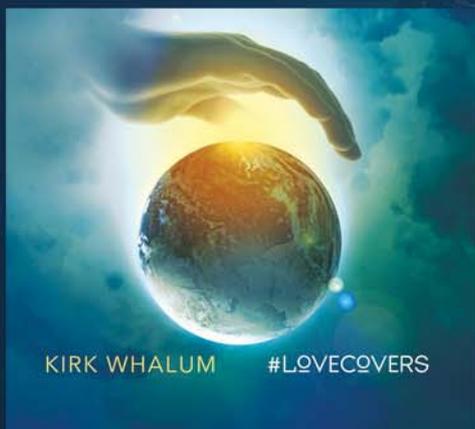
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