

New release from

BOB MERRILL

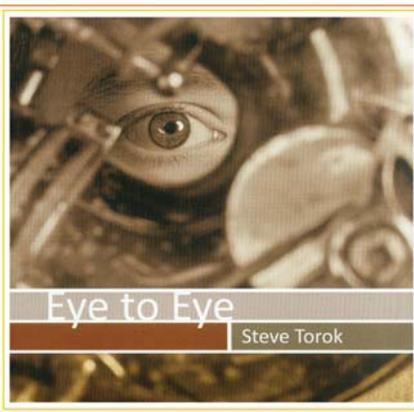


Trumpeter/vocalist **BOB MERRILL** visits a surprisingly eclectic repertoire with a stellar cast including John Medeski, Drew Zingg, Nicki Parrott, George Schuller, Russ Gershon and special guest Roswell Rudd.

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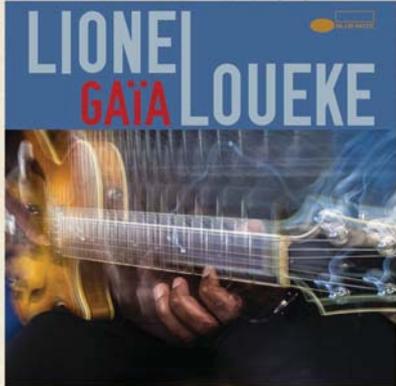
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BlueNote.com



LIONEL LOUEKE - GAÏA

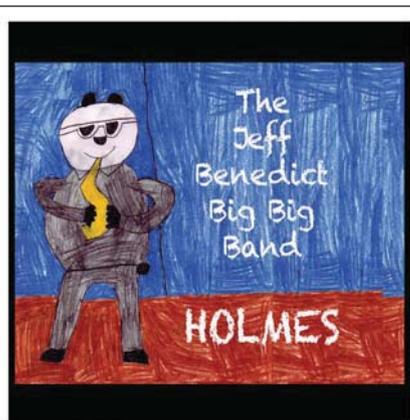
The remarkable rock-infused new album from acclaimed Beninese guitarist Lionel Loueke. On GAÏA, Loueke reunited with his longtime trio featuring bassist Massimo Biolcati and drummer Ferenc Nemeth for a session produced by GRAMMY-winning producer and Blue Note president Don Was.

BlueNote.com



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**MONK'S RIVERSIDE
BOX SET**

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THE GIFT OF GEAR

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AND MORE!



PARTY TIME!

**SHARON JONES & THE
DAP-KINGS CELEBRATE THE
SEASON IN SOULFUL STYLE**

15 Great Stocking Stuffers

By Frank-John Hadley

Christmas music is balm for the soul. Remedies of good cheer are prescribed every autumn by recording artists who redecorate old home-and-hearth carols and Yuletide favorites. Some even compose their own songs. This year's batch of holiday albums features a bevy of talented musicians with soothing powers.

The holiday season is the time to raise a cup of spiked eggnog and salute today's big bands. Leading the charge is the **Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra** led by trumpeter Wynton Marsalis. The

Yuletide album in the Basie organization's 80-year run. The core Basie virtues remain intact: meticulous musicianship, tight comradeship, buoyant swing. The riffs aren't as steamy and bluesy as they were when Basie (or his enlightened surrogate Grover Mitchell) was in charge, but no worries. Arrangements by several experts, including Sammy Nestico (savor his chart for "Good 'Swing' Wenceslas"), are a strong suit and take the onus off "Silent Night" and similarly obvious songs. Barnhart and other soloists shine. Pleasing to the ear, too, are vocals by Carmen Bradford (an alumna), good ol' Johnny Mathis and jazz-influenced Ledisi. New Orleans legend Ellis Marsalis gets to mimic Basie's piano style.

Ordering info: concordmusicgroup.com

Gordon Goodwin's Big Phat Band piles its 18 or more members into one big sleigh for the fun ride of the group's second holiday outing, **A Big Phat Christmas—Wrap This! (Music of Content; 49:10 ★★½)**. Swinging in the spirit of Basie is the defining motivator for arranger-pianist Goodwin and his Los Angeles-based revelers. They grant "Let It Snow" and other favorites new leases on life, and

and Dean Martin without imitating them or adopting a Rat Pack smugness. Skipping the usual holly-and-ivy crowd-pleasers, he merrily investigates sturdy, oft-forgotten tunes waxed long ago by the likes of Martin, Julie London and Brook Benton. Fortunate to have such a crisp, swinging band and to have pianist Park supplying sumptuous charts, Lorenson has a fine time with a recent Yuletide song by John Pizzarelli, "Santa Claus Is Near."

Ordering info: rusllorenson.com

David Benoit made Christmas albums back in the 1980s and '90s, but his new trio CD, **Believe (Concord 37154; 36:59 ★★½)**, is not a tossed-off exercise in rewrapping old presents. Collaborating with talented singer Jane Monheit, the pianist forgoes the lite-jazz he's known for and instead performs full-caloric acoustic jazz. His spry, intelligent playing prompts Monheit to follow him in reconditioning standards. They excel with a winning rendition of "My Favorite Things," mixing gaiety and a touch of the gorgeous to retain the song's tunefulness and identity. The pianist reveres Vince Guaraldi's soundtrack to *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, and he relishes, without sentimentality, the several melodies that make up his "Guaraldi Medley."

Ordering info: concordmusicgroup.com

A quarter-century since last trimming the tree in a recording studio, smooth-jazz operator **Kim Pen-syl** sends personalized season's greetings by way of his **Early Snowfall (Summit 669; 48:54 ★★½)**. Despite a set of standards more worn down than an old toboggan stored in grandpa's garage, the pianist considerably staves off boredom for the listener by offering updates of musical and emotional substance. Along with Rick VanMatre's flute and Rusty Burge's vibraphone, Pensyl's piano conjures honest-to-goodness Kris Kringle-certified jazz, not its sanitized simulacrum. He composed the album's title track, which has an air of enchantment.

Ordering info: summitrecords.com

A glorious gift of new music comes from **Ann Hampton Callaway**, a Tony-nominated Broadway and cabaret singer-songwriter with a genuine feel for jazz. Using impeccable phrasing, she infuses the music of **The Hope Of Christmas (Manchester Craftsmen's Guild 1042; 52:22 ★★★★★)** with a refined jollity. The songs aren't the usual Jack Frost lot. With the exception of one track, none of these songs have been available before. Callaway and New York cognoscenti like Michael Feinstein and Wesley Whatley did the songwriting—and the results are mainly exceptional. William Schermerhorn, a songwriter of wit and wise deliberation, penned the lyrics here, intelligently exploring the complex emotions in play during the holiday season. Arrangements by the Pittsburgh Jazz Orchestra's Mike Tomaro are characterized by a warm, small-band sound and structural clarity. The talented musicians present—including Hubert Laws, Gerald Albright, Claudio Roditi, the Ted Rosenthal Trio and vocal quartet New York Voices—are pledged to decorum, leaving it to Callaway to supply the poignancy.

Ordering info: mcg jazz.org

World-class trumpeter **Etienne Charles** shuns the routine and takes the measure of diverse musical celebrations on his **Creole Christmas (Culture Shock Music 005; 67:27 ★★★★★)**. Originally from Trinidad, he calls on prominent calypso singers Relator and David Rudder to spice up three tunes. The program includes two strong renditions of Lionel Belasco waltzes; "Roses Of Caracas Waltz" utilizes the wild talent of Macedonian clarinetist Ismail Lumanovski. Steel pans master Andy Narell is among



Cécile McLorin Salvant with the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra

group's **Big Band Holidays (Blue Engine 003; 59:15 ★★★★★)** compiles 11 performances that were first heard at JLCO's festive holiday concerts in recent years. This swinging assemblage of 16 excellent musicians treats familiar and unexpected songs with a joy and a heartfelt intent that never flags. This disc sparkles, thanks to Victor Goines' arrangements, the palette of colors on display and the top-flight improvisations. Among those exercising their imaginations: saxophonist Ted Nash and trumpeter Marcus Printup. Yet it's a guest, Cécile McLorin Salvant, who makes the most persuasive case for the empathy and intimacy of the Christmas spirit. A singer of uncommon artistry, she radiates authority when interpreting the Billie Holiday-associated, set-in-winter "It's Easy To Blame The Weather" and three more tunes. Vocalists René Marie and Gregory Porter are fine on a few songs, but it's Salvant who dispenses musical alchemy.

Ordering info: jazz.org/blueengine

Thirty-one years since Count Basie left for eternal rest, trumpeter Scotty Barnhart puts the present-day ghost band, **The Count Basie Orchestra**, through its paces on **A Very Swingin' Basie Christmas (Concord 38450; 44:50 ★★½)**, the first

the bandleader, looking good in a Santa suit, gets an extra slice of mince pie for his surprising revival of John Williams' "Somewhere In My Memory" from the 1990 comedy *Home Alone*.

Ordering info: bigphatband.com

Also capable of swinging from the rafters of Santa's wintry abode is the **Pittsburgh Jazz Orchestra**. On **Joyful Jazz (Manchester Craftsmen's Guild 1039; 69:51 ★★★★★)**, these celebrants plumb standards and reveal fresh perspectives. Credit goes to several skilled soloists (including trumpeter Sean Jones and soprano saxophonist Mike Tomaro) and to a delightful combination of reeds and brass. Tomaro's song "Merry Christmas, John Coltrane" is a life-affirming treat. Classy singer Freddy Cole's presence on three obscure and delightful tunes is a blessing of the season.

Ordering info: mcg jazz.org

Crooner **Russ Lorenson**, joined by the Kelly Park Big Band, delivers good cheer on his album **In The Holiday Spirit (LML Music 285; 42:56 ★★★★★)**. The San Franciscan possesses a warm, rhythmically confident voice that holds volumes of Noel exhilaration. A showman of taste and discretion, Lorenson admires Bobby Darin, Frank Sinatra

David Benoit (left) with Jane Monheit



the talented artists visiting Charles for the holidays. Mykal Kilgore, a singer with Broadway experience, goes to passionate extremes in the gospel number "Go Tell It On The Mountain." Don't think Charles gets lost in the crowd. He and equally bold jazz musicians like saxophonists Jacques Schwarz-Bart and Brian Hogans invest songs with their crackling inventiveness and harmonic ingenuity. With only guitarist Randy Napoleon accompanying him on "I'll Be Home For Christmas," Charles conveys complete, stunning emotional involvement.

Ordering info: etiennecharles.com

Far more conventional, the **Fred Hughes Trio** contributes to the special time of the year with *I'll Be Home For Christmas* (ShoreThing Records 1215; 45:36 ★★½). This well-regarded Washington, D.C.-based pianist and his bandmates demonstrate that with the right melody, harmony and rhythm sensibilities even the most comatose of standards can breathe again.

Ordering info: fredhughes.com

Mr. Claus knows exactly which album to turn to when he's in need of a roots-music fix: *A Blues Christmas* (Alligator 9203, vinyl and download; 40:21 ★★). This collection finds 14 roster acts—their tracks lifted from two old Alligator holiday CDs—sending messages of sensual revelry. Blues powerhouse Shemekia Copeland wraps her tonsils around the terrifically clever "Stay A Little Later, Santa," and the late Koko Taylor sings "Merry, Merry Christmas" with typical zest. Everyone from Elvin Bishop to Marcia Ball to the Holmes Brothers drinks heartily from the 'Gator wassailing bowl.

Ordering info: alligator.com

As the band's fans are well aware, the lead vocalist of **Sharon Jones & The Dap-Kings** has full-throated energy to spare. The group's new album, *It's A Holiday Soul Party* (Daptone 037; 34:08 ★★½), commands attention for how much it sounds like lusty soul of the 1960s and early '70s during Christmastime. This version of "White Christmas" sounds like a track by the Ike & Tina Turner Revue that was stashed away in a record company vault. Beyond hearty partying, Jones' most convincing singing is done on "Please Come Home For Christmas." She's to be applauded for her inclusive attitude, too, as she expends high emotion on the

Hanukkah salute "Eight Days."

Ordering info: daptonerecords.com

Santa would be remiss if he didn't place some gifts of rowdy holiday music under the tree. **The Brian Setzer Orchestra's** *Rockin' Rudolph* (Surfdog; 34:02 ★★½) finds the ex-Stray Cats rockabilly singer-guitarist focusing tons of mirth on the usual picks, plus a couple originals and the cartoon Flintstones' goofball "Yabba Dabba Yuletide." Setzer showcases his guitar prowess on "Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas," while "Carol Of The Bells" makes a favorable impression with its matrix of classical, rock and blues. Big band jazz takes over in swinging style on "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing."

Ordering info: surfdog.com

Starting in the mid-1980s, a holiday album credited to **The dB's & Friends** has been recycled every 10 years or so with new tracks alongside holdovers. *Christmas Time Again* (Omnivore 152; 69:22 ★★½) features wholly enjoyable old songs by the jangle-rock dB's and a version of "The Christmas Song" by indie-rock icon Alex Chilton. But that can't be said about new, undercooked turkeys basted by pop singer-songwriters such as Lydia Kavanagh.

Ordering info: omnivorerecordings.com

Bluegrass queen **Rhonda Vincent's** *Christmas Time* (Upper Management Music; 37:00 ★★½) stands out from the country crowd thanks to her smooth-textured tenor voice and bright fiddling. Sure, there's some commercial drivel here, but Vincent's highly melodic songs "Dreams Of Christmas" and "Christmas Time At Home" are nice—*real* nice. Willie Nelson and Charlie Daniels are among the guests who drop in to celebrate the season. **DB**

Ordering info: rhondavincents.com

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it's Christmas on mack avenue

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IT'S CHRISTMAS ON
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Mack Avenue Records celebrates the season with its brightest stars in a collection of familiar and maybe not-so-familiar holiday tunes. While "Santa Claus Is Coming To Town," "Little Drummer Boy" and Vince Guaraldi's Charlie Brown classic "Christmas Time Is Here" stand tall on the holly bedecked mantle, "Santa Claus, Go Straight To The Ghetto" makes a welcome addition to the Yule time repertoire.

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Monk at his Peak

We don't have Bach playing Bach, but we have Monk playing Monk, and *Thelonious Monk: The Complete Riverside Recordings* (Riverside/Concord) is as historically significant and musically enriching a treasure as anyone could want. These 15 CDs contain 153 studio sessions—everything that producer Orrin Keepnews could find from the more than two dozen sessions he'd run for his label's brilliantly iconoclastic, tradition-rooted pianist-composer from July 1955 to April 1961, the era of Monk's greatest ambition and artistic maturity.

Several classic albums—including *Plays Duke Ellington*, *Brilliant Corners*, *Monk's Music* and *At Town Hall*—are here in their entirety, plus offhand studio talk, revealing outtakes and previously unissued pieces that were deemed failures, including three from a scrubbed date with drummer Shelly Manne. However, everything is sequenced chronologically, and there is no identification of songs by the albums on which they appeared. Nor do we get the original, often witty cover art. But the music—it's tender, flinty, wry, hummable, joyous, infectious, danceable, reflective, fundamental, quizzical, vital and often offhandedly virtuosic. Monk's impact can be taken today as that of a genius everyman, distinct and inimitable.

Hear the pianist in the moment, pausing strategically between or even during his stark

phrases, casting standards such as "I Got It Bad (And That Ain't Good)" as if hewing it from a tree trunk. Hear him meld stride and ragtime figures with seemingly far-fetched harmonic extrapolations that prove wrong is right, hilariously on "Tea For Two." Hear him balance his rumbling left hand against his insistently percussive upper-register right, then comp airily for Gerry Mulligan's baritone sax on "Rhythm-a-ning." Hear sudden tangents and tossed-off exclamations as on "I Let A Song Go Out Of My Heart," celestially chromatic arpeggios and glisses on "Pannonica," "Nuttty" and "I Mean You," note-bending dissonances and odd but inevitable tunes like "Off Minor," "Trinkle, Tinkle" and "Straight No Chaser." The music's pleasures seem inexhaustible.

Keepnews brought Monk to his nascent Riverside label when the pianist's career had been dragged down by his previous label's disinterest and his lack of a cabaret card, restricting New York City gigs. The producer introduced the "high priest of bop" to new listeners (who might otherwise have been scared off by his reputation for being difficult) with Ellingtonia, but he remained supremely attentive to Monk's potential as well as his moods.

When *Thelonious Monk: The Complete*



Riverside Recordings was first released in 1986, Keepnews won the Best Album Notes Grammy, and the whole package, including a glossy booklet with black-and-white photography, was honored as Best Historical Album.

The new CD box set contains the original liner notes and photography in a small booklet, making this a truly compact package. The booklet measures 5 by 5 1/4 inches, and each of the 15 CDs is housed in a cardboard slip-cover instead of a plastic jewel case. So the new set is less than a quarter of the size of the old LP edition. For those running out of shelf space, this is a significant improvement.

—Howard Mandel

Ordering info: concordmusicgroup.com



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MCG Jazz presents Ann Hampton Callaway's *The Hope of Christmas!* This spirited and charming collection of new music with lyrics by William Schermerhorn includes featured soloists: Gerald Albright, Hubert Laws, Chuck Loeb, Claudio Roditi, New York Voices and more!



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Sinatra Box: 100 Years, 101 Swingin' Songs

What makes Frank Sinatra so great? Critics and fans have been trying to explain that to the uninitiated for decades.

Here's how Don Costa (the producer of 1962's *Sinatra & Strings*) put it: "His reading lyrically is far better than anyone I have ever heard—it's almost flawless. Also, he has this rare ability to phrase musically without destroying the meaning of the lyric, but at the same time maintaining the flow of the melody. To create this balance is very difficult because the words are not always meant to be read in the same meter as the melody is written in. However, Frank can place the emphasis exactly the right way so that there is that balance, and with him it always works."

That's a fine description of Sinatra's skills, and it's one of the best quotes contained in the booklet that comes with *Ultimate Sinatra*, a deluxe four-CD box set spanning his entire career.

One hundred years after his birth (and 17 years after his death), The Chairman of the Board remains deeply ingrained in American culture. But not everyone's music library contains a decent Sinatra collection. *Ultimate Sinatra* is a remedy.

This isn't a comprehensive box set for hardcore fans looking for a bunch of rarities. The 80-page booklet is heavy on photos but light on details. It specifies the recording dates and arrangers, but not the names of the albums on which the tracks originally appeared. These are quibbles. The music contained here is timeless and plentiful.

The appeal of this set is its breadth: It chronicles five phases of Sinatra's career: the big band years (1939-'42); the Columbia Records years (1943-'52); his first stint with Capitol Records (1953-'62); the era when he recorded for the label he founded, Reprise (1960-'88); and his fabled late-career return to Capitol (1993-'94).

Ultimate Sinatra is a good introduction for rock fans who don't know much about Ol' Blue Eyes but keep hearing their grandparents talk about him. It's a primer for kids who want to know about that dude who sings "You Make Me Feel So Young" on the soundtrack to the Christmas movie *Elf*. It's also a nice package for fans who don't yearn to dig deep but who want something more extensive than Capitol's 20-track CD *Classic Sinatra: His Great Performances* (1953-'60).

It's appropriate that this set includes 101 songs



because it could function as the text for a college course titled Sinatra 101. Listen up, students.

This set is one-stop shopping for those in need of a sleek set housing all these gems: "Night And Day," "Someone To Watch Over Me," "Come Fly With Me," "Luck Be A Lady," "My Kind Of Town," "Fly Me To The Moon," "It Was A Very Good Year," "Strangers In The Night," "Summer Wind," "New York, New York" and "My Way."

Buy this set for an uninitiated but curious music lover and you run the risk of creating yet another Frankoholic. You've been warned.

—Bobby Reed

Ordering info: sinatra.com

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Steve Barto MUSIC

Honoring A Class ACT

Sigfried “Siggi” Loch began his career in the music industry behind the wheel of a VW Beetle. It was the early 1960s, and Loch, a specialist foreign sales rep for EMI Electrola, was on the road peddling newly imported albums to record stores across Germany. His “mobile” beginnings were a sign of things to come. Within six years, Loch, at 26, would become the youngest manager at the Hamburg-based Phillips label. But his ascent wouldn’t end there. In 1972, he became the head of Warner-Elektra-Atlantic in London. Then, in 1992, he launched his own record label, ACT.

Today, ACT is considered one of the finest curators of progressive jazz and creative music, and Loch, the Polish-born record producer behind the venture, is largely responsible for its success. In 2015 Loch celebrated his 75th birthday, adding yet another milestone to a life already full of them. To commemorate the occasion, the Munich-based label has released *The ACT MAN: A Life In The Spirit Of Jazz—75 Siggi Loch*, a five-CD box set that provides a vivid cross-section of Loch’s prolific career as a producer.

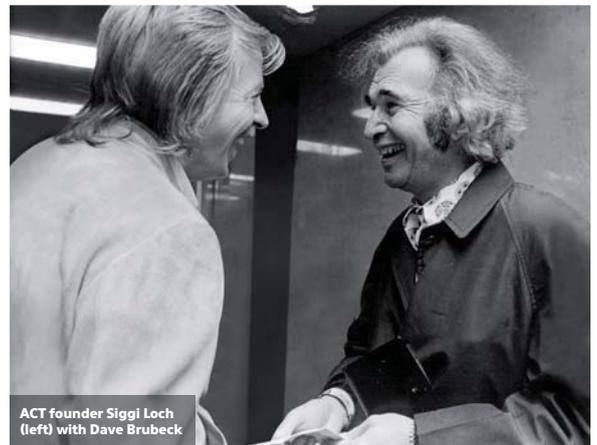
Each disc in this substantial box set is dedicated to a different genre of popular music, a testament to Loch’s broad influence. Everything from Dixieland jazz to ’60s rock ‘n’ roll is represented, but connecting the pieces is Loch’s pristine touch as a record producer and his fierce commitment to

preserving the artist’s vision.

The first disc, *The Beginning*, showcases Loch’s lifelong love affair with traditional jazz, and features recordings that span from the early 1940s to the mid-’90s. The disc begins with clarinetist Sidney Bechet’s winning rendition of “Indian Summer” (though he didn’t personally produce this track, Loch claims it was Bechet who inspired his passion for music) and includes a startling live take of Dave Brubeck and Gerry Mulligan’s “Unfinished Woman.”

As is the case for most lovers of jazz, Loch also kindled a deep appreciation for the blues throughout his life, and disc two, *Blues & Rock*, shines a light on the blues icons that graced Loch’s studio throughout the years. Present on this disc are the American greats John Lee Hooker, Muddy Waters, Buddy Guy and Willie Dixon—all captured in peak form. But a real treat is the German jazz saxophonist Olaf Kübler, who, with Loch’s guidance, filters the spirit of the blues through a distinctly European prism.

The third CD, *Crossing Borders*, collects tracks from the genre-bending world musicians that Loch fostered in his day, including Danilo Rea, Al Di Meola and the supergroup Jazzpaña. Covering more recent ground, disc four, *Visions Of Jazz*,

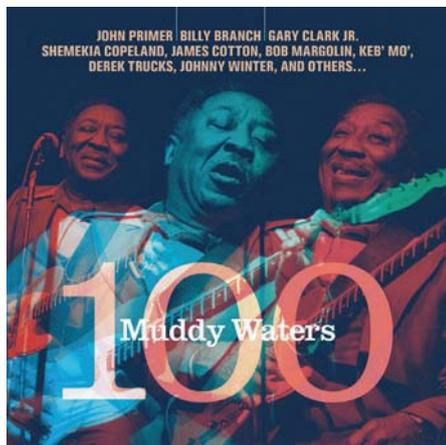


focuses exclusively on ACT artists, and includes such European standouts as Nils Landgren, Michael Wollny and Eberhard Weber. Rounding out the package is *Jazz Berlin Philharmonic*, which consists of live recordings from the titular concert series that Loch continues to curate to this day.

In the 80-page liner notes included with this deluxe box set—which feature scores of color and black-and-white photographs—Loch claims that it was his “knack for spotting new talent and identifying trends in pop music” that led to his meteoric rise through the record industry. That may be true, but at the heart of Loch’s craft is also a profound love of music, which is evident on every track on this disc.

—Brian Zimmerman

Ordering info: actmusic.com



Mud Fest

Though the exact date of Muddy Waters' birth is subject to debate, this much is certain: *Muddy Waters 100*, Raisin' Music's officially authorized centennial tribute to the late blues icon, is as festive a celebration as any fan could hope for.

Waters, a musical pioneer, was the indomitable force behind blues' transition from the twangy, acoustic style of the Delta to the hard-driving, electrified sound we know today. Though the songs on *Muddy Waters 100* represent the various stops along his musical path—from his 1941 recordings on a Mississippi plantation to his work for Chess Records in the early 1950s—they all embrace his trademark spirit of innovation, with reworked classics that incorporate elements of hip-hop, electronica, pop and funk.

The album includes 15 newly recorded tracks from Muddy Waters Band alumni and many of today's most preeminent blues artists, including John Primer, Gary Clark Jr., James Cotton, Keb' Mo', Derek Trucks, Bob Margolin, Billy Branch and Shemekia Copeland. The late guitarist Johnny Winter also appears on this disc, performing a moving rendition of "I'm Ready" that might be his last known recording. He died just five weeks after this album was released on July 24.

As a tribute CD, *Muddy Waters 100* isn't focused on preservation. It embraces Waters' inventive nature, and many of the best tracks on this recording incorporate new sounds into familiar songs. A fresh take on "Mannish Boy" carries a distinctly urban swagger, courtesy of the hip-hop drum loops of programmer Blaise Barton. And an updated "Last Time I Fool Around With You" moves with a powerful sense of funk, thanks to the incendiary bass of Felton Crews.

Produced by the Grammy-nominated Larry Skoller and recorded in Chicago, this commemorative CD comes housed in a hardcover booklet featuring 48 pages of illustrated and black-and-white photos of Waters, as well as an original essay by Robert Gordon.

The influence of the blues has spread throughout American culture, spawning a number of musical rivers and streams. But as this genre-spanning album proves, they all lead back to Muddy Waters.

—Brian Zimmerman

Ordering info: muddywaters100.com

JAMES WHITING
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Australian Vibraphonist, James Whiting leads an all-star lineup on his new release of original material.

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Centennial Strayhorn Celebration

Given Billy Strayhorn's aversion to the spotlight, it is slightly ironic that the latest effort to remedy his underrating as a shaper of the jazz canon takes the form of a coffee table book. *Strayhorn: An Illustrated Life* (Agate Bolden), published on the occasion of his centennial year, makes the bittersweet story of the mild-mannered pianist, composer and arranger who toiled in Duke Ellington's shadow a visually appealing light read.

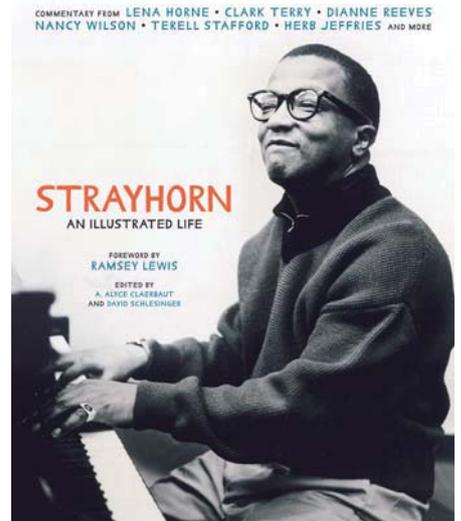
Produced by the family-owned company that publishes Strayhorn's music, this 209-page collection of interviews, photographs, essays and scores conveys the personal warmth and boundless creativity of the dapper, diminutive Swee' Pea, whose best work was harmonically and structurally ahead of its time. Of special interest to fans and scholars will be the book's replicating some of Strayhorn's handwritten manuscripts, including for the first time anywhere the original score for "Take the 'A' Train," which became one of the 20th century's seminal compositions.

The book comes in the wake of Robert Levi's 2007 PBS documentary, *Billy Strayhorn: Lush Life*, and David Hajdu's acclaimed 1996 Strayhorn biography, *Lush Life*, both of which are titled after Strayhorn's dreamy ballad. Like those works, the new book aims to raise awareness of what it calls the grossly overlooked and incomplete documented record of Strayhorn's written output.

Tapping the recollections of a host of friends and associates—including former Ellington band vocalist Herb Jeffries and bassist Jimmy Woode, Strayhorn's close friend Lena Horne, pianist Marian McPartland and singers Rosemary Clooney and Nancy Wilson—the book's splashy blend of candid photographs, quotations and sidebars evokes an image of the Dayton, Ohio, native as a self-assured but limelight-shy artist who struggled to be happy even as he won the love of many around him.

The straightforward text—half of which is written by Strayhorn's niece, Alyce Claerbaut, the book's co-editor (along with David Schlesinger) and president of the family-operated Billy Strayhorn Songs Inc.—points out that Strayhorn's open homosexuality may have driven him to keep a low profile in a homophobic jazz culture. The extent to which Ellington himself enabled Strayhorn's obscurity also is under scrutiny. Although Strayhorn possessed an uncanny ability to seamlessly finish dozens of uncompleted Ellington ideas, he seldom received a publishing credit. Moreover, when Strayhorn's originals became part of the orchestra's songbook, Duke often took a co-composer's credit, as was common practice among leaders at the time.

Putting all this in a coffee table book reflects how the effort to bring broader recognition to Strayhorn, whose best-known songs also include



"Satin Doll," is gaining traction. Today, the notion that Strayhorn was a jazz force beyond Ellington's "writing and arranging companion" is winning acceptance, borne out by fresh interpretations of his work by a new generation of musicians. This book will be an enjoyable read for knowledgeable jazz fans and neophytes alike.

—Michael Barris

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Book Compiles McCann's Stunning Photos

When Les McCann began playing the piano as a child, he found himself drawn as much to his family's Kodak camera as to the instrument. By the early 1970s, he had received global acclaim as an influential keyboardist, but his photography remained a hidden talent. The collection *Invitation to Openness: The Jazz & Soul Photography of Les McCann, 1960–1980* (Fantagraphics Books) presents these vivid black-and-white shots, which reveal that his artistic sensibilities have been as much visual as musical.

While McCann led a successful piano trio in California during the 1960s, he became a jazz superstar when he teamed up with saxophonist Eddie Harris on the live album *Swiss Movement* (Atlantic) at the end of the decade. McCann not only revealed a distinctive take on blues changes and funk rhythms alongside the brawny saxophonist, but also had a crossover hit singing Gene McDaniels' "Compared To What" on that album. About four years later he experimented with an electric piano and a Moog synthesizer on the Atlantic album that lent this book its name.

McCann has continued to tour and perform (and paint) while numerous DJs have sampled his earlier work. As he suggests in an interview with Pat Thomas—who compiled this book along with Alan Abrahams—McCann's successes in different disciplines comes down to trusting his own intuition.

But McCann's photos are so stunning because many great artists trusted him. He captures warm, and not everyday, smiles from Miles Davis, Jimmy Smith and Wilson Pickett. Others, like Count Basie and Coleman Hawkins, are simply radiant while they're relaxing offstage (even if McCann's account of how Hawkins dealt with an obnoxious fan accompanies the photos). Also, McCann's bandstand perspective lent him the kind of angles—let alone accessibility—that would have been difficult, if not impossible, for any other photographer. This

collection is loaded with uncanny perspectives of hard-working musicians onstage: John Coltrane, Stanley Clarke, Tina Turner, Joshua Redman, Nancy Wilson and Eberhard Weber with Sarah Vaughan. In one particularly dramatic shot, blues legend B.B. King looks as he's stepping away from a shadow. In another, McCann captures trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie's famous bulging cheeks.

Invitation to Openness recalls the landmark 1988 collection of bassist Milt Hinton's photos, *Bass Line* (Temple University Press). Both musicians were not only accomplished enough to work with some of the biggest names in jazz, but also had the genial personalities that allowed those bandleaders to be relaxed when their colleagues' cameras clicked. The books' pictures also say a lot about American society surrounding the music. Hinton's photos of the Cab Calloway band on tour of the South revealed how jazz performers transcended Jim Crow segregation; McCann's photos of activists Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Jesse Jackson and Stokely Carmichael—as well as such outspoken musicians as Nina Simone and Roberta Flack—remind the viewer of how much the country has changed over the decades.

McCann's book also offers numerous examples of his hilarious, frank and sometimes trenchant observations. That attitude comes through in his interview with Thomas and his comments throughout the book. One such quote, which runs alongside his vivid shots of Stevie Wonder, is too vulgar to be printed here. McCann's sense of humor could also be a reason why he also befriended so many comedians. The book includes his shots of a young, upstart Richard Pryor as well as a roguish Redd Foxx. Still, even after spending time with these comedy giants, McCann surprisingly claims that "the funniest person I think I've ever known" was "Mama" Cass Elliot. Clearly, this man will never deliver merely what's expected of him. —Aaron Cohen

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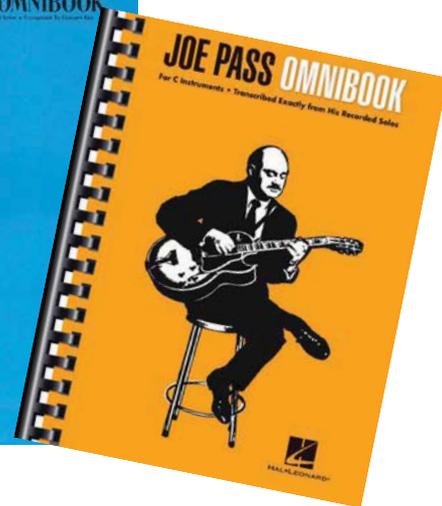
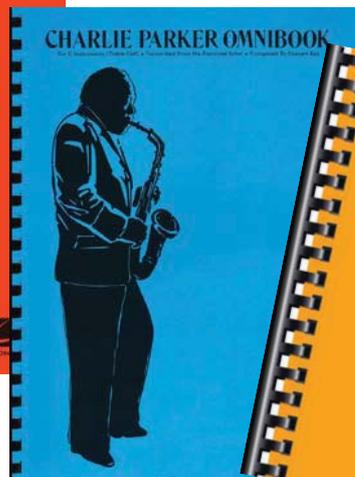
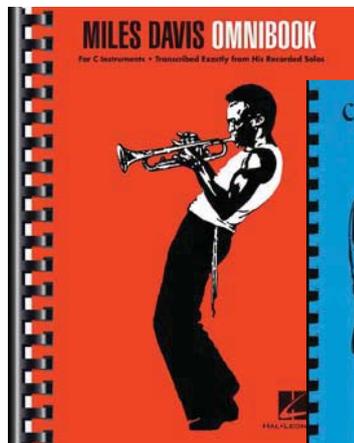
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More Omnibook titles are in the works, including collections spotlighting the solos of Stan Getz, Julian "Cannonball" Adderley, Oscar Peterson and Paul Desmond. Hal Leonard is also preparing an Omnibook featuring standout trombonists and another focusing on scat singers such as Ella Fitzgerald and Mel Tormé. Look for these additional titles starting late this year and into 2016. Hal Leonard is also planning to create Play-Along versions with backing tracks (similar to the *Charlie Parker Omnibook* Play-Along version) for all the titles in the series.

—Ed Enright

Ordering info: halleonard.com

Literary Jazz for Kids & Adults

The merger of jazz and literature is the focal point of two delightful new releases, both of which spotlight some of the greatest names in the history of jazz.

Published by The Secret Mountain, *Dreams Are Made For Children: Classic Jazz Lullabies* is an illustrated storybook accompanied by a 12-track CD. This book is perfect for parents who want to introduce their toddlers to the music of Sarah Vaughan, Ella Fitzgerald, Chet Baker and Frank Sinatra.

Each two-page spread in the book combines Ilya Green's whimsical, colorful illustrations with the printed lyrics to a song that's on the CD.

The lyrics to "Hit The Road To Dreamland" (sung by Mel Tormé on the CD) are accompanied by Green's smile-inducing illustrations of two children riding atop flying sheep while another lucky youngster zooms across the sky in a red rocket ship.

Elsewhere, the lyrics to the timeless tune "God Bless The Child" (sung by Billie Holiday) are paired with depictions of smiling kids of different ethnic backgrounds. A girl proudly holds up her pinwheel and a boy works on the back tire of his bicycle.

The book also includes a biographical paragraph about each artist on the CD, so kids can learn about icons such as Holiday and Peggy Lee.

One can imagine a child treasuring this book from the years when it was read to him—and then gaining a much deeper comprehension of the lyrics after he becomes a young reader himself. After all, kids are never too young to learn about the transcendent artistry of Sarah Vaughan.

And we can't think of a better way to prepare for a journey to Slumberland than listening to Nat "King" Cole soothingly croon "My Sleepy Head (Go To Sleep)."

While kiddies are the audience for Green's storybook, Sher Music has released a unique stocking stuffer aimed at grownups. *Poetry + Jazz: A Magical Marriage* is an audiobook CD with 23 tracks, featuring music by artists such as saxophonist Gene Ammons, bassist John Patitucci and guitarists John Abercrombie and Mike Stern.

Each track on the CD takes an existing musi-

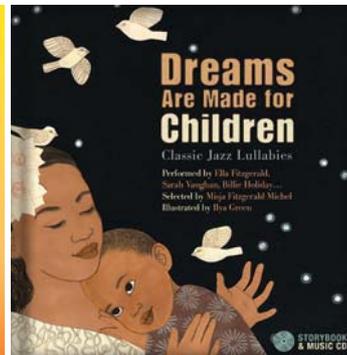
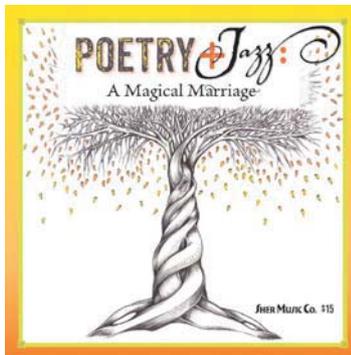
cal recording and combines it with a newly recorded spoken-word performance of a poem. For example, track 15 has the song "You're Blase" (as recorded by saxophonist Stan Getz on the Concord album *Spring Is Here*) merged with Cory Bih's powerful recitation of "Orpheus Alone," which was written by Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Mark Strand.

Another highlight is Alison Luterman's poem "Accidents" melded with the Maria Schneider Orchestra's "Gush" (from the ArtistShare album *Evanescence*). The potent recitation here is by jazz singer René Marie.

Other poets represented on the CD include Rainer Maria Rilke, Kenneth Rexroth, Philip Levine, Stephen Dunn and Carol Snow.

—Bobby Reed

Ordering info: thesecretmountain.com; shermusic.com



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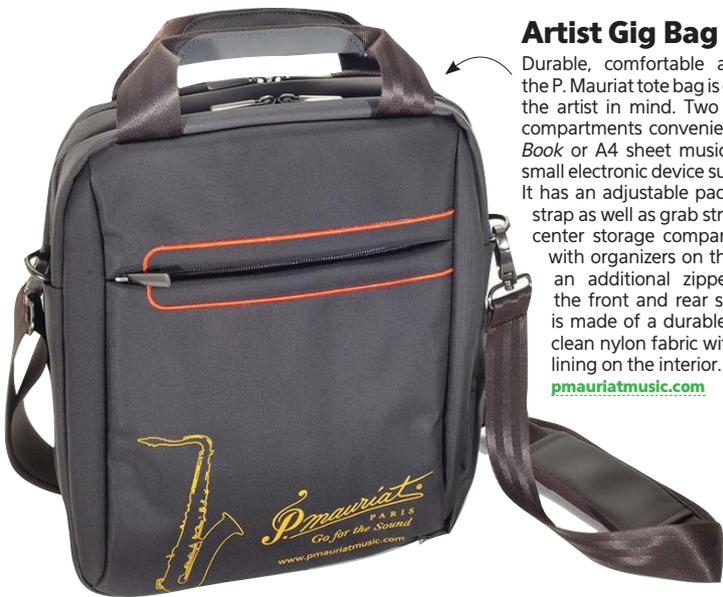
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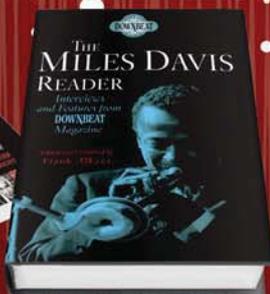
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