



LEVON MIKAEKIAN CELEBRATES THE MUSIC OF HIS NATIVE ARMENIA WITH MARCH 12 RELEASE OF "UNTAINTED."

Pianist's album features traditional Armenian Songs and dances in the wake of the country's "Velvet Revolution," performed by a D.C.-based trio with bassist Jon Steele, drummer Kelton Norris. Mikaelian's adult understanding of the songs sometimes overrides the childhood innocence he drew on in selecting them. Songs such as "Cilicia" and "Tesnem Anin" are about places that had been part of Armenia since antiquity, but were annexed by Turkey in the wake of World War I and the harrowing events known as the Armenian Genocide.



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I think about this quote a lot: "It's tough to get out of bed when you've been sleeping in silk pajamas." It's by the boxing great, Marvin Hagler. He's talking about when a fighter stops being hungry. Once you get comfortable, it's hard to keep fighting.

I fight like a motherfucker every day. I'm trying to do something great in the world and still put food on the table for my family. You have to fight to give anything beautiful a chance.

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MOONJUNE RECORDS

FRUITFUL FRIENDSHIPS

At 6-foot-4-inches and 250 pounds, Leonardo Pavkovic is a larger-than-life figure in the record business. But his physical stature is exceeded by his sheer passion for music.

"I am an unusual label," said the gregarious head of MoonJune Records. "I do not sign artists. There is no such thing as a musician sending me a demo and me taking the demo into consideration. The whole label is built on my personal friendship with musicians. When I started this label, I didn't have distribution, I didn't have money, I didn't have a lawyer or publishing. I just said, 'OK, let's see how I can help my friends.'"

The label's inaugural release in 2001 was saxophonist Elton Dean and guitarist Mark Hewins' collaboration, *Bar Torque*. And today, Pavkovic is closing in on the 100-release mark for his label, while his MoonJune Music agency has handled booking of about 2,000 shows in more than 50 countries. Indonesia has become a particularly fertile scene to tap into for Pavkovic, yielding discoveries like guitarist Tohpati Ario Hutomo and keyboardist Dwiki Dharmawan.

"I find Indonesia to be a very interesting place," he said. "Jakarta is a major city, like the London of Indonesia. Almost 20 million people live there from all around Indonesia and everybody knows everybody. It was very easy to make connections there, so I started booking bands and being involved with the festivals. I became friends with some of those guys, like Dewa Budjana. He plays in the biggest pop-rock band in Indonesia, called Gigi, but he always wanted to do progressive rock and fusion on the side. So I said, 'I will help you.' I liked what he was doing and saw potential in him."

Recent MoonJune releases include Budjana's sixth album for the label, *Mahandini*, *Lines In The Sand* by Serbian keyboardist Vasil Hadzimanov, and *Tales From The Dreaming City* by British guitar virtuoso Mark Wingfield.

"Leonardo is a man with a vision about the sort of music he feels should be created and heard in the 21st century," said Wingfield, who has three upcoming releases on MoonJune. "He built his label from scratch by choosing artists he felt would create this sort of music. It's even more incredible that he did it in this climate, where so little money is coming in from music sales. There is a huge and growing body of great music that simply wouldn't exist if it weren't for Leonardo."

Growing up in Jajce in the former Yugoslavia before relocating to Southern Italy during his college years, Pavkovic began cultivating his eclec-



Mark Wingfield has issued *Tales From The Dreaming City* through MoonJune Records.

tic taste in music. "When I was collecting records in my teens, I never divided music into categories," he explained. "I started with rock, but then I discovered John Coltrane, Miles Davis and Sun Ra, then progressive rock, Frank Zappa and the Mahavishnu Orchestra, then ECM artists like Eberhard Weber, Jan Garbarek and Terje Rypdal. I enjoy equally with great passion the first album by Black Sabbath and Keith Jarrett's *Köln Concert*. It is just music that I like. And that's actually how my label is represented. I don't like to be [called] a jazz label, progressive label, fusion label."

Pavkovic immigrated to New York in 1990 and felt an immediate connection to the metropolis. "Within 24 hours of being here, I said to

myself, 'Wow, I am home.' For the first time in my life, I felt like I was in the right place. And now, I'm using my very privileged position of being in the most important big city in the world to help my friends, so that they can continue making amazing music."

Wingfield is grateful that Pavkovic has remained steadfast: "Labels like MoonJune are vital to keeping the art form living and growing. But to do this, you need a label head who is a visionary, willing to take risks and provide an environment where the artists are encouraged to take risks. You also need someone who has a Herculean determination to forge that vision. Leonardo is that person." —Bill Milkowski

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Miles Evans works on a Gil Evans Orchestra album at Avatar Studios.

CAROL FRIEDMAN

"My father was not just a great musician, he was a great dad," Miles Evans said, speaking before a recent gathering of Gil Evans devotees at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. "I remember him telling me that he never knew his real father, so he was determined to be the best father he could."

Miles and his musician/engineer brother, Noah, have launched a series of new Gil Evans Orchestra recordings that will keep their dad's musical vision alive. The first of the three albums, *Hidden Treasures: Monday Nights* (Bopper Spock Suns Music), was released in December after a crowd-funding campaign through PledgeMusic.

The Canadian-born composer and arranger, who died in 1988 at age 75, was one of the most significant orchestrators in jazz history. The enormously popular albums on which Gil collaborated with Miles Davis embodied a modernist aesthetic based on a synthesis of jazz and 20th-century classical music. *Porgy And Bess* and *Sketches Of Spain* in particular, with their complex harmonies influenced by Ravel and Debussy, and their extended instrumentation—classic big band augmented with French horn, tuba and other woodwinds—are among the most famous jazz albums of all time.

After helping to invent "cool" and "modal" jazz, Evans explored free-jazz and fusion with his orchestra, including a 1975 album devoted to the music of Jimi Hendrix. The orchestra eventually settled into a regular Monday night gig at New York's Sweet Basil beginning in 1983, the year Miles joined the band on trumpet; he took the helm after his father's death.

The Evans brothers recently revived the band after a period of dormancy. At the library, Miles spoke as part of a panel discussion that included Stephanie Crease, author of the biography

Gil Evans: Out of the Cool. Although Davis and Evans worked together on only a few projects, Crease said the two remained "friends for life." And, noted Miles, "They both had an amazing ability to find the greatest musicians. And they never wanted to rest on their laurels."

Monday Nights captures the churning jazz-funk fusion and electronics-aided experimentalism of the orchestra's work in the late '70s and '80s. The album includes tunes by Gil ("Moonstruck," "Eleven"), Miles ("LL Funk") and longtime orchestra members Pete Levin (keyboards), John Clark (French horn) and Alex Foster (saxophones). Today's orchestra also includes GEO veterans Kenwood Dennard (drums), percussionist Mino Cinelu, trumpeter Shunzo Ohno, trombonist David Taylor and bassist Mark Egan.

Foster, a 29-year veteran of the Saturday Night Live band, said the revival of the Evans orchestra is important to him both musically and personally. "Gil's music is epic," he said. "It's a tremendous honor and a blessing to play anything associated with him."

The next album in the series, *The Classics*, will consist of new recordings of Evans' late-'50s arrangements with Davis, including "My Ship" and "The Meaning Of The Blues." The third volume, *Gil And Anita*, is based on unreleased recordings Evans co-produced in 1984 with his wife. "We've revitalized them with some overdubs featuring the current band," Miles said. The family is looking at possible release dates in 2020 and 2021 on his father's birthday, May 13.

The Evans brothers extol the virtues of producing and releasing independently. "It's nice to own your own master and to be your own record company," Miles said. "You choose the best studios. If you need more time, you have it. You have the artistic freedom to realize your own vision."

—Allen Morrison

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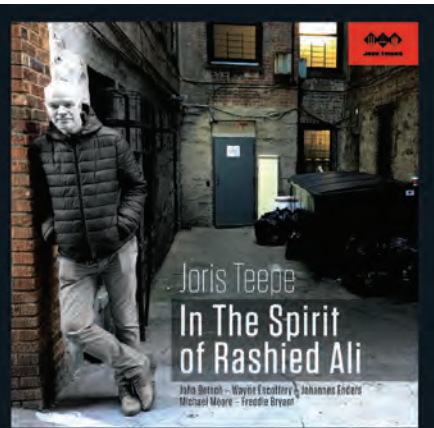
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Chicago bassist Matt Ulery realizes that the name of his indie company, Woolgathering Records, might connote “irresponsible daydreaming,” but he explained that he chose the name partially because it “would keep me inspired to be experimental.” That’s an apt description of the music on the label, which includes Ulery’s own work, as well as that of Midwest-based colleagues.

Ulery talked about this approach a few blocks away from the Loyola University Chicago campus, where he’s a bass and composition instructor. As a teacher, performer and writer, his reach across different musical communities informs his stunning new disc, *Sifting Stars*. The album blends Ulery’s experiences in chamber music and jazz as his quietly haunting pieces combine small brass group improvisation with strings and voices. For Ulery, launching Woolgathering is a means to give back to the myriad artists who have helped him.

“Seeing people wanting to produce their music is inspiring me to do that for myself,” he said. “If I’m in a position with my label to help somebody who needs it, and I can get behind them, I’m all for it. I’m not saying I want to get in there and have any creative control they don’t want me to have. I haven’t felt the need to change anyone’s art with Woolgathering. I want anyone to know that if they’re going to do something, I trust them.”

Previously, Ulery had released records on another artist-owned label, trumpeter Dave Douglas’ Greenleaf Music. The experience taught him a great deal about logistics—the ins and outs of physical and digital releases, as well as how to use online resources, like Bandcamp. Learning about how to build and maintain an audience proved equally crucial.

Throughout 2018, Ulery turned all of these experiences into releasing a lineup of Woolgathering albums, including Chicago pianist Rob Clearfield’s *Wherever You’re Starting From*. Saxophonist Tim Haldeman’s *Open Water As A Child* is a musical commentary on the water contamination crisis in Flint, Michigan, not far from his home in Ann Arbor. Haldeman said that Ulery provides room for bold musical or political statements without concern for sales potential.

“We had years and years of conversations about labels, hearing stories about bad record deals and frustration around all that,” Haldeman



Chicago bassist **Matt Ulery** runs the independent label **Woolgathering Records**.

MICHAEL JACKSON

recalled. “Matt’s definitely approaching it from a musician’s standpoint. It becomes more about wanting to have something to do with the creative spirit inside of all of us.”

Commissions from foundations and other arts organizations enable Ulery to devote time to composing. The multi-part “*Ida*” on *Sifting Stars* took shape as an assignment from the quintet Axiom Brass.

“A lot of composers operate on commissions, get their piece played once and it’s done,” he said. “But it’s another creative outlet to make music: to go into the studio and make what’s almost a rock record. It’s all an experiment, and I’d never done any of the things that I do in school.”

As an educator, Ulery is boosting an upcoming generation through the venerable jazz tradition of hosting jam sessions. He and drummer Quin Kirchner encourage young musicians to participate in these open performance opportunities Monday nights at The Whistler, a bar in Chicago’s Logan Square neighborhood. Whether they prefer standards or their own original tunes, Ulery just wants them to get up and play.

“Let’s keep doing stuff, let’s be busy, produce our own records, make our own bands, play jazz standards together, meet each other and talk,” Ulery said. “I’m going to keep doing that, no matter what. [I come] from a punk-rock type of background, where you make records, put them out, play shows, be active. I want to be inspiring to people playing jazz from the ’50s and ’60s, and inspire them to find their own musical voices. I find that inspiring.”

—Aaron Cohen

Waltzing out of Town



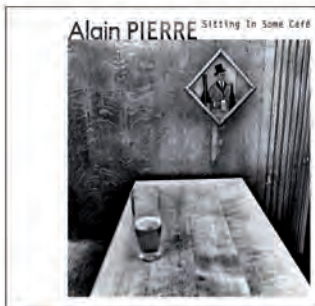
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