

OUTSIDE IN MUSIC



LINDSEY VICTORIA

Pianist Jen Allen is set to issue *Sifting Grace* through Outside In Music, a media company helmed by trombonist Nick Finzer.

SUPPORT IN ALL DIRECTIONS

Trombonist Nick Finzer, 31, has a thriving career as a leader, accompanist and acclaimed educator at the University of North Texas. But back in 2012, just out of a master's program at The Juilliard School, he was having trouble finding a label that would

meet his timeline for a debut album.

"I was young and fresh and eager," he said over coffee at a Manhattan patisserie in December. "So, I put it out on my own." That led to some self-education in the art of marketing, which Finzer used to maximum effect

helping a few friends release their albums. By 2016, "It was like, 'I guess we can create a label out of this.'"

The label was dubbed Outside in Music, and Finzer's debut album, *Exposition*, which he had released in 2013, became the OiM catalog's first listing. Colleagues signed on to the label and brought other artists with them. What began as a trickle of releases has grown to a steady stream: The label has about 60 CDs, and a clutch of digital-only collections, out or set to be released.

OiM, which now includes a subsidiary label called Next Level, positions itself as multifaceted media company for jazz musicians—many of them young—who lack the will or the means to navigate the world of promoting one's career in the digital age. OiM provides a range of artist services (including management and consultation), while simultaneously maintaining and marketing its catalog.

"We focus on a digital-first approach and a content approach," Finzer explained. "We encourage artists to co-release things—digital and physical—to make sure things can exist in all places, meaning streaming, physical stores, YouTube"—anywhere, in fact, where the music can be heard and an artist's brand built.

Though OiM can aid artists in all phases of their projects, the company typically becomes involved after the tracks have been recorded. Thinking holistically, OiM offers services variously executed in-house or through a network of select vendors. But OiM is flexible; clients can pick and choose among services and bring in vendors with whom they have a preexisting relationship.

Paul Nedzela, a baritone saxophonist with the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra who knew Finzer primarily from the big-band scene, retained OiM after mixing and mastering what would become his debut album. A quartet effort titled *Introducing Paul Nedzela*, the 10-track collection was teased with a digital release of the swinging single "Lisa" in June 2019, a month before the full album was released.

"Nick really took the reins," Nedzela said. "He has an idea of what the state of the music is like right now, what the business is right now. He's got his finger in a lot of pies and has an idea of what you have to do to tap into the new scene, from a recording standpoint."

OiM handled the album's social media posts. It wrote a one-page press primer that complemented a full release by an outside publicist with whom OiM coordinated. OiM

also hooked up vendors for the design and printing of the package, arranged distribution of physical and online copies, and negotiated the tricky path to a slot on Spotify's State of Jazz playlist for "Bernard's Revenge," a hard-driving track from the album.

"The fact that it got picked up got me more exposure than I would have without him doing that stuff," Nedzela said.

Like Nedzela, Jen Allen—a pianist who teaches at Trinity and Bennington colleges—came to OiM with her tracks already laid down. Unlike Nedzela, however, she hadn't met Finzer. In fact, even though they've performed with some of the same artists, Allen and Finzer never have met in person. It is a very modern take on the business relationship—but one that has worked.

"Nick's really organized and very thoughtful about what he's doing," Allen said. "There are a lot of things that have come my way through Outside in Music."

For Allen, the process began with questions OiM asked about her work, a step that Finzer argued helps shape a profile useful for social and other media. OiM arranged gigs and turned Allen's photos into art for the cover of her album *Sifting Grace*, slated for a Feb. 21 release on Next Level. The quartet recording features excellent musicians: Kris Allen (saxophone), Marty Jaffe (bass) and Kush Abadey (drums).

Sifting Grace could presage a more extensive collaboration with OiM, she said, citing the possibility of a big band album in a year or two. For that, she said she might call on OiM to aid in the recording process itself: "That would be ideal. In a project like that, it needs a lot more input from other people."

Whether the project is big or small, Finzer encourages artists to put themselves out there. Abundance is key to being noticed in the multiplatform marketplace, he said, and if that means issuing an instructional video, a digital release of a holiday song or a standards CD as a means of drawing listeners to work that more closely reflects an artist's unique vision, so be it.

Finzer practices what he preaches, functioning, he said, as a de facto "guinea pig" for OiM services. The release of his next CD, *Cast Of Characters*, on Feb. 28, will be his fifth since he graduated from Juilliard. He also has produced four digital-only collections and a well-received educational series on YouTube that has boosted the global audience for both his teaching and his music. All of which has informed the OiM experience today—and, potentially, for the future.

"I feel like the industry is probably ready for another shift soon," he said. "I don't know what it is, but I want to be ready."

—Phillip Lutz

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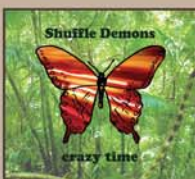
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Brian Lynch's new big band release is a double album that reflects his love of literature.

SELF-ENABLING BIG BAND PRODUCER

Last January, Brian Lynch, 63, took the first sabbatical semester of his eight-year professorship at Frost School of Music at the University of Miami. Over the next six months, the master trumpeter-composer worked on his first big band album, composing, recording and mixing the nine compositions that constitute *The Omni-American Book Club: My Journey Through Literature In Music*, out now on his own label, Hollistic MusicWorks.

Dialogue is key. The works, propelled by an array of beat signatures—hardcore swing to bolero to hardcore clave—distill in notes and tones the core ideas of a cross-generational, polyethnic cohort of 18 authors who have inspired Lynch and informed his worldview.

Each track is dedicated to two writers. The leader uncorks a string of authoritative solos in his singular harmonic argot, exchanging ideas with guest soloists Regina Carter (violin), Dave Liebman (soprano saxophone), Jim Snidero (alto saxophone), Orlando “Maraca” Valle (flute) and Dafnis Prieto (drums).

Most prominent in the authorial mix is Albert Murray (the co-dedicatee, along with Ta-Nehisi Coates, of “The Struggle Is In Your Name”), whose 1970 collection, *The Omni-Americans*, contends that black culture is a fundamental component of what “American-ness” means. Lynch has refined that hybrid principle through the fluent multilingualism of his musical production, informed by consequen-

tial end-of-the-’80s apprenticeships with jazz giants Horace Silver and Art Blakey, and parallel two-decade stints as co-equal bandmate to Phil Woods and Eddie Palmieri. Both veterans played on the 2006 album *Simpático* (an ArtistShare release credited to The Brian Lynch/Eddie Palmieri Project), which won a Grammy for Best Latin Jazz Album. Lynch received a Grammy nomination in the same category for his 2016 release, *Madera Latino: A Latin Jazz Perspective On The Music Of Woody Shaw* (Hollistic). His 22 prior albums include several low-budget jazz recordings.

“The discipline I gained through making, in one afternoon, albums that could stand the test of time—recording directly to two-track,

no mixing—was invaluable,” Lynch said a few weeks after *The Omni-American Book Club* earned Grammy nominations for Best Large Jazz Ensemble Album and Best Instrumental Composition (“Crucible For Crisis,” on which Prieto and Valle perform). “After the good result from *Simpático*, on which I was free to do as I wanted, I decided to enable myself as a producer, as well as a player, composer and bandleader.”

For this latest project, Lynch said he wanted “a theme that connects to the causes and contexts that drive my music.” He found it during conversations with co-producer Kabir Sehgal, himself an admirer of writer Murray’s works. “If there’s one thing I love as much as music, it’s reading,” Lynch said. Determined to complete the work during the term of his sabbatical, Lynch “didn’t even fund-raise, but just barreled all the way through.”

The core sessions were recorded at Frost’s Austin L. Weeks Center, with additional recording done at six other studios.

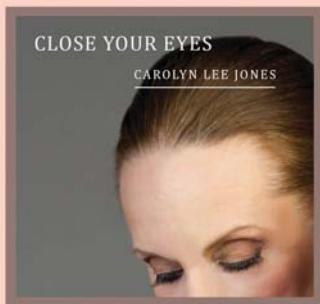
That the project cohered so successfully testifies to Lynch’s hard-earned expertise in matters of production. “Brian knows his business,” said Gary Keller, a Frost faculty colleague whose saxophone exchanges with Liebman on “The Trouble With Elysium” are an album highlight. “It was hard music, but everyone was up to the task.” Fourth trumpet Alec Aldred, a Frost alumnus, noted Lynch’s “amazing attention to detail—he was great at communicating with everyone and navigating how to most efficiently get through the music.”

“I recorded methodically to make sure that, at the end, I’d have options to ‘cut the film,’ so to speak,” Lynch said, noting he Skype-produced Liebman’s session, which transpired in Pennsylvania, and that saxophonist Donald Harrison and Valle recorded their parts in New Orleans and Havana, respectively. The time-intensive process was facilitated by access to Frost’s first-rate studio facility and on-site recording engineer Chris Palowitch. Lynch praised the high level musicianship of an orchestra of local pros and Frost students, alumni and faculty. “Everyone was paid as if they were young musicians in New York,” he said. “It’s a professional project. Nobody was doing this as part of schoolwork.”

Indeed, Lynch considers “the idea that you can produce your own stuff”—the 21st century notion of musician-as-entrepreneur—as central to his pedagogical mission. “We’re teaching more than just chords and scales at Frost,” he said. “I imbue that you can’t wait for someone to discover you; you should take it into your own hands. All my students know their way around the studio, know how to record themselves. If you’re able to put out a professional product, that’s your calling card. First of all, it’s got to be good. But also know what’s going on in the business.”

—Ted Panken

Carolyn Lee Jones



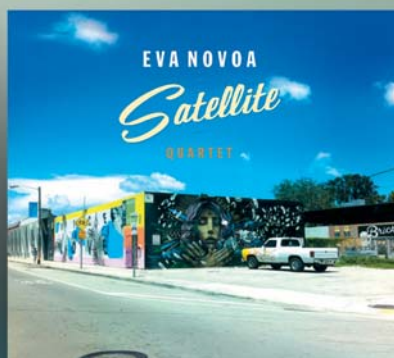
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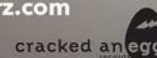


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PAAL NILSSEN-LOVE



PETRA CVELBAR

The prolific Paal Nilssen-Love runs his own label, PNL Records.

PNL IN PERPETUAL MOTION

A few years ago, the Norwegian drummer Paal Nilssen-Love—a former member of groups like Atomic, The Thing and the Peter Brötzmann Chicago Tentet—purchased an apartment in Lisbon, Portugal. After returning from a tour in Japan with reedist Ken Vandermark this past December, he spent nearly a week there, the longest stretch he'd slept there since acquiring the home. Nilssen-Love's schedule usually includes more than 200 days gigging around the globe each year. And since 2007, he's run PNL Records, his own label, releasing more than 40 titles by projects and ad hoc pairings he plays in, including *EthioBraz*, a collaborative album between his muscular big band, called Large Unit, the Ethiopian ensemble Fendika and a couple of musicians from Brazil. "It's a lot of work, but in the long run, it's absolutely worth it," he said nonchalantly during a recent phone interview from Japan.

Thanks to the internet, he said the label could operate from anywhere, which is good because he's rarely home. "Traveling with him on a regular basis, it's clear that he is always working," said Vandermark, one of his most frequent collaborators over the past two decades. "The only time he ever takes a break is directly after the concerts. From when he wakes up until then, he's on the phone or computer, and often he gets back to work when we return to where we're staying at night. From a physical standpoint, I don't know how he does it. No one

works harder than Paal, day after day, year in and out."

Nilssen-Love lives and breathes music, whether that means pouring every ounce of his energy into performances that leave him drenched in sweat or collecting records of all stripes and styles of music. "There are so many recordings being put out today, so you've got to be conscious about every factor involved in releasing a CD," he said. From the beginning of PNL, he partnered with Norwegian sound artist Lasse Marhaug, whose striking graphic-design work has given each title a distinctive look and the entire catalog a unifying aesthetic. Marhaug also mixes and masters many of the releases, each gorgeously packaged in thick and glossy gatefold sleeves harking back to the glory days of the LP.

Still, for Nilssen-Love the music comes first, and it was a desire to take control of his output that primarily motivated him to start PNL. "I realized it would be much easier if I ran a label myself, because if any mistakes happen, if it's late or delayed, then it's my own fault and I know what is going on," he said. "I realized there were more tapes of my music that I wanted released, so if this stuff was all going to come out, I had to do it myself."

Over the years, the label has released numerous titles from many of the drummer's working bands, whether the rangy free-jazz of the Frode Gjerstad Trio, the jagged, brassy

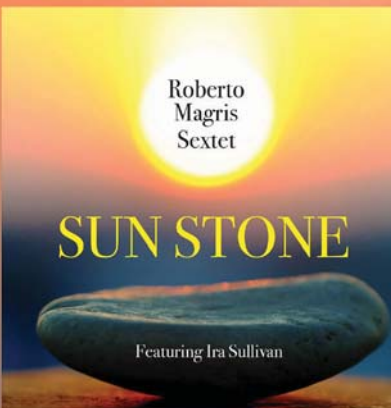
Large Unit, or his early post-bop collective The Quintet—featured in a recent archival box set. But the bulk of the titles document his extensive improv work with the likes of Vandermark, Joe McPhee, Akira Sakata and Arto Lindsay, among others.

Like all labels today, PNL has been affected by streaming and illegal downloads. "A couple of years ago I found out about some guy in Russia who had uploaded quite a few of the CDs that could be downloaded for free," he said. "A contact in Russia got in touch with him, and the guy told him that I could fuck myself because I'm making enough money on touring and CD sales!"

Still, the drummer remains unbowed in his commitment to physical documentation of his work. "In the very beginning, I didn't have any proper distribution, but I was thinking, of course, I have the best distribution because I'll have these CDs on every single gig," he said. "If I'm doing 170 gigs and they're always there, then that's pretty good distribution." With eight titles under his belt in 2019, Nilssen-Love already has big plans for 2020 with new albums by the Gjerstad trio and Lean Left (a quartet with the drummer, Vandermark, and The Ex guitarists Andy Moor and Terrie Hessels), as well as a new solo album produced by Marhaug. "I want to use the studio in a completely different way—let's call it moving microphones and moving drums."

—Peter Margasak

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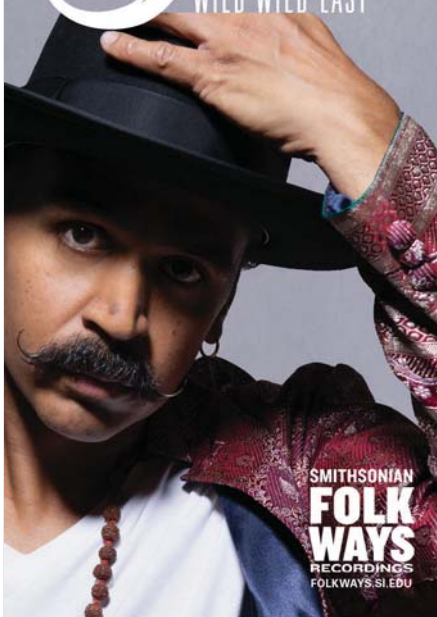
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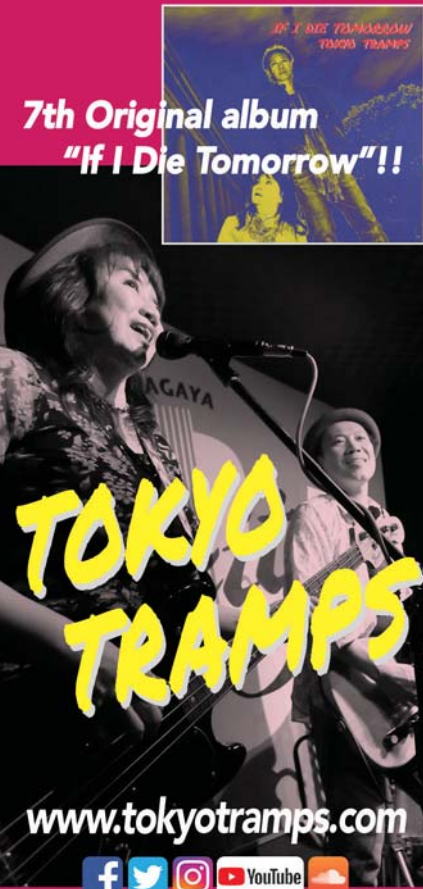
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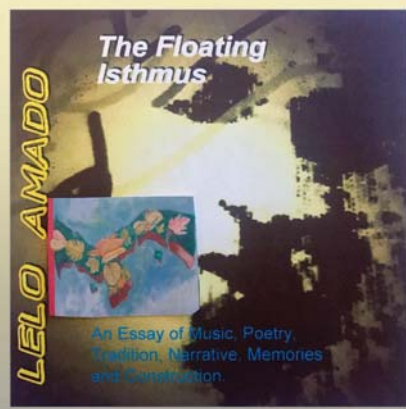
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