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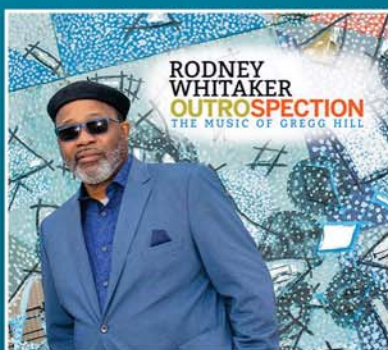
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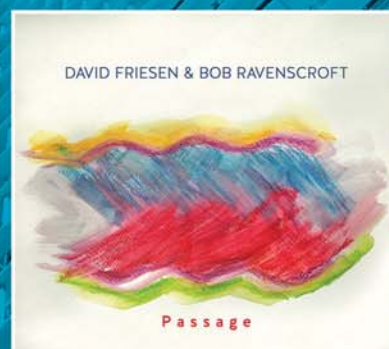
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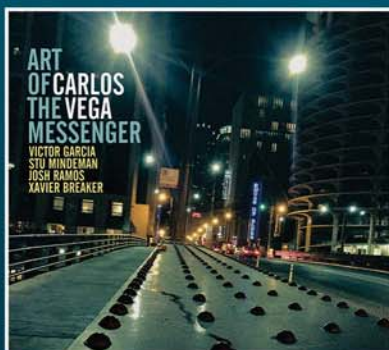
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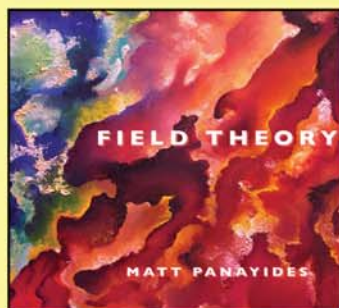
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DOWNBEAT (issn 0012-5768) Volume 88, Number 6 is published monthly by Maher Publications, 102 N. Haven, Elmhurst, IL 60126-2970. Copyright 2021 Maher Publications. All rights reserved. Trademark registered U.S. Patent Office. Great Britain registered trademark No. 719,407. Periodicals postage paid at Elmhurst, IL and at additional mailing offices. Subscription rates: \$34.95 for one year, \$59.95 for two years. Foreign subscriptions rates: \$56.95 for one year, \$103.95 for two years.

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POSTMASTER: Send change of address to: DownBeat, P.O. Box 11688, St. Paul, MN 55111-0688. **CABLE ADDRESS:** DownBeat (on sale May 25, 2021) Magazine Publishers Association.



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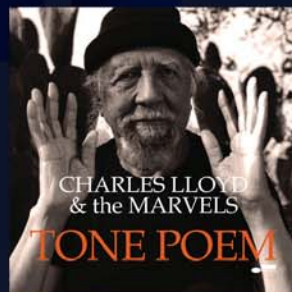
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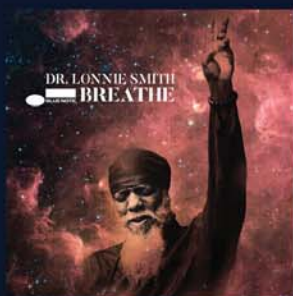
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JUNE 2021

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ON THE COVER

20 Vijay Iyer

Combat Art

BY PHILLIP LUTZ

Pianist and composer Vijay Iyer has spent his career challenging audiences and jazz convention with a flair for complex, yet satisfying, music as well as socially charged themes and performances. Iyer continues to buck the status quo and stir audience reaction with the release of his latest trio recording, *Uneasy*, as detailed in this month's cover story.



Cover photo of Vijay Iyer by Ebru Yildiz

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First Take > BY FRANK ALKYER



Multi-instrumentalist Isaiah Collier recorded *Cosmic Transmissions* at Van Gelder Studios.

Songs of Resilience

PANDEMIC STORIES — WE HEAR THEM wherever we go. Pretty much every story in this issue is a pandemic story in some way. How could this not be true since we've been living with COVID-19 for more than a year now?

But here's the twist. Before reading a word, you might think these would be tales of woe and misery. Admittedly, there is a certain sentiment of loss and longing, but the overarching theme is one of can-do creativity and resilience.

One of my favorite stories this month is a behind-the-scenes look at the five-star recording (see page 45 of our Reviews section) from saxophonist Isaiah Collier.

Collier, 23, and his band The Chosen Few have created *Cosmic Transitions*, a fire-breathing work that demonstrates musical spark and depth well beyond Collier's years.

In September of last year, in the midst of COVID, Collier and the band sojourned to Van Gelder Studios in New Jersey, one of the great jazz shrines, created by the late Rudy Van Gelder.

"I was one of the last group of cats to work with Rudy in 2016 when I was part of the Thelonious Monk Institute's peer-to-peer international all-star group," Collier said. "Going back, it was nostalgic, but not only that, the energy was more intense because it was like, 'OK, all this musical DNA has been etched into this one room.' Now it's your turn to add onto this DNA."

Collier said he and the band felt that presence, and that pressure, as soon as they entered.

"One hundred percent," he said. "I was completely surprised by everything. When my friend Sonny Daze [at District 81 Records] reached out to me about [recording], I said, 'Man, if you want me to record this album, the only place I can think of is Van Gelder's.' And he was like, 'That's

funny because that's the place I got.'"

Recording it on Sept. 23 made the date even more of an event for Collier. It was the first day after the autumnal equinox ... and John Coltrane's birthday. Coltrane, of course, recorded more than 40 albums at Van Gelder's, including *A Love Supreme* in 1964.

"The energy in that place was beyond the word ... active," Collier said. "We did this record in the very same format that they did back then. Everybody was in one room. But the distance was great enough to keep us separated [for COVID purposes]."

All of this brings up the question of how young artists try to make a name for themselves in the midst of this pandemic.

"I've been blessed, I'm not going to even front," Collier said. "Not only that, but being blessed enough to take a step back and assess the situation and still figure out how I can make this work. I was laughing at this because I was like, 'It's such a funny time to be alive.' And someone asked, 'What do you mean by that?' We have a rare occasion. It's kind of like we're living through multiple different time periods all at once. I feel like we're living through the '20s, '30s, '60s and even the '90s, but all simultaneously."

"And you've got to think, in those times, what were Bird and all of them doing? They had to overcome some of the same things."

For Collier, that sense of the ancestors and their difficult times serve as inspiration.

"If you're going to be about it, there's nothing that's going to stop you from getting what you've got to get done," he said. "This time has provided me with a moment to be creative. This is about being creative. It's there. Do what you have to do. Create your own opportunities."

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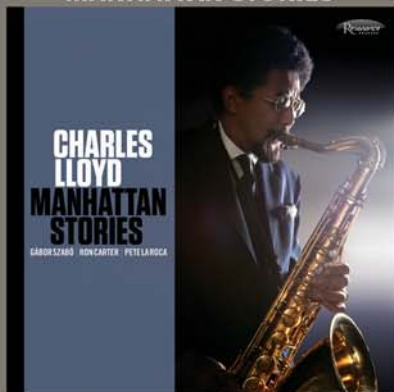
ROY HARGROVE & MULGREW MILLER IN HARMONY



In Harmony is the 1st previously unissued recording of the late trumpet star **Roy Hargrove** since passing in 2018. Captured live in 2006 and 2007 with piano great **Mulgrew Miller**, *In Harmony* is an intimate snapshot of two masters performing without a net at the top of their games. The limited-edition 180-gram 2LP & deluxe 2CD is being released in cooperation with the Roy Hargrove and Mulgrew Miller Estates and include an elaborate 16-pg LP insert & 68-pg CD booklet with rare photos; essay by acclaimed writer **Ted Panken**; plus interviews and statements by **Sonny Rollins**, **Christian McBride**, **Jon Batiste**, **Common**, **Ron Carter**, **Chris Botti**, **Keyon Harold**, **Karriem Riggins**, **Robert Glasper**, **Kenny Barron**, **Ambrose Akinmusire** and others. Vinyl mastered by **Bernie Grundman** and pressed at RTI.

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Back by popular demand, the critically acclaimed 2014 Resonance release by jazz icon **Charles Lloyd**, *Manhattan Stories*, is available once again as a deluxe, limited-edition 180gram 2-LP 2nd pressing newly remastered by renowned engineer Kevin Gray at Coherent Audio, cut at 33 1/3 RPM and pressed by RTI. Featuring **Gábor Szabó**, **Ron Carter** and **Pete La Roca** captured live in 1965 at Judson Hall and Slugs in New York City. The extensive LP insert includes essays by the esteemed late music critic **Stanley Crouch**, **Willard Jenkins**, **Michael Cuscuna** and **Don Heckman**; plus rare photos by **Hank Parker**, **Francis Wolff**, **Lee Tanner** and **Raymond Ross**.

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Chords & Discords

Into the Beyond

I just received my print copy of the May issue and saw who was featured in The Beat section, and thought I would respond while it's on my mind. I expect you may receive a couple of letters saying, "How could you feature [that] ... he/she/they are *not* jazz/blues."

To that I say, "Well, yes, that's true, so that puts them in the Beyond category — totally within the scope of the magazine's coverage." Full disclosure: You printed similar comments from me on this topic in the February 2013 issue of the magazine.

While blues and jazz form my "home base" in terms of my musical tastes, said tastes tend to wander about the musical world — on my phone, when in shuffle mode, you may find "A Love Supreme" segway into "Call Off Your Dogs," then into "The Thrill Is Gone," followed by a trip to the past via the first Tijuana Brass album, then to Bennett, Sassy, Miles, Blood Sweat & Tears, Red Hot Chili Peppers and ... well, you get the idea.

All of which is to say: Keep on covering all three worlds: jazz, blues and beyond — it's why



Into the beyond with Lake Street Dive

I am a subscriber. While I don't like everything I hear, I love hearing everything.

New topic: While I'm fairly sure it's due to reduced coverage, due to COVID, etc., I do like the staple binding — very conducive to folding for reading anywhere.

JOE FRANK
KENNEBUNKPORT, MAINE

Editor's Note: Joe, you must be referring to the article on Lake Street Dive from our May issue. We agree that they deserve our attention as jazz-schooled artists who have taken a decided turn toward pop songwriting.

Research Request

I work for a professor at Villanova University who is working on a book project around Keith Jarrett. He asked if I would inquire at DownBeat magazine about archive materials from over the years that cover interviews, profiles, reviews, etc., of Jarrett and his work. Is there any way that I would be able to gain access to this? If so, how might I go about doing this? Thank you for your help.

MATT RIDDLE, PH.D. STUDENT

Editor's Note: The best place to start is at a good music library. Villanova should have access to the DownBeat archives in that library. While we do take research requests (at standard hourly rates), it's been a bit of a challenge for the past year because of the pandemic. Still, reach out. We'll do what we can.

track jazz birthdays fail to include Jim Pepper?

I am an on-air host for KUVU Denver (kuvu.org) and a program called *The Jazz River*. I will be doing a two-hour show that week devoted to Jim Pepper's music. I would love to see him gain some wider recognition, even in death.

MATTHEW GOLDWASSER
MATTHEW.GOLDWASSER@GMAIL.COM



Bill Laswell, Wadada Leo Smith and Milford Graves

Corrections

- We failed to give proper credit to a photo on page 28 of our May issue. The image of bassist Bill Laswell, trumpeter Wadada Leo Smith and the late drummer Milford Graves was taken by R.I. Sutherland-Cohen. As you can see above, it's a shot for the jazz history books. DownBeat regrets the error.
- On page 34 of the May issue, Jennifer Wharton was quoted as being the only female trombonist in New York early in her career. That should have read "bass trombonist." DownBeat regrets the error.

Have a Chord or Discord? Email us at editor@downbeat.com or find us on Facebook & Twitter.



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KAREN COX

A new recording from Rhiannon Giddens and Francesco Turrisi addresses themes of love, loss and the music of their respective homelands.

Rhiannon Giddens Yearns for Home on Duo Effort

Rhiannon Giddens is homesick. That's the partial theme of her new album, *They're Calling Me Home* (Nonesuch Records), with Italian multi-instrumentalist Francesco Turrisi. Giddens and Turrisi, who

both live in Ireland when they aren't on tour, have been there since March 2020 due to the pandemic. The two expats found themselves drawn to the music of their native and adoptive countries of America, Italy and Ireland

during lockdown, and recorded the album in just six days.

"It was a kind of a lifesaver in a lot of ways," Giddens said, sitting with Turrisi while speaking to DownBeat via Zoom in late March. She

then rotated around to tell children audibly playing in the background, “Can you please remember that we’re actually working right now?” — a moment likely relatable for any parent maintaining a career these days.

“We were in the middle of trying to do Zooms and trying to figure out how to make this new life work, I suppose, and it was just very hard,” Giddens said. “We had just been starting to sing these old songs.”

This evolved into an album about “love and loss and longing for home, and just all the really deep emotions that have been surrounding us for the last year,” she said. “When you can’t go home, all of a sudden it takes on a different meaning than when you can just hop on a plane any time. It’s been over a year for me since I’ve even set foot in the United States, which is a very weird sensation.”

The album highlights these sentiments in Giddens and Turrisi revisiting “Waterbound,” a traditional fiddle tune first recorded in the 1920s that includes the refrain: “Waterbound, and I can’t get home, down to North Carolina.”

Giddens, a native North Carolinian, explained what it means to return to the Tar Heel State. “It’s being in the air where I grew up, seeing my family, just being somewhere where I don’t have to translate everything that’s going on. Ireland, it’s not like it’s Iceland, but it’s still a different country and a different culture. When I go back home, I know what to expect. I know what they mean when they say that. [It’s] just wanting even a little bit of taste of that for a minute.”

They’re Calling Me Home ends with an unconventional, wordless version of the hymn “Amazing Grace.” Turrisi relayed the story of its development. It began, he said, with him playing a large Middle Eastern frame drum: “I had this idea of trying to do something like a groove, but more like a pulse with a drum, and I asked Rhiannon, ‘Can you sing something completely free on top, out of time?’ At the time I was thinking about Irish, traditional music, Sean-nós songs, they called them.”

Giddens didn’t know any such songs, but began just humming “Amazing Grace.” When they listened back to the recording, they felt they were onto something cool. “I was mimicking bagpipes, because how many American funerals does a guy with the kilt and bagpipes come and play ‘Amazing Grace’?” she said. “I’ve been to a few.”

The duo takes a similar approach to instrumentation on the album’s opener, “Calling Me Home,” which features Giddens singing powerfully over Turrisi playing an accordion in a slow, droning fashion. “I find that the way that Francesco, in particular, plays the accordion is a different tonal vibe than what we are used to in the States,” Giddens said. “When we hear accordion, we

think a certain kind of reedy sound, whereas the way he approaches it, the sound world is different. It’s deeper.”

This is a key idea to both musicians — to use an instrument however they see fit, rejecting the idea that any one instrument is owned by a given nation, ethnicity or culture.

“I pick up a lot of instruments that don’t belong to anything,” Turrisi said. “I go in with the utmost respect, research and try to learn everything I can, but then what, ultimately, I’m going to do with the instrument is my thing.”

Giddens added, “I think it’s joyous when you expand on an instrument.”

Some would say Giddens does just that, famously taking up the banjo after having studied opera and forming the Grammy-winning string band the Carolina Chocolate Drops in 2005. Asked what drew her to the instrument, she admitted her answer could be lofty, but the truth is simple. “I could say a lot of things, like I felt the ancestors calling or it felt like I’d come home, but the truth is I just love the sound,” she said. “That’s it.”

Regardless, Turrisi feels it was an essential move, and one that informs their work and inspired their original connection. “We were noting the other day that Rhiannon studied Italian opera in conservatory, and I studied American jazz, and it’s funny because obviously it’s a swap of cultures,” he said. “But also, for me, the way we connected in the first place was, for me, through jazz.” Turrisi first discovered Giddens’ work in researching jazz and found it revelatory.

“I read an article about the Carolina Chocolate Drops, talking about Black string bands, and I was like, ‘Oh, my God, this is the missing link!’ because nobody really talks so much about this in the history of jazz,” he said. “Everybody talks about brass bands and New Orleans and stuff like that. But that kind of link of the American Black string band was the first big fusion of all of these sounds that were in the Americas.”

The international scope of the duo’s culture-swap is felt across *They’re Calling Me Home*, and as such the album defies categorization. “For me, it’s very hard to categorize something like that consciously, because there’s just so many musical languages that I’ve been exploring, even within instruments,” Turrisi said. “I can’t really think what’s European and what’s American, really. I’m playing Arabic stuff on the cello banjo from the 1920s. It’s all like a whole big soup.”

Giddens agreed. “The record is a mixture of who we are, so that’s a mixture of American and European, specifically Southern Italian,” Giddens said. “That comes out of us thinking about our homes, our original homes.”

—Daniel Margolis

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From left, Demian Cabaud, Ariel Bringuéz, Jorge Rossy and Miguel Zenón interpret the music of the Ornette Coleman Quartet on *Law Years*.

Zenón Finds Light in Ornette

ONCE, WHEN ALTO SAXOPHONIST MIGUEL Zenón was working as Charlie Haden's sideman, Ornette Coleman joined his former bassist on stage for an encore. Decades before, these two players had spearheaded the free-jazz movement as founding members of Coleman's revolutionary quartet.

"That was the only time I ever saw them play together," Zenón remarked during a Zoom interview from his Manhattan home. "There are so many thoughts that went through my mind, seeing these older musicians recreate something that I grew up with."

According to Zenón, the Ornette Coleman Quartet's 1959 recording *The Shape Of Jazz To Come* (Atlantic) had exerted a strong influence on his development as a young player. Today, he acknowledges that legacy with the live recording *Law Years* (Miel Music), seven tracks culled from material Coleman wrote for that legendary group with Haden, trumpeter Don Cherry and drummer Billy Higgins.

"There's a voice there I can connect with," Zenón said. "Ornette played the alto, so that's an immediate connection for me. Also, there's an element of folkloric energy to his music, and I relate to that. It's the purest form of musical expression: music made for the sake of communicating an idea."

Like Coleman, Zenón is a monster improviser, forward-looking composer and prolific leader. Besides touring with Hayden ("one of the greatest things that ever happened to me," he said), Zenón has gigged alongside a slew of jazz notables: Danilo Pérez, Kurt Elling, Fred Hersch

and David Sánchez among them. He's a founding member of the SFJAZZ Collective in San Francisco and a prominent jazz educator. Beyond that, he's earned eight Grammy nominations and taken home MacArthur and Guggenheim grants.

Curiously, the new album happened by chance. In June 2019, Zenón was in Basel, Switzerland, teaching jazz clinics, performing with the Swiss Jazz Orchestra and leading a four-night stint at the Birds Eye Jazz Club. This residency featured a different roster each night: a duo with guitarist Wolfgang Muthspiel, a student ensemble, his eponymous New York-based quartet and an ad hoc ensemble formed for just one date.

"[The organizers] suggested that I put together a band that's already in Europe because it would be easier to get them to Switzerland," Zenón recalled. He seized the opportunity to hire some admired players: tenorist Ariel Bringuéz, drummer Jorge Rossy and bassist Demian Cabaud. They had never played together as a group, but the instrumentation triggered an idea. They would do Ornette, Zenón decided.

By the time Ornette Coleman recorded *The Shape Of Jazz To Come* with his new quartet, he had started to experiment with chord-less melody and deep, open expression. This is the sound that Zenón wanted to capture on the gig.

"Coleman was a revolutionary guy," Zenón said. "He was hearing things that no one else was. I still listen to him now and think, 'Man, how could this guy come up with that?' He was such an original thinker."

On the recording, Zenón and his cohorts tap

into Coleman's musical insight on tunes like "The Tribes Of New York" with its crisp, single-line choruses and energizing solos, and "Free," a wilder, less consonant foray into horn-led abandon. Next, the title cut, a dramatic head full of sinuous turns, lends itself to extended solos that serve to establish each player's autonomous aesthetic.

On the album's subsequent tracks, Zenón directs the quartet into alternate feels, with the swing-based "Giggin'," one of Coleman's first compositions sans piano; the sleepy ballad "Broken Shadows," featuring an arco bass and elegiac horn line; and the simple air of "Dee Dee," an exercise in contrapuntal exuberance crafted around a narrow tonal center.

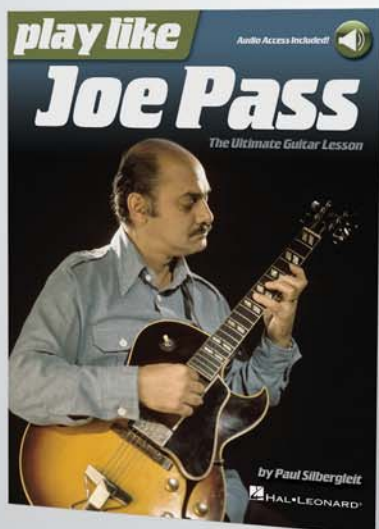
Zenón closes the album with a shifting medley of two disparate Coleman tunes; one half of the band plays the swinging, melodic "Toy Dance," and the other plays the chaotic, out-of-time "Street Woman." This surprising juxtaposition not only speaks to the distinctiveness of Coleman's mid-career efforts, but to the excitement of the band's spontaneous cohesion.

Zenón had been deliberate in choosing these particular bandmates. "Everyone in the band is a Spanish speaker [from a different country]," he said. "We all grew up with music that wasn't jazz, but found our way into music through jazz. I can hear the fellowship, the camaraderie, in this."

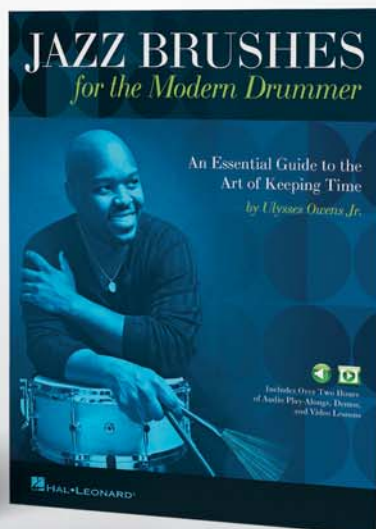
It was the band that urged Zenón to release the gig recording as a live album. He hadn't planned to, but the pandemic caused him to reconsider: "This is one of the things that found its light within all of this darkness."

—Suzanne Lorge

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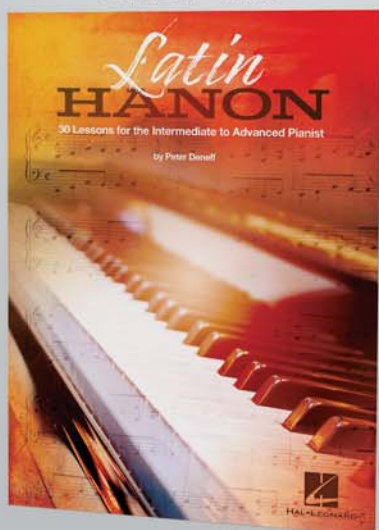
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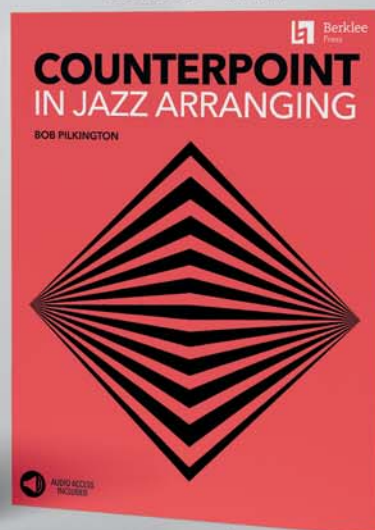
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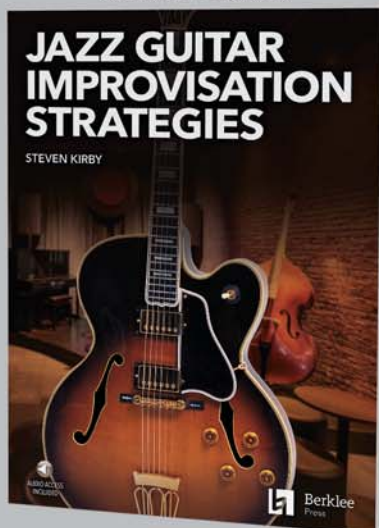
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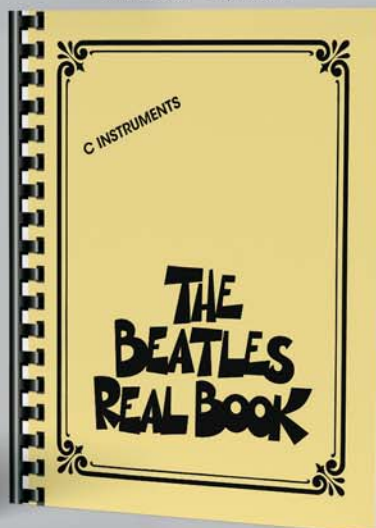
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Stéphane Wrembel's latest album is *Django Experiment VI*.

Stéphane Wrembel's Django Experiment

FRENCH-BORN GUITARIST-COMPOSER

Stéphane Wrembel, a true Django-phile at heart, is that rare artist who gives his audience food for thought as well as machine-gun-like streams of single notes. In between burning renditions of "Minor Swing" or "Limehouse Blues," the insatiable reader and lover of philosophy will invariably suggest books to read, from Nietzsche to Plato to Greek mythology.

During a mid-March live streaming event from the French Institute Alliance Française's Florence Gould Hall in New York, Wrembel also referred to British ethologist Richard Dawkins, whose 1976 book *The Selfish Gene* is also the title of one of Wrembel's own compositions from 2012's *Origins*, which he showcased that evening with his working band of rhythm guitarist Thor Jensen, electric bassist Ari Folman-Cohen and drummer Nick Anderson.

And while he regards Dawkins as "grumpy but very artistic and brilliant," Nietzsche is Wrembel's main man. "It's something you must read," he said. "First, there is the beauty of the language in which it's written. It's such a high level of writing. Everything that he says is so well crafted and poetic, and the power of his thoughts is just incredible."

"Nietzsche was a genius. Most people don't know that he also composed a lot of music for piano. He was very fine musician, a very fine thinker, and when you read Nietzsche it will affect the way you see the world."

Since moving to New York in 2003, Wrembel has been waving the flag for Django Reinhardt, his biggest inspiration and the focal point of his annual Django A Gogo festival, which has brought together some of the finest musicians in the world, equally influenced by Reinhardt, to celebrate the Sinti guitar style. While his 12th annual festival went on without a hitch in 2019, the 13th was a smaller, strictly virtual event due to the pandemic. He is planning to resume the annual

tradition at Town Hall on Jan. 22, 2022, the day before Django's birthday.

Meanwhile, January of 2021 saw the release of his *Django Experiment VI*, the latest in his ongoing tribute series, which he launched in 2017. To coincide with that release, Wrembel livestreamed a concert with his core band, along with guest violinist Daisy Castro and clarinetist Nick Driscoll, from Café Lenna in Saratoga Springs, New York, where they delivered faithful renditions of Django tunes like "Impromptu," "Naguine," "Swing de Paris" and "Nuages." As the guitarist noted, "With *Django Experiment*, we stay strictly within a certain framework. You play Django's music and that's just the way it is. But when I play my music, I do whatever I want."

And that's where Wrembel's other guitarist influences come out. As he explained. "My big guitar guys growing up were Mark Knopfler, David Gilmour, Jimmy Page, Frank Zappa. I also loved Steve Vai and Joe Satriani and, in fact, learned Satriani's *Surfing With The Alien* note for note. But when I finally paid closer attention to Django's music, it struck me like lightning how incredible it was. I still love to listen to everything from Ralph Towner to classical guitar to Pink Floyd. But, to me, guitar is just one integrated thing and Django just helps to understand the instrument better."

Wrembel has remained productive through 2020 and early 2021. With his gigs canceled, he focused on doing a book of transcriptions of 17 solo guitar pieces by Reinhardt, all of which he had previously recorded on 2019's *Django L'Impressionniste*. "These are very obscure pieces that Django recorded between 1937 and 1953," said Wrembel. "I took the opportunity of the lockdown to do that book, to learn to teach online and to start practicing classical guitar, which is a brand new technique for me. And I also took this opportunity to read my philosophy, of course."

Nietzsche, anyone?

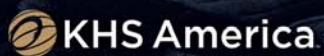
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Blades Introduces *Salswing!*: Rubén Blades, the Panamanian-born singer, actor and activist, continues his love of big band Latin jazz and salsa with the *Salswing!*, his latest release backed by the Roberto Delgado Orquesta. In a letter to listeners, Blades notes that his goals with this recording were to introduce Delgado and his orchestra to a wider audience, noting that the band was “capable of expanding its original Panamanian roots to cover other musical genres.”

rubenbladesproductions.bandcamp.com

Abbasi, Sung, Villafranca Named Guggenheim Fellows: Jazz artists Rez Abbasi, Helen Sung and Elio Villafranca have been awarded Guggenheim fellowships for 2021. They join 184 artists, writers, scholars and scientists receiving the honor. Presented annually by the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, the fellowships are granted through a peer-review process of nearly 3,000 applicants. Since its establishment in 1925, the foundation has granted nearly \$400 million in fellowships to more than 18,000 individuals, which includes more than 125 Nobel laureates, members of all the national academies, winners of the Pulitzer Prize and more. gf.org

Jazzfest Berlin Honored: Jazzfest Berlin has been named winner of the European Jazz Network's 2021 Award for Adventurous Programming. The EJN jury stated: “Jazzfest Berlin is one of the oldest jazz festivals in Europe, and yet it has been able to innovate itself, striving to break musical and cultural boundaries. This included engaging with a younger generation of organizers and artists, experimenting with new fruition spaces and commissioning innovative musical projects. Three years ago it appointed a young woman as artistic director — the first in its history — and in the year of the pandemic it created a fantastic program in several locations, including a live ‘musical bridge’ between Berlin and New York, reminding us about the importance of collaboration and exchanges at a time of acute isolation.” europejazz.net



Pi Recordings founders Yulun Wang (left) and Seth Rosner.

Pi Recordings @ 20

PI RECORDINGS IS ONE OF THE MOST respected labels in jazz, routinely presenting innovative, challenging work from veterans like Henry Threadgill, the Art Ensemble of Chicago and Wadada Leo Smith, as well as modern-day masters like Tyshawn Sorey and Vijay Iyer, and up-and-coming creators like saxophonist Anna Webber. The label's catalog is tightly curated — fewer than 100 releases in 20 years — but conceptually unified. Pi releases rigorous, pathbreaking music that stretches the boundaries of jazz while honoring its history.

Seth Rosner started the label in 2001 while working at New York's famed Knitting Factory. His first two releases were by Threadgill; one bid farewell to his 1990s band Make A Move, while the other introduced Zooid to the world. Those were followed by discs from Roscoe Mitchell and the Note Factory, Wadada Leo Smith's Golden Quartet and Fieldwork, a trio led by Iyer. Before long, Rosner got a cold call from Yulun Wang, a former finance industry professional looking to do something a little more fulfilling.

“I’ve always been a big jazz fan and had been super impressed with Seth’s first five releases,” Wang said via a Google meeting in mid-March. “Back in 2001, to have musicians of that caliber show up on a label that I knew nothing about was something of a surprise.”

Their partnership has endured, and grown, ever since — they are Pi's only employees.

Pi is one of the labels most invested in present-day documentation of the work of prominent AACM artists. In addition to those mentioned above, Pi has worked with George Lewis, Fred Anderson and Muhal Richard Abrams. Rosner said, “Just to say it in the simplest terms, a bunch of African-American guys from the South Side of Chicago who go out and take over Europe and just advocate for themselves and do it. Forget

about the fact that it's avant-garde... if you look at the arc of that, and what those guys have accomplished, it's unbelievable.”

Pi is also a label whose roster is stocked with prize winners — Threadgill has a Pulitzer, he and Mitchell are both NEA Jazz Masters, Vijay Iyer, saxophonist Steve Coleman and Tyshawn Sorey are MacArthur Fellows — whose releases regularly top critics polls. Its founders see that as a reflection on their artists, not themselves; as accolades rolled in year after year, Rosner said, “It began to look like, ‘Hey, someone is recognizing not necessarily what we’re doing, but what the artists are doing,’ and it just happens to be that we’re the guys documenting that.”

But Pi is interested in more than supporting avant-garde jazz legends; the label is engaged in a broader project of building a path from the music's past to its future.

“That was something that I had hoped,” Rosner said. “And, as Yulun and I got together, we agreed that would be a foundation of Pi: to have these older musicians and still have a mentoring, nurturing relationship with younger musicians and let them grow through that and be the next branch of it.”

Pi's 2021 slate of releases is in line with that overall mission and their history to date. In addition to albums by saxophonist Hafez Modirzadeh (with Pi since 2010) and vocalist Jen Shyu (onboard since 2011), the label is preparing a double CD by Webber; a six-CD set by pianist Matt Mitchell and drummer Kate Gentile's Snark Horse project performing one-bar compositions with a pool of improvisers; a live album by Steve Coleman; and, to cap off the year, the latest album by Henry Threadgill and Zooid to be released in conjunction with the saxophonist/composer's autobiography, written with Brent Hayes Edwards.

—Phil Freeman

Avishai Cohen Realizes Grand Symphonic Vision

BASSIST AND COMPOSER AVISHAI COHEN

has been dreaming big for a long time. And part of that dream has been to expand his vision of making music from the trio format that he has favored in jazz to the grand stage of blending that trio with a symphonic orchestra.

With the release of his latest recording, *Two Roses* (Naïve/Believe), the Israeli-born artist has turned that ambition into reality.

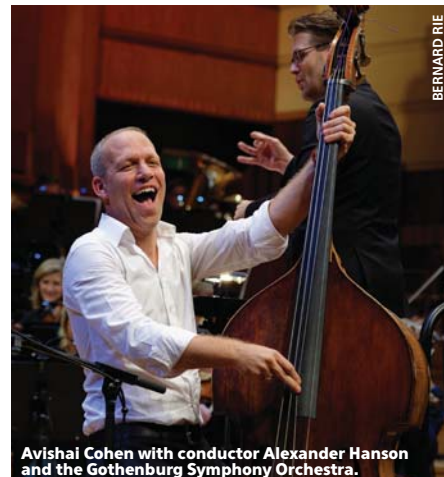
Collaborating with the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra in Sweden (conducted by Alexander Hanson), Cohen and his trio mates — Elchin Shirinov on piano and Mark Guiliana on drums — turn in a lush program of 14 songs that put the bandleader's composing, arranging and vision on full display.

"When I started, it seemed a natural time to do it because I have been writing and arranging more and more for strings for years," Cohen said via email. "I've always dreamt of making it a whole project. My classical training, other than studying classical piano from 10 years old, has been mainly listening to a lot of great composers. My studying of Bach, Mendelssohn and even Béla Bartók in my younger years triggered my hunger for classical music."

He said the project, recorded in January 2020, seemed to be more of a fantasy in the beginning, but he slowly started dipping into the classical world. In 2013, Cohen released *Almah* (Parlophone), an album of music that featured his trio alongside a small chamber ensemble. From that point on, the fantasy seemed more possible.

"So, I decided to contact some good orchestrators and begin the journey — diving into the assignment, getting deeper and deeper into it — and within a few years, this incredible body of work was ready to be performed and recorded," he said. "I engaged several wonderful arrangers/orchestrators along the way [who were] connected to the classical world, such as Robert Sadin from the U.S., Jonathan Keren from Israel and Per Ekdahl from Sweden."

The result is an album that encompasses many of Cohen's musical muses — from reimagining some of his own compositions like the beautiful "Almah Sleeping," to delivering new music for the occasion like "Nature Talking," to singing, as he does quite well, on songs like "Alon Basela" and "Morenika," to revisiting some of his favorite songs, such as "Two Roses (Shnei Shoshanim)" and "A Child Is Born."



Avishai Cohen with conductor Alexander Hanson and the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra.

"The two songs you refer to, I have arranged and visited many times," Cohen said of "Two Roses" and "A Child Is Born." "The original notes are so good, but it's wonderful to arrange them and bring out another side to the music."

As the world reopens, Cohen hopes to bring the material to live audiences.

"I really miss the stage," he said. "I have some trio shows confirmed right now in Europe. And in August, a residency is booked at the Blue Note New York [with the trio]. Fingers crossed this pandemic is over soon, and we all can enjoy coming together again at live shows. It will be a big party!"

—Frank Alkyer



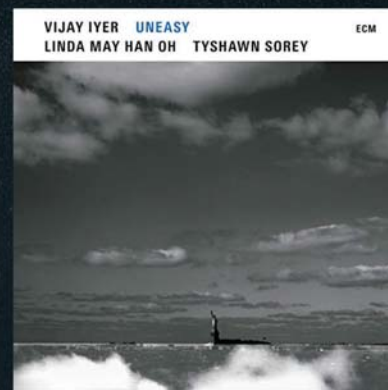
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COMBAT ART

PIANIST AND COMPOSER VIJAY IYER CONTINUES TO BUCK CONVENTION AND STIR REACTION WITH THE RELEASE OF HIS MOST RECENT RECORDING, TITLED *UNEASY*.

By his own account, the Vijay Iyer of a decade ago was made to feel like a “token weirdo” when moving among the high priests of a classical music establishment rooted in white privilege. He responded with small acts of protest, including a memorable commissioned work — one based on a centuries-old fragment by an establishment god — that featured dissonance so raw he now cheekily attaches an expletive to the frame of mind in which he created it.

On the cusp of age 50, Iyer seems dangerously close to developing a maturity to match his genius. While responding to injustice is still central to his aesthetic, he made clear — in a three-hour Zoom conversation in February from his Harlem home — that his view of the establishment has become less reductive as the work he does for it becomes more plentiful.

So, has the famously soft-spoken, hard-driving pianist/provocateur been tamed by the powers that be?

To be sure, he has secured the trappings of an establishment existence: a tenured Harvard professorship, a MacArthur fellowship and a growing number of classical commissions. With jazz work limited during the pandemic, he has accumulated a half-dozen or so such commissions during the lockdown-year alone. They range

from a solo work for violinist Jennifer Koh to an ensemble piece for the Boston Lyric Opera. None seem to have inspired profane commentary.

Not surprisingly, he said he has learned a thing or two: “Now that I’ve gotten more into that world, more present in that world and have more relationships with great performers and have gone through this process many times — bringing the work from idea to execution with state-of-the-art performers and ensembles — I have a better sense of what the stakes are.”

But it would be a mistake to assume that Iyer has foresworn his outsider status. To the contrary: He has offered an argument that his righteous fire still burns. Exhibit No. 1: the album *Uneasy*, his latest vehicle for jazz trio, and one that exploits his gift for eliciting, well, unease in audiences.

Released in April, the album, his seventh on ECM, was recorded in December 2019, just weeks before the World Health Organization announced the discovery of a new coronavirus-related pneumonia.

Though the album might not exactly anticipate the coming calamity, it plays to concerns about inequality that the pandemic — and, in a similar sense, the resurgent Black Lives Matter protests following George Floyd’s killing — have helped to highlight.



**'WHATEVER THEY THOUGHT
THEY WERE GETTING BY
COMING TO MY CONCERT,
I WANTED TO CHALLENGE THAT.'**

STEVEN SUSSMAN



Perhaps none of the album's 10 tracks more explicitly evoke those concerns than the opener, "Children Of Flint." The title refers to the Michigan city in which thousands of mostly African-American people were, through the actions of public officials, exposed to unsafe levels of lead in their water.

The piece, he said, is a kind of twin to a Flint-related work for solo viola he wrote for a 2019 concert at Columbia University's Miller Theater. That work was part of a university-wide project developed around the relationship between people and water. By focusing on Flint, Iyer said, he was presenting a challenge to a largely well-off group of white concertgoers and Columbia, an institution that was "patting itself on the back for being eco-conscious."

Like the original, he said, the new piece is "an occasion to meditate on and mourn for and care about or instigate some kind of caring around this issue."

Musically, he said, it draws on eight bars of the original work that center on a progression in which Iyer employs the viola in an awkward way: "The piece makes the soloist vulnerable by asking them to do things that the instrument

isn't supposed to do. There are moments when it feels like it's going to fall apart. That sound hung in my ear for a while."

Out of it he created a structure on which he and his bandmates — Linda May Han Oh on bass and Tyshawn Sorey on drums — have built a solid but subtle evocation of anxiety, one that is especially disquieting because of the seductive pleasure of its lyricism.

By turns swelling and receding, the sound lingers in the ear, and weighs on the mind, and would do so even if it had no extramusical intent. As it happens, problems similar to those in Flint continue to beset Black neighborhoods. So the new piece remains as relevant as its predecessor.

"It still is imbued with and born of that same set of concerns, which was in response to a certain set of circumstances," he said.

Likewise, conditions of concern and circumstance apply to the second track on the album, "Combat Breathing." The Brooklyn Academy of Music had commissioned Iyer to open a program with a short solo piano piece. As with the piece at Columbia, he immediately thought of the commission as an opportuni-

ty to provoke by weaponizing his relationship to the audience and institution.

"It was 2014: Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice," he said, referring to Black people killed by police. "That year was fucked up. It was like, 'Why should I make a solo piano piece right now? What I really want to do is give this money away. What can I do not in BAM but to BAM and to the audience at BAM — to that 95 percent white concertgoing audience at BAM in Fort Greene, in Brooklyn, in a historically Black neighborhood in this institution that is historically white?'"

Iyer and choreographer Paloma McGregor organized a "die-in" in which 30 black people lay prone on the stage in front of an audience who, unprepared for this demonstration, would be forced to contemplate the meaning of their inaction to the accompaniment of his solo piano.

"This is a moment when people who didn't pay to see this will have to see it, will have to face it. Whatever they thought they were getting by coming to my concert, I wanted to challenge that. I wanted to open the space to others, to make it not my space — make it a space for

collective action.”

In a sense, “a space for collective action” defines the realm in which the trio operates. Iyer and Sorey have closely collaborated since the day 20 years ago when Sorey showed up at Iyer’s Manhattan apartment for a kind of try-out. The day began with Sorey playing the piano, working his way from a note-for-note solo off Iyer’s 2001 album *Panoptic Modes* through a bit of Stockhausen through a serialist improvisation. It ended with Chinese food and an extended bonding session. In between was a full-blown jam with Derek Phillips on bass and Sorey making an immediate impact on drums.

“That day was so cosmic,” Iyer said. “I knew from day one he was one of the greatest musicians I would ever meet.”

Over the years, they have experienced lows and highs together, both offstage and on, from a demeaning incident near a Finnish-Estonian checkpoint to a cathartic performance at a German club on the day in 2013 when the killer of Trayvon Martin was acquitted. Sorey was also at BAM the night of the 2014 die-in, a featured member of the ensemble performing Iyer’s score for the film *Radhe: Rites of Holi*.

The two have hooked up in academic settings, from the time Iyer served on Sorey’s doctoral dissertation committee at Columbia to the current period, in which Sorey is a professor at the University of Pennsylvania. “This leads to conversations we don’t have in the context of the trio,” Sorey said. “It means a lot to be able to connect on more than one level, which also informs the way we play together musically. It deepens that connection that much more.”

Iyer enlisted Sorey to appear this semester in his Harvard class on composer-performers in the African diaspora. In the class, held online during the pandemic, discussions sometimes turn to disparities, a subject the two discuss privately in relation to their elite institutions. “We mostly talk about our experience with certain types of students who carry a certain type of privilege,” Sorey said, “how sometimes their behavior can be a turnoff in a lot of ways.”

The two are also co-artistic directors at the Banff International Workshop in Jazz and Creative Music in British Columbia, Canada, where Oh was recruited as a faculty member and first played with Iyer and Sorey in a trio format. The initial soundings suggested a convergence of spirits, though the group needed to be nurtured.

“Like minds often gravitate toward each other,” Oh said. “But it’s important to come to some sort of agreement musically.”

That kind of agreement became obvious as the threesome shared bandstands outside of Banff, notably at a well-received night in January 2019 at the Jazz Standard. The final decision to become a recording unit was made

the following summer when the three were again at Banff, where they put together a trio set for the students.

“I had a flash of intuition,” Iyer recalled. “I said, ‘Hey, you guys want to make a record?’ They were like, ‘Yes.’ We got it done in a few months, from August to December.

“This feeling we had with Tyshawn and Linda had a certain electricity and drive. It felt easy. It fell into place. It’s a different energy, a different sense of pulse, a different propulsiveness, a different exploratory feeling, a different anchoring. It felt alive in a new way.”

Given the three-way simpatico, there was no problem translating a tune like “Combat Breathing” into an in-studio exercise without losing the provocative intent, even though the presence of an audience seemed critical to that intent.

“It just becomes subject to other forces,” Iyer said. “Everything we are comes into play, which means committing to a certain vulnerability around the material, around the execution of it so that it’s not like, ‘We did it, we’re awesome.’ It’s about facing risk, facing the unknown. That’s the recurring theme.”

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'THAT IS ACTUALLY A MAJOR THROUGH-LINE IN THE HISTORY OF THIS THING THAT'S CALLED JAZZ — BLACK ARTISTS DEFIANTLY SHOWING UP AND BEING PRESENT IN WHITE SPACES.'

For Sorey, the need to take risks and the urge to incite are intertwined and immutable, whatever the space. "You want to be in tune with the kind of energy in that room, the temperature — getting a feel for whoever's in that room, which creates this feeling of provocation," he said. "It creates this feeling of, 'I want them to come with me. I want them to go somewhere with me. If I'm going to create a work in a studio, I want it to do something.'"

Sorey has worked with Iyer on four albums, all of which convey that kind of resolve. "He's always been defiant," Iyer said. "That's who

he is. He can push it beyond what it was ever meant to do, to spin it into something unimaginable, unprecedented. That's what he's always done, and that to me is that defiance. That is the Black radical tradition."

For his part, Sorey embraced Iyer's invocation of defiance in his characterization: "My very being is exactly that, as a composer and a performer. I might even say 'unapologetically defiant.'"

With Iyer, he said, no apologies were ever needed: "The more I got to know him, it became a thing like, 'Finally here's somebody who can

really accept what I can bring to the music.' He's not trying to tell me what to play or what to do."

Trust is at the heart of it. Iyer presents bare-bones charts, depending on his musicians to make the right decisions. That approach, Sorey said, is very much in the tradition of African-American bandleaders: "A lot of what his music is are these skeletal structures, which take so much from the Black aesthetic from a creative standpoint. It's similar to what people in the swing era and in bebop were doing. They had these very skeletal forms, but you could make so much music out of those forms."

Iyer also looks to African-American tradition in his concept of an activism tied to the relationship between artist and circumstance, which reflects in no small measure his appreciation of the way Black musicians have dealt with audiences ignorant of their history. "I think about that a lot," he said. "That is actually a major through-line in the history of this thing that's called jazz — Black artists defiantly showing up and being present in white spaces."

Recalling a conversation with the late Muhal Richard Abrams, he noted that, when the AACM legend first played for European audiences, who knew nothing about the cultural milieu of Chicago's South Side, he was able to develop a sense of reciprocity with them: "It's something deep about what we are as human beings. That we were able to cut across this vast divide between us and them, that's activism too. It's not labeled as such. It doesn't have an agitprop title. But it's doing something only music can do."

Tellingly, this communication is possible because of — not in spite of — the sometimes-brutal honesty with which the musicians carry their messages. Iyer said that an invitation to sit in Geri Allen's piano chair after her death in 2017 and play Charlie Parker's "Ah-Leu-Cha" at the Newport Jazz Festival motivated him to retrieve a live recording of Miles Davis' group playing the tune before a largely white audience at Newport in 1958. The everyday indignities Davis and his cohort had suffered were well documented and served as subtext for the performance. A year after the performance, Davis was infamously beaten by police in New York.

"I could not believe the intensity, the fire, the rawness," Iyer said. "Then I was thinking, 'What does it feel like for them to face the Newport audience and play this music?' That's what you're hearing at this moment. It's an encounter. They're not just delivering the goods. It's actually delivering them in a certain way with a certain kind of ferocity — dare I say frustration or rage or disgust."

In Iyer's own time, working with veterans like drummer Andrew Cyrille and bassist Reggie Workman, he said he had experienced

that level of commitment: “What I’ve found is that often in live performance — this is a generational thing, I think — they kind of approach it like combat.”

Having absorbed their lessons, Iyer appears to have adopted something of their take-no-prisoners approach. The best evidence on the new album may be “Combat Breathing” itself. On it, he slashes and splashes his way across the keyboard canvas with the kind of abandon few pianists can muster while maintaining full control of their faculties. In his case, of course, those faculties are considerable. The result is a work of proportion equal to its power.

The moment of greatest power — one in which the individual and collective aspects of the trio collide and connect most urgently — may come toward the end of “Combat Breathing.” After a solo turn by Oh, Iyer takes a second solo on a one-bar vamp. Together the band builds a narrative, with Iyer laying down long and winding lines around the center of action and Oh and Sorey playing off each other, creating a vortex of sound that, with each cycle of tension and release, becomes more forceful until it sweeps Iyer into the swirl.

“I would say that particular arc of those couple of minutes of me playing there has something in common with that strain of play-

ing of Coltrane’s band in the ’60s,” Iyer said.

When a pianist discusses John Coltrane, the subject of McCoy Tyner will naturally be raised. And while Iyer said he never tried to play like Coltrane’s pianist, he did admire the way Tyner cut through the churn created by the saxophonist and drummer Elvin Jones. Iyer said he began to find his own solutions around the time of *Reimagining* (2005), running arpeggio-like figures that over time became more complex and refined, yielding a propulsive effect like Tyner’s. That strategy has reached a peak of sorts on *Uneasy*.

Iyer’s pianism gets vigorous — and rigorous — workouts throughout the album: plumbing the complex reharmonization on Cole Porter’s “Night And Day”; negotiating the two-handed ostinato on the album’s other cover, Allen’s “Drummer’s Song”; playing through the title track’s intricate metric patterns with serpentine erudition.

A more restrained pianism is deployed on “Augury.” Described by Iyer as a solo meditation, it is, at three-and-a-half minutes, the shortest track on the album and the only one on which Iyer formally abandons the compositional side of his musical brain for the strictly intuitive. On it, he said, he employs something akin to what the surrealists called automatic writing,

though the tremulous portent he fashions arguably owes more to the impressionists.

“Augury,” he said, “is doing something that none of the other pieces on the record are doing.”

Despite Iyer’s ability to command the keyboard, he isn’t about pianistic display. Fellow pianist Craig Taborn, who has been engaged in two-piano collaborations with Iyer since they both belonged to Roscoe Mitchell’s band 23 years ago, may have said it best:

“Vijay has a certain kind of calling. There’s an ethic there. The music, when he’s engaged with it, has the feeling and sense that there’s a much larger purpose that we’re contending with.”

For the onetime token weirdo, the ultimate purpose remains to be seen. He has made inroads at Harvard, helping to bring onto the faculty Black artists like Esperanza Spalding and Yvette Janine Jackson. But as meaningful as such gestures are, the task ahead will be bigger, especially post-pandemic.

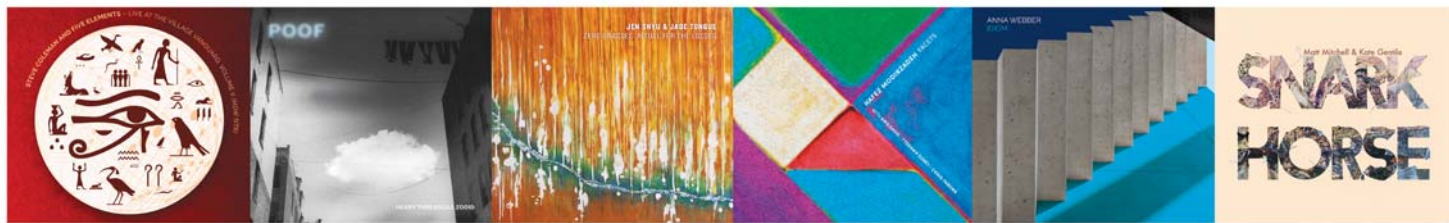
“I’m really concerned about our collective futures, what it is we’ll be able to do together,” Iyer said.

“Performing artists have suffered profoundly. Do we want to rebuild or start from scratch and rethink the whole system?” **DB**

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JEFF COFFIN, INC.

BY ED ENRIGHT — PHOTO BY MICHAEL JACKSON

From Nashville to the world, the multi-instrumentalist leads the charge for musicians being entrepreneurial, creative and in control of their careers.

Jeff Coffin, the saxophonist best known for his ongoing work with the chart-topping rock group Dave Matthews Band and his 14-year tenure with the triple-Grammy-winning jazz-bluegrass outfit Béla Fleck & the Flecktones, has become his own cottage industry.

He fronts several groups, runs his own internationally distributed label Ear Up Records and self-publishes big band charts of his original tunes. Based in Nashville since 1991, the 55-year-old multi-reedist, composer, bandleader and educator is constantly teaming up with other artists and diving into worthy causes. He's a paragon of musical entrepreneurship and artistry who's remained in overdrive mode throughout the COVID-19 global lockdown.



Coffin with his wife, Ryoko Suzuki, and members of the Wild Iris Brass Band during a recent pop-up gig

Coffin's talents range as widely as the many musical genres he trades in. He has released dozens of recordings and counting as a leader or co-leader, works as a Yamaha Performing Artist & Clinician, serves as a Boston Sax Shop Ambassador and teaches improvisation at the prestigious Blair School of Music at Vanderbilt University. He has authored several instructional books for musicians, as well as a new series of children's books coming out this year. Coffin operates his own studio, which he calls Into The Air, a tricked-out spot above his garage where he produces, engineers and mixes his own recordings. His onstage energy, melodically driven compositions, dedication to education and passion for improvisation have earned him the admiration of jazz musicians and music lovers around the world.

A genuine artist who knows no frivolity, Coffin has been generous with the fruits of his success in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic — which has led to widespread cancellation of gigs, lessons, touring and recording sessions — and a pair of recent natural disasters that have hit the Nashville area especially hard. A tornado last spring wreaked havoc, trashing an entire neighborhood, and in late March of this year the whole region was overwhelmed by a devastating derecho that produced severe winds and flooding.

When DownBeat reached Coffin by phone on March 30, he expressed real concern for fellow musicians whose lives were upended by the previous weekend's storm. He wanted to help in any way he could. "Some friends of mine lost everything," he said, ticking off a list of instru-

ments and gear that were waterlogged.

Amid all the wreckage of the past year, Coffin has found ways to funnel money back into the local community in support of musicians who have been unable to make a living. He has been presenting weekly online concerts from his home studio via Facebook, soliciting donations from viewers (through the website itastudiostreams.com) in the process. So far, Coffin has collected about \$10,000.

"That money is all going directly to local musicians," he said. "I'm continuing to do those with different guests each week, and I look forward to the prospect of being able to actually bring cats into my studio and pay them like it's a regular gig" once it's safe to do so. Coffin also hopes to start curating live shows at Nashville venues like Rudy's Jazz Room and the Jazz Workshop.

As for his own career, Coffin has put out several new studio recordings during this period of canceled tours and shuttered clubs. Last April, he released the three-tune *Songs Of Solitude*, a sparse affair featuring bassist Viktor Krauss, drummer Jordan Perlson and Coffin's wife, Ryoko Suzuki, on harmonium. This year, he has already released two full-length duo CDs: *Let It Shine* with the visionary cellist and vocalist Helen Gillet and *Symbiosis* with beat-box saxophone sensation Derek Brown. Looking ahead, he has more albums in the can and ready to hit, including recordings by Band of Other Brothers (with Coffin, bassist Will Lee, keyboardist Jeff Babko, guitarist Nir Felder, drummer Keith Carlock), The Nu Gurus (a group Coffin recently formed with

up-and-coming Nashville musicians) and two trio releases: a fresh new recording with Krauss and Perlson, and an album with The Veridian Trio (Coffin, Perlson and electric bassist Felix Pastorius) that dates back a few years.

Coffin's duo recordings are fascinating, in-the-moment affairs that indulge his taste for intimate musical interaction with like-minded artists. In addition to his pre-pandemic studio collaborations with Gillet and Brown, he recorded *The Moment Of Now* (2018) with drummer Roy "Futureman" Wooten, *Flight* (2018) with percussionist Tatsuya Nakatani and *Duet* (2011) with drummer Jeff Sipe.

Coffin first met Gillet — an embracer of looping technology and master of extended techniques whose creative output melds elements of rock, punk and Belgian folk music — in New Orleans, through the late saxophonist Tim Green, an unsung local hero. The two began improvising together at Gillet's solo gigs whenever Coffin came through town. In preparation for their performance at the Side Bar during the 2019 NOLA Jazz Fest, Coffin composed five new pieces for woodwinds and cello.

"After the gig, I said, 'We should record this stuff,'" said Coffin, who had never written for cello before. "So Helen came up for three or four days and we did it all right here in my studio."

Coffin found the experience enlightening. "She's a spirit, man," he said of Gillet. "She's so intuitive, and she has this almost shaman-like quality to her. She has that malleability factor. There's no judgment; it's pure, open. And she just brings the light, you know? And the way she plays that instrument ... she works it in a way that it becomes *every* instrument. I remember Wayne Shorter saying one time that the saxophone can be any instrument you want it to be: a muted trumpet, or a drum, or a piano, or French horn. When I hear Helen, I hear all those different instruments. She also sings French chansons. Helen is originally from Belgium, so she's fluent in French.

"I've tried to take what Wayne said to heart also. I have a lot of different instruments: soprano through baritone saxophones, all the flutes, clarinet and bass clarinet, a tárogató and various whistles. And I conceptualize those instruments sometimes as other instruments. So, for Helen and me, the sonic palette that we were able to work from was very interesting, and it encouraged us to keep trying new things." They played a total of 13 instruments between the two of them on *Let It Shine*, and they ended up calling in Roy Wooten to play cajon on two tracks.

"Jeff and I link up with knowledge of New Orleans rhythms," Gillet said. "And that was very helpful when we were improvising together. I've modeled a lot of my rhythmic improv off of saxophone players. And the timbre that I can latch onto ... I feel like a tenor saxophone or a

VIJAY IYER **UNEASY**
LINDA MAY HAN OH TYSHAWN SOREY

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“The album is extraordinary, reaffirming Iyer’s status as one of the most creative figures in improvised music.”

– Boston Globe





Helen Gillet with Coffin in his Nashville studio

'I REMEMBER WAYNE SHORTER SAYING ONE TIME THAT THE SAXOPHONE CAN BE ANY INSTRUMENT YOU WANT IT TO BE: A MUTED TRUMPET, OR A DRUM, OR A PIANO, OR FRENCH HORN.'

trombone, so it was fun to improvise that way.

"At times I was almost a little self-conscious to get as gritty and 'out there' as I can get," she continued. "But Jeff has a way of welcoming everything that needs to happen. We're coming from two separate vocabularies, and that's what was so exciting: that it felt welcoming of our differences. And beautifully so."

For the *Symbiosis* sessions with Brown in November 2019, the two saxophonists agreed to write most of the material on the spot instead of in advance. "I said, 'Let's not come in with any music. Let's try to write some stuff from the ground up,'" Coffin remembered. "And we just started playing and working stuff out. We would play all the parts and then kind of piece everything together like a jigsaw puzzle. Because it was all new material, Derek wasn't able to prepare anything. He had to invent ways to do things on the spot. That's the energy of the record, though, that we're both holding on for dear life."

Coffin met the one-man saxophone groove machine years ago while he was giving a clinic at a college in Texas where Brown was a teacher.

"When I do these clinics, I do some solo stuff," Coffin said. "And Derek heard me doing some of these alternate-techniques things, like slap-tonguing and multiphonics. And he said, 'It just clicked with me, that was the direction I wanted to go.' But Derek obviously took it

to a whole different realm. He's inventing not only new ways of playing the saxophone. He's inventing ways, like Wayne Shorter was saying, to make his instrument be anything he wants it to be. He's conceptualizing it in a completely different way.

"I remember back in the early '90s, when I was studying with Joe Lovano [after graduating from University of North Texas], one of the things he said was that your instrument should be any instrument of the of the ensemble. It can have the rhythmic capacity of the drums, the steadfastness of the bass, the harmonic expanse of the piano and the single line of a vocal or a saxophone. You can be all those different instruments at once. Derek is taking that idea to an extraordinary level and providing a lot of sonic structure, but there's still a transparency to it. That's the thing that blows me away: All of these parts are individual, and yet they have their own sonic space. The strata of sound is still there, and you can hear through it. And that's hard for any ensemble to get, let alone one person."

Coffin's universe continues to expand, with new musical collaborations and business ventures always on the horizon. His Ear Up label has contracted the services of A Train Entertainment, an international distributor and publisher dedicated to expanding the horizons of independent artists. "They'll be dealing

with playlists and all the digital stuff around the world," Coffin said. "Having help is important, but it has to be the right kind of help. I'm not a control freak in the sense that I want to control everything; I'm a control freak in the sense that it has to be right. And it has to represent my ideal of what I want the label to be, of how I want to present music and how the artists we are showcasing deserve to be presented. That's why the motto of my label is 'Music Handpicked by Musicians': Because I don't have to answer to anybody. I can lose money and like, OK, whatever. I don't want to lose a *lot* of money, but I can lose a little. I've been very fortunate to have had some great gigs. I'm investing in my fellow musicians. I'm investing in people I really believe in. I'm investing in strength-in-numbers. It helps propagate the scene. And I'm in no hurry. It'll build as it builds."

Coffin's side businesses continue to gain traction in the marketplace. His innovative *10 Improvisational Flute Etudes* has been expanded into an entire series for alto and tenor saxophones, trumpet, clarinet and (soon) piano. A Coffin-penned children's book titled *The Rabbit, The Carrot, The Crow and The Canary*, with illustrations by trumpeter Augie Haas, came out this spring, and he has a pair of kids' books about musical instruments on deck. Connecting the Dots, an improv-teaching app developed by Coffin, is due out this year, and the saxophonist is looking forward to connecting with fellow saxophonists through The Sax Loft (thesaxloft.com), a new subscription-based educational website run by himself, Tia Fuller and Kirk Whalum.

Since the pandemic began, Coffin has written and recorded a bounty of new material. "I've got 30 new tunes that are slamming, with cats contributing from Brazil and New Orleans, George Porter Jr., Preservation Hall guys, DJ Logic — it's all over the place," he said.

As his conversation with DownBeat approached the 90-minute mark, Coffin mentioned that he was looking forward to an actual live performance coming up that weekend with the Wild Iris Brass Band, a Nashville-based group with four other horns and two percussionists he recently formed with trombonist Ray Mason, a recent transplant from New York.

"Ray is a big brass band guy who lives three doors down from me," Coffin said. "We've done some pop-up gigs at the farmer's market. We've got a bunch of cats from town playing, and my wife is playing tambourine. Ray and I have been writing tunes for that. We've got a gig this coming Saturday, and we're going to do some recording afterwards."

It's just another typical day in the DIY world of Jeff Coffin, Inc.

"I'm trying to be creative through all this," he said, pausing for a breath. "I'm trying to find creative ways of being creative."

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Ulysses Owens, Jr.

PLAYS IT FORWARD

By Gary Fukushima

Photos by Rayon Richards

His new album with a multigenerational, über-diverse big band is the drummer's latest push to give back artistically, and personally.





Ulysses Owens Jr. at the kit

On the opening track of drummer Ulysses Owens Jr.'s new big band album, he plays five sharp rim shots, which catapult the band into "Two Bass Hit," the brash John Lewis/Dizzy Gillespie composition first recorded by Gillespie and his jazz orchestra in 1947. However, this arrangement is closer to the sextet version heard on Miles Davis' 1958 release *Milestones*.

"It's always very emotional for me, because I remember learning that solo," said Owens Jr., about playing that tune. He was 16 when advised by John Riley, the veteran drummer for the Woody Herman Band and the Village Vanguard Orchestra, to pick up *Milestones* to listen to "that solo" by Philly Joe Jones and understand the sound of straightahead jazz. "The sound just shot through me," Owens Jr. said, in a video conversation with DownBeat from his family home in Jacksonville, Florida. Until that point, the only jazz he and his gospel musician friends knew were fusion groups like the Chick Corea Elektric Band, and he favored drummers like Dave Weckl and Dennis Chambers. Owens Jr. literally threw all of his r&b and hip-hop records in the trash, determined to become a jazz musician.

It's a journey that has seen him advance to being one of the first students selected for the inaugural jazz program founded in 2001 at The Juilliard School, to becoming a celebrated drummer and sideman on Grammy award-winning and nominated projects by artists Kurt Elling, Christian McBride and Joey Alexander, to evolving into a mentor, educa-

tor, author, community organizer and band-leader in his own right. His latest album, *Soul Conversations* (Outside In Music), marks the debut of the Ulysses Owens Jr. Big Band. It's a live recording documenting the band's buzzy four-night run at Dizzy's Club at Jazz at Lincoln Center in late December of 2019.

"It seems to me like he's doing the Lord's work out there, in a certain kind of way," said Elling, speaking to DownBeat by phone from his home in Chicago. Owens Jr. credits Elling as the first significant artist to offer him a steady sideman role. "I've been impressed with him since the first time I met him. He's ambitious in all of the best ways. He's not ambitious for his ego. He's ambitious because he has important things to say and important things to play."

"One of his superhuman qualities is he is always trying to make things better," said trombonist Michael Dease, calling in from his living room in East Lansing, Michigan. Dease is the associate producer for Owens Jr.'s album, the two having first met in college at Juilliard. "It's actually very selfless," Dease elaborated on his close friend, "how he tries to improve everything he's involved with."

Owens Jr. has been trying to improve since age 2, when he sneaked onto the drums and began to play during a break at a church choir rehearsal led by his mother. He recalled how his parents would threaten to take his drums away if his grades didn't improve. "My father took the drums down and put them in the attic," he recalled. "I was crying and screaming. But after that, I never had bad grades again."

Bad grades were due in part to a learning disability. Owens Jr. was introverted, and he struggled with math. "I had teachers tell me that I would never graduate," he remembered. But thanks to the attentive care of his parents, who invested in additional tutoring, not only did Owens Jr. receive his high school diploma, he was one of only two jazz drummers to be accepted to Juilliard that fall. He had his eyes set on New York for some time, getting the chance to visit the city through an outreach program designed to attract potential students of color to the school. It was during that trip when he reached out to John Riley for that fateful lesson.

Riley was the first of many mentors he would have, including his drum teachers Herlin Riley (no relation to John Riley), Lewis Nash and Billy Drummond. But it was pianist Mulgrew Miller who became the biggest fount of Owens Jr.'s inspiration. Miller had approached him on a gig and told him he should do something different with his ride cymbal. Afterward, he went back to Miller and asked if he could email him for more advice. Miller told him he was one of the first young musicians to actually ask him for more information.

Thus began a relationship that endured right up to Miller's death in 2013. He was like a second father to Owens Jr., and they talked on the phone every week until his passing. Miller became a father figure to many other young, Black jazz musicians of Owens Jr.'s generation. "Tim Green, Robert Glasper, Derrick Hodge, Karriem Riggins," he listed. "If you went to a Mulgrew Miller gig ... you'd see a bunch of young guys like us just sitting there, waiting on him to come and say hello to us."

"It was very important to him," he added, noting that Miller himself was mentored by Phineas Newborn Jr., Donald Brown and James Williams, and he played with the Jazz Messengers for Art Blakey.

Miller and Blakey are also inspirational figures for Dease, who is on the jazz faculty at Michigan State University. A shared love with Owens Jr. of passing information to a new generation was the main factor in creating the big band. "I had mentioned to Ulysses," Dease recounted, "that Art Blakey was such a driving force for the development of new musicians for decades. We were in our early 30s at the time, but I think we were just feeling the void that the passing of Art Blakey left in the music scene. We felt like even though we were still kind of on the fresh side, maybe there's something that we can do for the cats coming up behind us."

Owens Jr. had already started to take a mentoring role in Joey Alexander's trio, where he was the oldest of the three musicians and could apply what he had learned with Kurt Elling and Christian McBride to helping the brilliant-but-young Alexander and his family understand how to handle the rigors of the road.

In addition, Owens Jr. had received a call in 2016 from Aaron Flagg, the chair and associate director of jazz studies at The Juilliard School, to invite Owens Jr. to direct their small ensembles, which he has done ever since. It should not be overlooked how significant it is for an African-American youth with a learning disability to not only be accepted to one of the elite musical academies of the world, but to then one day join the faculty of that very same institution.

In 2008, Owens Jr. and his family founded Don't Miss a Beat, a non-profit organization based in his hometown of Jacksonville, Florida, to enlighten children and teens by providing academic assistance and arts education. "My goal is to even the playing field for children," he stated, noting that children of color who have difficulty learning are often branded, as he was, as having "something negative" about them. "One of my commitments is creating moments for children who don't really have the chance to be catered to."

Owens Jr. is also hoping to help burgeoning jazz students through another project, a book he has authored on jazz entrepreneurship entitled *The Musicians Career Guide: Turning Your Talent into Sustained Success*. He explained, "It's basically 15 to 20 years of notes of everything I wish somebody taught, and things that I learned that I think students need to learn. We don't have Art Blakey and Betty Carter," he continued, "we don't have a lot of these multi-generational bands anymore."

The discussions Owens Jr. and Dease had about Art Blakey led to the formation of the young drummer's first group. The New Century Jazz Quintet was the brainchild of Owens Jr. and pianist Takeshi Ohbayashi, formulated on the bullet train as the two toured Japan in 2013. "I said to Takeshi, 'What if we were to create a hybrid American-Japanese band, like Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers, but they're all young, killin' and swingin'?" Owens Jr. said. According to Dease, he had already planted the bug in Owens Jr.'s brain about creating a Blakey-type of band, and he ended up playing as a special guest on the NCJQ's debut album *Time is Now*. Dease had also just recorded his big band album with Owens Jr. playing drums, witnessing the his work there and in the Christian McBride Big Band, "I noticed that Ulysses is sort of a natural leader on the drum set," Dease recollected, which led him to approach Owens Jr., saying, "Hey man, Art Blakey had a big band."

"The big band was forced upon me," Owens Jr. admitted. "One of my favorite people in the world is Michael Dease. He is really my brother." Like all good brothers, Dease was constantly in his ear. "So, Mike Dease, he started to pull my coattail. 'Hey, man, why don't you create a big band? I think there are things about you when you play big band that don't come out

when you play small group."

With Dease's assistance, Owens Jr. put his big band together, starting with most of the New Century Quintet — pianist Ohbayashi, bassist Yasushi Nakamura and trumpeter Benny Benack III — at its core. As for the rest of the musicians, they wanted a band that was, in the spirit of Blakey, multigenerational, but also multi-gender and multicultural. "I come from a very strong, women-led family," said Owens Jr. "I'm very into the idea of women taking their rightful place in these positions." Dease, whose father is white and mother is Black, added that diversity was important to him "as a biracial person seeing bands that were all-Black or all-white, and feeling like I didn't have a place." The result? Owens Jr. and his band has succeeded in creating a true musical melting pot, with musicians younger and older, Black, white and brown, anchored by some of the most dynamic young women playing in New York, including alto saxophonists Alexa Tarantino and Elena Terakubo, trumpeter Summer Camargo and trombonist Gina Benalcazar. Vocalist and composer Charles Turner fronts the band and induces a heart- and show-stopping moment on the album with his original song "Harlem, Harlem, Harlem."

The band has a repertoire of nearly 30 charts and growing, with elaborate arrangements from Dease's MSU colleague Diego

Rivera, who plays tenor saxophone for the band, as well as contributions by up-and-coming arrangers such as Danny Jonokuchi and Steven Feifke.

The Ulysses Owens Jr. Big Band marks an arrival of sorts. It has revealed how its band-leader has embodied all the elements that shaped his life, so he can be a living vessel to transport them to a new generation. As he was helped as a youth, so now he helps young kids; as he was taught at Juilliard, so now he teaches college students there; as he was mentored by older musicians, so now he and his core group, are able to do so with his big band.

It's a watershed moment for the still-young, elder statesman to ascend to the role he seemed destined to play. Dease, in his assessment of what impact the big band has had, summarized, "It gradually grew and developed into an ensemble that reflects Ulysses' vision and commitment to bringing cats along with him, making something exciting and inclusive happen in the jazz scene."

Owens Jr., for his part, sees himself, his mentors and his mentees as all part of the same family, where the older members have a mandate to nurture and mentor their young. "That is what these young jazz musicians need to come into," he concluded. "If we can bring that back into education, that's when we'll start producing world-class artists."

DB

WILLIE JONES III
FALLEN HEROES

NEW ALBUM FROM WILLIE JONES III:
FALLEN HEROES

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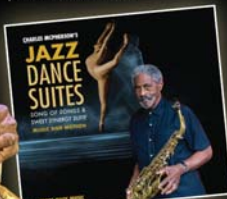
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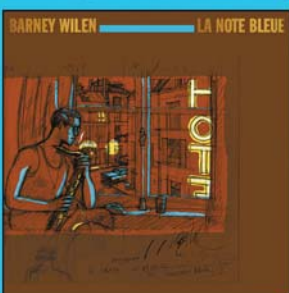



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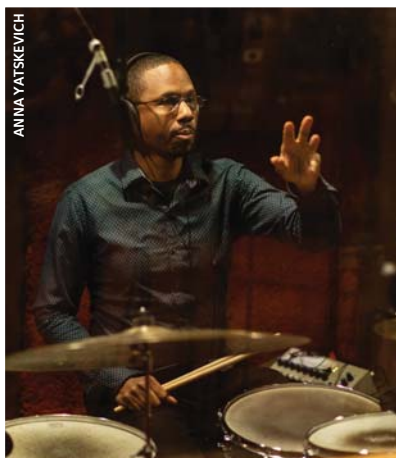
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Willie Jones III pays tribute to Roy Hargrove, Jimmy Heath, Ndugu Chancler, Larry Willis and others on *Fallen Heroes*.

WILLIE JONES III OFFERS AN HOMAGE TO HIS FALLEN HEROES

Sheltered in his music room, Willie Jones III adjusts the volume on a Billy Taylor record. He swivels around to face his Yamaha Maple Custom drum set. Since March 2020, the soundproof corner of his Brooklyn apartment has served as practice space, office and composer's chamber.

"It's tricky, but it's been cool," said the Los Angeles native, who's lived in Brooklyn for more than two decades. "And finally, there's some daylight."

As dawn has taken its time to break, Jones has taken time to reconcile memory and mourning, arriving at a place of gratitude. This month, he issues *Fallen Heroes*, his eighth release as a leader and the 23rd on WJ3 Re-

cords, the label he launched in 2000. In 2018, Jones hadn't considered releasing an homage album, at least not intentionally. But life happens and, unfortunately, death followed.

"That was a major blow," said Jones, recalling the moment that he learned Roy Hargrove had passed away. At that point, he began envisioning a project dedicated to Hargrove, whose ensemble he'd served in from

1998 to 2006. Jones set up a tribute gig at Caramoor Jazz Festival, inviting personnel from different eras of Hargrove's touring band, including Larry Willis, who soon followed Hargrove. "Then Jimmy Heath made his transition, and it just opened up for me conceptually," he said.

Producing a project that would honor those fallen heroes of the bandstand, Jones sought

to include another icon whose influence he considers significant to his artistry though not explicit in his sound: Ndugu Chancler, one of the first drummers Jones heard live.

"He was always very supportive," Jones said. "It's one thing to be inspired by somebody from listening to their records, but knowing someone personally, in the way I

thing that's worked out [beforehand] is the opening phrase," Jones said.

Bookended by Jones' original tunes, *Fallen Heroes* features compositions from Willis, Heath and Hargrove. "Generally, I like song lists to be upbeat," Jones said. "But that's not what we recorded. This is what we documented. It's a lot of songs that have vibe." The al-

bum's mood casting includes contributions from Jones colleagues who have also enjoyed seminal associations with his fallen heroes — including Justin Robinson, Sherman Irby, Steve Davis, Gerald Cannon, Renee Neufville and Jeremy Pelt. After booking George Cables for the January date, Jones invited emerging pianist-composer Isaiah Thompson for sessions in August as a way to continue the legacy of mentorship. "It just made sense to include him," he said.

Thompson, who released his debut album on WJ3, feels grateful for the opportunity to be part of the continuum. "When you play with more experienced musicians, you can feel the legacy of the artists they played with," he said. "That's what keeps the music moving forward."

Part of the WJ3 catalog, Jones' album in effect pays tribute to a fifth hero who instilled in him the importance of artistic ownership: Billy Higgins. "He always told me how important it is to own your own music," said Jones, who also serves as label producer.

In early 2020, Jones tracked Thompson's record — along with releases from Gregory Tardy and Teodross Avery — even though his calendar brimmed with performance dates. By April, he'd lost his gigs and arrived at a crossroads: release the music or put it on hold. "I just thought, I'm going to put [these records] out, anyway," Jones said. "People need to hear this music now more than ever."

Over the past two decades, Jones' relationship with WJ3 Records has gone through changes. And while the pandemic has diminished certain returns, he takes the long view: "If you're not losing money, then you're winning."

"In any type of market where you're doing what you love and you're in total control of it as your own boss — if you're able to do all that and not lose money, you're ahead of the game. So I put out those records during the pandemic, and now I'm dropping mine. Hopefully, I'll have some gigs to support that. I'm confident I will." —Stephanie Jones

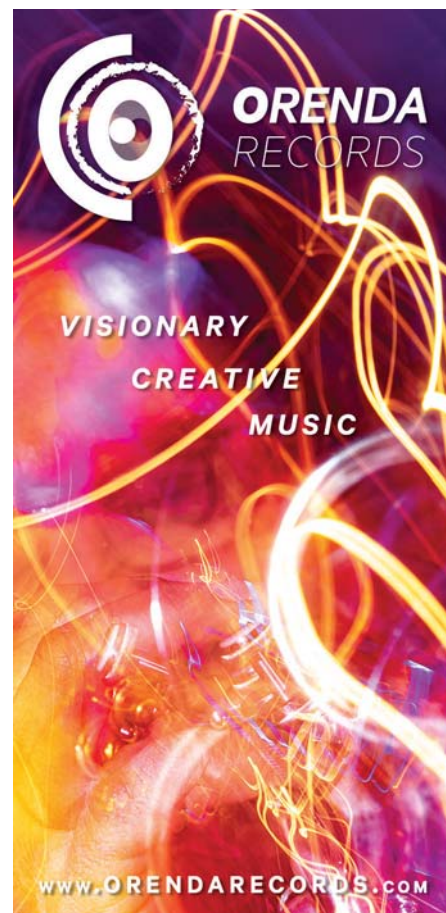
'Knowing someone personally, in the way I knew Ndugu, has a different impact on you.'


knew Ndugu, has a different impact on you."

Fallen Heroes opens in artful rumination. Jones' solo piece "Something For Ndugu" bonds foundational elements heard throughout the album: influence, spontaneity and personal expression. Borrowing a phrase from the brief but distinctive intro to Michael Jackson's "Baby Be Mine," he honors Chancler's figure as a medium for his own improvisation. During a West Coast tour, Jones allowed the figure to spark his solo performance. By the time he booked a studio date in January 2020, he'd decided the improvised gesture would serve as track one. "The only

bum's mood casting includes contributions from Jones colleagues who have also enjoyed seminal associations with his fallen heroes — including Justin Robinson, Sherman Irby, Steve Davis, Gerald Cannon, Renee Neufville and Jeremy Pelt. After booking George Cables for the January date, Jones invited emerging pianist-composer Isaiah Thompson for sessions in August as a way to continue the legacy of mentorship. "It just made sense to include him," he said.

Thompson, who released his debut album on WJ3, feels grateful for the opportunity to be part of the continuum. "When you play






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REGGIE QUINERLY

New York Nowhere

2021 finds drummer and composer Reggie Quinerly releasing his fourth project, New York Nowhere. The title and overall theme takes its inspirational cues from the city that never sleeps. This project reflects the balance between the individual and collective experience of living in one of the most populated cities in the world. Mixed in with the all constantly shifting and deafening sonic scenes, Quinerly emerges with a concise musical message of hope.

To assist in the recording New York Nowhere, Quinerly enlisted top players Antoine Dye-trumpet, John Ellis-tenor sax, John Chin-piano and Sean Conly-bass to bring together a diverse set of swinging and soulful sounds.


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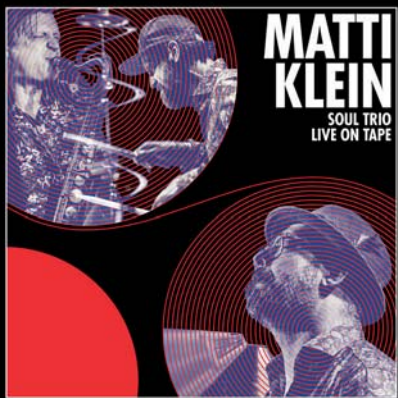
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Sound Prints: Joey Baron (left), Lawrence Fields, Joe Lovano, Dave Douglas and Linda May Han Oh



GEOFF COUNTRYMAN

Joe Lovano & Dave Douglas' Sound Prints

Other Worlds

GREENLEAF MUSIC

★★★★½

Wayne Shorter continues to glimmer as the lodestar for Sound Prints, a superb combo that excels at trumpeting its honoree's expansive artistry without losing its own identity.

That's largely because the copilots of Sound Prints — saxophonist Joe Lovano and trumpeter Dave Douglas — have already cultivated their own respective voices, in terms of improvisation and composing. Bassist Linda May Han Oh, pianist Lawrence Fields and drummer Joey Baron bring the idiomatic knowledge and the improvisational wit required to interact with Lovano and Douglas and make the music leap off the sheet.

Unlike Sound Prints' previous two albums,

the new recording showcases all originals. Still, Shorter's musical DNA is noticeable throughout, especially in the album's stargazing theme, in its philosophical undertow and in the mutable dialogue and spatial awareness conveyed by the quintet.

Douglas' undulating "Pythagoras" sounds as if it could have been included in Shorter's orchestral *Emanon*, while still taking full advantage of the trumpeter's oblique phrasing and Lovano's flowering passages. Douglas also contributes the luxuriant "The Transcendentalists," on which he and Lovano issue a beautiful unison melody atop levitating rhythmic momentum.

Other Worlds opens with "Space Exploration," "Shooting Stars" and "Life On Earth," a suite composed by Lovano that emphasizes the telepathic push-pull that marked both Shorter's longstanding acoustic quartet and Miles Davis' mid-'60s quintet. Sound Prints, however, engages in an open, improvisational

freefall toward the end of "Space Exploration," then gradually issues fragmented melodic pieces on "Shooting Stars," embarking on a loose excursion that differs from Davis' or Shorter's flights of fancy. Things coalesce brilliantly on the driving "Life On Earth," on which Fields delivers his most wondrous improvisational moment on the disc.

Other highlights includes Douglas' "Antiquity To Outer Space," featuring some splendid arco bass from Oh, and Lovano's suspenseful "Midnight March," which finds the connective tissue between Shorter and Ornette Coleman. Indeed, *Other Worlds* simultaneously applauds Shorter's legacy and cultivates one of its own.

—John Murphy

Other Worlds: Space Exploration; Shooting Stars; Life On Earth; Manitou; Antiquity To Outer Space; The Flight; The Transcendentalists; Sky Miles; Pythagoras; Midnight March. (69:59)

Personnel: Joe Lovano, tenor saxophone; Dave Douglas, trumpet; Linda May Han Oh, bass; Lawrence Fields, piano; Joey Baron, drums.

Ordering info: greenleafmusic.com



Vincent Herring *Preaching To The Choir* SMOKE SESSION RECORDS

★★★★★

The music Vincent Herring gives us here has the elegant rhythmic sway of a jazz set. Herring phrases with a beboppish body English, but filtered through a contemporary lens.

His two ballad choices come across with a warm, romantic lyricism. Lionel Richie's "Hello" achieves a darkness through dynamics and a tongued phrasing that gives the tune shape. "In A Sentimental Mood," simply borrows on its familiarity, although both Herring and pianist Cyrus Chestnut take particular pleasure in teasing its subtleties. Chestnut, who

has been at Herring's side many times over the years, is particularly wry in his half-chorus as he tiptoes to the brink of shifting the tempo, suggesting the soft-spoken modesty of Count Basie and John Lewis.

As veteran players at this point, Herring and Chestnut are entitled to drop passing references to their heroes. Chestnut gives us a quote from Cannonball Adderley's "Work Song" on "Dudi's Dilemma." "The Song Is You" flits past at the two-minute mark of "Ojos de Rio." The opening to "Old Devil Moon" is borrowed from Benny Golson's "Killer Joe." But it's an appropriate heist, since "Old Devil Moon" is, in its way, a "Killer Joe" kind of tune.

The program is a balance of standards with three originals. "Minor Swing" is vampy ball of energy by Chestnut. It gives Herring a chance to play against himself, but the over-dubbing sounds crowded and a little over-stuffed. Herring's contribution is the title track, "Preaching To The Choir." The stop-time back-and-forth is fairly standard, but Herring navigates the expected terrain with swirling passion.

—John McDonough

Preaching To The Choir: Dudi's Dilemma; Old Devil Moon; Ojos de Rio; Hello; Fried Pies; Minor Swing; In A Sentimental Mood; Preaching To The Choir; Granted; You Are The Sunshine Of My Life. (65:00)

Personnel: Vincent Herring, alto saxophone; Cyrus Chestnut, piano; Yasushi Nakamura, bass; Jonathan Blake, drums.

Ordering info: smokesessionrecords.com

Thumbscrew *Never Is Enough* CUNEIFORM

★★★★★

There is a considered effortlessness that comes as the result of having played music together for the best part of a decade. Such is the sound of Thumbscrew's Mary Halvorson, Tomas Fujiwara and Michael Formanek — a finely tuned rhythm section that continues to explore the seemingly limitless bounds of their creativity on the band's sixth album together.

Formidable bandleaders in their own right, each brings compositional talents to the table, writing three songs apiece. "Camp Easy," composed by drummer Fujiwara, allows ample space for guitarist Halvorson's meandering lines to intersect with bassist Formanek's phrasings, making for a gently lilting and pastoral piece. Halvorson's "Sequel To Sadness," meanwhile, harnesses a loose, four-to-the-floor beat anchored by Fujiwara's textural cymbal work that ultimately strays into a clattering, robust drum solo. And Formanek's "Emojis Have Consequences" sees each band member intricately interlocking into a matrix of melody, building pace to another lively solo from Fujiwara.

The record's opening lobe transforms into a



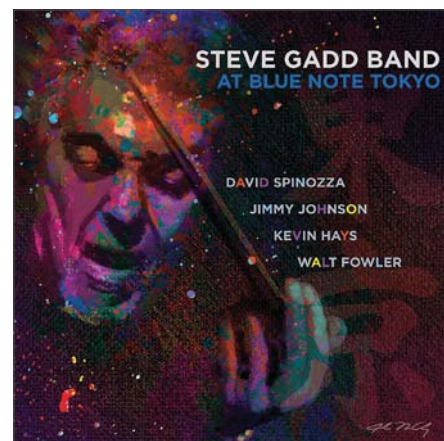
canter, then to a gallop, shredding through Halvorson's melodic lines on the free-form "Fractured Sanity" and making liberal use of reverb-laden textures on the lyrical "Unsung Procession," before closing track "Scam Likely" dissolves into a dark palette of distortion and thundering drums. It's remarkable how the trio can create such expansiveness in their sound from just three instruments.

—Ammar Kalia

Never Is Enough: Camp Easy; Sequel To Sadness; Never Is Enough; Through An Open Window; Heartdrop; Emojis Have Consequences; Fractured Sanity; Unsung Procession; Scam Likely. (56:48)

Personnel: Mary Halvorson, guitar; Michael Formanek, upright bass and electric bass; Tomas Fujiwara, drums.

Ordering info: cuneiformrecords.bandcamp.com



Steve Gadd Band *At Blue Note Tokyo* BFM JAZZ

★★★★★

Any live album released since last March seems especially rich and poignant. This set by drummer Steve Gadd's regular quintet — with guitarist David Spinozza subbing in for Michael Landau — has particular resonance because of it reminds us about life on the road for the average musician.

Now 76, Gadd is likely one of the most-influential musicians still playing. His recorded work has shaped how we hear — and how drummers hit — the drums. But Gadd is more of a reliable team player than a marquee name, and his bandmates are equally low-key despite their own deep discographies. This is the type of band that keeps the music alive on a nightly basis in regular times, even if it's unlikely to headline a festival.

This is also the type of band that aims to please. Trumpeter Walt Fowler has a fluid attack and pleasant tone, whether he's calling forth the ghost of Davis on the opening "Where's Earth?" or carving his way through the bossa of his own composition "Timpanogos." Spinozza contributes two songs and a distinctive style that favors downward runs and sudden, bluesy flourishes.

Kevin Hays has an expressive voice that's well suited to his soulful "Walk With Me" and Dylan's 1971 rocker "Watching The River Flow." His electric keyboards are a compelling addition, but when he shifts to piano, the soundman fails him.

Through it all, Gadd glides like an all-star, only stepping forward with a riotous climax on bassist Jimmy Johnson's "One Point Five."

It all sounds like a bunch of pros doing what they do for an appreciative audience. What a concept!

—James Hale

At Blue Note Tokyo: Where's Earth?; Doesn't She Know By Now; Timpanogos; One Point Five; Hidden Drive; Way Back Home; Walk With Me; Rat Race; Watching The River Flow. (60:17)

Personnel: Walt Fowler, trumpet; David Spinozza, guitar; Kevin Hays, keyboards, vocals (7, 9); Jimmy Johnson, bass; Steve Gadd, drums.

Ordering info: bfmjazz.com

The Hot Box

Critics	John Murph	John McDonough	Ammar Kalia	James Hale
Lovano/Douglas Sound Prints <i>Other Worlds</i>	★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★
Vincent Herring <i>Preaching To The Choir</i>	★★★★½	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★
Thumbscrew <i>Never Is Enough</i>	★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★	★★★★½
Steve Gadd Band <i>At Blue Note Tokyo</i>	★★★★½	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★

Critics' Comments

Joe Lovano & Dave Douglas' Sound Prints, *Other Worlds*

Knotty but mostly satisfying, Lovano and Douglas patch together solos and dialogs from what sometimes seem like scraps of warm-up exercises. But it works. The scenery is often sparse. Covers some brittle, off-center provocation, but lyrical landscapes, too. "Manitou" and "Transcendentalists" are oases.

—John McDonough

For their first outing without featuring any Wayne Shorter compositions, Sound Prints creates an animated selection of live improvisations, from the free-form flows of the "Other Worlds Suite" to the journeying lyricism of "Sky Miles." Intricate and intuitive.

—Ammar Kalia

What began as an opportunity to pay tribute to Shorter has evolved into an ongoing pairing of two charismatic soloists in their prime with a highly engaged rhythm section.

—James Hale

Vincent Herring, *Preaching To The Choir*

Herring's brand of urbane, soulful modern post-bop never gets moldy, regardless of its coziness.

—John Murph

A warm, deep-swinging and satisfying collection of tunes from saxophonist Herring. Pianist Cyrus Chestnut, bassist Yasushi Nakamura and drummer Johnathan Blake provide a sturdy backing for his bop-influenced lines in a spirit of communal optimism.

—Ammar Kalia

Recorded in the face of wrenching anxiety, this sounds like a victory lap in some parts; an easy-listening coast in others. The space between the raucous Wes Montgomery cover and the mellow "Hello" makes this seem like two different albums.

—James Hale

Thumbscrew, *Never Is Enough*

Despite the gossamer nature of the arrangements, the music never fails to hold one's attention.

—John Murph

A satisfying showcase for Harvorson's musicianship and many convergences, but with a muse-y, meditative fixation on its own sounds. Ideas are mushy and indistinct, save for "Heartdrop," a lovely anchor of welcoming convention amidst much probing, but inconclusive, ambiguity.

—John McDonough

Sounding like The Bad Plus of free improvisation, Halvorson, Formanek and Fujiwara constantly mess with expectations, locking in and breaking apart with finesse.

—James Hale

Steve Gadd Band, *At Blue Note Tokyo*

Channeling grooves and sticky melodies that recall the golden soul-jazz era of CTI, the album boasts the feel-good element during a time when we need it the most.

—John Murph

Electric piano and guitar provide the spongy center of this steady set, which has the even-tempered quality of a Henry Mancini film score: tight, disciplined and on point. Gadd keeps the tempos ticking with a cunning infectiousness. But the plan permits no breakout climaxes to stir the blood.

—John McDonough

Gadd is in reliably groove-heavy form, but the compositions he chose lack a certain lustre. The Steely Dan-esque "Doesn't She Know By Now" is the only track to come close to expanding on the drummer's subtle creativity.

—Ammar Kalia

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Jeremy Pelt *Griot: This Is Important!*

HIGHNOTE

★★★★½

What is implied in the music is defined in words of *Griot: This Is Important!*, a blend of spoken-word commentary and bop-flavored originals by trumpeter Jeremy Pelt.

Evidence is best expressed on “Don’t Dog The Source,” with its double meaning of attention to the cultural roots, the straight-ahead urgency of his horn and the pounce of Allan Mednard’s drums. After a slow, dirge-like beginning on “Carry Christ Wherever You

Are,” Pelt rips into a serious sermon of sound with moments where he seems to shout, “I’m all fired up!” His tonal intensity is a blistering fusillade of phrases as if in response to the late Larry Willis’ comment of what’s it like being a Black jazz musician in America: “It requires real commitment,” Willis said.

With this unique venture, Pelt reaches into another sonic sphere; you wish the interviews were longer and given a better recording. But as saxophonist JD Allen says during his commentary, “Let your music speak,” and it does here with a purpose of educating and entertaining.

“Underdog,” with Chien Chien Lu’s vibraphone and Victor Gould’s piano reflects performances of Senegalese griots and their magic on the kora, thumb piano and marimba.

Increasingly, it seems, jazz musicians are searching for new ways to expand the improvisational core of America’s original art form. Pelt reaches back and, like a true griot, finds a fresh way to tell his story.

—Herb Boyd

Griot: This Is Important! Griot—Intro (words by Jeremy Pelt); Words by Paul West; Carry Christ Wherever You Are; Words by Larry Willis; Underdog; Words by JD Allen; Don’t Dog The Source; Words by Bertha Hope; A Seat At The Table; Words by Harold Mabern; Solidarity; Words by René Marie; A Beautiful (f*cking) Lie; In Spite Of... Words by Warren Smith; Words by Ambrose Akinmusire; Relevance. (43:98)

Personnel: Jeremy Pelt, trumpet; Chien Chien Lu, vibraphone; Victor Gould, piano; Nord keyboard; Vicente Archer, bass; Allan Mednard, drums; Ismel Wignall, percussion; Brandee Younger, harp.

Ordering info: jazzdepot.com



Garage A Trois *Calm Down Cologne*

ROYAL POTATO FAMILY

★★★★½

Calm Down Cologne is the kind of project fans dream about. The five-track release is a welcome return to the foundational lineup of Garage A Trois, now with added finesse. The album’s improvisation-heavy focus showcases the kind of group chemistry that can only be attained after so many years of musical activity, stylistic evolution and nurtured social connection.

Right from the opening of “No Zone,” the offbeat stutter of Skerik’s saxophone motif sets the song in one direction before the bold snap of Stanton Moore’s snare whips the music around with the false tease of a meter change.

Each track presents easy-to-grab hooks, either through a downbeat-accentuating pattern or dramatically contrasting timbre. Yet, tracks never get too comfortable before a notable pivot. Christa Wells’ unison vocal overdub aligning with saxophone and keys on “The Epic” is one such colorful deviation.

On “In-A-Pro-Pro,” Skerik finds his own pivots, while tempo and momentum remain intact, thanks to Moore’s drumming and the assertive, wah of Charlie Hunter’s Hybrid Big 6 guitar. Skerik, switching between Rhodes, Mellotron, Modal 001 synthesizer and saxophone illuminates the adventurous and truly fresh side of a reunited Garage A Trois.

While the band embraces roles that serve their instruments best — Skerik’s melodically experimental contributions, for example, don’t try to push the rhythmic direction or set the tempo the way Hunter and Moore do — connection to Garage A Trois’ history isn’t required to appreciate *Calm Down Cologne*. Simply come for the irresistible grooves and stay for the sonic oddities.

—Kira Grunenberg

Calm Down Cologne: No Zone; The Epic; Calm Down Cologne; In-A-Pro-Pro; Numinous. (35:50)

Personnel: Charlie Hunter, guitar; Skerik, saxophone; Rhodes, Mellotron, Modal 001; Stanton Moore, drums; Christa Wells, vocal (2).

Ordering info: royalpotatofamily.com

Michael Formanek *Imperfect Measures*

INTAKT RECORDS

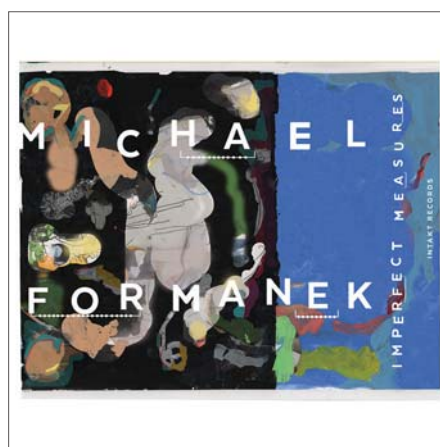
★★★★★

After the world went to lockdown last year, a lot of musicians spent time playing alone. But this CD is not a product of COVID. It addresses a moment of personal challenge. In 2017, bassist Michael Formanek went back to full-time performing after 17 years of conservatory teaching. And two decades after recording his first solo album, he made a second, *Imperfect Measures*.

He’s spent the intervening years earning acclaim as a composer, collaborator and band leader, and elements of those pursuits insinuate themselves into this record. While Formanek is the only musician heard on *Imperfect Measures*, he created a collaborative environment by inviting artist Warren Linn to come into the studio and draw while Formanek played.

Several pieces adorn the album’s packaging. And Formanek exercised a compositional influence upon the unscripted music by selecting excerpts from much longer improvisations.

The result is a collection of nine tracks, ranging from three to 11 minutes, that are the product of abstraction, but don’t sound especially abstract. The recording quality is clear and unenhanced, preserving Formanek’s rich,



round tone. The opener, “Quickdraw,” progresses at an undeniably dazzling clip, but also with inescapable logic. Both “Loop Back” and “Notice Moments” punctuate intricate passages with flamenco-like flourishes, which results in music that imparts a sense of narrative structure even though it rarely repeats. *Imperfect Measures* isn’t just a selection of great bass solos; it’s a distillation of a keenly organized musical mind.

—Bill Meyer

Imperfect Measures: Quickdraw; On The Skin; A Maze; Full Frontal; Airborne; Loop Back; Notice Moments; Wisp; The Stand. (55:58)

Personnel: Michael Formanek, bass.

Ordering info: intaktrec.ch



Joyann Parker
Out Of The Dark
 HOPELESS ROMANTIC RECORDS
 ★★½

Joyann Parker is a brassy, bluesy belter who wears her heart on her sleeve, tempting devils and angels alike to join the party. Amid the endless twilight zone of COVID, the Minneapolis-based singer/songwriter helps bring us out of the dark with a soulful batch of originals, penned with guitarist Mark Lamoine, that draws deep from the Americana well of blues, gospel, country and roots-rock.

Bridging the traditional God-and-the-devil divide, Parker opens with the lusty “Gone So Long,” a lowdown blues, then segues into the joyous gospel rocker “Carry On,” which promises “the Lord’s gonna carry you through the river/Shield you from the raging storm.” Expanding on the theme, the anthemic title track — from throes of the pandemic — finds strength in the god within us: “Take all you’ve been gifted and be who you’re meant to be.”

In Parker’s case, that means being all the many things a woman can be, good and bad. On “Predator,” she warns girlfriends to swipe left on the “devil with the angel face” who’s clearly up to no good, then switches gears and goes prowling for a “Dirty Rotten Guy.” She’s equally ambivalent about whether she wants to be a “Bad Version Of Myself” to keep her man, and even warns lovers to “get used to it, we lie,” on “What Did You Expect.”

Revved into overdrive by her tight-knit core ensemble, a hot horn section and an entire choir of backup singers, Parker’s follow-up to her 2018 debut *Hard To Love* is a surefire way to cure the pandemic blues, especially if you take her advice: “Come On Baby (Take Me Dancing).”

—Cree McCree

Out Of The Dark: Gone So Long; Carry On; Bad Version Of Myself; What Did You Expect; Either Way; Predator; Dirty Rotten Guy; Come On Baby (Take Me Dancing); Fool For You; Hit Me Like A Train; Out Of The Dark. (41:11)

Personnel: Joyann Parker, lead vocals, guitar, keyboards; Mark Lamoine, electric guitar, acoustic guitar; Tim Wick, piano, organ; Brad Schaeffer, bass; Bill Golden, drums, percussion.

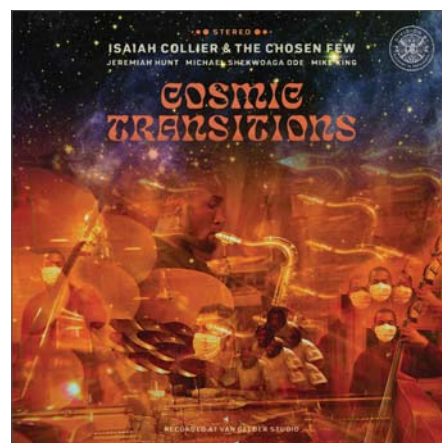
Ordering info: joyannparker.com

Isaiah Collier & the Chosen Few
Cosmic Transitions
 DIVISION 81
 ★★★★★

This offering is the third from the Chicago-based saxophonist, who at the age of 23 has transcended the realm of prodigy. It is not his age that shocks. It is what he’s playing. Isaiah Collier and his band, the Chosen Few, walk through several moments of transition in the music, moving from its foundation in the blues directly into hard-bop. What we know as the avant-garde are an extension of the blues. And this album handles the blues with care. They are the foundation, again and again, for a musical gift that is an ancestral inheritance.

Fully in the tradition, Collier’s music is not unthinking imitation. Though he recorded this album in 2020 at Rudy Van Gelder’s studio, utilizing the same equipment that John Coltrane used for *A Love Supreme*, Collier’s move is to honor transition by reanimating it. This is no easy task. One has to be prepared, something Collier clearly understands.

It is an album inspired by the cosmic energy of Mercury in retrograde. From the downbeat, with a literal tolling of the bell, until the final note that finds Collier improvising, forcing



the limits of his soprano saxophone, *Cosmic Transitions* is like the moments after an afternoon rainstorm. What Collier describes as the survival process, of living through the matrix, is a sound that disturbs the grounds of our imagination. Over five movements, the suite can be heard as a single statement: The blues give life to ballads, which give life to bebop, which are merely expressions of free modes of expression.

—Joshua Myers

Cosmic Transitions: I. Forgiveness; II. Humility; III. Understanding; IV. Truth & Guidance; V. Mercury’s Retrograde. (56:28)

Personnel: Isaiah Collier, saxophones; Jeremiah King, bass; Michael Shekwoaga Ode, drums; Mike King, piano.

Ordering info: division81records.bandcamp.com

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Damon Locks Black Monument Ensemble

Now

INTERNATIONAL ANTHEM

★★★★

Recorded outside in a garden at the end of the last pandemic summer with the cicadas screeching into the mix, *Now* is an album of life and vitality, created from the need to commune without literal closeness. The session took two days, the same days the group learned the material. The songs pour out like an onslaught, and linger on the brain long after they've played.

Locks' melding of electronics and samples feels like pulling from hip-hop as much as he's pulling from the visual medium of collage. This is Black music intended to be interpreted as such, made at a time when it felt more necessary than ever in the United States to proclaim Black people's distinctive and continual contribution to the fabric of the country.

Clarinetist Angel Bat Dawid and cornetist Ben LaMar Gay weave through these songs like the lamentations that echo the vocals, pushing themes through like a Greek chorus. Dana Hall on drums finds every corner of every pocket. But it's Locks whose production on these songs makes this all feel like some greater art piece. —Anthony Dean-Harris



Now: Now (Forever Momentary Space); The People vs The Rest Of Us; Keep Your Mind Free; Barbara Jones-Hogu And Elizabeth Catlett Discuss Liberation; Movement And You; The Body Is Electric. (30:33)
Personnel: Angel Bat Dawid, clarinet; Ben LaMar Gay, cornet, melodica; Dana Hall, drums; Damon Locks, samples, electronics, lyrics, compositions; Arif Smith, percussion; Phillip Armstrong, Monique Golding, Tramaine Parker, Richie Parks, Erica Rene, Eric Tre von, vocals.

Ordering info: intanthem.bandcamp.com/album/now

Alyssa Allgood What Tomorrow Brings

CELLAR MUSIC GROUP

★★★★½

Chicago-based Alyssa Allgood's third album casts Allgood's dry, expressive voice in a svelte chamber setting. Guitarist Mike Allemana, bassist Dennis Carroll and drummer George Fludas are more than accompanists, particularly Allemana, a master of the understated, single-note run.

While Allgood is in her twenties, she sings with a depth beyond her years, particularly on her covers of Abbey Lincoln's "Should've Been" and Dinah Washington's signature "This Bitter Earth."

The album starts with a breezy "There Are Such Things," a tune identified with Frank Sinatra that showcases Allemana's economy of style and Allgood's mastery of scat. The mood swings with Carroll's "Enclosure," a love song from an introvert's point of view, while "Memories," one of two Allgood-Carroll collaborations, presents the singer as a cynical woman whose memories "are out of touch and so are you."

An Allemana-Allgood duet on "For All We Know" paves the way for "Passing Glance," a supple Carroll-Allgood effort with Allemana at his densest, Allgood assured and daring. —Carlo Wolff



What Tomorrow Brings: There Are Such Things; Enclosure; Should've Been; Memories; This Bitter Earth; Mad About the Boy; Time Found; Bridges; Try Your Wings; Light Out of Darkness; For All We Know; Passing Glance. (53:37)

Personnel: Alyssa Allgood, vocals; Mike Allemana, guitar; Dennis Carroll, bass; George Fludas, drums.

Ordering info: cellarlive.com

Steven Feifke Big Band Kinetic

OUTSIDE IN MUSIC

★★★★½

This debut by Steven Feifke Big Band, a fixture of the New York jazz scene, feels like a pushback against playlist-centric consumption. As a luxurious whole, *Kinetic's* extended solos and unhurried pace are decadent, and Feifke's original material and arrangements are worth a listen.

The album is at its most vibrant when Feifke is applying the big band aesthetic to modern jazz, especially on the back half of the album. Having set the stage with more traditional swingers, he stretches out on "Midnight Beat," a snaky r&b-inspired jam capped off by a cheeky solo from bassist Dan Chmielinski, and the rolling grooves of "Nica's Dream."

There's also an emphasis on the collective with this material. Feifke allows himself few piano solos, preferring to push others into the spotlight. Saxophonist Sam Dillon adds a Sonny Rollins-like haze to "Closure," and trumpeter Benny Benack III attacks his two solo turns.

This big band is clearly having a blast working as one, giving this whole album an air of infectious joy. —Robert Ham



Kinetic: Kinetic; Unveiling Of A Mirror; The Sphinx; Until The Real Thing Comes Along; Word Travels Fast; Wollongong; Nica's Dream; On The Street Where You Live; Midnight Beat; Closure. (67:11)

Personnel: Steven Feifke, piano; Andrew Gould, alto saxophone, soprano saxophone, flute; Alexa Tarantino, alto saxophone, flute; Alex LoRe, alto saxophone; Lucas Pino, tenor saxophone, clarinet, flute; Sam Dillon, tenor saxophone, clarinet, flute; Andrew Gutasukas, baritone saxophone, bass clarinet; Max Darche, John Lake, Benny Benack III, Gabriel King Medd, trumpet, flugelhorn; Robert Edwards, Jeffery Miller, Armando Vergara, trombone; Jennifer Wharton, bass trombone; Alex Wintz, guitar; Dan Chmielinski, bass; Ulysses Owens Jr., Bryan Carter, Jimmy Macbride, Joe Peri, drums; Veronica Swift, vocals.

Ordering info: outsideinmusic.com

Nik Bärtsch Entendre

ECM 2703

★★

For the past two decades, Swiss pianist and composer Nik Bärtsch has pursued an instantly recognizable, meticulously conceived practice with two different yet interrelated bands: Ronin and Mobile, although the former has been his primary outlet. Each excursion pursues a rigorous strain of minimalist groove as interlocking patterns meted out on piano, bass, drums and saxophone say less about melody and harmony than about his puzzle-like conception, where shifts occur gradually, perpetually changing shape and complexion beneath an addictive drive that's both hypnotic and energizing. His music is inherently mutable, its modular construction allowing Bärtsch to reimagine and reorder his materials with infinite variation.

It makes sense that his second solo album — with *Hishiryō* being his 2002 solo debut — would revisit older pieces in this format. While it's certainly interesting to hear him pare down his work for just two hands, one of which occasionally reaches inside of his instrument to scrape or dampen a string, the transition destroys the most rewarding quality of his work — how his working ensembles translate his simple, pulsing themes into kinetic devices that thrive because every part is so integral yet subtle. —Peter Margasak



Entendre: Modul 58.12; Modul 55; Modul 26; Modul 13; Modul 5; Déjà-vu, Vienna. (53:19)

Personnel: Nik Bärtsch, piano.

Ordering info: ecmrecords.com

Joachim Kühn *Touch The Light*

ACT

★★★★½

Although originally proposed by ACT founder Siggü Loch as an album of ballads, pianist Joachim Kühn's *Touch The Light* is more about the reflective possibilities of slow tempo than the usual emotions — longing, sorrow, romance, hope — associated with balladry. As such, when he leans into Bob Marley's gently uplifting "Redemption Song," the easygoing pace allows him to stagger the accompaniment into lazily syncopated chords.

Like much of *Touch The Light*, "Redemption Song" bypasses the head-solo-head form to present the song itself as improvisation. Kühn expresses through the way he reshapes the melody and harmony instead of flights of improvisatory flash. On "Purple Rain," for example, he uses the flat-third bluesy-ness of Prince's verse to extend into jazz territory.

Kühn's approach doesn't always work. His version of the Peggy Lee hit "Fever" sticks too close to the blues bass line to offer much breadth, and despite his best efforts, "Blue Velvet" never sounds quite as profound as he'd like. But his playing is always deftly shaded and tunefully charming, ensuring that *Touch The Light* is pleasant even when it isn't perfect.

—J.D. Considine

Touch The Light: Warm Canto; Allegretto; Symphony No. 7; A Remark You Made; Sintra; Ponta de Areia; Redemption Song; Touch The Light; Fever; Blue Velvet; Stardust; Purple Rain; Last Tango In Paris; Peace Piece. (44:09)

Personnel: Joachim Kühn, piano.

Ordering info: actmusic.com



Noah Haidu *Slowly: Song For Keith Jarrett*

SUNNYSIDE RECORDS

★★★★★

On *Slowly: Song For Keith Jarrett*, pianist Noah Haidu, with bassist Buster Williams and drummer Billy Hart, pays heartfelt tribute to the jazz legend's quintessential Standards Trio with drummer Jack DeJohnette and the late bassist Gary Peacock.

The tribute is fueled by Haidu's appreciation of Jarrett's lyrical solo piano approach and the trio's organic style of collaboration. There are personal impetuses, too, including Haidu's tradition of seeing Jarrett live with his father (who passed away only weeks before Jarrett's final performance in 2016), and the breakup of his marriage.

Slowly is bittersweet as Haidu considers emotional endings within his musical celebration. In many cases, this side-by-side consideration appears quite literal, as on the track "Rainbow/Keith Jarrett," which merges Jarrett's late-'70s waltz with a joyous ode written by Haidu.

Along with several Haidu originals, *Slowly* features originals from Williams and Hart. The trio also does careful justice to the standards "Georgia," "What A Difference A Day Makes" and "But Beautiful."

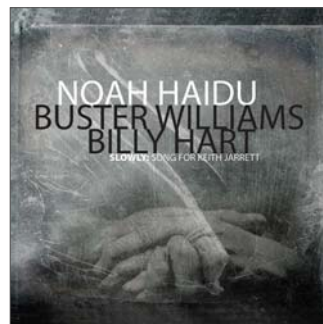
While he bolsters emotional moments, Haidu does tend to rush the time feel at times. Still, *Slowly* is a work of stunning execution and heart.

—Alexa Peters

Slowly: Song For Keith Jarrett: Air Dancing; Duchess; What A Difference A Day Makes; Rainbow/Keith Jarrett; Georgia; Slowly; Lorca; But Beautiful. (74:36)

Personnel: Noah Haidu, piano; Buster Williams, bass; Billy Hart, drums.

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com



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Mark O'Connor

Markology II

OMAC
★★★★½

To say that Mark O'Connor is a remarkable musician is an understatement. In his career as a violinist, he made his Grand Ole Opry debut as a teenager, toured with Stephane Grappelli, worked with David Grisman and the Dregs, wrote many classical works and remains an important figure in the category-blurring New Acoustic Music movement. O'Connor has been so consistently busy as a violinist and a composer that it is easy to forget about his guitar playing.

Back in 1978, O'Connor recorded *Markology*, a wide-ranging album that showcased his guitar in a sextet with two other guitarists, two mandolins (including Grisman) and bass. *Markology II* features him as a solo guitarist on six traditional melodies, "On Top Of The World" (which was on the original *Markology*) and three of his originals.

O'Connor can improvise ridiculously fast lines with ease while clearly articulating each note. On beloved numbers as "Beaumont Rag" and "Alabama Jubilee," his ideas fly by at a blinding speed, but O'Connor also displays an obvious joy at embracing a strong melody such as "Goin' Home" and "Shenandoah."

While listeners can debate if this is a jazz album, they can't argue that the guitar playing on *Markology II* is less than brilliant. —Scott Yanow

Markology II: Greensleeves; Goin' Home; Beaumont Rag; Salt Creek; On Top Of The World; Alabama Jubilee; Shenandoah; Flailing; Kamala Boogie; Ease With The Breeze. (45:46)
Personnel: Mark O'Connor, guitar.

Ordering info: omacrecords.com



Bill Kwan

No Ordinary Love: The Music Of Sade

IKEDA MUSIC
★★★

San Francisco vocalist Bill Kwan's latest, *No Ordinary Love: The Music Of Sade*, invites comparisons to her iconic recordings, a risky move. Veer too far into covers and a new version becomes superfluous; stray too far, and the recording bears little of the joie de vivre of the original.

There are welcome oases here. Kwan's delivery on "Jezebel" and "The Moon And The Sky" strike just the right notes; both are sensitive and straightforward. "Haunt Me" captures an enchanting, breathy moodiness amid an arrangement studded by Alex Sipiagin's trumpet solo. The star of the show, however, is "Love Is Stronger Than Pride."

Noam Wiesenberg's arrangements here are a delight, striking a balance between the two parallels, but Kwan's interpretations tend to waver.

With Sade, there is a cool, clear, emotive calm. Unfortunately, Kwan's delivery sometimes contradicts the impassioned nature of the lyrics.

No Ordinary Love is an inconsistent offering, but it offers a lesson. Sometimes the brightest spots on a tribute can be the re-imagining of lesser-known gems.

—Ayana Contreras

No Ordinary Love: The Music Of Sade: The Sweetest Taboo; Flower Of The Universe (from Disney's A Wrinkle in Time); King Of Sorrow; Jezebel; No Ordinary Love; The Moon And The Sky; Love Is Stronger Than Pride; Haunt Me; The Big Unknown (from Widows). (41:09)

Personnel: Bill Kwan, vocals; Alex Sipiagin, trumpet; Kevin Hays, piano; Fender Rhodes; Tony Scherr, guitar, acoustic and electric bass; Keita Ogawa, drums, percussion; Ludovic Beier, bandoneon, accordion; Antoine Silverman, Entcho Todorov, violin; Adda Kridler, viola; Jody Redhage, cello.

Ordering info: billkwan.com



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Saint Disruption

Rose In The Oblivion

SELF RELEASE
★★★

Saint Disruption is a strange concoction. The collective, led by keyboardist John Medeski and faith healer-cum-musician Jeff Firewalker Schmitt, is soul-funk, but also contains large doses of blues, hip-hop, electronica and a soupcon of jazz.

The writing of *Rose In The Oblivion* is quite belabored. The lyrics are especially grating between pretentious ("What sells for redemption is merely an invention/Of hungry clones, palace drones, to keep the truth away," and obnoxious ("What am I, the pilot? I ain't no pilot!").

Meanwhile, the arrangements are simultaneously flaccid and overblown. "Choke A Man" manages to pack in every moldy blues trope one can imagine, from guitar wankery to churchy organ to gruff-then-wailing vocals, without enlivening any of them.

Bin Hassan's work goes some distance toward redeeming the album, as does nearly all of Medeski's keyboard playing. Ultimately, though, it's only the Medeski completists who will have much use for *Rose In The Oblivion*.

—Michael J. West

Rose In The Oblivion: Stories (Birth Of Saint Disruption); Flight 19; Painstorms; Last Poet First Ukhu-pacha; Instant Gratification; Choke A Man; Thief Of Darkness. (28:32)

Personnel: John Medeski, keyboards; Jeff Firewalker Schmitt, percussion (2, 4, 5), drums (3, 4, 6); Mark Wienand, saxophone (1); Duane Simpson, guitar (1, 2, 5, 6); Adam Matar, guitar (2, 5, 6); Michael Hynes, bass, guitar (4, 5); Ted Marks, drums (1, 2, 5-7); River Guerguenian, drums (4); Umar bin Hassan, vocals (1, 3); Agent 23, vocals (1); Debrissa McKinney (2, 4); Datrian Johnson, vocals (2, 4-6); Lyric Jones, vocals (4); Austn Haynes, vocals (4); Kimi Leger, vocals (4, 5); Heather Kabat, vocals (7).

Ordering info: saintdisruption.com



Brian Charette *Power From The Air*

STEEPLECHASE

★★★★★

Brian Charette long ago overturned expectations that the organ belonged only in greasy, soul-jazz contexts. Charette has cheerfully bucked tradition, while still holding it in considerable respect.

He can groove with the best, but was after a new sound, that of a wind-driven chamber group providing layered, subtle backgrounds for the organ's improvised lines.

On *Power From The Air*, the best illustration comes on what is arguably the hokiest choice of the set: The old groaner "Cherokee," reinvented with a brilliant Charette line skating across the ensemble winds. Other tracks, like "Fried Birds" and "Elephant Memory," pick up on the mercurial style-switching that has become Charette's calling card.

He uses dissonance with immense intelligence, holding a line against the accompaniment until it seems sure that he's losing his way, only to bring it back in perfectly on cue. Alternating single-note lines with ambiguous clusters allows him to make full use of the instrument's technical range, but he never sounds like he's merely pulling knobs and wrangling Leslies. It's masculine without being masculinist and macho, and even in this day and age, that's a pretty good thing. —Brian Morton

Power From The Air: Fried Birds; As If To Say; Harlem Nocturne; Silver Lining; Elephant Memory; Power From The Air; Cherokee; Want; Frenzy; Low Tide. (56:40)

Personnel: Brian Charette, organ; Mike DiRubbo, alto saxophone; Kenny Brooks, tenor saxophone; Itai Kriss, flute; Karel Ruzicka, bass clarinet; Brian Fishler, drums.

Ordering info: steeplechase.dk



Spike Wilner Trio *Aliens & Wizards*

CELLAR MUSIC GROUP

★★★★★

After COVID brought live music to a screeching halt, Spike Wilner, owner of New York's Smalls and Mezzrow, threw a lifeline to the jazz community. He reorganized as the nonprofit SmallsLIVE Foundation, streaming live shows and posting a vast archive. Now SmallsLive is releasing what Wilner hopes will be the first of many co-productions with the Cellar Music Group. Fittingly, the debut album, *Aliens & Wizards*, is helmed by Wilner himself.

Recorded at the height of the pandemic with bassist Tyler Mitchell and drummer Anthony Pinciotti, the trio follows up *Odalisque* from 2017 with a vibrant mix of old standards and evocative originals.

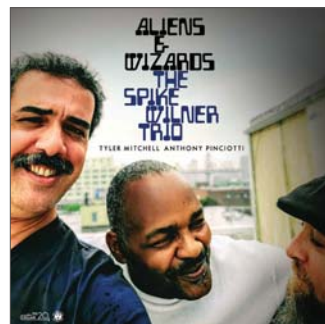
The sprightly opener, "Righty-O!," Wilner's keyboard-driven take on his late drummer friend Johnny Ellis' composition, could be subtitled, "How to have fun in a pandemic." Ditto the spirited closer, "Trick Baby," a drumbreak-studded romp with swooping keyboards, pulsing bass and a crystal-clear message: "Hey, we're playing again, and life is sweet!"

Between are more reflective originals, including the hymn-like "Prayer For Peace," "Non Troppo" and the lovely bowed-bass "Adagio." Taken as a whole, *Aliens & Wizards* mirrors jazz life in the time of COVID while tracking Wilner's personal journey. —Cree McCree

Aliens & Wizards: Righty-O!; Non Troppo; Adagio; Mindset; Blue Gardenia; Stella By Starlight; Aliens & Wizards; Prayer For Peace; Trick Baby. (46:15)

Personnel: Spike Wilner, piano; Tyler Mitchell, bass; Anthony Pinciotti, drums.

Ordering info: cellarlive.com



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Clovis Nicolas *Autoportrait* SUNNYSIDE RECORDS

★★★★

Clovis Nicolas, who created *Autoportrait* during the pandemic restrictions on public activity, takes a purist's route to making a solo record. He simply plays his upright bass without even so much as a bow.

Strength, tone, dexterity and sensitivity to rhythmic phrasing carry the 42-minute program, which moves steadily through the bassist's influences, starting with a nod to Bach's cellos suites. He references bebop, Coleman Hawkins, Duke Ellington, Lennie Tristano, Dave Holland and "Rhythm" changes with propulsion that sustains interest in where he's going.

That's essential, as his big sound is completely exposed. While he projects noble, woody resonance, with little unintended extraneous noise or clatter, it's Nicolas's inner drive and unusual turns that keep it compelling. Even when walking, as on "Another Rendezvous," he makes offbeat moves that land firmly. His composition "Four Steps" is a knucklebuster. "Everything Happens To Me" could be considered a tad overwrought, but it's been a rough year for everyone.

Hearing Nicolas alone, one may wonder how he sounds in a group. His previous albums as a leader are *Freedom Suite Ensuite*, a 2018 quintet release, and *Nine Stories* from 2014, with a sextet. —Howard Mandel

Autoportrait: After Bach; Hot House; Body And Soul; Thon's Tea; Free; Another Rendezvous; Jubilate Deo; Four Steps; Solitude; Line Up; Chloe; Lady Bass; Everything Happens To Me. (42:10).
Personnel: Clovis Nicolas, bass; Kendall Durrelle Briggs, piano.

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com



Chris Schlarb/ Chad Taylor *Time No Changes* ASTRAL SPIRITS

★★★★½

Chris Schlarb's music definitely has a cult following, thanks to his genre-busting group, Psychic Temple. Yet, Schlarb was a guitarist who made some noise with drummer Tom Steck in the duo I Heart Lung.

Schlarb tapped drummer Chad Taylor for this project in a rare and revealing return to the producer's musical origins, as well as an homage to 1963's *Fantasias For Guitar And Banjo* (Vanguard), a landmark record by guitarist/banjoist Sandy Bull with Billy Higgins.

Every song is in E, thanks to an open-tuning of Schlarb's guitar and the dearth of chord changes allows for rhythm, space, mode and mood to be the variable elements. The pair is at their most successful on "Creedmoor," where Taylor's hypnotic beat is elevated by Schlarb's impeccable strumming. On the concluding "Sassafras," Taylor introduces a rapacious commotion. Yet Schlarb is reluctant to follow, keeping steadfast to his spiritual and tonal center, cajoling the drummer back to familiar territory before ending, leaving a full 60 seconds of silence to ponder. Hardcore jazz listeners might look for more, but those decisions are why Schlarb is far more than just a guitarist. —Gary Fukushima

Time No Changes: Time No Changes (Part One); Creedmoor; Time No Changes (Part Two); Mother With Child; Sassafras. (40:41)

Personnel: Chris Schlarb, 6- and 12-string acoustic guitar, Moog synthesizer, Hammond organ; Chad Taylor, drums, mbira.

Ordering info: astralspiritsrecords.com



Tobias Meinhart *The Painter* SUNNYSIDE RECORDS

★★★★★

As backhanded compliments go, saying Tobias Meinhart doesn't stand out on his own album is as misleading as it is well-intended. It's just that the strongest impression that comes off *The Painter* is of a superb group, set to work on excellent material. The interplay between bassist Matt Penman and drummer Obed Calvaire is absolutely central, a matter quickly established in the rubato intro to "White Bear." Penman's solo on "Oak Tree" is masterly, and he's called into action again for an unaccompanied, double-stopped intro to the title track.

"The Painter" begins with a slow throb, skittering percussion sounds, then raw, vocalized tones on the alto flute before Meinhart's unselfconscious Coltrane influence asserts itself. It's a beautiful piece, but like the rest of the album, neither lulling nor merely pictorial or atmospheric. Every track has a strong musical logic and exactly the means needed to realize it. The two guests, trumpeter Ingrid Jensen and guitarist Charles Altura, are sparingly but effectively used.

This is a highly impressive achievement, an album quiet enough to slip by you, but packed with wonderful music. —Brian Morton

The Painter: White Bear; Oak Tree; Movement; The Painter (intro); The Painter; Bird Song; Estate; Neowise; The Last Dance; Dreamers. (61:56)

Personnel: Tobias Meinhart, tenor and soprano saxophone, alto flute, voice; Ingrid Jensen, trumpet; Charles Altura, guitar; Eden Ladin, piano, Rhodes, ARP string ensemble; Matt Penman, bass; Obed Calvaire, drums.

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com



Mike Wade *The Nasty NATI Brass Band*

★★★★

Brass bands, especially those that emerged since the '90s, have to maintain a tricky balance. The emphasis is on party anthems. But those fiery tunes have to be tempered with more somber material meant for seduction or contemplation.

Trumpeter Mike Wade's ensemble The Nasty NATI Brass Band does a better job than most in keeping balancing those two creative sides.

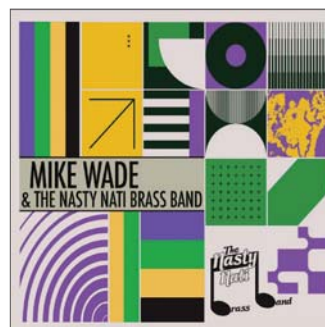
As fun as the record gets, particularly the jumpy rewrite of Cheryl Lynn's disco classic "Got To Be Real" and the groovy take on the Cincinnati Bengals fight song, the album is best on thoughtful tunes.

The weight is borne by two songs written in honor of Tamir Rice, a 12-year-old boy from Cleveland killed by police in 2014. Equally powerful are the two gorgeous versions of "I Love You More Than You'll Ever Know" that meld the Blood Sweat & Tears and Donny Hathaway versions. An abrupt jump into uptempo can be jarring, but it is a platform to showcase the group's skills. —Robert Ham

The Nasty NATI Brass Band: Marauder Groove; 2 B Real; Jammin'; Hot Hot; In Memory Of: Tamir Rice (Version 1); Reality; Where Is The Tip?; I Love You More Than You'll Ever Know (Instrumental); Bobby Drake; In Memory Of: Tamir Rice (Version 2); Pump It Up; Bengals Anthem; I Love You More Than You'll Ever Know (Vocal). (67:32)

Personnel: Mike Wade, trumpet and vocals; Wm. Alexis Owens, sousaphone and vocals; Charles "Ali" Schweitzer, percussion; Roland Joseph, trumpet; Dr. G. Scott Jones, trombone; Dione Howard, drums; Reggie Jackson, drums; Maurice "Rdot Edot" Suttles, Kelli Key, vocals; Eli Gonzalez, alto and tenor saxophone; Kayla Upthegrove, Ritwik Banerji, tenor saxophone; Kim White, soprano and alto saxophone; Marvin "T-Bone" Curry, trombone.

Ordering info: mikewademusic.net



Cherry's Sweden Sojourn

Don Cherry is renowned as the pocket trumpeter who was Ornette Coleman's first and most enduring foil. An inveterate traveler who picked up instruments and ideas from around the globe, he also pioneered what came to be known as world music. But partly because Cherry, who died in Spain in 1995, based himself outside of the United States for many years, certain phases of his career remain obscure. The non-profit Blank Forms has undertaken a multi-faceted effort to shed light upon his sojourn in Sweden during the 1960s and 1970s, and the artistic and familial partnership that he shared with the visual artist, Moki Cherry. In April 2021, the organization's Brooklyn gallery hosted an exhibit of publications, videos and Moki's brilliantly colored tapestries. The same month, it published **Organic Music Societies (Blank Forms 06)**, a 496-page illustrated collection of interviews, correspondence and historical discussion of the couple's collaborations edited by Lawrence Kumpf with Naima Karlsson and Magnus Nygren. Finally, Blank Forms has issued two revelatory albums of previously unreleased music.

In the early 1960s, Cherry was in high demand as a sideman. But even though he recorded and toured with Coleman, John Coltrane, Sonny Rollins, Archie Shepp, Steve Lacy and Albert Ayler, he struggled financially, in part because he had his New York City cabaret card revoked after a run-in with the law. In Europe he found more opportunities, and love in the person of a Swedish art student Monika Karlsson. But even in Europe, the jazz life and family obligations proved hard to reconcile. Inspired by the 1960s zeitgeist and eager evade the temptations found in jazz clubs, they put into practice Moki's credo, "The stage is home and home is a stage."

Beginning in 1967, the Cherrys created multimedia happenings on both sides of the Atlantic. In 1970, they moved with their children Neneh (Moki's daughter from an earlier relationship) and Eagle-Eye into a former schoolhouse in Tågarp, Sweden. From there, they took residencies in art spaces, teaching opportunities around Sweden and concert tours across Europe. Wherever they went, they brought the kids, who often joined them in performance. Moki's textile creations adorned the stage, musicians and Don's album covers, and she played tambura in concert.

While Don found a community of Swedish musicians, he didn't forswear work with old comrades. **The Summer House Sessions (Blank Forms Editions; 46:51/41:36 ★★★★★)** documents an encounter between the two camps in July 1968. At the end of tour with the New York Total Music Company, he



Don Cherry THE SUMMER HOUSE SESSIONS

brought bassist Kent Carter and drummer Jacques Thollot to Stockholm. They joined woodwind players Bernt Rosengren and Tommy Koverhult, bassist Torbjörn Hultcrantz, and drummers Leif Wennerström and Bülent Ates, who had been participants in workshops Cherry had led. The combined groups convened at the summer house of engineer Göran Freese, who recorded the concert.

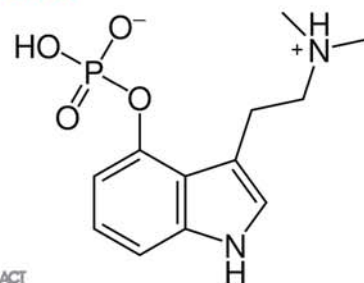
Despite the impromptu nature, the music flows with suite-like logic reminiscent of Cherry's mid-1960s albums for Blue Note. But its sources are more wide-ranging, including Turkish and Brazilian folk melodies alongside Cherry originals and tunes by Ornette Coleman and Charles Brackeen. This session, which predates the albums *Eternal Rhythm* and *Mu*, is the earliest example of Cherry's impulse to transcend national boundaries. A full LP was mixed and prepared for release, but ended up on an ABF shelf for half a century. The CD of *The Summer House Sessions* includes a second disc of more sprawling, free-form material, which is provided as a download with the LP edition.

Organic Music Theatre: Festival de Jazz de Chateaufallon 1972 (Blank Forms Editions; 40:36/29:34 ★★★★★), by Don Cherry's New Researches featuring Naná Vasconcelos, presents a concert originally broadcast by French TV, then shelved for half a century. The Cherry family, joined by the Brazilian percussionist, multi-instrumentalist Christer Bothén and saxophonist Doudou Gouirand, caravanned to the south of France, picking up a Danish puppet troupe along the way. Cherry played no trumpet, instead guiding the band from the piano in a series of Brazilian, Native American and Indian chants, glosso-lalic outbursts, and disarmingly sincere songs that extolled the joys of natural living. While the set indulges no virtuosic displays, Cherry's gift for dynamics is intact, making this performance as compelling as it is charming. **DB**

Ordering info: blankforms.org



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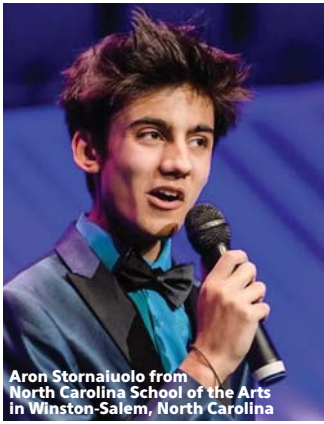
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Aron Stornaiuolo from North Carolina School of the Arts in Winston-Salem, North Carolina

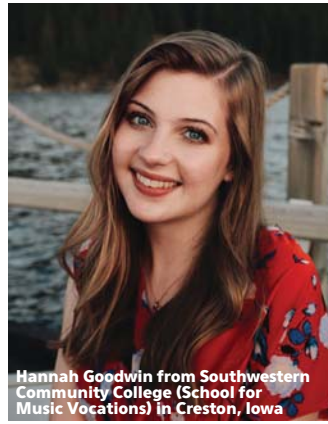
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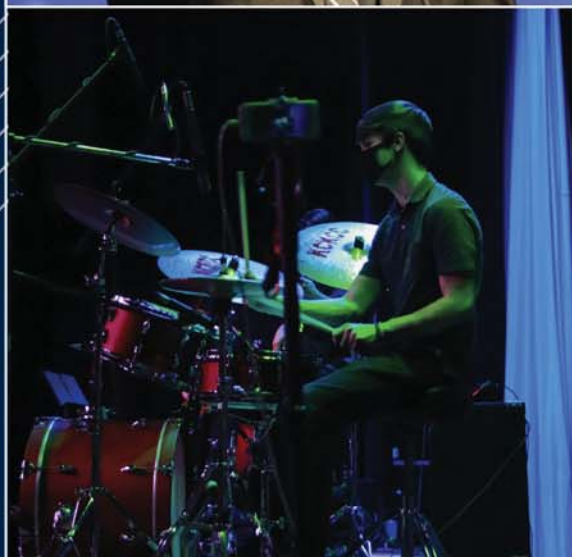
2021 SMA Recipients:

(Top) Outstanding Soloist: Noah Haskin on "A Change
Is Gonna Come," The Standard Vocal Jazz Ensemble,
John Stafford II, director

(Middle) Blues/Pop/Rock Soloist: Community College
Outstanding Performance: Ben Garber (Drum Set) with
KCKCC's Blue Devil Funk Band, Dr. Justin Binek, director

(Bottom) Large Vocal Jazz Ensemble- Community
College Outstanding Performance: The Standard Vocal
Jazz Ensemble, John Stafford II, director

Latin Group - Community College Outstanding
Performance: The Standard Vocal Jazz Ensemble, John
Stafford II, director



JAZZ SOLOIST



Rico Jones from Manhattan School of Music in New York



Connor MacLeod from Plano West Senior High School in Plano, Texas



Jackson Hanks from Hoover High School in Hoover, Alabama



Esteban Castro from The Juilliard School in New York

Focus on Listening

INSTRUMENTAL DIVERSITY, WORK ETHIC, generational talent, musicians with big ears and students-as-near-peers were some shared themes with 2021 Jazz Soloist Student Music Award winners.

Jackson Hanks, of Hoover, Alabama, was a high school winner as a vibraphonist. The Hoover High School junior has been a member of his school's top jazz band for all three years that he's attended, and he also plays different instruments in other groups. "He's a great piano player, and a drummer, as well," said Sallie White, teacher and band director at Hoover. "He's also been in our top symphonic ensemble, as a percussionist, since he was freshman. Jackson has marched snare in marching band, too, and this year he marched quads.

"But he really loves the vibes," she said. Since vibraphone is one of the lesser-played instruments in high school jazz, White observes that he's proactive in his exploration and mastery of that tuned percussion instrument. "Jackson's been very good at networking and trying to meet other people that play vibes," she said. "He has such a grasp of music theory, as well as composition and arranging," she said. "Jackson is certainly a talented young man and so hard working."

Alto saxophonist Connor MacLeod of Plano West Senior High School is another winner at the high school level. (He's also a Blues/Pop/Rock Soloist winner.) "Quite honestly, Connor is one of those once-in-a-career type students, where he's extremely talented and extremely hardworking all while being very humble," said Preston Pierce, assistant band director and secondary teacher at Plano West. "He's constantly

wanting to learn. At the same time, he's constantly wanting to help his peers get better — any student who's willing. Like I said, he's a pretty special young man."

In addition to adjusting to remote learning like most of his peers around the world, MacLeod had also been focusing on his listening this past school year. A best friend and recent Plano West alum had been giving his former bandmate some advice, Pierce said: "He told Connor that he wished he would have done more harmonic listening and listening for chords.

"I noticed the other day when we were having an after-school rehearsal where all the kids came up to campus: My tenor player is playing a solo. And I stop and tell him, 'When you're getting to this chord, you keep playing this note,'" he continued. "And then right away, Connor chimes in and says, 'Yeah, you're playing the flat seventh, and it's clashing.' He heard the note. His ears have really developed.

Pianist/composer Esteban Castro is a triple-crown Student Music Award winner this year. In addition to Jazz Soloist, the freshman at The Juilliard School also won Outstanding Original Composition—Small Ensemble and Outstanding Performance—Small Jazz Combo. Castro is familiar with the Student Music Awards from winning multiple times during his high school years. "But he said this was extra meaningful, because this was now in the college division," said Ted Rosenthal, a Juilliard faculty member.

"Esteban is exceptional, and it's inspiring to me," Rosenthal said. "With his incredibly

high level of musicianship, he keeps me on my toes. It's one step away from kind of hanging out with my colleagues, musically. It's really fun and can be mutually inspiring."

Castro also studies classical piano. "He's got an enormous kind of resourcefulness at the piano," Rosenthal said. "So, sometimes he'll come up with very striking things in his left hand that are unusual."

Following a Small Jazz Combo Undergraduate College win last year, tenor saxophonist Rico Jones is a double winner in 2021 for not only Graduate College Jazz Soloist but Outstanding Jazz Arrangement—Small Ensemble, as well. And Manhattan School of Music faculty member Vincent Herring is constantly impressed with his student.

"I've been watching and listening to his development for a while," Herring said. "He is a very creative voice, and he's doing all the things you need to do to find yourself.

"Rico is searching music in a different kind of way. He's incorporating and bringing in things that are unconventional or not the usual sources. Normally tenor saxophone players, they're all pulling from the same sources — John Coltrane, Sonny Rollins. Those sources are great, of course," he pointed out. "He's looking for inspiration from different musical sources, too. So he's both a very creative person and a very hard worker. I don't really look at him as a student anymore. He's going to be a very promising artist."

—Yoshi Kato



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Creston, Iowa

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Amy Azzara
University of Miami,
Frost School of Music
Kate Reid
Coral Gables, Florida

Patricija Skof
University of Music and
Performing Arts Graz
Dena DeRose
Graz, Austria



Faith Quashie from Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan

Undergraduate College Outstanding Performances

Emma Hedrick
University of Miami,
Frost School of Music
Kate Reid
Coral Gables, Florida

Faith Quashie
Western Michigan University
Gregory Jasperse
Kalamazoo, Michigan

Katelyn Robinson
University of North Texas
Rosana Eckert
Denton, Texas

Lexie Lakmann
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point

Timothy Buchholz
Wausau, Wisconsin

Maggie Kinney
University of Miami,
Frost School of Music
Kate Reid
Coral Gables, Florida

Graduate College Winners

Hila Hutmacher
Conservatorium van Amsterdam
Humphrey Campbell
Amsterdam, Netherlands

Katie Oberholtzer
University of Miami,
Frost School of Music
Chuck Bergeron
Coral Gables, Florida

Graduate College Outstanding Performance

Lora Sherrodd
Temple University
Najwa Parkins
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

SMALL VOCAL JAZZ GROUP

Community College Winner

First Take
Southwestern Community

College
(The School for Music Vocations)
Jeremy Fox
Creston, Iowa
Outstanding Scat Soloists:
Aviana Gedler and Hannah
Goodwin on "Garby"

Graduate College Winner

Frost Extensions
University of Miami
Frost School of Music
Kate Reid
Coral Gables, Florida

Graduate College Outstanding Performance

West End
University of North Texas
Rachel Azbell
Denton, Texas

ASYNCHRONOUS SMALL VOCAL JAZZ GROUP

Community College Winner

Vocal Jazz II
American River College
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Greg Kettinger
Mike Moreno

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Todd Bashore
Norman David

DRUMS

Justin Faulkner
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The Standard Vocal Jazz Ensemble from Kansas City Kansas Community College (photo by Larry F. Levenson)

Lauren Kinhan, Janis Siegel
New York, New York

Graduate College Outstanding Performance

Vocal Jazz Ensemble
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Kimberly Snaveley
Las Vegas, Nevada
Outstanding Soloist: Gary Fowler
on "Centerpiece"

LARGE VOCAL JAZZ ENSEMBLE

High School Winner

Two N' Four Vocal Jazz Ensemble
Valencia High School
Christine Tavares-Mocha
Outstanding Soloist: Mia
Mercedes Gutierrez-Jeffries
on "Molasses"

High School Outstanding Soloist

Eric Amundson
Vocalist
West Des Moines Valley
Vocalese
Valley High School
Heather Nail
West Des Moines, Iowa

Performing Arts High School Outstanding Performance

Vocal Jazz Ensemble
Milwaukee High School of the
Arts
Raymond Roberts
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

High School Honors Ensemble Winner

OCDA All-State High School Jazz Chorus
Various Oklahoma High Schools
Guest Conductor: Kate Reid
University of Miami
Frost School of Music
Coral Gables, Florida

Community College Winner

Singcopation
Mt. San Antonio College
Bruce Rogers
Walnut, California

Community College Outstanding Performance

The Standard Vocal Jazz Ensemble
Kansas City Kansas Community
College
John Stafford II

Community College Outstanding Performance

Vocal Jazz I
American River College
Art LaPierre
Sacramento, California

Undergraduate College Winner

Advanced Vocal Jazz Ensemble
Berklee College of Music
Ned Rosenblatt
Boston, Massachusetts
Outstanding Soloist: Avery

Schmalz
on "As We Live and Breathe"

Undergraduate College Outstanding Performance

Vocal Jazz Group
University of Massachusetts
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Catherine Jensen-Hole
Amherst, Massachusetts

Graduate College Winner

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Kansas City, Kansas
Outstanding Soloist:
Noah Haskin on "A Change is
Gonna Come"

Undergraduate College Winner

Willamette Singers

Wallace Long
Willamette University
Salem, Oregon

Undergraduate College Outstanding Performances

Point of Departure Vocal Jazz

Berklee College of Music
Grant Heineman, Annie Dickinson
Boston, Massachusetts
Outstanding Soloist: Lilla Sabbah
on "Hideaway"

FIU Jazz Vocal Ensemble

Florida International University
Lisanne Lyons
Miami, Florida

Graduate College Winner

Pacific Standard Time

California State University, Long
Beach

Bob Cole Conservatory of Music
Christine Helferich Guter
Long Beach, California
Outstanding Scat Soloist:
Dakota Noxon on
"Tribal Dance"

Graduate College Outstanding Performances

Frost Jazz Vocal I

University of Miami
Frost School of Music
Kate Reid
Coral Gables, Florida

UNT Jazz Singers

University of North Texas
Jennifer Barnes
Denton, Texas

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High School Winner

Jazz Choir

Folsom High School
Curtis Gaesser
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Outstanding Soloist: Sophia
Augustine on "Sunny Side
of the Street"



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Jazz Soloist

Undergraduate College
Outstanding Performances

Varun Das, drums

Student of John Riley

Vittorio Stropoli, piano

Student of Marc Cary

Graduate College Winner

Rico Jones, tenor saxophone

Student of Vincent Herring

Blues/Pop/Rock Soloist

High School Honors Winner

Meghna Das, vocalist

MSM Precollege Program

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Small Jazz Combo

Undergraduate College Winners

The Ritual

Marc Cary, Director

Original Composition — Small Ensemble

Undergraduate College
Outstanding Compositions

Matanda Keyes, "Contra"

Student of Kendrick Scott

Jazz Arrangement

Graduate College Outstanding
Arrangements—Small Ensemble

Rico Jones, "Central Park West"

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SMALL JAZZ COMBOS



Lucas Santana and Stet from Conservatorium Van Amsterdam in the Netherlands



Dreyfoos Jazz Quintet from A.W. Dreyfoos School of the Arts in West Palm Beach, Florida



OHS Jazz Ensemble from Oswego High School in Oswego, Illinois



New Soil Ensemble from Young Lions Jazz Conservatory in San Diego, California

A Very Different Year

FINDING STRATEGIES TO DEAL WITH THE challenges brought about by a year of remote learning during the pandemic was a common theme for DownBeat Student Music Award winners in this year's Small Jazz Combo category.

For Christopher De León, who became director of jazz studies at the Alexander W. Dreyfoos School of the Arts in West Palm Beach, Florida, in the fall of 2020, it meant taking over a jazz program at a time when he couldn't meet with his students.

"Everything was so crazy," he said. "Even now, there are still quite a few kids I still haven't met in person. But in retrospect, it was probably the best year for a change"

De León knew that the music students in the jazz program at Dreyfoos were talented, and decided to challenge them by entering the school's Jazz Ensemble I in the annual Charles Mingus Concert hoisted by the Mingus Institute.

"We started virtual rehearsals in November, and the Mingus Concert was in February and they did great," De León said. "It was the first national music event Dreyfoos had been in since 2016. That helped inspire the students in our Jazz Quintet to submit to DownBeat. They found the time to rehearse and then record. I'm really proud of their drive."

The Dreyfoos Jazz Quintet members — seniors Adam Lord (tenor sax), Jackson Spellman (trombone) and Aiden Taylor (bass), and juniors Asher Pereira (piano) and Harrison Gesser (drums) — recorded Joe Henderson's "Afro-Centric" and other tunes, and won in the Small Jazz Combo Performing Arts High School category. Pereira also won an Outstanding performance SMA for Original Composition.

Keith Hall, professor of jazz drum set at Western Michigan University, had two of his drum students, leaders of the Gordon Sooy and Drew Deur Trios, win SMAs in the Undergraduate/College and Graduate College Small Jazz Combo categories, respectively.

"I've been working with Gordon for approximately 10 years," Hall said. "He started at my Summer Drum Intensive camp before he got to the university. He's a creative person who's not afraid to be different, think outside the box and go for it. His trio features Brandon Yenchus on bass, Jeff Grassl on alto sax and Gordon on drums — instrumentation that gives everyone lots of room."

"Drew came to my camp as a freshman in high school, and he's now a junior here," Hall continued. "He's really developed a depth to his groove, and it's been fun to hear that. He's very focused, has great leadership qualities and gets to the essence of music. Drew has a trio with Aris Chalin on piano and Kazuki Takemura on bass."

"They found a local studio where they could record safely, and it really captured how they're all developing at such a fast rate."

The Ritual, a quintet of Manhattan School of Music students taught by Kendrick Scott and Marc Cary, also won in the College/Undergraduate Small Jazz Combo category.

"It's been a very different year," says Vittorio Stropoli, a sophomore at MSM and the pianist for the group. "All the other members of the group except for our drummer, Miguel Russell, stayed at home in Florida. But we did manage to get together and play in December at the school's annual Jazz ComboFest. And since that was recorded and videotaped, we were able to use that to enter the DownBeat

competition."

Stropoli, Russell and the other members of The Ritual — Stephane Clement on trumpet, Phillippe Clement on guitar and Nolan Nwachukwu on bass — were taught by faculty member Kendrick Scott in the fall semester, then by pianist Marc Cary in the spring semester. In addition to the Small Jazz Combo Award, Stropoli also won a Jazz Soloist Outstanding Performance Award.

"Vittorio and the other young musicians were really proactive and put in the effort to be part of this competition," Cary said.

Brazilian-born saxophonist Lucas Santana has been based in the Netherlands for six years, studying at Conservatorium Van Amsterdam. He was working toward recording a debut album with his own ensemble in March 2020. The pandemic put those plans on hold — but opened up another creative avenue that led to a DownBeat SMA in the Small Jazz Combo Graduate College category.

"I was scheduled to record an album with nine-piece ensemble, but then everything went into lockdown," Santana said. "They were only allowing one horn for any group recording session. I put everything on hold, got a smaller group together, the Stet, and wrote new music."

Joining Santana in the group were Tijds Klaasen (bass), Tim Hennekes (drums), Davor Stehlik (guitar) and Jetse de Jong (piano).

"We were finally able to record in October and November, and I decided to enter several songs in the DownBeat awards," he said. "It was my first time entering, so I didn't have any expectations. But we won, and I also won an outstanding Performance Award for my solo on the song 'Heritage.'" —Terry Perkins



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Ben Taylor of University of Miami in Coral Gables, Florida



Ben Garber from Kansas City Kansas Community College



Commercial Break from Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee

High School Outstanding Performance

Take One

Niles North High School
Daniel Gregerman
Skokie, Illinois

Community College Winner

Singcopation

Mt. San Antonio College
Bruce Rogers
Walnut, California

Undergraduate College Winners

Vocal Jazz Ensemble I

Berklee College of Music
Ned Rosenblatt
Boston, Massachusetts
Outstanding Soloist: Dominic Nye on "But Not For Me"

Vocal Jazz Ensemble 3

Berklee College of Music
Ned Rosenblatt
Boston, Massachusetts

Undergraduate College Outstanding Performance

Vocal Jazz Ensemble 4

Berklee College of Music
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Graduate College Winner

The Long Beach Vocal Jazz Collective

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Outstanding Soloist: Emily LaSalle on "It's Something"

Graduate College Outstanding Performance

Gold Company

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Kalamazoo, Michigan
Outstanding Soloist: Anastasia Chubb on "Noticing the Moment"

BLUES/POP/ROCK SOLOIST

High School Winner

Connor MacLeod

Alto Saxophone
Plano West Senior High School
Preston Pierce
Plano, Texas

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High School Honors

Outstanding Performance



Preston, of Solon, Ohio, is a fifth-year student in the Tri-C JazzFest Academy, where she studies with director and artist Dominick Farinacci. To date, she's won seven total DownBeat awards.

Listen to Preston's new, original songs on Spotify

"Move Along"

"Some Overdose"



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for more information about the program.





Ava Preston of Tri-C JazzFest Academy in Cleveland, Ohio



Meghna Das of Manhattan School of Music Precollege Program in New York



Coleman Hovey of University of Massachusetts Amherst

High School Honors Winner

Meghna Das

Vocalist
Manhattan School of Music
Precollege Program
Jeanai La Vita
New York, New York

High School Honors Outstanding Performance

Ava Preston

Vocalist
Tri-C JazzFest Academy
Dominick Farinacci
Cleveland, Ohio

Community College Outstanding Performance

Ben Garber

Drums
Kansas City Kansas Community College
Justin Binek
Kansas City, Kansas

Undergraduate College Winner

Ben Taylor

Guitar
University of Miami

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Undergraduate College Outstanding Performances

Coleman Hovey

Piano and Synthesizer
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Amherst
Jeffrey Holmes
Amherst, Massachusetts

Valentina Shelton

Vocalist and Piano
University of Miami
Frost School of Music
Kate Reid
Coral Gables, Florida

Graduate College Winner

Brian Lawrence

Baritone and Tenor Saxophones
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Adam Schroeder
Las Vegas, Nevada

Graduate College Outstanding Performance

Katelyn Dietz

Vocalist
Western Michigan University

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Undergraduate College Winners

Asynchronous Blues/Pop/Rock Group
FROST FUNK ENSEMBLE
Steve Rucker

Blues/Pop/Rock Soloist

BEN TAYLOR, GUITAR
John Hart

Vocal Jazz Soloist, Co-Winner

AMY AZZARA
Kate Reid

High School Honors Ensemble Winner

Large Vocal Jazz Ensemble
OCDA All-State High School Jazz Chorus
KATE REID, GUEST CONDUCTOR



Amy Azzara and Katie Oberholtzer

Graduate College Winners

Asynchronous Blues/Pop/Rock Group
FROST FUSION ENSEMBLE
Steve Rucker

Blues/Pop/Rock Group

THE V. TET
Chuck Bergeron

Studio Orchestra

Jazz Arrangement
SETH CRAIL, "MOON RIVER"
Stephen Guerra

Vocal Jazz Soloist, Co-Winner

KATIE OBERHOLTZER
Chuck Bergeron

Small Vocal Jazz Group

FROST EXTENSIONS
Kate Reid



Frost Fusion Ensemble

Outstanding Performances

Undergraduate Vocal Jazz Soloist
EMMA HEDRICK
Kate Reid

Undergraduate Vocal Jazz Soloist

MAGGIE KINNEY
Kate Reid

Undergraduate Blues/Pop/Rock Soloist

VALENTINA SHELTON, VOCALS AND PIANO
Kate Reid

Graduate Large Vocal Jazz Ensemble

FROST JAZZ VOCAL I
Kate Reid

Outstanding Arrangement

Undergraduate Jazz Arrangement
KENTON LUCK, "JINRIKISHA"
Chuck Bergeron



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CHIP HENDERSON, Guitar
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Undergraduate College Winner

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University of Miami
Frost School of Music
Chuck Bergeron
Coral Gables, Florida

ASYNCHRONOUS BLUES/POP/ ROCK GROUP

Junior High School Honors Ensemble Winner

Radio Motion
Caleb Chapman's
Soundhouse
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Salt Lake City, Utah

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Soul Research Foundation

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Evan Wharton
Salt Lake City, Utah

Restless Repeat

Caleb Chapman's Soundhouse
Robbie Connolly
Salt Lake City, Utah

Undergraduate College Winner

Frost Funk Ensemble

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Frost School of Music
Steve Rucker
Coral Gables, Florida

Undergraduate College Outstanding Performances

Blues and Rock Ensemble I

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Kevin Kjos
Kutztown, Pennsylvania

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Graduate College Winner

Frost Fusion Ensemble

University of Miami
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Coral Gables, Florida

Graduate College Outstanding Performance

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Las Vegas, Nevada

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The Standard Vocal Jazz Ensemble

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Kansas City, Kansas

Undergraduate College Outstanding Performance

Latin Jazz Ensemble

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Uli Geissendoerfer
Las Vegas, Nevada

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Vegas '22

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

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Graduate College Outstanding Performances

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George Mason Latin American Ensemble

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ASYNCHRONOUS

The Vinny Falcone Organ Quartet from the University of Las Vegas



Syncing Up

DOWNBEAT HAS ADDED ASYNCHRONOUS categories to its Student Music Awards this year, including Asynchronous Large Jazz Ensemble and Asynchronous Small Jazz Combo.

Brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and the remote learning required to ensure the safety of students, faculty and others, asynchronous recording required student musicians to record their performances individually, at home, to a click track. Those videos are then arduously synched and mixed in post-production. At present, consumer technology can support real-time duo performances at best, and most don't have access to the computing power and the strong internet connection required to support those advances.

The inaugural Junior High School Asynchronous Large Jazz Ensemble winner is the EDMS Jazz Band from Easterbrook Discovery School in San José, California. Located roughly eight miles from Zoom headquarters in Silicon Valley, Easterbrook and its bandleader, Nils Johnson, opted for that so-ubiquitous-it-became-a-verb software platform as its main method of communication when distance learning started last April. SmartMusic, a web-based practice system, was utilized so students could rehearse at home "all by themselves in their garage, living room, bedroom —wherever they were," Johnson said.

"The kids adapted OK," he said when asked about how EDMS Jazz Band members handled remote learning and eventual asynchronous recording during the pandemic. "My jazz band students probably did better than some of my others, because they were already some of the top players in the school and were into it enough that they came into school an hour earlier than everyone else two days a week."

One of the numbers the band performed was Duke Ellington's "Harlem Airshaft." The arrangement itself had an intriguing journey, with scans of the original charts going from trumpeter and ex-Ellington band member Fred Berry to Don Keller Sr. (Johnson's late high school band director in seaside Aptos, California) to Don Keller Jr., former leader of the United States Naval Academy Band, to Johnson, who tweaked the arrangement and instrumentation for his students.

A silver lining from the global lockdown is that it allowed multiple Grammy-winning Los Angeles area-based big band leader Gordon Goodwin to work with High School Asynchronous Large Ensemble winners The Phathouse Band from Caleb Chapman's Soundhouse in Salt Lake City, Utah.

"I had a couple of kids from Japan, about six or seven kids from Australia, a kid from the U.K. and kids from all over the mainland U.S.," Goodwin said. "Certainly, you lose the intimacy of connecting with people, like when we're in the same room playing music together. But I found that if I was really specific and kind of thought about reaching out through the internet to these kids, you can approximate that."

Modeling was a key to success, Goodwin explained, with no eating or multi-tasking on devices during video instruction sessions — mimicking classroom rules — and having "students sit up, centered in the camera, in the frame, so that I could see their faces and read their body languages," he said.

He also encouraged students to treat the solo recording with the same decorum and energy that they'd bring to a concert. "This is like you're on stage — not in your bedroom. So I need you to act accordingly," he instructed. "Act as if you're sitting — and moving along —



Makoto Ishizaka from the Berklee College of Music in Boston

with your friends in the band."

The flip side to not being able to perform with bandmates is the ability for one's playing to be heard individually. "Once they send the audio that they've recorded, I can hear every detail in a nuanced way that I couldn't in a band room, where a kid can hide a little bit if he just can't play a little passage as well," Goodwin said.

Bassist Makoto Ishizaka from the Berklee College of Music is a five-tool musician whose Jazz Orchestra was the Undergraduate College Asynchronous Large Jazz Ensemble winner. The composer, arranger, bandleader and instrumentalist added mixing and mastering of asynchronous video to his arsenal. "That was all his work," said Greg Hopkins, Ishizaka's composition teacher.

At the Graduate College level, members of the Asynchronous Small Jazz Combo-winning Vinny Falcone Organ Quartet from the University of Las Vegas had to delve into self-reliance and interpersonal communication during lockdown. They arranged, rehearsed and recorded their pieces remotely.

"They really did a lot more talk-through since they weren't able to physically be able to play with one another," said Adam Schroeder, UNLV's assistant director, Division of Jazz and Commercial Music, when asked about the group's remote recording. "Normally they could just experience things as an ensemble. They were forced to deal with it 100 percent on their own and feel all of their feelings that came through it. It's an unteachable thing. But what came out musically is a better representation of who they are as a musician, as a person, as an artist and as a future community member."

—Yoshi Kato



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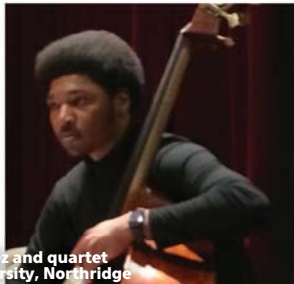
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Drummer-composer Angelo Velasquez and quartet members from California State University, Northridge



Albert Kuo from Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois



Derek Plunkie from University of Music and Performing Arts, Graz, Austria

ASYNCHRONOUS LATIN GROUP

Graduate College Winner

UMASS Grad Composers Ensemble

University of Massachusetts Amherst
Felipe Salles
Amherst, Massachusetts

ORIGINAL COMPOSITION – SMALL ENSEMBLE

Junior High School Honors Winner

Chia Ren Cher

"String Quartet No. 1, Colour"
Raffles Institution

Tan Chan Boon
Singapore

High School Outstanding Compositions

Jackson Hanks, "Unforgiving"

Hoover High School
Sallie White
Hoover, Alabama

Vivian Shanley, "Ideal Realism"

Cedar Rapids Washington High School
Joel Nagel
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Performing Arts High School Outstanding Composition

Asher Pereira, "Painting Painting"

A.W. Dreyfoos School of the Arts
Christopher De Leon
West Palm Beach, Florida

High School Honors Winners

Daiki Nakajima, "Sleep With The Sun, Wake With The Moon"

Prospect High School
Dann Zinn
Alameda, California

Noah Denton & Luke Sterling, "Oculus"

Home-Schooled, Dave Eggar, NJCU
(multi-stylestring program)
Bristol, Tennessee
Los Angeles County High School for the Arts
Thomas Sharp, Los Angeles, California

High School Honors Outstanding Compositions

Brandon Goldberg, "Authority"

Pine Crest School
Martin Bejerano, University of Miami,
Frost School of Music
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Ryota Sato, "New Adventure"

Wilcox High School
Aaron Lington
San Jose Jazz
San Jose, California

Sean Harbour, "Hurt From The Words Unspoken"

Colburn Community School
Lee Secard
Los Angeles, California

Undergraduate College Winners

Albert Kuo, "Boom and Bam" Northwestern University

Victor Goines
Evanston, Illinois

Angelo Velasquez, "Murcielago"

California State University,
Northridge
Tina Raymond
Northridge, California

Undergraduate College Outstanding Compositions

Esteban Castro, "Gotham"

The Juilliard School

Ted Rosenthal
New York, New York

Matanda Keyes, "Contra"

Manhattan School of Music
Kendrick Scott
New York, New York

Graduate College Winner

Miguel Alvarado, "Ping Pong"

Middle Tennessee State
University
Don Aliquo
Murfreesboro, Tennessee

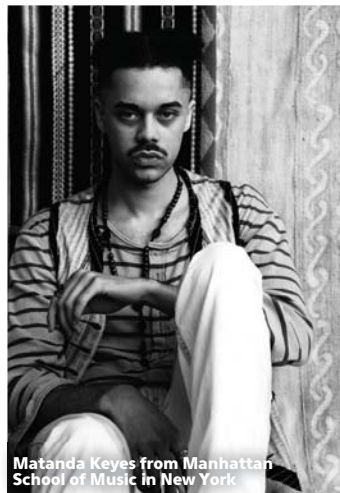
Graduate College Outstanding Compositions

Derek Plunkie, "The North Sea"

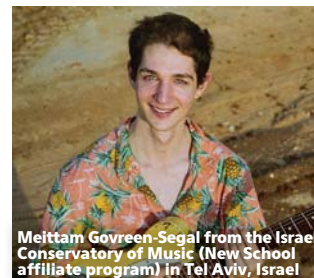
University of Music and
Performing Arts, Graz
Ed Partyka
Graz, Austria

Jon Sheckler, "Medicine Leaves"

University of New Orleans
Brian Seeger
New Orleans, Louisiana



Matanda Keyes from Manhattan School of Music in New York



Meltam Govreen-Segal from the Israel Conservatory of Music (New School affiliate program) in Tel Aviv, Israel



Ben Dunham of Tarpon Springs High School in Tarpon Springs, Florida



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For more information, contact Robert Keating, Director of Bands,
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Henry Zuccarello, “Vulcan”
Belmont High School
Allison Lacasse
Belmont, Massachusetts

High School Outstanding Composition

Ben Dunham, “Opportunity”
Tarpon Springs High School
Kevin Ford
Tarpon Springs, Florida

High School Honors Winner

Ziyi Tao, “A Musical Tragedy”
Special Music School High School
Max Grafe
New York, New York

Undergraduate College Winner

Austin Yee, “Sunsets On Saturn”
Eastman School of Music
Bill Dobbins
Rochester, New York

Undergraduate College Outstanding Compositions

Darsan Swaroop Bellie, “Winds of Calamity” Movement II: Protest”
Northwestern University
Victor Goines
Evanston, Illinois

Meittam Govreen-Segal, “An East Window”
Israel Conservatory of Music
(New School affiliate program)
Aviya Kopelman
Tel Aviv, Israel

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Daniel Varga, "Solar Crisis"

University of Music & Performing
Arts, Graz
Ed Partyka
Graz, Austria

Ursula Reicher, "Metamorphosis"

University of Music &
Performing Arts, Graz
Ed Partyka
Graz, Austria

JAZZ ARRANGEMENT

Junior High School Honors Winners

Diogo Feldman &
Skylar Tang, "Misty for



Katelyn Dietz from Western Michigan
University in Kalamazoo, Michigan

Trumpet and Flugelhorn Quintet"

Easterbrook Discovery School,
San Jose, CA
Crystal Springs Upland School,
Hillsborough, CA
Jeff Lewis
San Jose, California

High School Winner

Henry Zuccarello, "Nardis"

Belmont High School
Allison Lacasse
Belmont, Massachusetts

Gary (Kaiji) Wang from Eastman School
of Music in Rochester, New York



High School Outstanding Arrangement

Ben Dunham, "Humpty Dumpty"

Tarpon Springs High School
Kevin Ford
Tarpon Springs, Florida

High School Honors Winner

Allen Green, "Invitation"

Colburn Community School
Lee Secard
Los Angeles, California

High School Honors Outstanding Arrangement

Daiki Nakajima, "Celia"

Prospect High School
Dann Zinn
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Undergraduate College Winner

Kara Walton, "Do I Love You Because You're Beautiful?"

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Drew Deur Trio from Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan

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Denton, Texas

University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Carlos Mata-Alvarez
Las Vegas, Nevada

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Kenton Luck, "Jinrikisha"

University of Miami
Frost School of Music
Chuck Bergeron
Coral Gables, Florida

Ryan Kiernan, "Ladybird"

University of Southern California
Thornton School of Music
Bob Mintzer
Los Angeles, California

Graduate College Winner-Vocal

Miguel Alvarado, "Blackbird"

Middle Tennessee State University
James Simmons
Murfreesboro, Tennessee

Graduate College Outstanding Arrangements-Vocal

Katelyn Dietz, "What About Today?"

Western Michigan University
Gregory Jasperse
Kalamazoo, Michigan

Molly Redfield, "Moonglow"

Graduate College Winner-Small Ensemble

Patrick Hill, "My Shining Hour"

Temple University
Richard Oatts
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Graduate College Outstanding Arrangements-Small Ensemble

Jackson Churchill, "Silent Way"

University of North Texas
Nick Finzer
Denton, Texas

Rico Jones, "Central Park West"

Manhattan School of Music
Vincent Herring
New York, New York

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Kyle Myers, "Won't You Be My Neighbor?"

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Gary (Kaiji) Wang, “Confession”

Eastman School of Music
 Bill Dobbins
 Rochester, New York

Jueun Seok, “My Shining Hour”

Eastman School of Music
 Bill Dobbins
 Rochester, New York

Simeon Nathanael Davis, “Herbs and Roots”

University of North Texas
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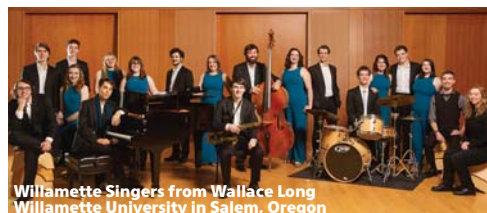
Pacific Standard Time from California State University in Long Beach, California



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Singcopation from Mt. San Antonio College in Walnut, California



Willamette Singers from Wallace Long Willamette University in Salem, Oregon

Focus on Improv

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS HAD A HUGE impact on jazz education at all levels. And, without question, vocalists and vocal groups — especially large ensembles — have been affected especially hard. “Singing is the absolute worst thing for transmission of the disease,” said Wallace Long Jr., director of choral activities and music department chair at Willamette University in Salem, Oregon.

Despite not being able to meet in person for more than a year, the Willamette Singers, under Long’s direction — like other outstanding groups competing in the Large Vocal Jazz Ensemble Competition — persevered and were able to submit live recordings that won DownBeat Student Music Awards.

“In 2020, we toured in January, like we usually do,” Long said. “The timing turned out well for us this year. Luckily, we had some decent live recordings from the tour we were able to send to DownBeat in the Undergraduate College category.”

Raymond Roberts, vocal director at the Milwaukee High School of the Arts and the school’s SMA-winning Jazz Vocal Ensemble in the Performing Arts High School category, also places a strong emphasis on vocal improvisation. That focus on improv increased this year with the inability to meet and teach his students in person.

It’s been really difficult in the pandemic,” Roberts said. “Ensemble parts take a lot longer to put together virtually, so we’re focusing even more on improv, which has always been very important in my philosophy of teaching large vocal jazz ensembles. If I have 12 students who can really express themselves strongly and competently in an improvisatory way, that’s going to make the large ensemble better.”

Like the Willamette Singers, the MHS Jazz Ensemble was able to submit live recordings

done just before the COVID-19 shutdown.

“We performed March 6 last year for the opening concert for the North Central American Choir Director’s Conference here in Milwaukee,” Roberts said. “There was a lot of energy in the room and the students really wanted to represent Milwaukee and the school well.”

Bruce Rogers, director of choral activities at Mt. San Antonio College in Walnut, California, has built an outstanding jazz vocal program that’s won 17 SMAs over the past 20 years. This year, his premiere large vocal group, Singcopation, won two SMAs in the Large Vocal Group category (both live and asynchronous).

“Winning two Student Music Awards has been both overwhelming and humbling, especially in a year that’s been really difficult for my students and myself,” Rogers said. “We haven’t met face to face in over a year, but not one person in the group bailed.”

“After that, everything we did this school year has been virtual,” Rogers said. “The students have done well with that, too, thankfully.”

Christine Helferich Guter, director of vocal jazz at the Bob Cole Conservatory of Music at California State University, Long Beach, has also built an outstanding vocal program in the Los Angeles area. During Guter’s tenure, vocal groups and vocalists have won more than 30 SMAs.

Pacific Standard Time, Cal State’s premiere vocal jazz ensemble, won SMAs this year in both the live and asynchronous Large Vocal Jazz Ensemble Graduate College categories. And ensemble member Dakota Noxon also won an SMA for Outstanding Performance—Scat Soloist.

“I’m over the moon,” Guter said. “I’m happy for everyone in the ensemble — and for Dakota, who’s one of the highest-caliber students I’ve ever worked with.” —Terry Perkins

JUDGING CRITERIA

PERFORMANCE CRITERIA

- 1) Overall sound
- 2) Presence or authority
- 3) Proper interpretation of idiom
- 4) Improvisation or creativity
- 5) Technique
- 6) Intonation
- 7) Phrasing
- 8) Dynamics
- 9) Accurate rhythm/time
- 10) Material

ENGINEERING CRITERIA

- 1) Perspective: balance of channels; amount and type of reverb; blend (Do all sounds seem to have been performed at the same time and place? Do solos seem natural or do they stick out?).
- 2) Levels: saturation or other overload, under modulation resulting in excessive hiss, consistency of levels, left/right balance, etc.
- 3) Transparency and apparent transient response.
- 4) Special effects: Are they appropriate? Do they add or detract?
- 5) Extraneous noises, clicks, hum, etc. (for a non-live performance, any non-musical sound).
- 6) Professional etiquette.

AWARDS & PRIZES

Plaques are awarded to the music department of each winning middle school, high school and college. Certificates are awarded to each winner (or Outstanding Performance honoree) and to the director of ensembles.

JUDGES

Jim Anderson: Professor with the Clive Davis Institute of Recorded Music, President of the AES Educational Foundation.

Darcy James Argue: Composer, arranger, bandleader.

Jeff Baker: Recording artist, educator, producer, composer and co-founder of The Reality Book, the Jazz Forward Competition and Next Records.

Janice Borla: Vocalist; Director of Vocal Jazz, North Central College; vocal jazz camp founder.

Don Braden: Saxophonist, flutist, composer, arranger; Music Director, Litchfield Jazz Camp.

Jeff Coffin: Saxophonist, composer, bandleader, educator/clinician.

Claire Daly: Baritone saxophonist, recording artist, composer, educator/clinician.

John Daversa: Chair, Department of Studio Music and Jazz, Frost School of Music, University of Miami.

Orbert Davis: Emmy Award-winning trumpeter, composer, educator; co-founder, conductor of Chicago Jazz Philharmonic.

Les Hooper: Composer, arranger for film, TV, commercials, orchestra and recordings; clinician.

Fred Irby III: Howard University coordinator of Instrumental Music, trumpet instructor and Director of the Howard University Jazz Ensemble.

Bart Marantz: Legendary jazz educator whose bands have won 245 DownBeat Student Music Awards.

Miles Osland: Saxophonist; Director of Jazz Studies, University of Kentucky.

Bob Parsons: Saxophonist, arranger and composer.

Dave Rivello: Eastman School of Music Assistant Professor of Jazz Studies and Contemporary Media, and Director, New Jazz Ensemble.

Albert Rivera: Saxophonist, composer, educator; Director of Operations, Litchfield Jazz Camp.

John Santos: Percussionist, clinician, label owner; U.S. Artists Fontanals Fellow; writer/historian.

Gregory Tardy: Recording artist, Assistant Professor of Jazz Saxophone, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Roger Treece: Arranger/composer, UNC Jazz Press author and educator.

Ryan Truesdell: Bandleader, composer, arranger, trombonist, clinician.

James Warrick: Educator/clinician, former Director of Jazz Studies at New Trier High School.



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AMON DRUM



Ben Rubin at The Bridge Studio, Brooklyn, New York

Expanding Musical Storytelling via Modern Production Methods

I was mixing Jon Irabagon's forthcoming record, *Bird With Streams* (Irrabagast, 2021), when the saxophonist made a suggestion: "I think the track needs more canyon. What do you think?" With wind, a stream and real, live birds, these solo tenor saxophone interpretations of Charlie Parker songs, tracked outside in a South Dakota canyon, were already uniquely ambient. Fortunately, he had placed a microphone far away in the canyon that I could just crank up.

Irabagon wanted a cinematic ending on the final song, "Quasimodo." So I decided to pan the saxophone slowly to the left to make it sound like he was wandering away from the microphone. As he's leaving, the stream grows louder and louder. By the last second, the listener is plunged into the water. On other tracks, I employed a 3D effect pioneered by Tchad Blake

to make sounds seem to pop out of the speakers. Through mixing, I was able to expand the story Jon was telling beyond the classic bebop melody, harmony and rhythm.

I produce and mix records, working with artists to find the most authentic way to present their music to the world. They hire me to help them bring out nuances and meanings in their songs. Whether we're using the language of harmony, hues or hertz, artists know that I'll understand what they mean because I was an upright bassist first, playing all kinds of music with all kinds of folks, all over the place.

"I want to sound like I'm in outer space when I play the harmonic passages," Dezron Douglas explained of his recent solo bass composition "Meditations On Faith" (Bandcamp, 2021). What he was hearing in his mind's ear took him far outside the bounds of the studio.

OK, cool. Let's go there. With tasteful amounts of delay, reverb and fader automation, I was able to take his song light-years deep into the universe.

Keeping the listener emotionally invested is my main musical goal. My job is to strip away anything that breaks focus on the song. Sure, the highest levels of songwriting and performance can, themselves, certainly sustain attention. But by using all the tools in the modern studio, we can imbue recordings with additional significance, strengthening an ever-deeper connection between artist and listener.

When applying these techniques to instrumental and/or improvised music, I always try to preserve some of the classic, essential elements of each genre. Make sure the music is swinging. Maintain some acoustic instrumentation. Honor the craft of improvisation. Always keep

the spirit of the traditions in mind.

Often, people come to me with their record ready to mix. With “Do the song no harm” (the producer’s version of the Hippocratic Oath) in mind, I first ask myself: What can I do to help this song? Often something subtle is all that’s needed. During my first listen, I start to decide which moments I should spotlight, like a hype man stacking ad-libs to accentuate pivotal phrases of a rap. As sonic chef, I concoct the right blend of spices to make everything sound

help an artist think deeply about all aspects of their recording, I ask, “Why?” a lot. Often, I’ll urge the artist to choose a title for the record at the beginning of the process. That commitment can add clarity to the nascent work. Then, we have a beacon to follow along our journey. The clearer the blueprint we have heading into the studio, the easier it will be to capture much of the sound we are seeking on the way in.

Once the record date comes around, I set up the studio so the musicians can just open the

hop single “Reckoning” (UFO, 2020) grew out of a MIDI file containing a bare-bones arrangement of a few simple parts, including bass and drums. I fleshed his ideas out into a fully realized song, choosing all the sounds, creating the signature beat and altering the arrangement. Donny’s tenor saxophone improvisation makes this track inarguably jazz, but everything surrounding the horn is unrelenting hip-hop.

Perhaps the most fully realized example of my production style is *Freebird* by Walking Distance featuring Jason Moran (Sunnyside, 2018). Band members alto saxophonist Caleb Wheeler Curtis, tenor saxophonist Kenny Pexton, bassist Adam Coté and drummer Shawn Baltazor brought me into their process early on. They had just composed all new songs based off Charlie Parker’s, using techniques like rearranging the melody from a note inventory, or just reversing it. Taking the pop music approach that “each song is its own world,” we decided every track should sound distinct.

One track featured everyone around a single microphone. On others the players performed in separate booths, in various configurations. Then, we added the supercharged energy of pianist Jason Moran. At the Bunker in Brooklyn, we were able to record everything, save a few overdubs, in two days, even though this involved using eight different mic setups. (Thank you, Aaron Nevezie!)

Once all the tracking was done, we mixed with great attention to detail, taking each song as far as we could. For the duration, the band considered me as a member, elevating my production to the same level as the writing and playing. None of the songs would have existed without its Bird inspiration, yet we had a record full of new stories.

In music, narrative flows from the vessel of song. Song remains king and we must serve it first. Of course, a good song needs great performances by great musicians. Once it’s all recorded, producers and mixers can amplify the listener’s experience using volume, panning, delay, reverb, saturation, distortion and dimension, to name a few techniques.

The advent of digital plug-in effects enables practically limitless audio manipulation (for both good and evil). Modern ears are not only accustomed to all these types of sounds, they’ve come to expect them. Making records in this way can open the door to larger, more diverse audiences. The producer/mixer lights the way. **DB**

I want my clients to experience their own ideas in a different light, to understand how studio tools can transform the way listeners experience their music.

bigger and better and more alive.

Nicki and Patrick Adams wanted something different and unusual for their piano/trumpet duo arrangement of the Miles Davis classic “E.S.P.” on their new album, *Lynx* (Sunnyside, 2021). As mixer, I could have just added some delay and panning to change the vibe of the track. Instead, I decided to go “old school” by having them “play” the effects live on outboard gear as we printed the mix. This non-replicable, improvised performance suffused the track with some additional movement and mojo.

Essentially, I’m a presenter of possibilities. I want my clients to experience their own ideas through a new filter, in a different light. I want them to understand how studio tools can transform the way listeners experience their music. First versions can create opportunities for artists’ pushback that helps clarify their intentions and/or carve out a new path.

When given the go-ahead, the producer/mixer can take a song’s original concept somewhere else. Keyboardist Erik Deutsch and vocalist Theo Bleckmann knew they needed “something more” when they called me about the track “Sunstorm” from a forthcoming release. They gave me free rein to radically alter the arrangement, the sound of the instruments, and even add or remove parts. Ultimately, what I brought to the track was, Erik said, “artistically, sonically and compositionally so far beyond what Theo and I had imagined.”

Of course, I always prefer to be brought on early in the pre-production phase. Then I can become a sonic architect, designing the music from the foundation up, working with the artists on song development, song choice, arrangement, musicians, instrumentation, studio choice. To

floodgates. As the great Quincy Jones once said, “You’ve got to leave space for God to walk through the room.” The musicians can trust that my engineers and I have all the technicalities covered, so that they’re free to concentrate exclusively on performing. In the control room, we stand ready to embrace the unexpected, and record it. “Always rollin’!,” as producer/engineer Amon Drum says.

When Amon and I decided to make the Analog Players Society records *Soundtrack For A Nonexistent Film* and *Tilted* (Ropeadope Records, 2020), our goal was to develop new sample-able recordings we could break up into hip-hop-based beats, (à la De La Soul’s *And The Anonymous Nobody* ...). We prepped Amon’s large, swooping wood-and-brick live room at the Bridge Studio in Brooklyn for the arrival of tenor saxophonist Donny McCaslin, pianist Orrin Evans, Dezron Douglas and drummer Eric McPherson. I had the band play a couple of familiar standards, and asked Eric to keep it on the *boom-bap* side. Beyond that, we just created the space for Amon to capture their pure flow. We considered anything played at the session, even the bits between songs, fair game. From a single three-hour recording session, we generated enough material for two full records, plus the upcoming single “Home In America,” featuring hip-hop legend Masta Ace (due out June 18 on Ropeadope).

About a year later, McCaslin called me to work with him on a new track. He was looking to me to transform his melodic lines into what he ultimately called a “compelling kaleidoscope of sound.” From our previous work together, he knew my aesthetic would bring out the emotion he was looking for. The resulting jazz-meets-hip-

Whether he’s mashing up hip-hop and jazz with Masta Ace and Donny McCaslin, playing rock ‘n’ roll with Marshall Crenshaw or producing Peter Bernstein’s solo jazz guitar recordings, Grammy-nominated producer/mixer/bassist Ben Rubin (aka Benny Cha Cha) is known for making records that are pure or genre-bending or both. A seven-time pick as a Rising Star Producer in the DownBeat International Critics Poll, Rubin has also played the Newport Jazz Festival with Dred Scott Trio, remixed Killah Priest and Karsh Kale, and won an Independent Music Award with his band Mudville. He has more than 100 recording credits to his name, many for the labels SmallsLive and Ropeadope Records. Visit him online at benrubin.com.



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Stefon Harris' Vibraphone Solo on 'Touch Of Grace'

Vibraphonist Stefon Harris' composition "Touch Of Grace, from his 2004 Blue Note album *Evolution*, is a study in minor ninth chords. And you'll notice Harris likes to make that ninth apparent. Look at measure 5 of his solo, where he not only starts on the ninth, but leans on it in the second beat. The next bar also starts on the ninth, and here he holds it, as he also does in bar 8. If you look, you'll find other instances of Harris emphasizing the ninth.

One place that particularly catches my ear is bars 10–11. On the G#m9, Harris lands on the D#, the fifth. In the next bar he leads to the same note, but since the chord has changed to C#m9, it's now the ninth. He's resolving to the same pitch but the context has changed, moving it from a chord tone to an extension. However, to my ear it makes the ninth sound like a stronger tone.

With the chords moving in a non-diatonic and often non-functional manner, a crucial aspect of Harris' improvisation here is his use of forward motion: a simple but very effective improvisational concept where the lines lead to a chord tone on or near the downbeat, creating motion toward the chord resolution.

A clear example is bars 7–8. In bar 7 Harris is playing F lydian, but as he descends from B to A at the end of the measure he resolves it to G# on the downbeat. G# doesn't exist in the scale of F lydian, but it fits the F#m9 chord that occurs in that measure (notice it's the ninth). Bars 4–5 and 9–10 do a similar thing, and 12–13 visit the same B–A resolving to G#, except this time the harmony is moving from Em to C#7(#9). This is especially clever, as it's the same series of notes, in the same order, resolving to the same beat, but the difference in the surrounding harmo-

ny gives them a different flavor.

Forward motion doesn't have to occur over chord changes, as bars 13–14 demonstrate. Here Harris plays some dense rhythms through beats 2 and 3 and lands on the chord tone G# (the fifth) on the downbeat of bar 14. We get the same sense of the line moving forward to conclude on a resolving tone, but without a chord change.

Similarly, forward motion doesn't have to lead into notes that separate the chords. Over measures 19–20, Harris plays a strong line leading up to a high E. Although this pitch exists in both the F#m and F major chords, it still creates that forward-motion effect when the line leads up to and resolves on a chord tone. Also interesting about this is how Harris doesn't resolve to the downbeat but instead arrives a 16th note early.

Another example where the forward

motion is obscured by Harris anticipating the resolution is measure 21, where he lands on the C natural a half beat early. It's particularly effective, since it's the flat fifth of the chord we're on, but since he jumps up to it from the root it doesn't sound at all bluesy — more like a smack in the face. And even though it's the fourth of the next chord (not exactly a resolving tone, but at least it's in the corresponding scale), Harris doesn't sustain the note into that bar. Put all that together and we have a kind of "forward motion that isn't." Heady stuff.

And like any great improviser, Harris doesn't stick to one approach. In measures 17–19 and 22–23 we hear him not using forward motion, but instead leaving space where the chord change happens. Instead of leading our ears to the chord change, Harris is leaving the chord change to happen and then playing on the new harmony — which creates a very different effect, especially when juxtaposed with all the forward motion he's been using.

And just because he's using forward

motion to resolve to chord changes doesn't mean his phrases all end on the downbeat. In the previously mentioned measures 10–11, where even though his line resolves to the ninth on the downbeat, there are a couple more notes after, so that the phrase actually lands on the seventh on the "a" of 1 (the final 16th-note subdivision of the first beat).


An intriguing side note: Harris uses this same sort of phrase ending in bars 2 and 26, as well as on the second beat of bars 15 and 17. Not only is the rhythm the same, but the melodic shape is the same (though it's inverted in bar 26), becoming a sort of mini-motif.


A subtle aspect, but deserving of praise, is Harris' use of grace notes, as in measures 4–5, 9–11, 14–17, 19 and 24–25. He uses them in a way akin to how a horn player would. Harris has taken a technique common on reed and brass instruments and developed a means of applying it to his instrument. **DB**

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

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Warm-Sounding, Easy-Blowing Hard Rubber Saxophone Mouthpieces

JodyJazz has added alto and soprano models to its line of HR* Custom Dark saxophone mouthpieces. The HR* Custom Dark Alto and Soprano are made with premium hard rubber and share the same dark, vintage sound characteristics as the company's popular tenor saxophone model. The alto version comes in sizes 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 tip openings, while the soprano is available in sizes 5, 5*, 6, 6*, 7, 7* and 8.

The HR* Custom Dark line is crafted from a special hard rubber formula that was developed for JodyJazz's Chedeville brand of classical mouthpieces. The material helps to impart more warmth and beauty in the sound due to its purity and density.

As I warmed up the alto piece (with a size 7 tip opening) for play-testing on my French-made vintage horn, I remarked at just how different the instrument sounded than when I outfitted it with any of the bright-sounding metal and rubber alto mouthpieces that are so ubiquitous today. In the absence of artificial sizzle, I could really hear — and feel — the true core tone and unadorned resonance of my horn. I found myself submerged in a world of old-school tonal purity, suitable for classical chamber music or vintage cool-jazz. Although the piece took me into a sonic realm that's more subdued than what I'm used to, I experienced warmth, calm and in-the-zone focus while exploring the tonal nuances and shadings offered by the HR* Custom Dark Alto.

A test-drive on the HR* Custom Dark Soprano (also a size 7) was sim-

ilarly revelatory. My Japanese-made curved soprano was virtually transformed from a pitch-stubborn, shrill adversary into an in-tune, accommodating friend. I liked the feeling of being able to “center” the highest notes of the soprano, and bell tones rang out with surprising ease.

HR* Custom Dark mouthpieces all feature a gold-plated brass ring on the shank of the mouthpiece, which adds mass to give the player a boost of body and increased harmonics. They use a roll-over baffle to provide sufficient “pop” without any harsh highs, and they feature an large chamber and bore for the ultimate in mellowness. Rounded sidewalls add a desirable complexity to the tone.

The most surprising thing about these dark-sounding mouthpieces is how free-blowing they are. Their wide-open response can be credited to the advanced designed of their facing curves, as well as their expertly hand-finished tip rails, baffles and tables.

—Ed Enright

jodyjazz.com



Tama Star Reserve, Starphonic Snares

Boutique Drums with Innovative Features

The Tama Star Reserve and Starphonic handcrafted snare drums sound every bit as good as they look. I received two of them for this review: a 6.5- by 14-inch Star Reserve Hammered Aluminum snare, and a 7- by 14-inch Starphonic Walnut snare. A variety of gorgeous shell options and sizes are available.

Tama's top-of-the-line snares are the Star Reserves, so let's first take a look at the hammered aluminum model. At 3mm, the shell is extremely thin and features hand-hammering on the outside and inside. This is mostly for sonic purposes, but also gives the drum a snakeskin-like appearance. The drum also has brass Sound Arc hoops, which are basically triple-flanged hoops with the top flange rounded in towards the head. The snare has a Linear-Drive strainer that allows tension adjustment on both sides, which is great for dialing in the tension of your snare wires. The wires themselves are a high-carbon design that maximizes projection and sensitivity. Right out of the box, this snare has rock-solid center of sound and tone. It is sensitive enough to play the quietest of dynamics, but it will also hammer out backbeats all night. I was struck by how much depth and character this drum has for being constructed of metal.

The Starphonic Walnut snare features a 6mm, seven-ply black walnut shell, with an outer ply of black walnut burl. A neat visual aspect of the drum is its unique claw tension/tube lug design with a grooved hoop. Each tension rod claw rests in a channel at the base of the hoop, which is an ingenious

way to keep the tension rods and claws under the playing surface. This makes the entire area of the hoop playable. Even better, when it's time to change the head, the claws simply swing back out of the way when loosened. It also features the same fantastic snare throw-off design and wires as described above. I loved the complex, super focused tone of this drum. Wood drums with shells this thin tend to be very bright in character, but the walnut shell and depth of the drum keeps that tamed, while providing crispness and tons of projection. It plays beautifully, with ultra precise response to intricate, quiet stickings. Backbeats and cross-stick patterns have a cutting depth due to the thicker hoop.

These days, it seems like every drum maker is offering a “boutique” snare of some kind, but Tama has added some really innovative features and functionality to its new models.

—Ryan Bennett

tama.com



1. Combined Power

Avid has launched Pro Tools Carbon, a hybrid audio production system featuring intelligent Pro Tools integration that combines the power of the user's native CPU with the performance of HDX DSP acceleration. The result is the smoothest tracking experience Avid has ever designed.

More info: avid.com

2. Resonant Voice

Alvarez Guitars' AG60CE8SHB is an acoustic-electric eight-string grand auditorium model in a shadow burst finish. The new guitar offers open, resonant voicing and instant response. It features a deep shine, a thin poly finish and a North American sitka spruce top. It comes fitted with LR Baggs StagePro EQ and an Element pickup.

More info: stlouismusic.com

3. Goin' Mobile

Yorkville Sound has introduced the EXM Mobile 8, a wedged, lightweight, three-way, battery-powered speaker with Bluetooth technology. Designed with versatility and everyday use in mind, the EXM Mobile 8 contains an 8-inch woofer and a coaxial midrange and tweeter.

More info: yorkville.com

4. Less Hum, More Music

The Revelation Mini FET is inspired by the legendary Revelation and Revelation II tube microphones. It has the same intimacy and warmth of a tube mic but is built around a FET circuit with a smaller footprint. The Mini FET utilizes a premium 32mm center-terminating, gold-sputtered capsule, combined with a low-noise circuit, to provide pristine sound in a range of applications. Its design results in recordings with less hum and more music. A three-stage pad provides the flexibility needed for recording high-SPL sources such as horns and kick drums.

More info: mxlmics.com

5. Audio Capture

The H8 Handy Recorder from Zoom takes capturing digital portable audio to a new generation of musicians, podcasters and sound designers. Suitable for everyone from pros to amateurs, the portable recorder's touchscreen interface presents an intuitive, three-way app workflow navigation. Whether a user is recording music or capturing sound effects in the field, the H8 adapts to the feature set required for the job.

More info: zoomcorp.com

6. Guitar Hang

Gator Cases' closet hanging guitar bags come in three models: electric, acoustic and bass. The bags feature dual-rail closet hooks, a ventilation grommet for humidity control, a soft tricot interior lining. The hooks are attached directly to reinforced nylon web straps to ensure that guitars hang safely. Mesh pockets with hook-and-loop closures on the rear side of the bags provide additional storage for accessories like tuners, pedals and strings.

More info: gatorcases.com



DB Buyers Guide >

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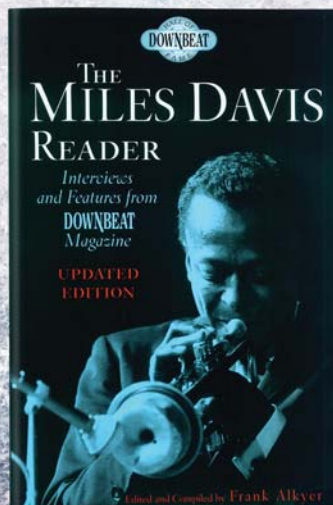
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Ben Monder

He might not be a household name among casual listeners, but it would be hard to find a single jazz musician who does not hold guitarist Ben Monder in the highest regard. Some might remember him as the guitarist for David Bowie's 2016 swan song opus *Blackstar*, but Monder's eclecticism runs the gamut from free-jazz collaborations to contemporary post-fusion. Regardless of style or mode, all of his music is undergirded with a deep sense of harmonic wisdom and an undeniable emotivity. DownBeat awarded Monder four stars for his latest offering, *Day After Day* (Sunnyside 2019), an expansive, two-disc revelation that showcases his brilliant solo renditions of jazz standards and familiar refrains and wickedly clever trio arrangements of rock and pop songs. Monder commented on the following musical selections via video chat from his home in Brooklyn.

Marc Johnson

"Porch Swing" (*The Sound of Summer Running*, Verve, 1998) Johnson, bass; Bill Frisell, guitar; Pat Metheny, guitar; Joey Baron, drums.

Sounds like there's two guitarists, and it sounds like one of them might be Bill Frisell. That sound evokes a lot of really strong feelings in me. I like this solo [Metheny's] a lot as well. I don't recognize this player, though. I'm trying to think, "Who did Bill do duo records with?" Is it Pat Metheny? That was sort of an uncharacteristically clean sound for him. Now, in retrospect, the feel was definitely him. That was great. Now that I think about it, I remember they did a record together, but I obviously never heard it. [afterwards] That's embarrassing, because I actually did a two-guitar gig with [Johnson] and [Kurt Rosenwinkel] playing the music from that record. [laughs] Sorry, Marc.

Billy Cobham/George Duke Band

"Ivory Tattoo" (*"Live" On Tour In Europe*, Atlantic, 1976) Cobham, drums; Duke, keyboards; Alphonso Johnson, bass; John Scofield guitar.

Is this John Scofield with Billy Cobham? John is kind of the perfect person to play this type of fusion. He's got the bebop influence, but you also hear the deep blues influence. John's another person I used to follow around when I was much younger. It's great to hear that stuff.

Larry Coryell/Emily Remler

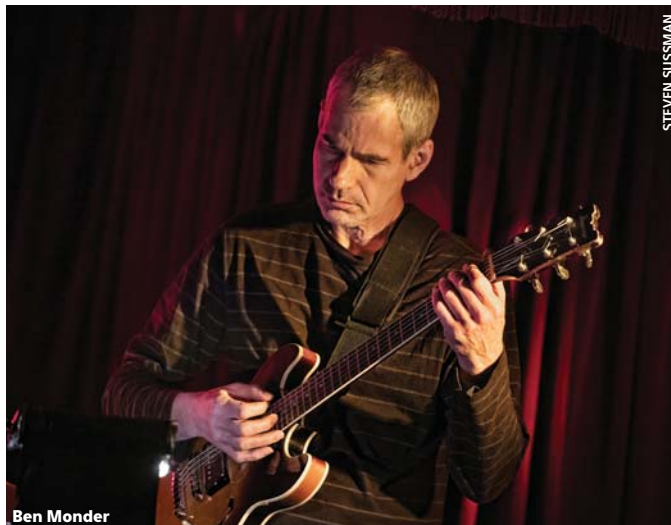
"Six Beats, Six Strings" (*Together*, Concord, 1985) Coryell, guitar; Remler, guitar.

When I was a teenager, I had a revelatory experience with Larry Coryell. I was listening to the radio. It was an Eleventh House concert, and I was like, "This guitar playing, I've never heard anything like it." And then he came out and did an acoustic thing for an encore. It blew my mind. I started buying all of his records. I'm not getting who the [other] person is. It's somebody who plays with his fingers. [afterwards] I never would have gotten that, because I know her playing from much more straightahead contexts. That was a great track. I'll have to explore that record.

Anthony Wilson

"Theme From Chinatown" (*Jack Of Hearts*, Groove Note, 2009) Wilson, guitar; Larry Goldings, organ; Jim Keltner, drums.

Beautiful sound, very pure. Beautiful interpretation of this melody. Look at how much space the organ player's leaving. You don't get that every day. Look how the drummer's [playing], he's coming from almost a free-jazz background, barely playing time. It's an interesting juxtaposition. There are these bursts of activity from the guitar, but in such a restrained and tasteful way. I appreciate that. You got me on this one. [afterwards] I feel bad for not getting that, but [Wilson] sounded great. Really mature play-



ing and really strong. I clearly haven't checked him out enough. Calling Jim Keltner a free-jazz player is maybe the dumbest thing I've ever said.

Gary Versace

"Anchors" (*All For Now*, Steeplechase, 2020) Versace, piano; Jay Anderson, bass; Obed Calvaire, drums.

From the sound of it, I'm thinking it's a '60s recording — is that wrong? Is this Jason Moran? There's the [Lennie] Tristano influences coming through. Total control of the time. Maybe like a Herbie Nichols influence ... Sullivan Fortner? Orrin Evans? Was that Gary? I didn't even realize he put out a piano record last year. Holy shit, that sounded great!

Julian Lage

"Tomorrow Is The Question" (*Love Hurts*, Mack Avenue, 2019) Lage, guitar; Jorge Roeder, bass; Dave King, drums.

Is it Julian Lage? He's a joyful player, and the guitar is like a natural extension of his body. I like the looseness of how he was interpreting the time, even though he has a really strong swing feel. He seems really free, rhythmically. And I like the slightly overdriven amp sound he was getting.

Remy LeBoeuf

"Imperfect Paradise" (*Light As A Word*, Outside In Music, 2019) LeBoeuf, alto saxophone; Walter Smith III, tenor saxophone; Charles Altura, guitar; Aaron Parks, keyboard; Matt Brewer, bass; Peter Kronreif, drums.

Is it Charles Altura? Well, he's an astounding player. There's a lot of information, but I love the contour of the lines. Even though there are a lot of notes, it's very lyrical. Great feel, very fluid. I've seen him play. He's an amazing improviser. Super relaxed. I've met him only once — he definitely exuded calmness, very nice. Great tune.

Ted Greene

"Send In The Clowns" (*Solo Guitar*, Art of Life, 1977) Greene, guitar.

This is Ted Greene himself, right? This is such an important record for me — I got it when it first came out. The reason why I was just a little unsure is that it sounds so much better ... clearer than the version I have. Maybe it's been remastered or something. So, at first, I thought that maybe someone had learned this exact arrangement and rerecorded it. That's why I said, "Oh, it's Ted Greene himself." Absolutely one of the greatest guitarists to have ever lived. Really a genius. He can switch keys at any time. He's got that inner counterpoint. He's very aware of bass movement, almost like a classical approach, but it's all spontaneous. And he has such a beautiful sound and a great feel. [Greene] was very much in touch with his sound. So beautiful.

DB

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