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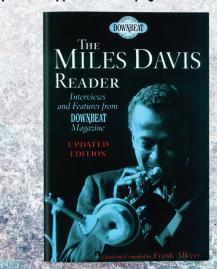
Lightkeeper is a masterful blend of tradition and innovation. It is an album that speaks directly to musicians and industry professionals through its precise arrangements, exceptional solo performances, and the rich interplay among a cadre of celebrated collaborators. Perea's compositions are thoughtful and expansive and demonstrate an extraordinary ability to fuse different influences into a cohesive whole. The record is as much a statement of personal triumph, a testament to the enduring passion for music, as it is an affirmation of jazz's endless capacity for reinvention. -Illiam Sebitz, 5finger Review



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JUNE 2025

ON THE COVER

24 Theo Croker

Dream ... Manifested

BY STEPHANIE JONES

Partway through his early set at Smoke Jazz Club, Theo Croker blinks the room back into focus. He leans over the piano. "That was fire," he says to Idris Frederick. The small moment transcends the crowded listening room. It's a moment of tenderness which, in its briefness, exposes the humanity in Croker's music, represented on his June release. Dream Manifest.

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First Take) BY FRANK ALKYER



Multiculturalism on the Edge

APRIL 24, 2025 — DENIZENS OF THE JAZZ world live a little differently than most other folks. They work when others play. They sleep on buses, trains and planes heading to the next town, the next country, the next gig. Musicians from every corner of the globe come to the United States to learn this music in its many meccas. They travel the world to absorb the local sounds, vibes and influences of Europe, South America and Asia.

Theo Croker, this month's cover artist and the grandson of the legendary jazz trumpeter Doc Cheatham, sojourned to Shanghai and spent the better part of six years honing his craft, doing residencies at the House of Blues and Peace Hotel Jazz Bar in China's most sophisticated city. That experience helped cultivate his mind and led him to craft the expansive music he's making today, like *Dream Manifest*, a story detailed beginning on page 24.

Adrian Younge, the genre-melding sound scientist who helped bring us the Jazz Is Dead label, has been delving into Brazilian music for years, traveling to South America at every opportunity. (During a visit to the DownBeat offices a few years ago, he tried to talk this editor into making the trip south with him. It was tempting, but deadlines ruined my chances of ever making it to that party.) Younge's trips and research introduced him to the likes of the legendary Hermeto Pascoal, whom JID brought to the U.S. for a tour in 2023. It also connected Younge with Asymuth, a Brazilian fusion band from the '70s, to record the album Azymuth JID004. Most recently, Brazil served as a backdrop for Younge's album Something About April III, the final installment of a trilogy, this time focusing on his Brazilian

love affair. See the review on page 47.

Meanwhile, Tobias Meinhart left small-town Germany to pursue his jazz dream in New York. Beginning on page 13, he talks about hitting the road and discovering Middle America. Lucía, winner of the 2022 Sarah Vaughan International Vocal competition, brings her Mexican roots to jazz on her debut recording, as detailed on page 16. Red Baraat, led by percussionist Sunny Jain, may be the most fun you can have listening to what's billed as "America's only South Asian Wedding Band." Get ready to dance on page 18.

If you haven't guessed, this issue is packed with cross-pollination, love and humanity. Pasquale Grasso brings his Italian heart to bebop on page 36. Dutch guitarist Robin Nolan plays the music of revered Beatle George Harrison in Gypsy jazz fashion on page 20. There are no borders in music, just places to find inspiration.

The international themes and multicultural thrust of this issue come in stark contrast to the feelings of trepidation spreading far and wide these days in response to shifting governmental attitudes regarding borders, immigration and the arts. As Meinhart asks, will we always have the freedom "to just be"?

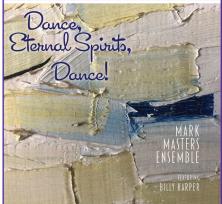
It's a good question with no clear answer. It's also an old question that has followed jazz musicians since the dawn of this music. Armstrong, Ellington and Basie struggled with it. So did Miles, Dizzy, Monk and Coltrane. And don't forget the AACM, Ornette, Zorn or anyone trail-blazing or simply traveling on the path of jazz.

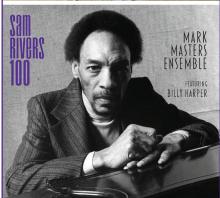
No one ever said jazz would be easy. Maybe that free-to-be longing is an essential part of what makes this music so special.





New Collaborations with Mark Masters Ensemble Featuring Billy Harper





Acclaimed arranger and bandleader Mark Masters reimagines music by visionary saxophonists Billy Harper and Sam Rivers on two stunning new albums. Both albums feature ingenious new arrangements for different configurations of the Mark Masters Ensemble, and are graced by the breathtaking solo work of Billy Harper.

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- Thomas Conrad, JazzTimes

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Need More Euro Jazz

DownBeat seems to harbor some sort of bias against the European free-jazz scene. I've complained previously about your failure to note Peter Brötzmann's passing (at least in print). Now another pioneering figure on that scene, pianist Irene Schweizer, has passed, again without this magazine's notice. It's well past time for DB to acknowledge that jazz is no longer a strictly American art form.

JOHN VEYLUPEK VIA EMAIL

Editor's Note: It's a big jazz world out there John, and we need to do more of EVERYTHING! I hope our Euro Jazz feature in the April issue featuring Sophia Jernberg, Spinifex, Tania Giannouli and Knats helped scratch that itch for the moment. More to come!

Burton for Hall of Fame

A guy named Harry Briggs mentioned the absence of Gary Burton on the list of Hall of Fame candidates in "Chords & Discords." I totally agree with him. On Discogs.com I've rated the top 250 jazz albums of all time, and I have Gary Burton's *Ring* album as the #1 Jazz recording of all time. No one has ever been able to use space and psychedelia the way he did back in the '70s.

JAMES VERWEIRE ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

Hot Box Abbreviated

Given the apparently limited word count, I think that Hot Box critics generally deserve to be cut some slack for occasionally vague or unhelpful comments. But no editor should have allowed John Murph's especially brief — yet still repetitive — comments on Jon Batiste's Beethoven Blues: "Hmmm ... OK. Nice. Not my cup of tea, but nice." Maybe if we all knew Mr. Murph and how exactly he takes his idiomatic beverage, that statement would have some meaning. But we don't, so it doesn't. Hmmm ... OK. I'd say that many DownBeat readers like me, even if not qualified to be critics, could do better. Mr. Batiste deserves better, too.

MIKE ATLESON COLUMBIA, MARYLAND **Editor's Note:** I think he meant it won't make his top 10 list for the year, or his bottom 10.

Dishonor, Indeed!

I greatly appreciated Frank Alkyer's First Take column in April's DownBeat titled "Kennedy Center Dishonor" in which he decried President Trump's takeover of the Kennedy Center including firing the president and purging the board. A short time ago the U.S. was recognized as the leader of the free world and had the respect of most of the world. The U.S. today under Trump is now hated and feared by most countries including former close allies. It is sad to see even the arts are now being attacked by Trump. From a musical perspective, it might be time to change the title of the famous Elvis Costello song "(What's So Funny) 'Bout Peace, Love and Understanding?" to "What's So Good About Intolerance, Hatred and Facism?"

BRUCE BALLAN VIA EMAIL

Don't Forget Dave Pike

The Blindfold Test is among the first things I read with each new DownBeat issue. I certainly enjoyed the Blindfold with Joel Ross.

It's interesting to learn how the current generation of vibraphonists feel about the music today relative to their instrument. Joel spoke to cats from earlier generations like Lionel Hampton and Bobby Hutcherson. Seeing the name Lem Winchester was also a nice surprise. However, one of the forgotten heroes of the vibes is the late Dave Pike. I hope the new generation has gone back to the well on Dave and his fluent bebop vocabulary.

BILL BENJAMIN BILTMORE LAKE, NORTH CAROLINA

Don't Forget Jazz Ed. Legends

I founded and chaired the jazz program at Manhattan School of Music (1981–'99). I was talking to Rich DeRosa, head of jazz composition at [University of North Texas] about an adult education course I will be teaching at the Arts Garage in Delray Beach, Florida. He felt that the next generations of jazz educators and mentors rarely get mentioned. It would include Justin DiCioccio, Bob Curnow, Bob Morgan, Bob Stewart, Bart Marantz, Neil Slater myself and others. We are still teaching, performing and lecturing and developing new audiences. Don't forget us old guys. (IoI)

DICK LOWENTHAL VIA EMAIL

Editor's Note: Thank you for all that you and the other legends do, and have done.

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Lucía, Red Baraat, Robin Nolan, Ars Nova Workshop at 25, Final Bar



Tobias Meinhart's Jazz Evolution

obias Meinhart moved from Germany to Brooklyn, New York, 15 years ago to follow his dreams of being a jazz musician. And while he's established his reputation as a commanding tenor saxophonist and gifted composer both in the Big Apple and in various European and South American countries, it wasn't until this year that he explored parts of the Midwest with a few dates on the West Coast.

With funding from South Arts' Jazz Road Tours, a \$15,000 grant, Meinhart and his quartet — consisting of pianist Julian Shore, bassist Matt Penman and drummer JK Kim — began the auspicious adventure in early March in Minneapolis. From there, they visited Spring Green and Madison, Wisconsin; then Sioux

Falls, South Dakota. They also performed in Los Angeles then Portland, Oregon — the latter date featuring Mark Whitfield Jr. replacing Kim — before concluding the month-long excursion in New York at the Django.

Exploring Middle America

While driving through the Midwest, Meinhart recalls seeing very few vehicles on the roads. Yet the U.S. landscape captivated him. "It's just all so beautiful," he said in early April, right before he left New York once again, this time for a 14-date European tour with his Berlin People combo.

"[The tour] gave me a really different perspective of the country after being so much in New

York City, where everything is dense and loud."

In addition to geographical beauty, Meinhart was taken by the warm reception he and his ensemble received. When they played in Spring Green, Wisconsin, he recalled one resident who had immigrated from Poland 30 years ago. "He started crying after hearing us," Meinhart says. "He said that the music had touched him so much."

Meinhart says that the Spring Green's resident was so moved that he took a four-hour drive with his family to catch the next show in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. "That never happens in New York," Meinhart said. "The art is so abundant in New York that hardly anyone cares. For many people in New York, art is just there. But to see that type of gratitude, it reminded me that this music is not all for nothing. That gratitude keeps me going. That and interacting with people."

Living in America

Meinhart possesses a burnished, velvety tone on the tenor with which he animates with supple improvisational lines that are often melodically mindful but can coil and unravel in cursive, calligraphy-like designs with both poise and passion. In conversation, he's as amicably engaging as his saxophone playing. He answers questions with considerable thoughtfulness without being haughty. And he's prone to query other people regarding their thoughts and life experiences with genuine concern.

He said that his tour to the Midwest was a step further in understanding the United States. He argues that he felt challenged in certain ways about some of his preconceived notions of middle America. Right now, many people are trying to understand the U.S. within the context of its current sociopolitical climate as the Trump administration has aggressively attacked immigrants, Black people, the LGBTQ community, the federal government, higher education institutions and the legal profession — all of which appears as if he's guided by the Heritage Foundation's notorious, "Project 2025" playbook.

Project 2025's tenacles have already infiltrated some of the U.S.'s most heralded art institutions, specifically the Kennedy Center, Voice of America and the Smithsonian with antagonistic measures designed to both quell dissenting voices and erase cultural, historical footprints made by marginalized communities.

In light of that, Meinhart reflects on what inspired him to move to the U.S. "It was really for me to be myself," he says. "I could be a jazz musician; I could be an artist. Whereas in the small village outside of Regensburg, Germany, in the Bavaria region, I suffered a bit because being an artist is looked as something being exotic. You could do music on the side, but people would ask, 'So, what's your real job?"

He loves living in Brooklyn because it gives him a chance "to just be." "But now, I feel like that idea is being challenged," Meinhart said. "I worry about that. I hope we find a way to preserve that freedom 'to just be' for everyone. But I'm very optimistic. As musicians, we have this gift of having strong communities."

Nevertheless, with an uncertain backdrop in the U.S., Meinhart believes that a lot of beautiful art can be created in resistance. "We have to come together and make it through these challenging times," he said. "So, what are we going to do? What kind of art are we going to make? I've been thinking about this a lot. Does that mean now that all the music we create must be angry? It's OK to put out angry music if that is what you're feeling. But what do the people real-

ly need at this moment?

"Contrary to what some people believe, it might be something joyful or pensive," he continues. "As I get older, I'm not sure if everybody wants just angry music. Maybe, we need something more hopeful and inspiring instead of something just angry."

Meinhart's Water Offering

To that end, Meinhart's newest self-released album, *Sonic River*, delivers a balm in these trying times. The album features him fronting one of his New York-based ensembles that includes drummer Obed Calvaire, bassist Matt Penman, guitarist Charles Altura and pianist and pump organist Eden Ladin.

Throughout Sonic River, Meinhart weaves multiple themes that touch upon his love for the outdoors. The album's watery title alludes to both the Danube River, Europe's second largest river, which flows near his hometown; and New York City's East River, which he passes routinely. He also underpins the album with his love for literature. Compositions such as the alluring "This Is Water," the enchanting ballad "The Panther" (featuring singer Sara Serpa) and the suspenseful "Mr. Vertigo" reflects his respective readings of David Foster Wallace, Maria Rilke and Paul Auster.

"I've loved reading ever since I was kid," Meinhart said. "Growing up, I would be under the blankets — before smartphones — with a book and lamp, because my parents would turn off the lights and say, 'Time to sleep."

Augmenting his love of literature is the inspiration Meinhart draws from his wife, award-winning photographer and filmmaker Mariana Meraz. "She comes from a very artistic family," he says. "Her parents are writers. I've always loved reading. But she's opened me up to a lot of things that I didn't know before. She's opened me up to a lot of other music and paintings too. I also learned how to speak Spanish from her. We met through our love for books."

Returning to the aquatic flowing analogy, it also speaks to Meinhart's artistic goal as to how he approaches improvisation and honing his voice. "To me, it's all about having this flowing feeling and being so immersed in something that you love," he says. "It's not being so self-absorbed in your thoughts; it's riding that perfect wave, when everything feels good and you don't have to force the creativity."

As 43-year-old Meinhart continues evolving, he said that he hopes to lose more of the feeling of self. "I want to be all giving in my music and make everyone sound good," he explained. "It's about being braver on the bandstand. My favorite musicians are the ones that allow themselves to be vulnerable. I want to evolve into the most open version of myself, both on and off the bandstand with little preconceived notions and judgements."

—John Murph







Lucía: From Mexico with Jazz

WHEN ASKED ABOUT HOW SHE FIRST encountered jazz, Mexican vocalist Lucía shared that she thought it was "a coincidence." But really, for the winner of the 2022 Sarah Vaughan International Jazz Vocal Competition, that chance encounter was more like kismet.

From an early age, the Veracruz-bred artist had sung with her parents in their son jarocho group Son de Madera, but by the age of 13, she began to take singing more seriously and began "searching for a way to approach technique."

"[At that time], there was the classical school here in Veracruz and a jazz school." Her parents told her that jazz was closer to the son jarocho tradition. Consequently, from the age of 13, she studied voice at the jazz school of Universidad Veracruzana.

Not long after, she became immersed in the history and traditions of jazz and blues. "I discovered Ella Fitzgerald. I already had listened to Coltrane because my mom had a CD. I had already listened to Miles to Nina Simone to Billie, but I wasn't aware that it was a whole thing. So, when I discovered it, I discovered scat singing, and then I just fell in love and it was like, I can't go back."

Rapidly, she began to see the connective tissue between jazz and son jarocho musical traditions. Both were born as creoles, both are stitched together from many different cultures: African, indigenous and Spanish among them.

"I think I felt very close to the dynamic that the music has and also the surroundings, because [jazz is] about getting together in community," she explained. "It's about improvisation. I feel some sort of connection."

To further illustrate the relationship, she brought up the son jarocho composition "El Toro Zacamandu." "It sounds completely similar to other African traditional music that we've heard in the past." Additionally, she says, "It's also mainly about community. It's like you get together and you put out a tarima, a wooden box where you get up, you dance, people surround the tarima, they dance, they play, they sing, they improvise."

Adding to that heady brew of inspiration is the bolero tradition that figured prominently into her childhood. "I was surrounded by Agustin Lara's repertoire because my mom is such a big fan, Alvaro Carrillo as well, Los Panchos, all of that lineage of musicians and composers." Toña la Negra, a famous vocalist from Veracruz, was also mentioned often during her upbringing. Later, she also started to study singers from the Bolero tradition.

In recent years, she's collaborated with a wide variety of artists, including Natalia Lafourcade, Aloe Blacc and the National Jazz Orchestra of Mexico. In 2024, Lucía guested on Alex E. Chávez's 2024 album *Sonorous Present* on a song titled "Catalina," which was pro-

duced by Quetzal Flores of the band Quetzal, a California-based Chicano musician and activist who is also steeped in the son jarocho tradition. When asked about how he connected to son jarocho music, Quetzal explained, "Son jarocho has been a part of Chicano Music since the '40s, maybe earlier. The moment Ritchie Valens coalesced the son with roots African-American rock in his recording of "La Bamba," he opened a pathway of expression that has continued to date."

Quetzal, who is close friends with Lucía's father, further relayed that "it was clear Lucía was special from a very early age, but on one family trip to Mexico I heard her sing soul music for the first time in her grandmother's living room, and I understood that she was going to be a singer."

Sonorous Present deals in a dizzying array of genres, including son jarocho, ranchera, Cuban batá, psychedelia, huapango, jazz and spoken word. And in the case of her debut album, *Lucía* (La Reserve), a similarly rich kaleidoscope of references is apparent.

Working with producer Matt Pierson, she knew certain songs must be included, such as "La Llorona," a traditional Oaxacan song that also has a version in the son jarocho style. "In that version that we recorded, you can hear the lines inspired from both the Oaxacan and Jarocho lyrics," she said. "We also wanted to include Latin American songs like 'Alfonsina y El Mar,' which has also been a big part of my path as a singer, because if you're a singer from Latin America, you have to get into Mercedes Sosa, Violeta Parra ... all of that lineage."

In terms of jazz lineage, they selected "You Must Believe In Spring," but naturally put their own spin on it. She noted that the song was "a very meaningful piece because when I was starting to get into jazz, I was having my situations as a human being. And I remember reading the lyrics, thinking, wow, this is a beautiful way to approach this topic, that sometimes you can get depressed, but you must believe that eventually you will get through that." The album also includes a tune called "Lacy" by contemporary pop star Olivia Rodrigo.

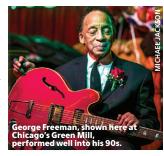
More broadly, the approach to recording Lucía was a sort of magical experiment that drew from and melded together her varied influences. "How would a jazz ensemble approach a Bolero?" she and Pierson asked each other. "Or how would a singer who has also sung a Latin repertoire, son jarocho, boleros approach a jazz standard? Or how would we approach scat singing on a Latin rhythm or a Latin passage in the arrangement? And that's what I would say eventually will be the path that I will keep phrasing. I eventually want to keep experimenting with being able to add my own granito de arena, my little thing that I can add to it." -Ayana Contreras

Final Bar

George Freeman, 1927–2025

GUITARIST GEORGE FREEMAN, A mainstay of the Chicago jazz scene, died April 1 at age 97 — just days before being scheduled to play a show to celebrate his 98th birthday.

Freeman came from a family of gifted musicians that included his older brothers, the late saxophonist and NEA Jazz Master Earle Lavon "Von" Freeman and drummer Eldridge "Bruz" Freeman. Swing and



blues as embodied by the likes of Charlie Christian, Benny Goodman, T-Bone Walker, Count Basie and others influenced Freeman's vocabulary, but his style continued to evolve over the course of his career. In 1950, he played with Charlie Parker, and he soon became recognized as one of Chicago's great bebop artists. He performed well into his 90s.

Freeman played frequently with his brothers at Chicago's Pershing Hotel Lounge. At the end of the '50s, he took to the road with soul-man Jackie Wilson and organists Wild Bill Davis, Richard "Groove" Holmes and Jimmy McGriff. He later gained wider acclaim touring with saxophonist Gene Ammons for five years.

Freeman's leader debut, *Birth Sign* (recorded in 1969 and produced by Michael Cuscuna), was released in 1972. Other recordings of note include the 1974 albums *Man & Woman* and *New Improved Funk*, 1995's *Rebellion*, 2001's *At Long Last George* and 2015's *All In The Family* with Chico Freeman (Von's son). His final studio album, *The Good Life* (High Note), with Joey DeFrancesco, Carl Allen, Christian McBride and Lewis Nash, dropped on his 96th birthday: April 10, 2023.

—*Ed Enright*

Francis Davis, 1946–2025

FRANCIS DAVIS, AN AUGUST JAZZ AND cultural critic who won both esteem and awards in print, film and radio, died April 14 in Philadelphia after a long illness. He was 78.

Davis reviewed jazz for several high-profile platforms, including the Philadelphia Inquirer, The Atlantic, NPR's *Fresh Air* and the Village Voice. He taught classes on jazz and blues at Temple University and the University of Pennsylvania. He was a two-time Grammy winner for liner notes, won multiple ASCAP



Deems Taylor Awards, and received both Guggenheim and Pew fellowships. He was renowned for the scope and taste of his jazz observations.

Francis John Davis was born Aug. 30, 1946, in Philadelphia. He graduated from Temple University in 1969. While a student, he worked at a record store on the University of Pennsylvania campus, and continued working there after graduation where he met his wife, radio personality Terry Gross in the late '70s. She hired him as an on-air music critic at Philadelphia's WHYY–FM.

In 2006, Davis started the Voice's year-end jazz critics' poll, which moved first to NPR Music and then to The Arts Fuse, where it is now known as the Francis Davis Jazz Critics Poll. He authored multiple books, including *In the Moment* (1986); *Outcats* (1990); *The History of the Blues* (1995); and *Jazz and Its Discontents: A Francis Davis Reader* (2004).

Davis was diagnosed with emphysema and Parkinson's disease in the fall of 2024. He is survived by Gross.

—Michael J. West



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Red Baraat Transcends Borders

when red baraat hits the stage and starts pumping out its ecstatic melange of genre-busting music that fuses 18th century Indian ensembles with Bollywood, Bhangra, Jain devotional songs, New Orleans brass bands and hip-hop born in Brooklyn, it's a party with a purpose: Bandleader and dhol drummer Sunny Jain is on a mission to break down cultural as well as musical boundaries.

"We're taking a humanist approach to understanding what's happening right now," Jain said, speaking from his home studio in Brooklyn's Park Slope neighborhood. "Let's help people who are being marginalized, and help one another come together. As opposed to separating ourselves because we have different religious beliefs, or different politics. We need to get out of our social media silos and engage in real life."

Multi-culti music explodes from the opening title track of *Bhangra Rangeela* (Sinj Records), Red Baraat's first album since 2018's *Sound The People*. Climaxing with "Hava Nagila," played by request at a Muslim-Jewish wedding, it fuses a Pakistani rapper and Sufi singers with Red Baraat's signature dhol beats and horn blasts. It also sets the tone for the rest of the album, which keeps the party going with epic remixes that includes a star turn from Stewart Copeland.

Red Baraat may be Jain's most famous incarnation, but he has worn (and wears) many other hats. For nearly a decade before launching Red Baraat, he was an in-demand jazz drummer in New York, where Jain relocated after leaving Rochester, New York, to study music at Rutgers University as well as New York University. He's

also been deeply involved in theater, assembling a baraat wedding band for the Broadway adaptation of Mira Nair's *Monsoon Wedding*.

For a man with so many irons in the fire, Jain is remarkably laid-back. Highlights from an animated conversation follow.

Cree McCree: Red Baraat is known for epic live performances. What's the largest number of musicians you've ever had on stage at once?

Sunny Jain: Probably the field recording we did for NPR's Make Music Day in 2014, when they commissioned me to write a piece that would be played publicly on the steps of the Brooklyn Library. I wrote it to work for all different levels, from beginners to advanced, so literally anyone and everyone could come and play. And 350-plus folks showed up, including the drum lines from the New York Giants and the Knicks.

McCree: How many people are in your core group of musicians? I know you have a big tour coming up this summer pegged to Bhangra Rangeela.

Jain: Ever since the pandemic, it's been seven people, including me. And we're a really motley crew. When we roll into a bar or restaurant, people are like, where are these people from?

McCree: There was actually a band called Motley Crüe back in the day.

Jain: Oh, I know Motley Crüe. [*laughs*] That was my first concert! I was 12 years old. And Whitesnake was opening up for them.

McCree: How has your music evolved since you

were a kid? Was dhol your first instrument?

Jain: No, I came to dhol very late, in my 20s. But it's a sound I grew up with. I'm a child of immigrants. My parents came here in 1970. I'm also the youngest of three siblings, and picked up a lot from them. The middle brother had eclectic taste in music, everything from Bach to Miles Davis to Stevie Wonder to Ice T. My parents listened to Bollywood music and devotional songs from the Jain religion, and we all went to parties where they played Punjabi bhangra music that makes you start moving.

But I fell in love with playing drums when I was 4. As a kid, I was into Crüe, Led Zeppelin, Rush. And when I went to a private teacher and said, "Hey, I wanna learn these rhythms." He said, "First I wanna show you swing rhythm. I wanna show you bossa nova." My drum teacher when I was 10 to 18 was a bebop drummer. And that's how I got involved in jazz.

And for a very long time, those things were very separate. There was jazz, there was pop music, there was my South Asian Indian music. Things only started coming together when I started composing at 19 or 20 and realized that I don't have to abide by any rules of jazz composition.

McCree: You've also been involved in theater.

Jain: I just got commissioned by Soho Repertory Theatre to work on a new piece called *Love Force*, and it's focused on bringing people together through music and immersing the crowd in singing and dancing and moving and kind of poking holes at these ways that we divide ourselves.

McCree: You also played drums in the Bob Dylan biopic A Complete Unknown. Were you just on the soundtrack, or did you appear on screen?

Jain: I was actually on camera. In the first five minutes of the film, when Timothy Chalamet is walking through the Village and crosses the street to go to Cafe Wha, I'm out there playing and singing a traditional Jain song. [Director] James Mangold gave me three cameos to let it seep into people's heads that Dylan's inspiration for "Mr. Tambourine Man" came from watching this Indian man on the street playing a tambourine and singing a traditional song.

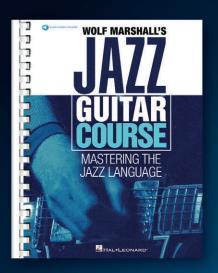
McCree: Circling back to Bhangra Rangeela, is there anything in particular you would like people to take away from it?

Jain: Just the idea of overcoming these fictitious borders governments create. With everything that's happening in Gaza with the Palestinian people and the Jewish people, and the divisions between India and Pakistan, we still have Indian artists and Pakistani artists on this album, people who are living in Islamabad right now. As human beings, when we talk to one another we can come together in one community. To me, that's the most important thing.

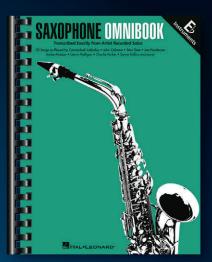
—Cree McCree



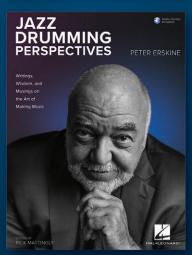
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Robin Nolan's Gypsy Jazz Spin on George Harrison

IT WAS THROUGH A MASTERSTROKE OF serendipity that Dutch guitarist Robin Nolan came to meet ex-Beatle George Harrison 30-plus years ago. A devout Djangophile, Nolan was playing gypsy jazz tunes on the streets of Amsterdam back in 1994 and hawking CDs of his trio that he had pressed up just for these busking occasions. One of the curious onlookers who happened by was the gardener at George Harrison's estate, Friar Park, a Victorian neo-Gothic mansion in Henley-on-Thames in England. Knowing of Harrison's interest in Django Reinhardt, the gardener purchased the self-produced CD and passed it along to his employer.

"It had my phone number on it," recalls Nolan of that first contact. "And they called it, because they loved the CD. So I had a surreal conversation on the phone with George, and he ended up inviting me over to play at a party they were having."

That turned out to be the beginning of a long friendship between the busker and the Beatle. Nolan and his gypsy crew ended up becoming the house band at numerous birthday parties held at Friar Park over the years for George, his wife, Olivia, and their son, Dhani. And he continues playing at those Friar Park parties to this day.

Nolan has recorded over a dozen albums of Django-styled gypsy jazz in various configurations over the years, but his recent 15th release is truly something special. Recorded at Friar Park using three of Harrison's own guitars, *For The Love Of George* was released on the ex-Beatle's Dark Horse Records on Feb. 25, to commemorate what would've been the legendary musician's 82nd birthday. And for a kicker, the title track is one that Nolan wrote based on a chord sequence that Harrison had scribbled down on an envelope shortly before his passing in 2001.

"Just seeing his handwriting ... and it's all just crossed out with an arrow going here and something else going there ... it gives me chills," said Nolan of the mysterious envelope that Harrison had left behind. "You're kind of looking at it and then you get the vibe. You stare at it a little longer and you go, 'What did he mean there? Did he mean F#7 or was that a C# minor 7?' So it took me a while, but I figured out what I thought he meant with that chord progression."

Once the harmonic puzzle was solved, Nolan crafted a melody. As he recalled, "I just thought, 'I've got to come up with a gorgeous melody which is all about George.' And then I just kind of heard him humming a really simple melody that fits over those chords. So I recorded a simple version of it and sent it to Olivia, a bit nervous, you know, hoping that she would like it. And she said, 'Oh, it sounds so George!' And, of course, it does sound so George because that's his unique harmonies in there. I just laid the melody

on top. And the publishing credit on that tune is Harrison/Nolan, which is like a dream for me."

Nolan said that being in Harrison's home studio with his own personal guitars was akin to being in the Tower of London with the Crown Jewels. "I felt really responsible. I had to make it as good as possible and just hope George would like it."

Aside from the title track, Nolan also delivers nine gypsy jazz interpretations of Harrison tunes along with one Lennon/McCartney number, "And I Love Her," which opens with a distinctive Harrison riff that became an integral part of that Beatles hit single from 1964. All the tunes on the album are performed on Harrison's prized 1962 Gibson J160 acoustic, 1964 Rickenbacker 360/12 electric 12-string and 1964 José Ramírez nylonstring acoustic.

Nolan's swinging interpretations of "Wah Wah" and "My Sweet Lord" (both from 1970's All Things Must Pass) and "I Want To Tell You" (from the Beatles' 1966 album Revolver) are imbued with chunking rhythm guitar and slick Djangoesque filigrees. Harrison's love of Indian music comes across on Nolan's droning take on "Marwa Blues" (from Harrison's final studio album, Brainwashed, which was posthumously released in November 2002 and co-produced by Dhani Harrison and Jeff Lynne (Electric Light Orchestra founder and Harrison's bandmate in the '80s supergroup Traveling Wilburys).

Perhaps Harrison's most famous tune, the romantic love song "Something" (from the Beatles' 1969 album Abbey Road), is rendered here in faithfully balladic form at the beginning before reverting to the quintessentially swaggering, medium-tempo swing style of Django midway through. "Dark Sweet Lady" (from Harrison's self-titled album from 1979) is given a touch of Spanish flamenco flair, while the Indian flavored "The Inner Light" (released as the B-side to the Beatles' 1968 single "Lady Madonna") is the sole unaccompanied solo guitar performance on the album. It closes on a poignant note with Nolan caressing each note of "While My Guitar Gently Weeps" with as much finesse and feeling as Django demonstrated on "Nuages."

"I met him when I was just a kid," said Nolan of his first encounter with Harrison. "I was playing under a tree one day and then for a Beatle the next day. And George just loved this stuff that we were playing. He was brought up with Django Reinhardt, so he just thought it was really cool that we playing Django's music. I think it was refreshing for him. And now to come full circle to this day, to be able to play Django's music on George's guitars ... it's just an amazing story."

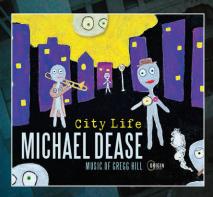
Robin Nolan's Gypsy Jazz Secrets is an instructional video series on YouTube. He also heads up the Gypsy Jazz Club (gypsyjazztransfusionclub. com), an online community of aspiring guitarists looking to expand their Django vocabulary.

—Bill Milkowski

ORIGIN RECORDS







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Survival of the Fittest

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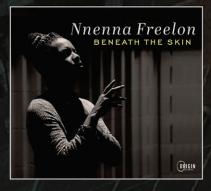


ALON FARBER HAGIGA

Dreams I Dream

Katia Toobool Assaf Hakimi Yonatan Rosen

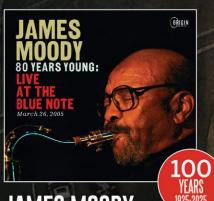




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Beneath the Skin

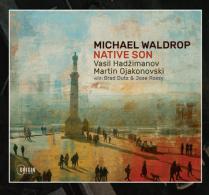
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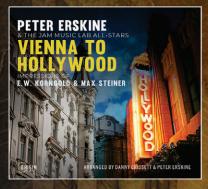


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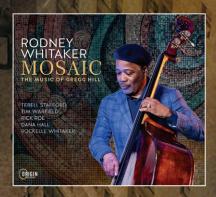
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Ars Nova Workshop: 25 Years of Community Building

ROBERT Philadelphia in the early 2000s with an omnivorous appetite for music. Growing up in England, he was into the punk scene, and made his way to New York and Los Angeles before finding Philly and a love for jazz. He wasn't entirely unfamiliar — he'd seen Sun Ra and the Art Ensemble of Chicago in concert years earlier — but a King Crimson show led him into progressive rock and old Soft Machine records, where he discovered Elton Dean. With that, he bought a saxophone, signed up for lessons and started seeking out gigs. When a new venue specializing in jazz and music outside the mainstream opened, he was ready for it.

"Solar Myth opened and there were a lot of interesting shows," he said. With records for sale and a neighborhood bar feel, Whalley was soon meeting people and learning history. "It's a great place. I love it."

Despite the casual ambience, Solar Myth was founded on 25 years of experience putting on shows at more than 50 venues across the city. The joint effort of presenting organization Ars Nova Workshop, and local beerand-burger establishment Fountain Porter, Solar Myth is housed in a former country-and-western bar on the city's historic Broad Street. The front room functions as a watering hole, while in the back Ars Nova brings recognized figures in avant-garde jazz and experimental music to Philadelphia, as they've been doing for 25 years.

Solar Myth started off strong this year. In the first month, they hosted saxophonists Marshall Allen, Zoh Amba and Lotte Anker, guitarists Marisa Anderson and Miles Okazaki and the Chicago band Bitchin' Bajas. That sort of diversity and name recognition among those in the know has been a constant since its first concert in November 2000: Chris Speed's yeah NO at the Plays & Players Theater, a 1913 house about a dozen blocks from the current home.

Ars Nova's ongoing 25th anniversary celebration series includes the return of Sun Ra Arkestra leader Allen and appearances by the James Brandon Lewis Quartet, Kahil El'Zabar and David Murray, and the electronic duo Matmos.

After 25 years, the programming has grown and the organization has expanded, but the mission has remained the same, according to founder and executive and artistic director Mark Christman.



"I really didn't have expectations for the work to support us," Christman said, looking back to Ars Nova's beginnings. "I had a full-time job to pay my bills for the first 15 years. I wanted to be near these artists and the world of art and ideas. I was prepared to not make a living from it. It took a while for that dream to evolve into 'maybe I could do this as a real job and not a hobby."

Christman describes the ways Ars Nova has changed over 25 years as a "shift from the transactional to the relational." Ars Nova Workshop now supports a staff of three full-time employees in addition to himself, works with guest curators and is guided by a board of directors. The nonprofit organization has moved beyond concert promoter to collaborating with artists on screenings, discussions, and podcasts.

"I saw it to be really limiting," he said of working purely as a concert producer. "I saw it was not always the best way to contextualize these artists and their ideas. Even early on, there were small exhibits and discursive materials.

"The problem," he said, "is that we didn't really push them as hard as the events that we actually had tickets to sell for."

The organization has made more of an effort to broaden its conception of programming over the last decade — or, as Christman puts it, to be "more involved in that intersection of the black box and the white box" — adding gallery exhibits and other sorts of

presentations to supplement the concerts.

The Workshop has also made a very gradual venture into running a record label. In 2020, they released Soundpath, a 40-minute take on a Muhal Richard Abrams composition (available on CD and download) by saxophonist Bobby Zankel's large ensemble, Warriors of the Wonderful Sound. After some delay, the fledgling label - also under the Ars Nova Workshop name — issued its second title, Live In Philadelphia, a collection of live recordings by Marshall Allen's Ghost Horizons (Ars Nova Workshop/Otherly Love Records), in May. The album comes in the wake of Allen's celebrated New Dawn (Weekend Records), the centenarian's first solo album. Plans are underway for more releases mined from the archives.

Over the years, Christman has "learned what this music really means, and what it means to me," he said.

"I've learned to employ the ideas and the values of jazz and improvisation," such as humility and challenging conformity. It's a music of resistance, of solidarity, and I want to build an organization that is reflective of the values of improvisation."

Christman is also giving thought to what producers and promoters can contribute to the musical ecosystem, or even what their obligations might be.

"The next 25 years is really about, how do you present this kind of work and what does that mean?"

Christman wants to challenge the "unhealthy environments" that such artists as Coltrane and Ra worked in and which persist today, from inequitable finances to poor living conditions. Christman and company helped with much needed renovations to the Sun Ra house in 2021 and more recently have been working with the Coltrane family on an upcoming exhibition and to restore the saxophonist's Philadelphia home, a National Historic Landmark that has fallen into disrepair.

Calling John Coltrane "the architect of the greatest American invention," Christman said the house stands as an example of the injustices musicians labor under. Coltrane bought the house in 1952 and retained it until the end of his life. Today, it's falling apart.

"The house is in a very sad state," Christman said. "It's a reminder that there's a lot of healing and work that still needs to be done in America."

—Kurt Gottschalk

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TURNTABLE



CROKER'S DREAM... MANIFESTED

BY STEPHANIE JONES PHOTO BY BRUNO BARRETO

Partway through his early set at Smoke Jazz Club, Theo Croker blinks the room back into focus. He leans over the piano. "That was fire," he says to Idris Frederick. The small moment transcends the crowded listening room. It's a moment of tenderness that, in its briefness, exposes the humanity in Croker's music.



n that Sunday night in New York, Croker shared songs from his June release, *Dream Manifest* (Dom Recs). A meditation on what can coexist, Croker's eighth leader album experiments with acoustic, electric and digital layers. On deep grooves, serenity and tension form covalent bonds. Trances become conversations. Beautiful, dreamlike melodies collide with grounding pads and gritty rubs.

Live, the music sparks many bright moments. But the energy on the bandstand eclipses everything. Croker transmits warmth and encouragement to his fellow artists. The audience can't help but receive it, too.

For years, the 39-year-old trumpet player, composer and producer has worked to create a kind of artistic ecosystem within and around his work. It's communal. One person's gesture creates room for someone else's. Before he begins a new project, Croker imagines what he'll create and how those around him can participate in its creation.

"The manifestation begins with you being able to visualize it," says the Florida-based artist, who, in 2022, booked 17 days at The Bunker Studio in Brooklyn — a week to record, 10 days to mix. He didn't have much in hand; he'd sketched out one tune on a sheet of notebook paper. But the band had just wrapped a 90-show run, and Croker had a complete vision for what he wanted to record. He had confidence in his fellow artists. "If I have an idea, we can execute it very quickly — without overthinking. I didn't want to overdo it. As soon as I had an idea and a melody, we did it."

The entire session was a boardroom brainstorm: Honor every idea, banish self-criticism. No concept, no progression was "too simple" to explore, he says. Time and again Croker returned to the principles of manifesting: "If mind is all, and you're looking for inspiration, when it comes, if you don't accept it, you're telling your subconscious, you're telling the universe, 'No, I don't want it.' So I trusted everything that came to me." Once the songs materialized, the experimenting could begin. "Look at 'Pinocchio'; it's straightforward. I don't mean it's easy, but it's straightforward, what it is. Then, when you listen to the record, you're like, 'What are they doing with it?'"

As a producer, Croker deploys different strategies to capture what his mind conjures. "I don't try to match a performance, but I do try to get that same energy and focus," he says. At Bunker, he first sought to make his fellow artists relaxed and comfortable. He needed them to be comfortable. Rather than loops and digital elements, humanness — instincts, second guesses, energies and breakthroughs — would inform the music.

"There might be some loop from a demo that we use as a foundation," says Croker, "but they're all takes. There's no overdubbing person by person or 'just play this loop and chop it.' Really, everything is some portion of a take or a full take." So, how would they get that sound? That groove, that pulsing vibration, that readiness?

To spark the energy of a live performance, Croker directed the artists to play entire songs continuously until they took shape; "64 Joints," which features singer Tyreek McDole, emerged from that live loop.

"There's a 12-bar chord progression that I made out of a sample," says Croker. "I would have that on repeat and I would let [the rhythm section] play over that for like 20 minutes, 15 minutes, without telling them anything. And they're playing; they might stop and use their phone or whatever, but they're in there just locked into that groove." That foundational motion, according to Croker, drives the music into the unknown. "When intuitively it started to turn into something, I'd be like, 'Roll the tape.' I'd go into the booth and we would start the take."

Artists who lean hard on their humanness — their strength and frailty — at some point must confront or embrace vulnerability. Croker was prepared for that. He wanted to feel it in his songs. He wanted listeners to hear it. During his time at Bunker, he took different psychedelics to summon what he knew needed to come out in the music. "I use them as medication," he says. "I'm not bouncing off the walls or hiding under the couch. I know I'm high off of it, and I'm channeling that energy into this song." Another critical benefit of taking psychoactive drugs: "It helps me quiet my ego: 'I gotta impress somebody. What would DownBeat think of the record? What would the critics think? What would the audience - how would we do this live?' All of that shit doesn't matter."

What does matter is the community of artists and loved ones contributing to the music's sound and the album's gesture. *Dream Manifest* convenes members of Croker's past and current ensembles, including Mike King, Eric Wheeler,



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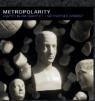








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Michael Shekwoaga Ode and Miguel Marcel Russell, plus guest artists McDole, Estelle, Kassa Overall, MAAD, Gary Bartz, Natureboy Flako, Malaya and multidisciplinary artist and creative director D'LEAU. Working within an ecosystem of skilled, imaginative artists — particularly those who'd been with him on the road — helped Croker activate his vision in real time.

"Usually I'll make a record and then we'll figure out how to make it sound the way you want it," he says. When he recorded his 2021 release BLK2LIFE // A FUTURE PAST and 2022's Love Quantum (both on Star People Nation/Sony Masterworks), Croker and his fellow artists recorded the tracks, then made adjustments. "With Dream Manifest, the drums sound how they sounded at the session," he says. "All those things were locked in while we were creating it, which was instantly giving it that sound. So it was very easy to do it: create it, tweak it, move on."

If the sound on *Dream Manifest* is humanto-human hookup, the mood is tenderness. While intrinsic to "One Pillow" — in Overall's lyric, in the heart-beating drums — qualities of tenderness appear all over the record. On "Prelude 3," Croker's trumpet solo pulls the music into one intimate moment, then another. A laid-all-the-way-back melody line on "Crystal Waterfalls," self-observant, reflec-

tive, gives the entire song room to move. Throughout the album, the music has the notion to lift and cradle the listener.

The motivation behind that tenderness and intimacy, like so much of Croker's music, has layers. "So, here's where it gets personal," he says. When he shifts the conversation to his mother, Croker speaks in soft cadences and matters of fact. "She's incredibly intelligent," in her academic pursuits and achievements, and in daily trials of life. Not long before the session, though, his mother experienced a psychotic episode after a change in her medication dosage. "She was on antidepressants, like most people in America, for 20-something years. And when she didn't take them anymore, it caused a crack in her system."

Suddenly, Croker found himself at a cross-roads. He and his brother were caring for their mother, and the session was approaching. "She was here. And we have to make this record," says Croker. "I can't *not* make this record; if I don't make this record and turn it in, I won't have a way to support my family or spend time with my mother to help figure this out."

When he and his brother brought their mother to the studio, Croker wasn't sure what would happen. Then something amazing took hold. Surrounded by artists and studio engineers, his mother, at last, seemed present. "I'm looking at my mom through a control booth

after six weeks of her being in a complete state of psychosis," says Croker. "I'm watching her be able to ground herself and be present while there's music playing. And the whole band knew it."

While they recorded "Crystal Waterfalls," he remembers thinking, "How far behind the beat can I play? At the same time, I'm watching my mom not walk in circles, not fiddle and be gone. She was able to bring her mind into it." That moment became a testimony for Croker. "Music has this very powerful healing aspect to it, and always has since the beginning of time."

Times of crisis can leave little room for reflection. That settles in later. For Croker, supporting his mother long-term meant learning when to lean out. "Now I see my mother as a human being who had to deal with her own traumas and her own issues from her parents," he says. "She has to heal and deal with her own things. That's helped me heal my own heart ... just seeing my mom as a full human, not someone who owes me something or is responsible for anything." And he continues to reflect: "That's where a lot of that tenderness came from."

The level of presence and honesty Croker achieves on *Dream Manifest* follows micro eras of experimentation and grind. "It took me years to get to the point where I could prac-

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tice a lot of things soft," he says, referencing endless nights spent playing trumpet at a volume lower than the TV in his New York apartment. "At first, it just started off being certain exercises, long tones and things like that, until I could build the muscles to play that soft, not forcing it. I think it really started to click three or four years ago."

Throughout his career, he's worked with Jill Scott, Ari Lennox, J. Cole, Common, Ego Ella May, Uele Lamore, Jazz at Berlin Philharmonic and countless other leaders and style icons. He drew early inspiration from conversations with his Grammywinning grandfather, the late Doc Cheatham. Later on at Oberlin Conservatory, he encountered Bartz and the late Donald Byrd, who became influential instructors. Croker recalls their respective teaching styles with gratitude. Rather than coddle or prod, they encouraged him to make his own discoveries and access his own motivations, which he did alongside Overall and his then-roommate Sullivan Fortner.

Not long after graduating, Croker landed a residency in Shanghai, where he met Dee Dee Bridgewater. The chance encounter would lead

to the most pivotal, unexpected mentorship of his career. "Dee Dee Bridgewater, the jazz singer, made me do this," he says with a twinkle. The legendary bandleader pushed Croker to explore the range of his artistry. "'You're not going to make a straightahead swing record," he remembers her saying, as a matter of fact, after they'd played a number of gigs together. "You need to meld all this stuff together and put out a record that shows all these different faces that you have, and styles that you have.' And that's what set me on that path. Because I was going to go head and make a straightahead record. And she said, 'No, we're not going to do that — that's not the future.' And I'm so grateful to her for that."

Croker considers his trajectory with Bridgewater something of an aspirational tale for young artists. "When Dee Dee signed me, I wasn't walking around looking for a record deal," he says. "I was doing the thing. I was playing 10, 12 shows a week in China with different bands. She happened to be there for a week and met me at the rehearsal and was like, 'Man, show us around. Let me hang with you."

In fact, at many points in his career,

preparation and camaraderie have bonded with a desire to experiment, moving his music to its next level. Somewhere between Star People Nation and BLK2LIFE // A FUTURE PAST, Croker's live sound went through critical changes. "I'd produce these records, but when you would come to the show live, it would be acoustic," he says. During the pandemic, he finally had time to shift his perspective and conceptualize bringing his production voice to life on the bandstand. When he befriended D'LEAU, Croker mentioned his goal to bring out those production elements during his live performances. Without further discussion, D'LEAU went home and began experimenting.

"He basically engineered the setup where I'm using a DJ mixer and Ableton and all the samples from the record and all the tracks from the record and I'm melding that with the live situation," says Croker. "And that's what I've been doing since 2022." He even uses vocal takes when he can't bring singers on tour, again imbuing his digital setup with humanness and room for error: "Every time we play, it's still different. It's tricky."

Even so, Croker keeps it analog. Frequently, artists and listeners alike will ask about his effects. "It's just reverb and delay," he says. "The reverb has two or three buttons; the delay has two or three dials. They're both analog. So I don't know what's going to happen. When I play a note into it, I have to adjust immediately to what I don't know. It's not digital. It's not user friendly. It's experimental friendly. It's creative friendly, in-the-moment friendly."

The brain may work to organize information, but the heart beats for chaos and evolution. That humanness, the people-ness in Croker's music, breaks through the music industry's quantizing and categorizing. "There are lots of records I always go back to," he says. "One is Gato Barbieri's Caliente!, which is very fusion-funky. But Gato Barbieri was an avant-garde jazz saxophonist, playing with growls and squeaks and moans. His shit was free-jazz almost. To hear him in the context of playing "I Want You" by Marvin Gaye, I'm still hearing that guttural, free-jazz tonality on the tenor. But it's this infectious dance groove with it. Genre-wise, it's all these elements happening at the same time that transcend what people think something should or shouldn't be. The way these things are going together, that really fascinates me."

Back on the Smoke bandstand, he calls McDole to the mic. As the singer approaches the stage, Croker works the mixer. Though his focus is on the sounds he's programming, he clocks the audience's response to his guest and smiles. The ecosystem slides and shifts, welcomes one more artist, activates the next unknown.



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Kandace Springs Sings Billie Holiday

BY ALLEN MORRISON PHOTOS BY ELI SETHNA

When it came time to pose for the cover of her new album, Lady In Satin — a tribute to Billie Holiday's 1958 classic LP of torch songs recorded with a full orchestra — the question for Kandace Springs was, "What do I do about the 'fro'?"



prings, a sultry songstress with four previous albums to her credit on Blue Note and other labels, is well known for her luxuriant, copper-colored Afro curls. But to pay homage to Lady Day, the cover concept had her pulling her mane back into a Holiday-esque updo, complete with an artfully placed gardenia on the side.

"My girlfriend came and did my hair, and we winged it," she says. "We actually took the picture right here in my living room. We got a background and pulled it off ourselves. She wet it down real slick and pulled it back and gelled it. And she was like, 'OK, now you're gonna look like Billie."

Kandace Springs reveres Billie Holiday but doesn't sound anything like her. Wisely, she doesn't even try on the new release, which mirrors the original in its song selection and orchestral accompaniment, played by the 60-piece Orquestra Clássica de Espinho from the Portuguese city of the same name. The song list includes such archetypal ballads of heartbreak as "You've Changed," "I'll Be Around," "You Don't Know What Love Is" and "I'm a Fool to Want You."

The 36-year-old vocalist and pianist has sung with many a big band but, prior to *Lady In Satin* (SRP Records), she has not been backed by a symphony orchestra. Known for her smoky, soulful vocal style that channels a range of influences, from Roberta Flack and Nina Simone to R&B masters like Luther Vandross, Springs has previously performed with the Metropole Orkest (Netherlands), WDR Big Band (Germany) and the Pacific Jazz Orchestra (United States).

Her usual vocal accompaniment, however, is her own blues-inflected piano and her two accomplished side women: the Oberlin and Juilliard-educated Caylen Bryant on bass and backing vocals; and drummer Camille Gainer-Jones, who has played in the bands of Diana Ross, Alicia Keys and the late Roy Ayers. The trio is also capable of some ethereal group harmonies, as when Springs calls on them to sing along with her on the coda of "Angel Eyes" in a live version posted to YouTube.

Springs' four previous albums embodied that stripped-down, acoustic jazz esthetic: 2016's *Soul Eyes*, 2018's *Indigo* and 2020's *The Women Who Raised Me* (a tribute to her vocal jazz influences), all on Blue Note, followed by *Run Your Race* (SRP Records) in 2024, which included Bryant and Gainer.

At her house in Nashville, where she was born and raised, she is surrounded by vintage keyboards. The living room, which doubles as a studio, is dominated by a nine-foot 1940 Baldwin concert grand piano. Via Zoom, she showed off her collection of Wurlitzer and Rhodes electric pianos, including one that had

been played by Ray Charles and Lionel Richie. She's also a collector — and restorer — of vintage cars

"I mess with cars still, all the time," she laughs. "I just sold a couple, too, this past week. I love gear, cars and pianos. That's my kryptonite."

Although she performs all over the U.S., and Europe and as far away as Japan and South Africa, Nashville is her place to unwind. "When I meet people in Nashville, they say,

genre — from American songbook standards like "Angel Eyes" and Duke Ellington's "Solitude," to modern R&B and pop classics like "I Put A Spell On You" and "People Make The World Go 'Round" (made famous by the Stylistics), to her own songs, often written with Sturken and Rogers.

The *Lady In Satin* project came along at the right moment. Springs had been wanting to sing more Lady Day songs — her haunting rendition of "Strange Fruit" has been a staple

'You need to stick with your hardcore jazz.' —Prince told Springs

'What do you do?' and I say I'm a singer. Then they ask, 'So, when are you playing next time here?' But I hardly work in Nashville at all. I'm here mostly because my family is here."

Early in her career, when she was signed to Epic Records, she spent a couple of years living in the Murray Hill section of Manhattan, but never quite got used to it. "I'm really a country girl at heart," she says, with a faint twang. "I ended up bringing my big Jeep Wrangler up there from Nashville, driving it everywhere with the big wheels, so at least I'd have a little dose of country. I'd go to the gigs in it."

In 2014, Prince turbocharged her career after he invited her to appear with him at a Paisley Park concert to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the album and film *Purple Rain*. He once remarked that she has "a voice that could melt snow." With the help of her managers, songwriters Carl Sturken and Evan Rogers, she secured an audition with Blue Note's Don Was, leading to a record deal.

Being an entertainer runs in the Springs family: Her father, Kenneth "Scat" Springs, who died in 2021, was a noted singer, often working as a backing vocalist for top-tier artists including Aretha Franklin, Garth Brooks and Vince Gill; he also sang locally with a funky group that did James Brown covers. Young Kandace accompanied him to many of his own gigs and soaked it all in.

Those influences show in her previous albums, which are eclectic. She has an instinct for picking songs from almost any era and

of Springs' repertoire for years — when she received an offer from a Portuguese orchestra to present a Billie Holiday tribute. The Orquestra Clássica de Espinho is an ensemble of mostly young professional and student musicians that evolved from the student orchestra of a Portuguese music conservatory. The concert and subsequent album feature new orchestrations by European arrangers William Goodchild, Nuno Peixoto de Pinho, Daniel Bernardes, Carlos Azevedo, Pedro Moriera and Telmo Marques, all inspired by the Ray Ellis orchestrations for the original Lady In Satin.

From their first rehearsal together, Springs was awestruck by the beauty of the sound. "It was just enchanting," she said. "There's nothing quite like it. It's 60 people working in harmony in the moment. Singing with them is kind of empowering but also humbling at the same time." She likens the feeling to playing on a sports team, "when you make those passes and you get that play — it's like that."

They rehearsed for two days before a concert in the Auditório de Espinho Academia in December 2023. The album used takes from both the rehearsals and concert. Springs was particularly taken with the three young background singers, two female and one male, whose 1950s-style vocals are subtly present in the final mix, adding a period authenticity. "It's so satisfying when you hear that. They were young kids, and their pitch was fantastic. I was like, 'Y'all sound so good. I don't know how you're doing that!"



She decided early on not to imitate or emulate Holiday. Rather, she was convinced that the only way to interpret the songs persuasively was to be true to her own vocal instincts, a style influenced by the great singers who followed Holiday, especially artists like Simone, Flack, Donny Hathaway, Sade and Vandross.

"I can impersonate a lot of people, but I can't really sing like Billie. I decided I'm not even gonna try."

She acknowledges she took risks on the album, singing some licks and runs, and throwing in occasional asides, that Lady Day

wouldn't have imagined. "But I had to make the songs my own," she said. She did extensive preparation over six months. "I sat with each song, singing them over and over. Some I actually learned how to play and sing, like "For All We Know," which now I play in my shows, "You've Changed" and "I'm A Fool To Want You" — oh, I love that song."

She also listened to interpretations by other singers she admires.

"The way Billie interprets a song, sometimes it was a little harder to nail exactly the note she was on. Or she would kind of sing through a note or gloss over it. And so sometimes my brain couldn't quite figure out where it was." That's when she turned to other singers, including Ella Fitzgerald, who could sing melodies as precisely as a piano. "She will sing every note exactly, pretty much, and then she'll ... go off and do her little scat thing and pretty much murder everybody. So, I listened to a lot of Ella's versions, like (her) 'You've Changed.' I listened to Frank Sinatra's version of 'I'll Be Around.' He sings it very clearly. Whew, that man! He could sing."

For Edward Redding's classic "The End Of A Love Affair" she listened to Chaka Khan's version for inspiration; for "I Get Along Without You Very Well," Diana Krall's version. "Diana was an influence on me. Vocally, I didn't take a whole lot from her, but I got inspiration from her as a female singer and pianist. I've been listening to her since I was a little kid. Oh, and Shirley Horn's version of 'But Beautiful' — that's my jam."

In her concerts and her other recordings, selecting the right song has always been crucial, Springs says. She listens broadly and is more interested in finding the right song than staying within a particular genre. "It's whatever moves me. You want to know one that's gonna throw you way off? Coldplay. Their stuff is so moving to me. I listen to them and [pretends to sob and wipe away tears] I'm like, 'Oh, my god, I need to cover this stuff.' If it moves me, I don't care what genre it is. Chris Martin! I know it sounds crazy, but sometimes I feel like I hear a little bit of a Nina Simone in the way he sings some songs, like 'Oceans.' It's very odd; you wouldn't expect it."

Although she's attracted to other styles, her commitment to jazz holds strong. When she first signed with Sturken and Rogers, they experimented with moving into hip-hop, in hopes of drawing a bigger audience. "So, I tried it for a second, but it wasn't really me. My heart was always jazz. Ever since my dad gave me my first Norah Jones CD. And I listened to Nina and Diana and Billie. I just loved jazz. Hip-hop is cool. I like it, but it doesn't move my soul like jazz always did."

Prince and her father, Scat, encouraged her to be true to her first love. "He and my dad were always like, 'You need to stick with your hardcore jazz. The more straightahead stuff is where you shine the most.'

"Prince helped keep me on the right track, with sticking with 'organic' music, playing instruments live, acoustic piano and upright bass, and not overdoing it with [electronics]. That's why we're a trio today, just me and the girls. And we make a lot of noise, just us three. We bring a lot of emotion. So, if you come see our show, you'll laugh, you'll cry a little — everything."



BY JAY SWEET PHOTO BY MARK SHELDON

Pasquale Grasso plays virtuosic guitar in a style that incorporates intricate harmonies and bebop phrasing with a clear, natural, unaffected sound that harkens back to a more classic era.

Hailing from Italy, he has come to be regarded as one of today's most gifted contemporary jazz guitarists, a statement supported by Pat Metheny, who, in a 2016 interview with Vintage Guitar magazine, said, "The best guitar player I've heard in maybe my entire life is floating around now, Pasquale Grasso."





A statement like that — from a master like that — surprised many, including Grasso himself, who reflects: "I remember seeing Pat Metheny for the first time at the Umbria Jazz Festival when I was around 8. I've always appreciated his artistry. We've spent some time together since then, and he invited me to his place several times to play. He doesn't often play standards, but when he does, it's incredible. We jammed a little before the pandemic."

Grasso's skills are easily recognized on his latest trio release, *Fervency* (Sony Music Masterworks), featuring bassist Ari Roland and drummer Keith Balla. The project showcases his evolution as an artist while staying true to his love for bebop, capturing the essence of the group's live performances.

"The record wasn't heavily planned," Grasso explains. "The trio had been on tour with Samara Joy, and when we returned to New York, my manager asked if I wanted to record something with the trio. I thought, 'Yeah, sure.' We had been playing so much together on the road, and it felt like a nice opportunity to capture that period. We traveled worldwide, and it would be great to have something to remember it by. So, we went into the studio for about a dayand-a-half and recorded a few songs we liked.

"The concept was to play some of my favorite bebop tunes, but I also wanted to start introducing a bit of my compositions. People were always asking, 'Do you compose? You never

compose!' So, I added a few of my pieces to the mix. I'm pleased with how it turned out. It has a very live feel — kind of unpolished, but you can hear how the trio interacts and how much we respect and care for each other as musicians. It captures the essence of how we play together."

Grasso's development seems a bit of unsurprising given his inherent early talents and the support system around him at a very young age.

"My parents were big jazz, classical and folk music fans," he says. "My dad moved to Canada when he was around 16 or 17 because he had some family there, and he came to work for six months as a mechanic. When he returned, he brought a bunch of jazz records from the store. So, when my brother and I were born, they would play those records at home, and music was always present. We listened to artists like Charlie Parker, Chet Baker, Dizzy Gillespie, Bud Powell and Thelonious Monk.

"My brother, Luigi, started playing before me because he had asthma and some respiratory issues. The doctor suggested that playing a horn would be a good way for him to exercise. So, my dad asked him, 'Since you like music so much, would you like to try playing the saxophone?' My brother said, 'Yeah, sure,' and he loved it. I became jealous and thought, 'I want to play something, too.' I told my dad, and he said, 'OK, let's go to the store.' When we arrived, my dad, who loved the trumpet, wanted me to play that. But when I saw a guitar on the wall, I

said, 'I want to play that one.' My dad tried to convince me that the guitar would be difficult because I'd need to bring an amplifier, while the trumpet would be easier. But I insisted, 'I don't care, I'll bring my amp. I want to play the guitar.' So, he got me a full-sized classical guitar that was way too big for me, but they didn't have many options. My dad said, 'If I buy this for you, you have to promise me you'll practice every day,' because we didn't come from a wealthy family. I was just a kid, but I loved it, and the fact that my brother was playing, too, made it a game for us to play together every day. I started learning by ear.

"My mom recognized that we had some musical talent, so she got a book to learn how to read music and then taught us. We even got a little piano at some point, and my mom would play notes and say, 'OK, turn around and tell me what notes I'm playing.' We didn't know it then, but we were training our ears. It turned out that my brother and I had perfect pitch because whenever she played a note, we could always guess it correctly."

Grasso proved to be a young child with an old soul by revelling in the guitarists who have influenced him.

"I was obsessed with George Benson," he says. "When I was 4, my dad had a vinyl record of one of George Benson's early recordings with an organ. I played that record so much; I loved his style. My brother eventually said, 'Enough

with George Benson!' When I was really into him, I would stand up and play my solos, singing them like he did. At the time, it wasn't like today, where you can just go online and find millions of records daily. My dad also introduced me to Bud Powell [a musician whose approach Grasso is most often linked to], but Benson and Wes Montgomery were my first guitar heroes. I used to play everything with

And the gigs paid about 50 euros. When I was a kid, I didn't mind because I was working and saving up the money. My parents always made sure I saved.

"To make it work, we'd organize a weeklong tour, but then I'd have to go back to school, or the school would complain. My brother and I loved it. It was my favorite thing to do. My parents would drive us to the gigs, and we were York. You need to see the scene there. There are great musicians. You must be able to play with them and be around musicians who live and breathe the music.' So, my brother and I went. I loved it so much that when I returned home, I told my parents I had to move to New York — and I did, at 19."

It was during these early days in New York that Grasso met the members of his trio.

"The first time I came to New York was in 2009. I came with Luigi and my friend Stefanoni. We went to Small's Jazz Club, where a great band played. I remember thinking, 'Wow, this is incredible. This is the kind of music I love, and there are people here who play it.' I met Ari Roland early on. We already knew about each other because we all had the same teacher, Barry Harris. Barry always told me, 'You should check out this bass player in New York, Ari Roland. He can play anything on the bass.' At the same time, he told Ari, 'You should hear these two brothers from Italy.' Ari even invited me to play at a session the next day.

"I also got to meet Keith [Balla] pretty early on. The great thing about Keith is that, while Ari is a little older, Keith is almost the same age as my brother, just two years older than me. And growing up in Italy, there weren't many people my age who shared the same passion for the music I loved. I never had that connection with any other young guys in Italy, because they all like modern jazz, so meeting someone like Keith was special."

While much of Grasso's work has included solo efforts and reinterpretations of bebop classics, he remains an active sideman, leading him to work with Joy, one of jazz's most prominent and brightest stars.

"The first time I saw Samara was in Barry's class when she was about 15," he says. "She was just a little kid, but I was amazed by her voice. We became friends over the years, and we eventually recorded together. After doing her first album, *Samara Joy* [Whirlwind Records], after COVID, when everyone felt down, we were back on the road, playing all over the U.S and Europe and having a great time."

Grasso played on her next album, *Linger Awhile* (Verve), which won a Grammy for Best Jazz Vocal Album, cementing her place as a rising star in jazz and raising Grasso's visibility. "She's flying high now, and seeing her grow has been an incredible journey," he says.

Pasquale Grasso's journey has been equally incredible, and his status continues to rise, as evidenced by the fact that in 2024, DownBeat recognized him as Rising Star Guitarist of the Year in its International Jazz Critics Poll. He has several exciting new projects and residencies at New York clubs, including Birdland and Mezzrow. Grasso's brand of bebop and swing will undoubtedly continue to garner much-deserved praise.

'She's flying high now, and seeing her grow has been an incredible journey.'

-Grasso on working with Samara Joy

octaves — I loved octaves when I was a kid.

"Then Charlie Christian became one of my favorite guitarists after I listened to Wes Montgomery. I remember reading an article about him where he said he played Charlie Christian solos on the guitar for most of his young life. I thought, 'Oh, I need to hear Charlie Christian.' So, when I was a young teenager, my dad got me a CD of Charlie Christian, and that's when I realized, 'Oh, yeah, this is my new favorite guitar player.'

"Back then, especially in Italy, there weren't many places to buy records. I had just one record, and I would listen to it constantly. I had to learn every song and part. Sometimes, I even learned the bass lines because that's all I had to work with. I'd even try to learn the drum solos. I focused on that one record, one of the best things I could have done. Even now, I don't like listening to many records in a week. I prefer to focus on just one, dive into it and learn all the songs deeply."

Being a young jazz fan in Italy did come with some challenges, especially for a musician mining a more traditional brand of jazz.

"Jazz is loved in Italy, but traditional jazz wasn't in fashion, especially in the 1990s and 2000s. At that time, everything had to be modern and mixed — fusion, funk and more. I didn't mind that music, but it didn't speak to me because I didn't feel connected to it. However, there was a strong but small community of traditional jazz players, and I met many of them through various workshops. About 20 to 25 musicians played that style, but the problem was that they all lived in different places, so to play a gig, everyone had to drive four hours.

excited to learn. Doing it together made it even better."

Another challenge was finding a teacher nearby that could keep up with Grasso's natural gifts and hunger to learn.

"There was a teacher in our town who played all the instruments - piano, saxophone, flute — and he started to teach me a bit, but he would give me piano chords to play on the guitar, which was very challenging because the guitar is a different instrument. Around that time, my brother was participating in a competition in Italy, and that's when I met my first real teacher, Agostino Di Gorgio, who was from New York. He's a fantastic guitar player who was living in Italy at the time, taking care of his grandfather. Agostino was from Astoria, New York, and studied with Chuck Wayne, a great guitarist. Chuck Wayne wrote two beautiful books: one about chords and the other about scales. Agostino had helped him write those books.

"When Agostino lived in Rome, my dad heard him play and liked his style. He thought maybe I should take lessons with him. So, my parents would drive me and my brother to Rome for lessons. After school, we'd drive about three-and-a-half hours from near Naples to Rome to study with him for a full day. Agostino introduced me to Barry Harris."

As with many young musicians, Harris became a significant mentor to Grasso.

"Barry would come to Europe a couple of times a year," Grasso said. "I would follow Barry wherever he went; his concept of music resonated with me, and I loved how he approached it. Barry once told me, 'You have to come to New

KEITH JARRETT



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Gerald Clayton Ones & Twos

BLUE NOTE

On Gerald Clayton's sophomore album for Blue Note Records, he tips his hat to DJ culture. The gesture makes sense, considering the label's long-established history with infiltrating contemporary hip-hop, deep house, broken beat, soul and funk music that helped jazz migrate from Village Vanguard to, say, Nublu. But Clayton's nod to DJ culture is oblique. He doesn't offer easily identifiable hybrid pieces that connect the dots between modern jazz and any of the aforementioned genres.

Specifically, turntablism inspires Clayton on

Ones & Twos. The conceit is Side A's being playable alongside Side B. A lofty idea, indeed. But for those who aren't inclined to roll out a twin set of turntables and purchase two vinyl copies, a conventional listening will have to suffice.

The cuts on Ones & Twos are more captivating than catchy. Clayton's piano serves as the main voice even though he expands his sonic palette with Rhodes and synths. He also corrals a formidable ensemble that includes vibraphonist Joel Ross, trumpeter Marquis Hill and flutist Elena Pinderhughes. With them, the tunes take on a ponderous nature that emphasize diaphanous textures more than vibrant melodies and rugged beats.

Often reminiscent of pianist and producer Kiefer's music on the hip-hop label Stones Throw, or those entrancing interludes on classic Earth, Wind & Fire albums that you'd wished were longer and more fleshed out, Ones & Twos is more memorable for its vibe than boasting any outstanding compositions. In the hands of remixers such as Mark de Clive Lowe or Georgia Anne Muldrow, songs like the Latin-tinged "Cinnamon Sugar" or the shuffling Brazilian meets India ditty "Rush" would probably elicit more fire. But in the context of DJ culture, Ones & Twos brims with opening fodder sans definitive joints. —John Murph

Ones & Twos: Angels Speak; Cinnamon Sugar; Sacrifice Culture; How Much Love?; Count M, Just Above; Lovingly; Rush; For Peace; More Always; Space Seas; Endless Tubes. (44:38)

Personnel: Gerald Clayton, piano, Rhodes, organ, synths, vocals, Joel Ross, vibraphone; Elena Pinderhughes, flute; Marquis Hill, trumpet; Kendrick Scott, drums; Kassa Overall, percussion.

Ordering info: bluenote.com



Kneebody Reach GROUNDUP

Reach is an eager, middle-aged but virtuoso romp from the on-and-off funk-fusion quintet (now a quartet, with Nate Wood covering both drums and bass) whose working history winds back 25 years.

The album comes out punching with a bone-cracking drum figure, as if going for a quick knockout blow, but soon enough finds a balance of contrasts between lively mischief and meandering languor without wishing to be

Ingrid Laubrock
Purposing The Air
PYROCLASTIC

Composer/saxophonist Ingrid Laubrock has long been influenced by the voice. *Purposing The Air* is her fullest realisation of jazz composition for voice yet, featuring 60 pieces performed by vocal and instrumental duos, set to the sparse, impressionistic words of poet Erica Hunt.

The gargantuan tracklist conveys the scope of Laubrock's undertaking. By splitting Hunt's poem *Mood Librarian* into 60 compositions or koans (Zen Buddhist statements), played in 15-track segments by four duos, Laubrock creates kaleidoscopic patterns of voice with cello, piano, guitar and violin. Each pairing serves a specific sonic purpose: Fay Victor's husky, powerful vocalisations sweep across Mariel Roberts' bowed cello, for example, while Sara Serpa's bright falsetto provides a sprightly and energetic pairing with Matt Mitchell's short, sharp piano phrasings.

The overall listening experience of the album is full of contrasting soundscapes and brief, emphatic ideas. Laubrock flexes her compositional skills, showcasing her capacity for angular arrangements as much as languorous melody, yet it can be difficult to immerse yourself in these improvisational pairings that move

limited by classification.

Ben Wendel and Shane Endsley provide the spine of the group as the two solo horns. But this is a fusion combo, where the keyboard of Adam Benjamin has an enlarged electronic presence that wraps the music is a thicker, more chunky ensemble ethos. Though a quartet, it also has a sense of form that creates the illusion of a larger group that tends to shrink the relative space of the soloists. The band casts the more defining musical shadow.

Not that Wendel doesn't push his way to the front erupting with volcanic bombast on "Repeat After Me" and the animated abandon of "Another One." And Shane Endsley's range moves from a brooding melancholy on "Reach" and "Long Walk" to the zig-zag precision of "Top Hat." All have their moments moving between high energy, pining sighs and the occasional side trip into the abyss where "Top Hat" finally leads.

Reach is a studio recording without a studio sound. It magnifies its grooves with layers of electronics and a prominent echo that shrouds it with a somewhat dark, sci-fi quality.

—John McDonough

Reach: Repeat After Me; Reach; Natural Bridge; Glimmer; Another One; Top Hat; Lo Hi; Long Walk; Say So; For DF. (42:10)
Personnel: Ben Wendel, saxophone; Shane Endsley, trumpet; Adam Benjamin, keyboards; Nate Wood, drums, electric bass.

Ordering info: groundupmusic.net



along just as they are developing. The itinerant feel is clearly purposeful, yet the cumulative effect can be overwhelming: The album demands constant attention and a finely tuned ear to be fully understood or appreciated.

—Ammar Kalia

Pyroclastic: Koan 28; Koan 13; Koan 55; Koan 15; Koan 47; Koan 11; Koan 18; Koan 37; Koan 12; Koan 38; Koan 46; Koan 39; Koan 43; Koan 35; Koan 58; Koan 58; Koan 58; Koan 59; Koan 49; Koan 31; Koan 36; Koan 49; Koan 25; Koan 56; Koan 17; Koan 6; Koan 20; Koan 91; Koan 89; Koan 20; Koan 10; Koan 20; Koan 30; Koan 32; Koan 31; Koan 50; Koan 40; Koan 40; Koan 41; Koan 50; Koan 30; Koan 32; Koan 31; Koan 51; Koan 50; Koan 53; Koan 51; Koan 54; Koan 50; Koan 50; Koan 50; Koan 57; Koan 57; Koan 41; Koan 50; Koan 52; Koan 45; Koan 50; Koan 50;

Koan 24; Koan 2; Koan 16; Koan 4. (123:19)

Personnel: Fay Victor (1–15), Sara Serpa (16–30), Theo Bleckmann (31–45), Rachel Calloway, (46–60), voice; Mariel Roberts, cello (1–15), Matt Mitchell, piano (16–30); Ben Monder, guitar (31–45); Ari Streisfield violin (46–60)

Ordering info: ingrid-laubrock.bandcamp.com



Hiromi's Sonicwonder Out There

CONCORD

***1/2

Long past the point where she needs any validation — particularly regarding comparisons to white male musicians — pianist Hiromi Uehara continues to conjure warm memories of Chick Corea. Rather than a diss, that comparison is meant as a compliment of the highest order. Who else approaches the piano with such verve, imagination and joy?

She brings so much exuberance to her work that you can easily forgive the addition of some dated electronic tones on the opening and closing pieces, and her tendency to pack every performance with surprising turns. "Yes! Ramen!!" — a joyous, albeit cliched, romp — epitomizes this approach, with spicy intervals intermingled with some chewier turns. Its energy is overwhelming.

The fourth release by her Sonicwonder quartet — with Adam O'Farrill, Gene Coye, and the extraordinary Hadrien Feraud — Out There defies you not to smile, even if it's at the corny places Uehara sometimes leads listeners. But for every outrageous musical backflip, there's balance in the warm, surging melodicism of "Pendulum," with a welcome guest vocal by Michelle Willis, or the softer instrumental version of the same composition.

Does it all work? As with Hiromi's previous albums, she retains a tendency to get a bit too rococo — a quirk that also characterized some of Corea's work — but who's to fault the occasional burst of synth in today's dark world? Overall, this is a balm that is all but guaranteed to encourage you to focus on the light rather than the gloom. — *James Hale*

Out There: XYZ; Yes! Ramen!!; Pendulum; Balloon Pop; Pendulum; Out There: Takin' Off; Out There: Strollin'; Out There: Orion; Out There: The Quest. (57:01)

Personnel: Hiromi, piano, keyboards; Adam O'Farrill, trumpet, pedals; Hadrien Feraud, bass; Gene Coye, drums; Michelle Willis, vegel (2)

Ordering info: concordrecords.com



Critics	John Murph	John McDonough	Ammar Kalia	James Hale
Gerald Clayton Ones & Twos	***	★★ ½	***½	***
Kneebody <i>Reach</i>	***	***	***	***
Ingrid Laubrock Purposing The Air	** ¹ / ₂	*	****1/2	***
Hiromi's Sonicwonder Out There	**	***	***½	***1/2

Critics' Comments

Gerald Clayton, Ones & Twos

Twelve tranquil, amiably sedating anchor pieces to be completed later by companion contrafacts, if I get Clayton's premise right. An odd experimental downpayment in deferred fulfilment. So, for now, a downpayment on a rating.

—John McDonough

Clayton's latest is inspired by turntablism, creating the possibility that the A and B sides of the record could be played simultaneously. While I wasn't able to try this out in practice, the album's individual tracks are accomplished and tightly constructed, with Clayton's phrases singing alongside Joel Ross' rhythmic vibraphone, Elena Pinderhughes' soaring flute and Kendrick Scott's textural drumming.

—Ammar Kalia

Is it any surprise this feels like a warm embrace when one of the tunes is called "Cinnamon Sugar"? Deep grooves and exceptional work by Joel Ross and Elena Pinderhughes.

—James Hale

Kneebody, Reach

Viagra-strength jazz-rock worthy of a stadium stage.

—John Murph

Back with their first album in six years and an altered lineup featuring drummer Nate Wood simultaneously on electric bass, Kneebody is typically punchy and experimentally electronic. A welcome return.

—Ammar Kalia

Big rhythm movement and a hot mix make *Reach* seem like a time machine with the dials set to 1974 — in the most complimentary sense possible. —*James Hale*

Ingrid Laubrock, Purposing The Air

Music of an acquired taste that demands required reading.

—John Murph

Laubrock finds a nexus of poetry and music in a netherworld of ars gratia artis whose musical, verbal and often silent logic is so frigidly astringent and emotionally severe, it collides sharply with the ear's sense of grammar. Credit the players who navigate the awkward ambiguities.

—John McDonough

Koans are divisive; the human voice, too. The four distinct approaches presented here are also likely to find both fan and foe. My ear leaned in for the Bleckmann/Monder offerings on the form, but cooled on the others.

—James Hale

Hiromi's Sonicwonder, Out There

Aggressive virtuosity in need of more streamlined compositions.

—John Murph

Spins simple musical molehills into skyscrapers of Lisztian athletics that could make the piano an Olympic event in '28. Since there's nothing Hiromi can't do — pirouettes, percussion, boogiewoogie, even Petersonian swing — she does it all. The Wow! factor is well-earned.

—John McDonough

A journey through synth-funk, hip-hop swing and soaring, soulful melodies, showcasing the group's concise interplay by switching grooves and trading solos at will without once losing their sense of momentum.

—Ammar Kalia

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ROLAND KIRK QUARTET

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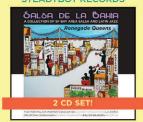
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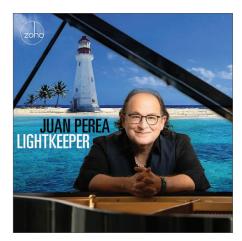
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Juan Perea Lightkeeper zoho

★★★½

Juan Perea is a seasoned pianist who knows his way around the keyboard and his versatility shines with indisputable brilliance on his debut release *Lightkeeper*. Debut? Yep, at 68: an arrival delayed in part by his practice of law. If his finesse in the legal arena matches his prowess on the piano, then he's a top-flight attorney. The opening track, "Oye Como Va," is a well-known Tito Puente jewel that brackets the album, and here it gets a fresh rhythmic gloss. Much of the

luster is administered by alto saxophonist Eric Marienthal and Dean Brown's sizzling runs on guitar.

Lightkeeper is a melange of styles and reflections, and while Perea pays tribute to Lyle Mays and McCoy Tyner, the music has a basic Latin pulse — that is, when the group isn't teasing out bits of fusion and French impressionism. Two versions of the title tune have hints of Ravel, Satie and Faure. The mood and tempo is even more pronounced when Perea eases into "Remembering." A forlorn, elegiac color pervades this tune, enhanced by his lilting arpeggios, and the pianist's yearning is pushed into deeper reverie by Gary Haase's haunting bass and Tom Brechtlein's tender touch on drums.

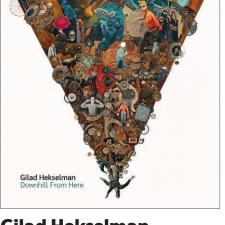
There's a relaxed, laidback feeling on "City Swing" that shifts into high gear once Brown's luscious licks on guitar settles in the groove, creating an almost partylike atmosphere.

The judge and jury may be out on Perea's next case, but the verdict on Lightkeeper is a unanimous thumbs up. —Herb Boyd

Lightkeeper: Oye Como Va (Radio Edit); LyleStyle; El Sueno; Tyner Tune; City Swing; Remembering You; Lightkeeper; Oye Como Va; Lightkeeper II. (49:49)

Personnel: Juan Perea, piano, keyboards; Eric Marienthal, alto saxophone; Dean Brown, guitars; Gary Haase, (1, 3, 6, 8), Hadrien Feraud (2), Janek Gwizdala (4), Jimmy Haslip (5), bass; Tom Brechtlein, drums; Steve Thomton percussion.

Ordering info: zohomusic.com



Gilad Hekselman Downhill From Here

LA RESERVE

The Israeli-born, New York-based guitarist finds himself in regal company on his 12th album as a leader. Alongside veteran bassist Larry Grenadier and the remarkably gifted drummer Marcus Gilmore, the trio tackles a program of six Hekselman originals, one dreamy Burt Bacharach cover ("Alfie") and a moving rubato take on a beloved Israeli folk classic (Nachum Heiman's "Like A Wildflower").

Hekselman's intimate style often has him playing with low dynamics, a delicate touch and a refined clarity of tone. But on the adventurous title track, he comes out of the gate with an array of tantalizing echo and looping effects to set a surreal mood behind Gilmore's surging undercurrent and Grenadier's fundamental bass pulse. The guitarist wails with abandon on this free-jazz swinger as things heat up midway through.

The gentle ballad "Navand" effectively combines acoustic and electric guitars as Gilmore sets a more delicate dynamic with sensitive brushwork. Grenadier's resonant bass solo here is particularly striking while the leader's flowing, lyrical approach on that tune and "Be Brave" are in the Pat Metheny camp. Gilmore's tour de force polyrhythmic whirlwind at the end of the latter tune shows why he is so highly regarded by bandleaders like Metheny, Vijay Iyer, Sullivan Fortner and Lakecia Benjamin.

Turning unapologetically aggressive, Hekselman cranks on the distortion/compression pedal on "Wise Man," which stands as another incredibly interactive drumming showcase for Gilmore. The guitarist also reprises "Scoville," his earthy tribute to role model John Scofield, which appeared on 2020's *Trio Grande*.

—Bill Milkowski

Downhill From Here: Downhill From Here; Navanad; Be Brave; Alfie; Wise Man; Seeing You; Scoville; Like A Wildflower. (44:00) **Personnel:** Gilad Hekselman, guitar, composer; Larry Grenadier, bass; Marcus Gilmore, drums.

Ordering info: lareserverecords.com

Kaisa's Machine Moving Parts

**1/2

In a sense all bands function like machines, a set of interlocking parts with specific functions that work together to produce a unified output, and that's clearly what the New Yorkbased Kaisa Mäensivu envisioned when she named her own ensemble, as well as its third album. Indeed, her sleek quartet operates with a machine-like precision here, tackling seven original pieces that offer a dichotomy of moods reflecting the chill of her homeland and the frenetic pace of her adopted city. There's no faulting the technical excellent of her group nor her airtight arrangements, but at the same time it's hard not hear the group name as something indicative of an almost mechanical approach to music, where the material feels closer to a challenging exercise rather than a deep creative expression.

Moving Parts captures a highwater mark of Mäensivu's artistry, but beyond the craft, it all feels weirdly insular, its polished veneer dazzling the ears but revealing little under the hood. At its best, as on the haunting "Moon Waves," there's an impressive marriage of groove and melody, but too often the emotional content feels like a contrivance, a projection



of what high-level jazz should sound like rather than a transmission of the leader's personal voice. It's difficult to level any criticism at the remarkable sound Mäensivu, pianist Eden Ladin, guitarist Max Light, and vibist Sasha Berliner achieve together, but when guest saxophonist Melissa Aldana steps up on "Origin Story," she brings the band's lack of personality into stark relief.

—Peter Margasak

Moving Parts: Tykytys; Midnight Sun; Origin Story; Moon Waves; Who's Asking; Satama (Harbor); Best Keep Secrets. (39:55)
Personnel: Kaisa Mäensivu; bass; Eden Ladin, piano; Max Light, guitar; Sasha Berliner, vibraphone; Joe Peri, drums; Melissa Aldana, tenor saxophone (3); Maja Mannila, vocals (6).

Ordering info: greenleafmusic.com



The Hemphill Stringtet The Hemphill Stringtet Plays The Music Of Julius Hemphill OUT OF YOUR HEAD

There's no denying the refined artistry of violinists Curtis Stewart and Sam Bardfeld, violist Stephanie Griffin and cellist Tomeka Reid, performing together as The Hemphill Stringtet. The Hemphill Stringtet Plays The Music Of Julius Hemphill gives welcome visibility to composer and alto saxophonist Hemphill (1938–95), while also offering an exhilarating look into the collective experience of these exceptional musicians.

Peter Madsen Trio Faces Of Love

***1/2

With *Faces Of Love*, pianist Peter Madsen has made 13 albums under his name, going back to 1993's *Snuggling Snakes*. His new trio album serves as welcome return and rebound for this distinctive jazz pianist, with 11 compositions diverse yet unified enough to cohere into an album-sized musical storyline.

Here, Madsen drew inspiration from poetry of different cultures and epochs, based around variations on the theme of love. But the proof of persuasion is Madsen's purely musical fruits, in fluid collusion with bassist Herwig Hammerl and drummer Martin Grabner. The album also provides a fertile showcase for Madison's gifts as a propulsive and fleet-fingered improviser, although he sometimes seems restrained by the taut rigors of his song structures.

Madsen spices up his tunes with sophisticated harmonic designs and odd time signatures, like the 7/4 pulse of the opening "The Garden Of Love" and "The Flowers And My Love," and the metric gambits in "Ecstasy" and "Love is a Fire that Burns Unseen." The prevailing atmosphere becomes briefly more modal, open and contemplative on "Sadness," referencing Confucius. Here, stacked fourths and coloristic percus-

The Stringtet brings various instincts and creative spirits to the improvised solos, duets and cadenzas heard in five of the seven tracks, placing the music well beyond tribute territory. The tonal distinction between saxophone and strings on the four non-"Mingus Gold" pieces isn't as wide a chasm as it seems. Still, there's a slight loss of the warm sonic density that would be present with a saxophone quartet. Occasionally, Hemphill's writing is almost too stable, as the repetitious motif of "Choo Choo" will demonstrate.

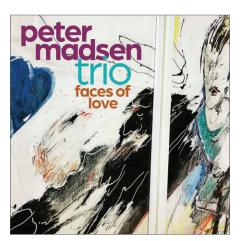
Conversely, the most cacophonous aspects of some tracks reveal the quartet's penchant for controlled chaos. Controlled because the disorder is more so due to loud dynamics and rapid overlapping notes than genuine harmonic discord. "Mingus Gold: Nostalgia In Times Square" stands out in this regard. A cultivated sense of frenzy heightens the energy of music, thus fostering the feeling of immersion within the iconic New York setting. It's this ability to walk the line between true musical bedlam and the perception thereof that shows the Stringtet's striking unspoken unity.

—Kira Grunenberg

The Hemphill Stringtet Plays The Music Of Julius Hemphill: Revue; Mingus Gold: Nostalgia in Times Square; Mingus Gold: Alice In Wonderland; Mingus Gold: Better Get Hit In Your Soul; My First Winter/Touchic; Choo Choo. (45:45)

Personnel: Curtis Stewart, Sam Bardfeld, violin; Stephanie Griffin, viola: Tomeka Reid. cello.

Ordering info: outofyourheadrecords.com



sion do lean eastward, towards the vicinity of ancient China. The Shakespeare-inspired "My Mistresses Eyes Are Nothing Like The Sun" is an exoticized blues for Chick Corea-like unison lines in the margins. The generous set closes with the brewing intensity of "Wild Night–Wild Nights," bowing to Emily Dickinson's sentiments but musically steeped in Spanish swagger and Corea-isms.

—Josef Woodard

Faces Of Love: The Garden Of Love; Air And Angels; Ecstasy; My Mistresses Eyes Are Nothing Like The Sun; I'm Not Yours; The Flowers And My Love; Defeated By Love; Let Thine Eyes Whisper; Love Is A Fire That Burns Unseen; Sadness; Wild Nights. (70:06)

Personnel: Peter Madsen, piano; Herwig Hammerl, bass; Martin

Ordering info: petermadsen.us



Ben Patterson Jazz Orchestra Mad Scientist Music

ORIGIN

With its latest release, the Ben Patterson Jazz Orchestra brings a ton of energy and perspective. Emanating from the large ensemble format, Patterson's compositions are arranged in nuanced and exciting ways, delivering on the promise of issuing from the brain of a "mad scientist."

The opening salvo, "We're Back Baby," comes straight at us from the first few notes punctuated by trumpeter Brian MacDonald. The rhythm never dies, but the arrangement offers more than just constant "swing." On "Always," the band moves through emotional territory with a similar level of verve, followed by "The Mixup," a blues number, which finds the orchestra right at home in the idiom. Yet finding a home in that sound is not all the orchestra is about.

A trombonist well-known for his work with the Airmen of Note, this is Patterson's third big band effort following the creation of the orchestra in 2016. *Mad Scientist Music* is a companion to the 2024 record *Groove Junkies*, and on both releases, Patterson's arrangements demonstrate that this format needn't be a vehicle to conserve the jazz of yesteryear.

As Patterson continues to draw from a diverse palate and a crew of gifted players, the orchestra could find its place in league with more established acts in the ecosystem of large ensemble jazz. A tune like "The Misinformation Age," with its deft use of the percussion of Fran Vielma and the vocal "instrumentation" of Emily Davies, is the strongest indication that a new perspective on big band jazz is afoot.

—Joshua Myers

Mad Scientist Music: We're Back Baby; The Misinformation Age; Always: The Mixup; Anne Marie; Just 'Cuz. (40:48) Personnel: Antonio Orta, alto and soprano saxophone; Mike Cemprola, alto saxophone, flute, clarinet; Tedd Baker, Xavier Perez, tenor saxophone: Doug Morgan, baritone saxophone, bass clarinet; Bill Mulligan, flute (3), darinet (2); Brian MacDonald, Kevin Burns; Luke Brandon, Alec Aldred, trumpet; Ben Patterson, Kevin Cerovich, Dave Perkel, trombone; Ben Polk, bass trombone; Shawn Purcell, guitar, Chris Ziemba, piano; Paul Henry, bass; Todd Harrison, drums, percussion; Fran Vielma, congas, tamboras de fulia, percussion (2); Emily Davies, vocals (2).

Ordering info: originarts.com

International Big Band/ BY MARTIN JOHNSON

Worldwide Jazz at Large

It's been many decades since big bands were dominant, but large ensemble music never went away. Thanks to institutional support, organizational commitment and, above all, composers and improvisors who continue to find inspiration and even transcendence in large ensemble jazz, the form continues to grow and adapt to new trends. That trend is evident stateside, but some of the most interesting orchestral jazz recordings have come from abroad with a range of approaches — some integrating extrinsic genres and others diving deep into the modern big band traditions.

For instance, on Storytelling Night: The Music Of Daniel Mester (BJO; ★★★½ 66:44), the Budapest Jazz Orchestra with ace reedman Tony Lakatos showcases Mester's compositions, which reflect the smartly layered sounds of Thad Jones arrangements as well as the arch storytelling of Gil Evans. But this music is no exercise in nostalgia: The rhythmic acuity in songs like "Bye Stars Hello Wars" (an uncomfortably prescient title) feel very present-day. Although Mester's songs are superb, the best showcase of the band's facility comes in their take on the Miles Davis classic "All Blues." Rather than drown the tune's innate delicacy, they highlight it, alternating austere passages with deft solos.

Ordering info: mesterdaniel.com

On its eighth recording, East Meets West: **Connections** (Chronograph; *** 49:19), the Winnipeg Jazz Orchestra also builds on the sturdy Jones/ Evans cornerstones of modern orchestral iazz. The title and the recording highlight the work of two excellent Canadian composers, Vancouver-based Fred Stride and Montreal's Jean-Nicolas Trottier. Trottier's compositions are innovative in their use of the sections; his "Echoes From Within" is a short piece for unaccompanied trombones. Stride's work surrounds his soloists with waves of sound and unabashed momentum on "Halfway Point." The WJO is a potent reminder of the wealth of talent north of the border.

Ordering info: winnipegjazzorchestra.com

On its latest *Bluegrass* (MCG, ****
53:59), the WDR Big Band, under the direction of saxophonist Bob Mintzer, collaborates with violinist Darol Anger and mandolinist Mike Marshall for a recording that reveals the commonalities between what may be perceived as disparate genres. The WDR will celebrate its 80th anniversary next year, but some of the music here is redolent of a classic from shortly after its formation: *Guitar Forms* (Verve), the stellar



1965 Kenny Burrell recording where the legend is joined by the Gil Evans Orchestra on several tracks. Like that recording, this one underscores the adaptability of roots music into a jazz context.

Ordering info: mcgjazz.bandcamp.com

British saxophonist Josephine Davies is best known for her work with her trio Satori, but on her latest recording, The Celtic Wheel Of The Year Suite (Ubuntu; $\star\star\star$ ½ 53:13), she's created the 17-piece Enso Ensemble for an eight-part suite honoring ancient Celtic seasonal festivals. The music reflects the darkness of winter, the renewal of spring, the bounty of summer harvests and both the autumn and winter equinoxes. The music blends the sumptuous harmonies in each of the instrumental sections and highlights the moods of the seasons. Particularly impressive is the brooding intro to "Gaia's Breath," a dedication to the winter solstice.

Ordering info: josephinedaviescomposer.bandcamp.com

On Idris Ackamoor's latest recording. Artistic Being (Strut; *** 98:19), he's assembled a large ensemble that he calls an Ankhestra, and elicited Danny Glover and Rhodessa Jones to narrate several segments. Ackamoor has been one of iazz's most devoted Afro-futurists, and this music embodies what the Art Ensemble of Chicago proudly called "great Black music from the ancient to the future." There are elements of several Afrodiasporic styles, with rumbling bass lines intertwining with pithy violin licks. The recording was made at a concert during February 2024 in San Francisco, and the live setting gives Glover and Jones' narration increased drama and weight and lends power to the solos. In a moment where the nation faces a new Jim Crow era, this music counts as a furious document of resistance.

Ordering info: idrisackamoor.bandcamp.com



Macie Stewart When The Distance Is Blue INTERNATIONAL ANTHEM

Multi-instrumentalist, composer, arranger and singer Macie Stewart has worked with a long list of musicians across genres, including SZA (R&B), Jeff Tweedy (alt-rock), Japanese Breakfast and Mannequin Pussy (indie rock), and artists working to expand jazz's parameters like Makaya McCraven and Alabaster DePlume. Her previous album, *Mouth Full Of Glass*, was a collection of gently sung songs performed on acoustic guitar, with strings and horns giving them fullness and life. When The Distance Is Blue is very much not that.

These six pieces and two short interludes are almost entirely instrumental, except when the voice is an instrument, and they are primarily performed on a few different prepared pianos and by a string quartet that features Stewart on violin and her longtime creative partner Lia Kohl (they have multiple duo releases) on cello. Several tracks also incorporate field recordings and natural sounds, and work with the space in which they were recorded as a compositional element: "Stairwell (Before And After)" features wordless vocals recorded in a stairwell at the Philharmonie de Paris, and one can hear not only the echoes within the space but the sound of Stewart's footsteps on the stones.

Other tracks feature the sounds of a fish market, an airport, a crowd of laughing children, and "Disintegration" lives up to its title, as the string quartet seems to fade into hiss and distortion as the piece ends. This music acknowledges no genre, and it's enraptured by the properties of sound. Listeners should approach it in that spirit.

—Phil Freeman

When The Distance Is Blue: I Forget How To Remember My Dreams; Tsukiji; Murmuration-Memorization; Spring Becomes You, Spring Becomes New; Stainwell (Before And After); What Fills You Up Won't Leave An Empty Cup; In Between; Disintegration. (38:02) Personnel: Macie Stewart, piano, prepared piano, violin, voice, field recordings; Lia Kohl, cello; Whitney Johnson, viola; Zach Moore, double bass

Ordering info: intlanthem.com



Adrian Younge Something About April III JAZZ IS DEAD

***1/2

When multi-instrumentalist and composer Adrian Younge created the first chapter of the *Something About April* trilogy in 2011, he was surprised at the impact his psychedelic soul and cinematic instrumental project had across

genres, especially hip-hop. The second installment of the trilogy was reminiscent of the soul music popular from 1968 to '73.

With Something About April III, Younge completes the trilogy, exploring Brazil's musical heritage and working with some Brazilian music legends, sifting through rare records to create what might be regarded as his magnum opus. To make this project culturally meaningful, Younge went as far as writing the lyr-

ics in Portuguese.

The recording is an ear-pleasing collision of sound and story about a young lovestruck Black Brazilian couple struggling to preserve their love against all odds. Fused with a 30-piece orchestral arrangement, breakbeats, analog synths and Brazilian psychedelia, each track unfolds warmly and dreamily. Brazilian vocalists Céu, Luiza Lian and Miguel Lian Leite add to the project's authenticity.

"Esperando Por Você" and "Nunca Estranhos" are emotional high points, show-casing Younge's command of orchestration and analog tone, while "O Som Do Amor" sounds like a lost Brazilian soul classic reinterpreted through a cosmic lens.

Younge admits that this is the album he wanted to make when he created the first album in 2011 but didn't have the musical knowhow or reach to mold the sounds that were buried deep inside him. Getting to that point can take considerable time to manifest. Now more musicians will have this cool collection of records for their own purposes.

—Veronica Johnson

Something About April III: A Musica Na Minha Fantasia; Som do Amor, Poxa Meu Amor, Nos Somos as Estrelas; Ainda Preciso do Sol; Esperando por Voce; Nossas Sombras; Nunca Estranhos; Sorrir na Chuva. (25:14)

Personnel: Adrian Younge, drums, bass, guitars, electric sitar, electric harpsichord, Hammond B-3 organ, Fender Rhodes, mellotron, celeste, tubular bells, percussion; Antonio Pinto, Manu Julian, Céu, Luiza Lian, Miguel Lian Leite, vocals.

Ordering info: adrianyounge.bandcamp.com





Sheldon Agwu Kintsugi INDEPENDENT RELEASE

A producer and session musician based in London, multi-instrumentalist Sheldon Agwu definitely knows how to use instrumental texture to create a mood. "Blighty," the second track on this debut album, smears diaphanous chords over gated snare and a lumbering dub bass to set the stage for a short, jazzy guitar solo, while "Airbender" applies layers of fog-like reverb to turn its short, looped guitar patterns into swirling clouds of sound. Even the barely amplified

guitar of "Unsung Heroes" takes on an otherworldly quality, thanks to the whispering background noise and some deft digital delay.

As a display of studio prowess, it's impressive. But as an album, *Kinstugi* is all form and no content. Agwu's melodic ideas tend to be repeated rather than developed, while the rhythmic content rarely stretches beyond the predictability of a practice loop. To his credit, most of these nine tracks are kept to three minutes or less, and thus avoid the noodling, meditations-on-nothingness approach that made André 3000's *New Blue Sun* so tedious.

Although many tracks seem more like sketches than fully formed songs, "This Infinite Dream I Call You," by vocalist Ylenia Tilli, is a notable exception, boasting enough thematic development to show just what Agwu can do with compositional form.

Still, it's hard not to wish there was more. Yes, the carefully layered title track cleverly mimics the Japanese art for which it's named, using golden technique to bring together shards of sound. But on the whole, it's like Gertrude Stein's take on Oakland: There's no there there.

—I.D. Considine

Kintsugi: Kinstugi; Blighty; Providence; Airbender; Serendipity; This Infinite Dream I Call You; Meditation Ribbon Dance; Unsung Heroes; Archean. (26:20)

Personnel: Sheldon Agwu, guitar, bass, drums, voice, electronics, programming; Marius Max, tenor saxophone (1); Ylenia Tilli, vocals (7).

Ordering info: sheldonagwumusic.com

Tal Yahalom Mirror Image ADHYÂROPA

It's a couple of years since Yahalom's *Solo Standards* came out, and a bunch since *Strange Protagonists* marked him down as a new name to watch on guitar. It always seems like faint praise to emphasise a musician's arranging skills rather than the excitement they generate as a soloist, but it's the shape and trajectory of the guitarist's work that always impresses rather than any firecracker solos or technical dazzlements. It's the same with this new disc, with its small, unusual ensemble and air of not running with any of the current stylistic packs.

The plucked ostinato rhythm that signals "KIM" is typical of Yahalom's ability to deliver maximum impact with the most limited means. "Tri-Tonal" has the same effect, seeming to emerge out of a simple count and a couple of chord shapes, while "Sleepless" plays with a wakeful and gently restless lullaby line. Yahalom can paint a picture, as with "Dusk On The Landwehr Canal," his clean, neat guitar notes hanging in the air like ribbons of mist.

So, while quite clearly this isn't a record to turn to if your main priority is pyrotechnics,



its satisfactions run steady and deep right through. We wouldn't be startled to hear that Yahalom claims Ralph Towner as an influence, but also wouldn't be taken aback if he were to eschew any debt to a predecessor. This is music that has emerged out of a highly personal vision and it's all the stronger for its avoidance of easy critical categorization.

—Brian Morton

Mirror Image: Prelude; Hymn For Tomorrow; KIM; Tri-Tonal; Sleepless; Chorinho For Tati; Sophianic Mess; The Boat Drifts Still; Dusk On Landwehr Canal. (50:04)

Personnel: Tal Yahalom, guitar; David Leon, alto saxophone, flute; Ledah Finck, violin; Irene Han, cello; Rogerio Boccato, percussion

Ordering info: adhyaroparecords.com



Altin Sencalar *Unleashed*

POSI-TONE

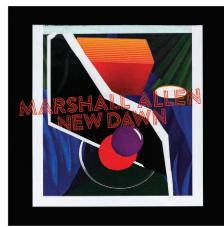
In his program notes for *Unleashed*, Altin Sencalar's eighth album (and third for Posi-Tone), the 30-year-old trombonist without false modesty calls attention to his chance-taking: "specifically playing trombone in an aggressive manner that showcases both my vision and a soloist and as an up-and-coming innovator," including "my love for playing at difficult tempos, extended ranges, passages that are unusual for trombone, some extended techniques."

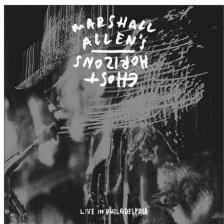
In self-describing his instrumental prowess, Sencalar is telling nothing but the truth — he's a crushingly strong player, whether gobbling changes at high velocities (the title track and "Solid Gold," a gnarly line by Michael Dease, his Michigan State University mentor, who titled it to signify on Sencalar's Turkish forename) or portraying emotional vulnerability ("Forgiveness" and "Obsession"). But what most impresses this observer is Sencalar's mature command of "dearth writing," as Benny Golson described the task of eliciting maximum color from a small ensemble. There isn't a throwaway track on the well-plotted-out 10-track program, recorded in a single June 2024 session with a sextet of A-listers propelled by grandmasters Boris Kozlov on bass and E.J. Strickland on drums. Sencalar pairs the trombone with Gregory Tardy's clarinet on his bolero-esque original "Buenaventura" and Eric Dolphy's "17 West" (on which Dolphy played flute), addressed with a second-line groove, and Bruce Williams' soprano saxophone on an apropos reharm of "Softly As In A Morning Sunrise." Throughout the proceedings, he interacts with vibraphonist and label-mate Behn Gillece, whose spikily percussive comping and nuanced tonal dynamics he exploits throughout. —Ted Panken

Unleashed: Unleashed; Obsession; Forgiveness; Set Adrift; 17 West; Solid Gold; Buenaventura; Straight Street; Softly, As In A Morning Sunrise; What's Next. (59:27)

Personnel: Altin Sencalar, trombone; Greg Tardy, tenor saxophone, clarinet; Bruce Williams, flute, alto saxophone, soprano saxophone; Behn Gillece, vibraphone; Boris Kozlov, bass; E.J. Strickland, drums.

Ordering info: posi-tone.com





Marshall Allen's Ghost Horizons Live In Philadelphia ARS NOVA WORKSHOP/OTHERLY LOVE

Marshall Allen is one of jazz's last survivors from the Greatest Generation. Born in 1924, he served in France during World War II and subsequently studied at the Paris Conservatory of Music. He joined Sun Ra's Arkestra in 1958 and ascended to leadership of the band in 1995, a position he still holds. Currently 100 years old, Allen has taken on a new guise as a solo artist, albeit one whose work remains infused with Ra's cosmic optimism.

Both New Dawn and Live In Philadelphia are collaborative efforts involving members of the Sun Ra Arkestra. Week-End commissioned the former specifically to observe Allen's centennial. Arkestra member Noel Scott helped select material from his compositions over the years, and other members of the band play on the record. Live In Philadelphia documents Ghost Horizons, a concert series that Arkestra guitarist DM Hotep set up at Solar Myth to give Allen a

regular gig after health issues forced him off the road in 2022. It features Hotep, Allen and a few other Arkestra members improvising with figures from contemporary rock and jazz as well as the noise underground.

New Dawn combines Arkestral horns with a string section. Lush orchestration amplifies the wistfulness of the title track and the Latintinged "African Sunset." This is not a revisit to the bracing chaos of Ra's Strange Strings so much as a nod to the lineage of Charlie Parker With Strings. But if Allen waxes persuasively balladic on "New Dawn," on "African Sunset" he uses his electronic instruments to confer a pleasantly hallucinatory gloss. "Are You Ready" is a big, bluesy shuffle that could easily fit into the current Arkestra's set; it's a pleasantly disposable toe-tapper with a string of solid solos. Far stronger are "Boma," which weaves blaxploitation strings into Jamaladeen Tacuma's Afrobeat-style arrangement, and a dub-tinged treatment of the Arkestra chestnut "Angels And Demons At Play."

The concerts from which Live In Philadelphia is sourced took place between 2022 and early 2024: preceding the session that produced New Dawn. The performances are stylistically diverse but united by exuberance and high engagement. Allen trades raw, emphatic alto bursts with Hotep's stinging, echo-shrouded flurries over a furiously swinging cadence supplied by Luke Stewart and Chad Taylor on the opener "Seductive Fantasy." The two take to Wolf Eyes' corroded electronics on "Back To You" as naturally as they do to Charlie Hall and James McNew's motorik groove on "Square The Circle" and the early-'70s fusion churned up by Brian Marsella, Immanuel Wilkins and Taylor on "Slip Stream." Of the two recordings, Live In Philadelphia makes the stronger case for Allen's readiness to inhabit the moment, no matter what it brings. —Bill Meyer

Sonny's Dance; Boma; Angels And Demons At Play. (40.44).

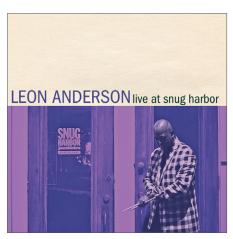
Personnel: Marshall Allen, EWI, alto saxophone, kora; Knoel Scott, baritone saxophone, clarinet, congas, drums; Cecil Brooks, trumpet, Bruce Edwards, guitar, Jamaladeen Tacuma, Richard Hill, Joseph Richard Carvell, bass; George Gray, drums; Owen Brown Jr, Akiko Arendt, Derek Washington, Elias Fledmann, violin; Michael Ireland, Vasileios Vasileiadis, viola; Ilekgra-Despoina Stevi, cello; Jorik Bergman, flute; Neneh Cherry, voice (3).

Ordering info: mexicansummer.com

Live In Philadelphia: Seductive Fantasy; Back To You; We'll Wait For You/Hit That Jive, Jack; The Last Transmission; Stay Lifted; On solar Planes; Space Ghost; The Hills; Square The Circle; In The Silence Of The Infinite; Cosmic Dreamers, Ode To Elegua; The Unknown; Warn Them; Slip Stream; Tachyons Flux From The Cosmic Blueprints; Rindima, (82,55).

Personnel: Marshall Allen, alto saxophone, Casio VL-Tone, EVI, vocals, DM Hotep, electric guitar, electric kalirmba, vocals, Elliott Levin, saxophone, flute; Luke Stewart, Eric Revis, bass; Michael Ray, trumpet, keyboard, vocals; Tcheser Holmes, drums, Gwen Laster, violin; Jan Jeffries, Mikel Patrick Avery, Chad Taylor, drums, percussion; Melanie Dyer, viola; Tara Middleton (Jupiter Girl Blue), vocals, effects; Dave Davis, trombone; Brian Marsella, keyboards; Immanuel Wilkins, saxophone, electronics; Charlie Hall, drums, percussion, Mellotron; James McNew, bass, electronics, sampler, Wolf Eyes: Nate Young, crash pad, vocals; John Olson, electronics, pipes, Ade Ilu Lukumi Bata Ensemble: Kevin Diehl, Batá drum, chorus; Joseph Toledo, lead vocals, percussion; Esteban "Tongo" Hernandez, Batá drum, chorus; Christian Noguera, Batá drum, chorus; Kash Killion, cello, sarangi.

Ordering info: otherlyloverecords.bandcamp.com



Leon Anderson *Live At Snug Harbor*OUTSIDE IN

Live albums are funny things, especially in the annals of jazz history. We're usually referring to albums that were recorded on a stage in front of an audience, bringing in all the energy that moment can capture, not in a studio

There are exceptions. But for most music fans, live albums, at their very best, capture the ambiance and aura of the proverbial smoky bar (or, perhaps, far-flung festival). For Leon Anderson, it's like home.

Anderson's *Live At Snug Harbor* is debut album from the drummer and composer, an educator who played many a night in support of Victor Goines and Ellis Marsalis at the venerable New Orleans Jazz Club. Soon enough, he was booked and busy enough to play there four to five times a week.

This album, thusly, captures the essence of a man in comfortable in his living room. A man stretching out and holding court.

Each tune is spread out like a Sunday paper by late afternoon: While the shortest, "Understanding" clocks in at 5:14, six cuts top nine minutes. "Lil Miss Ariel" is a delightful stroll, while "Essence Of The Soldier" is a rollicking jammer. "88 to 1621" is a fiery hardbop number, featuring a smoking hot solo by Ricardo Pascal.

This is a remarkably strong and consistent first effort: The totality of *Live At Snug Harbor* captures the edge-of-your-seat feeling of attending a spectacular night of jazz while sipping a well-crafted negroni. And ultimately, each cut offers a different facet of this combo's sparkling versatility. —*Ayana Contreras*

Live At Snug Harbor: P.J.'s, Lil' Miss Ariel, Lil' Froggy's Blues, Vengeance, Understanding, '88 to 1621, Essence of the Soldier, The Bruz of AD2. (89:25)

Personnel: Leon Anderson, drums, John Michael Bradford, trumpet; Ricardo Pascal, saxophone; Oscar Rossignoli, piano; Rodney Jordan. bass.

Ordering info: outsideinmusic.com

Organ Jazz / BY GARY FUKUSHIMA

The Many Moods of Organ

Of all the instruments that have defined the course of modern jazz for the past 80 years, the organ might be the most enigmatic. It can sound baroque, earthy and alien at the same time; it's up to those who push the keys and pull the drawbars to shade which direction it

For drummer Towner Galaher, it's all about the groove. The Mike Clark acolyte has formed a tight brotherhood with his band that includes organist Jimmy Sanders, whose actual brother, Johnny, was a dear friend of Galaher. The aptly named album Brothers (Rhythm Royale; ★★1/2 43:12) is a collection of eight groove-based originals that all vary slightly from each other but are intemperately similar in vibe, volume and smoothness. Galaher and his extra-matriarchal siblings play feel-good music, but it would feel better if they had more precision, especially considering they all pretty much stick to their arranged parts without much interactive variation. That said, Sanders has his moments to shine, especially on "Seventh Heaven," where he drives home the SNL-style funk vehicle with a rousing gospel fanfare, ending with a flourish of preternatural partials.

Ordering info: townergalahermusic.com

Another drummer, Virginia-based Jae Sinnett, protracts a different angle on the organ, using Allen Farnham's considerable iazz keyboard know-how to emulate the Hammond sounds on classic rock recordings in his *Blur The Lines Project* (J-Nett; ★★★½ **36:56)**, revisiting music from Rush, Rare Earth, Edgar Winter, Steppenwolf, Deep Purple and Led Zeppelin. Sinnett, for his part, embraces his inner John Bonham, ably matching the intensity and fire needed to pull this off, along with guitarist Jason Cale, whose distorted guitar shredding is fever-pitch perfect. Yet Sinnett and company keep the album from being merely a well-executed set of covers with some clever transitions to other modes of expression, particularly on the 1972 instrumental rock hit "Frankenstein," which takes on a life of its own as it morphs into free-jazz territory, featuring some terrifying solos from saxophonist Ada Rovatti and Farnham (on piano). Rovatti is a brilliant improviser, but her dark tone feels out of place leading these rockin' anthems: more Johnny Hartman than Jimmy Page.

Ordering info: jaesinnett.com

Guitarist Frode Kjkstadt's Jazz Detectives (Losen; *** * 63:08) harkens back to a more conventional jazz organ trio, internationally comprising native Norwegian Kikstadt, British organist Roy Powell and Cuban drummer (and current Norway resident) Raciel Torres. The trio sounds like a polished, eurythmic unit, displaying their pedigrees on "Dirt," a



swinging extended blues form with scintillating solos from Kjkstadt and Powell. There's a delicious variety of material throughout, from the funk-inflected grooves of "The Royster" and "Night At Zita." to blues-roots based music like "The Lizzard" and "Blues For Runi," to things of a more subtle conception, like the jazz-waltz "Baba Ganoush" or the evocative, Metheny-esque soft-rock ballad "Song For M." Throughout, Powell is more than up to the task of driving the trio with his proficiency of both rhythm and timbre. Kjkstadt has virtuosity for days and complements Powell with his blues-inflected bebop approach.

Ordering info: losenrecords.no

The last album on this list. Brian Charette's remarkable Borderless (Steeplechase; **** 58:33) could also be the last word on what it truly means to play jazz organ. Charette dives in with both feet (and hands) in a startingly intimate exposition on everything this grand instrument is capable of. There's certainly plenty of bluesy, groovebased vehicles like the John Patton-inspired "Blue Bow," the evergreen "Willow Weep For Me" and, in a deft curveball, Huey Lewis' top 40 hit "If This Is It." But Charette runs the gamut of countenance, at one point spinning off bebop lines over walking bass on "Tadd's Delight" and "Bicoastal" (his line to Charlie Parker's "Confirmation"), then experimenting with unusual, otherworldly aural ruminations on his vignettes "Sunrise." "Ratios" and "Fráctal." He even takes the listener to church with his gospel-tinged "Blood Sun," followed by a trip to the beach with "Venice Beach Rhumba" and Jobim's "Corcovado," where he makes a vocal cameo on Gene Lees' haunting lyrics. Through it all, it's fascinating to hear Charette manipulate the organ in mid-flight, in the process unlocking the massive potential for this ancient but enduring sound generator.

Ordering info: steeplechase.dk



Fred Moten & **Brandon López** Revision

TAO FORMS

With just a voice and an upright bass, this New York duo elaborately paints words and pictures with an authoritative, panoramic view. Brandon López improvises with his usual range of quiet probing and cataclysmic bowing. Meanwhile, Fred Moten inhabits a completely singular realm of wording, stepping aside from any established spoken poetry tactics to formulate a deeply personal construction of inspired image-combinations, unpredictable phrasing and tempo-shifts, often delivered in a subtly relaxed manner, calming and casual, but with severe tension only a few breaths away.

The tracks are all allotted numbers but are shuffled out of expected sequence. López often impersonates simpler folk instruments, relishing the grain of his strings, dynamically upping the volume to instill fear-of-noise inside our eardrums. Moten fragments lines, pausing, hesitating, toying with space in a targeted manner. "#5" is a core piece, 13 minutes of multi-passaged adventure, with Moten savoring his words, repeated or rearranged, sometimes briefly sung. There is much substance, much abstraction, as the perceiver is offered many routes of interpretation: What might Moten be saying, here or there? It sounds potent, but there is no "right" way to interpret his vivid subjective reality. Cussin' is present, but deployed unusually.

From a controlled, subdued delivery Moten is capable of a coiled drama, operating on content, rhythmic and tonal fronts: the complete performance portfolio. Moten coaxes the listener with his casual (or wired-up) observations and condemnations. "Our authenticity blew up the world, so we could have a little harvest," he sagely intones. -Martin Longley

Revision: #14; #5; #3; #4; #6; #2; #8; #10; #7; #11; #9. Personnel: Fred Moten, voice; Brandon López, bass. Ordering info: taoforms.bandcamp.com



Rodney Jordan Memphis Blue BAXTER MUSIC ENTERPRISES ***

Florida State University bassist and professor Rodney Jordan tips his hat to his hometown, Memphis, with a warm and flowing hard-bop set that revels in blues feeling, uptown and low-down. His crisp quintet plays with relaxed cohesion; nuanced arrangements maintain continuous interest.

Jordan's composing shines on the clever melodic hitch and funky backbeat of "Hargrove," Memphis-based trumpet ace Melvin Jones and saxophonist Mark Sterbank creating a delightful polyphonic duet on the way out. The bassist offers a probing rubato showcase of solo technique on the intro to the title track, a blues that melts into a jook-joint triplet feel and some splashy tremolo from pianist Louis Heriveaux. On his attractive, bossa-tinged "Escapatoria," Jordan dives deep; on Gigi Gryce's classic "Minority," he walks with a jaunty strut. Jones' "The Storm Will Pass," which opens the set, is also a smart bit of writing, with flugelhorn/tenor sax lead over Quentin E. Baxter's quickened, New Orleans-flavored beat.

Baxter is the project's secret sauce on this project, which he co-produced for his label in Charleston, S.C. His drums "speak" with insistently melodic logic, especially on the closing track, Jordan's "The Art Of Blakey." Sterbank, whose pleasingly hoarse, hooting tenor embroiders Mulgrew Miller's pert "Small Portion," is also a Charleston resident.

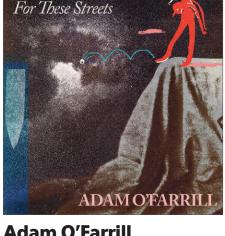
The only track that doesn't quite jell is a dreamy, abstract take on "Autumn Leaves," but give Jordan credit for taking a chance. The rest of the album is sweet and saucy as can be.

—Paul de Barros

Memphis Blue: The Storm Will Pass; Minority; Escapatoria; Hargrove; Memphis Blue; Autumn Leaves; Small Portion; The Art Of Blakev. (50:22)

Personnel: Rodney Jordan, bass; Melvin Jones, trumpet, flugelhorn; Mark Sterbank, alto saxophone, tenor saxophone; Louis Heriveaux, piano; Quentin E. Baxter, drums.

Ordering info: record-stop.com



Adam O'Farrill For These Streets OUT OF YOUR HEAD

For These Streets is an ambitious outing of orchestral soundscapes and dreamy meditations brought to life by an all-star octet. As a composer, O'Farrill is adept at developing harmonic structures and rhythmic frameworks that bring out the playfulness and imagination of the individual players and instruments he's working with. On "Swimmers," Mary Halvorson's guitar anchors O'Farrill's marauding trumpet as it oscillates between bluesy melodic fragments and meticulous brush strokes. Halvorson's guitar becomes more reflective and methodical in "Scratching The Surface Of A Dream," bringing Tomas Fujiwara's blustery percussion and David Leon's clarion flute into sharp relief.

On "Migrations," the spotlight shifts to Brennan's bright, crystalline vibraphone dancing above Fujiwara's rhythmic motif. Their duet conjures a celestial energy reminiscent of Sun Ra. The woodwinds — David Leon on alto saxophone and flute, Kevin Sun on tenor saxophone and clarinet — play with quiet yearning and deep emotional range. "And So On" continues to travel on the astral plane, with Halvorson's guitar taking on a harp-like delicacy, while Brennan's vibraphone opens up a celestial, ephemeral expanse.

For These Streets unfolds like a round robin of intimate vignettes, with each track spotlighting a different pairing of instruments. Halvorson and Brennan stand out with their consistently strong melodic lines and measured pacing, serving as a stabilizing force amidst the octet's shifting chemistry. The result is an album that feels both grounded and exploratory, intimate yet vast.

—Ivana Ng

For These Streets: Swimmers; Nocturno, 1932; Scratching The Surface Of A Dream; Migration; Speeding Blots Of Ink; Streets; And So On; The Break Had Not Come; Rose; Late June. (72:14)

Personnel: Adam O'Farrill, trumpet, flugelhorn; Mary Halvorson, guitar; Patricia Brennan, vibraphone; David Leon, alto saxophone, flute; Kevin Sun, tenor saxophone, clarinet; Kalun Leung, trombone, euphonium; Tyrone Allen II, bass; Tomas Fujiwara, drums; Eli Greenhoe, conductor.

Ordering info: outofyourheadrecords.com

Omer Avital New York Now & Then ZAMZAMA ★★★★

Recorded at Brooklyn's Wilson Live, bassist/composer Omer Avital's jazz club (between 2020 and 2024), New York Now & Then features arrangements with a crew that knows, emphasizes and amplifies the lively, engaging music of its leader. The kicker is that it is a live album: recorded in such a way to bring you close in, as if you were in a front-row seat, with a crowd that's there without crowding in.

Things are jump-started from the git-go, with Avital's "Sheikh Ali," a rousing blend of swing with a roving backbeat, introducing some of the principal players in his band. Use your imagination to ponder what Avital is referring to with "New York Now And Then," both the song and the album title. The tune is bursting with melody, harmony and joyous rhythm. The swing momentum elevates Gadi Lehavi's piano solo, one of a number of spots that at times evokes the spirit of McCoy Tyner while retaining a sound all his own, the chorus of horns behind him playing like an extension of his instrument.

Like Mingus in the '70s, this septet has the hefty sound of a big band while retaining its



small-group, close-in feel. There isn't a sound out of place here, the rambunctiousness no doubt held together by the leader's smart pen offered on a long leash. Things shift with the heartfelt (under-recorded) vocals of Lucy Wijnands via the gently rocking groover "Bed Stuy." More slow grind comes with the aching closer, "Zozo Blues."

—John Ephland

New York Now & Then: Sheikh Ali; New York Now & Then; IDKN; Desert Wind; (Way Down In) Bed Stuy; Zozo Blues.

Personnel: Omer Avital, bass; Gadi Lehavi, piano; Eviatar Slivnik (1, 2, 3, 6), Itay Morchi (4, 5), drums; Edo Gur, trumpet and flugelhorn; Yonathan Guedj, alto saxophone; Alexander Levin, tenor saxophone; Evan Amoroso, trombone; Lucy Wijnands, vocals (5).

Ordering info: omeravital.com

The Return of Strata-East

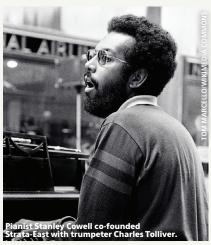
The first vinyl releases from the recently rejuvenated Strata-East Records remind us how persuasive and powerful jazz from the 1970s could be. The greatest challenge in revisiting these memorable discs is ranking them, but it's a welcome task.

Founded in 1970 by trumpeter Charles Tolliver and pianist Stanley Cowell, New York-based Strata-East was dedicated to inspiring both the artists it released and an audience eager for jazz of a spiritual bent. This winter, Mack Avenue Music Group entered into an alliance with Strata-East. The first fruit of that pact is the release of four albums. The presentation and packaging are as heavy duty as the audiophile LPs themselves: This music is built to last. (Strata-East: The Legacy Begins, a sampler of the label, is digital only.)

How sturdy and daring Strata-East music is becomes clear from the start of Stanley Cowell's remarkable 1974 solo album *Musa: Ancestral Streams* (Strata-East; **** 57:24). A recording to get lost in, Musa spans the rubato boogie-woogie of "Abscretions" (not a musical oxymoron for Crowell), the restful and majestic "Maimoun" and "Departure No. 1," an insanely fast work. Crowell enjoys puzzling out stunning lines so fast and furious there's no time to dwell on them. A virtuoso at the level of Phineas Newborn or Oscar Peterson, Cowell channels the history of jazz when he plays.

Cowell also is key to Charles Tolliver's Music Inc., Live At Slugs' Volume I and II (Stra**ta-East**; ★★★★ **1:35:41**), recorded in 1970 at a legendary New York club. There's no fat on this beautifully produced double album. Standout tracks include Tolliver's blazing lines on his tune "Spanning," and Cowell's "Orientale," which takes up one side of this double album. Tolliver launches it large, with full vibrato. He lays back as Cowell leans in, swirly and driving. Drummer Jimmy Hopps and bassist Cecil McBee are low-key, detonating when the tune calls for it. Tolliver takes "Orientale" out on trills and repeated notes, ascending only to return to Earth to worry it more. It finally subsides, the group's passion spent. A stirring track — and the longest on all four sides. The set concludes with "Our Second Father." Tolliver's tribute to John Coltrane. After Tolliver's brief introduction, Cowell builds a solo and McBee and Hopps heat up, opening the door to Tolliver, who plays with great bravado, scaling the heights of his horn in triumphant fashion.

The influence of Coltrane also looms over **Pharoah Sanders'** *Izipho Zam (My Gifts)* **(Strata-East;** **** 50:13). Recorded in 1969, released in 1973, this is sweeping and ceremonial. It starts with "Prince Of Peace," a group chant with Leon Thomas on ululating,



yodel-like vocals. A florid piano solo by Lonnie Liston Smith adds to the tune's exultant mass. There is plenty of Sanders on "Balance," the album's most cohesive tune. This raucous plunge into funk finds Sanders in conversation with other disrupters, alto sax man Sonny Fortune and guitarist Sonny Sharrock. The intrusive, joyous track features middle-register Sanders at full strength and a shape-shifting rhythm section. A weird, pungent piece that keeps you off guard, it's ultimately liberating - and healing, given the then-recent assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy. A strong, pure expression, the piece doesn't end so much as expire. Side B is dedicated to the title track, almost a half-hour of Sanders conjuring an atmosphere that chirps and rustles but also feels decidedly urban. It's abstract jazz as played by a jam band, replete with dazzling percussion (there are at least three drummers), penetrating saxophones and power. This track doesn't want to end, and we don't want it to.

A less militant if no less absorbing musical expression comes from Charles Rouse's 1974 Two Is One (Strata-East ★★★★ 40:19), an album long on funk and groove that confirmed Rouse as a leader after spending most of the 1960s as Thelonious Monk's key sideman. Rouse takes charge immediately on guitarist George Davis' "Bitchin'," a sinuous foray that spotlights Rouse's smooth, inviting style. Joe Chambers' "Hopscotch" extends the tension as Rouse captains this taut, jittery tune. The catholicity of style and the warmth of the players distinguish Two Is One. The title is based on a concept Rouse borrowed from Monk. The idea is that people can get to know each other so well they're of one mind. It's said that Rouse and Monk used to finish each other's sentences. It takes that kind of meld to play Rouse's title track, with three different tempos going at once.

Ordering info: strata-east.bandcamp.com



Sultan Stevenson El Roi EDITION ★★★★

Fans of 1960s Blue Note composer-pianist-bandleaders like Herbie Hancock, McCoy Tyner and Andrew Hill (count me in) will find much to enjoy in *El Roi*, 24-year-old London-based Sultan Stevenson's follow-up to his 2023 debut *Faithful One*, comprising solo, trio and quintet recordings of his eight original compositions.

Stevenson's writing is well-turned, melodically and harmonically subtle, starting with "Unspeakable Happiness," a title an enslaved person's description of freedom. His playing throughout is unshowy but enticing, warmly soulful and genuinely swinging. His keyboard approach is assured yet measured: he's effectively spare when grounding ensemble parts, as on the ballad "A Region" and stately "Purpose"; earnest in the solos "Arise" and "I Believe"; expansive and sparkling when he lets loose with single-note phrases telling a story on the threesome outing "My Unbelief," an album highlight.

The trio is so tight it's relaxed even when navigating internal tempo changeups as on the opener. Tenorist Kinch and trumpeter Short solo with distinction and blend companionably, attentive to the group dynamic. "Wisdom" is a worthy drum feature. And "El Roi" concludes with an Art Blakey-style free-for-all, fading out on a tumultuous riff.

Stevenson declares his music is explicitly about "faith and identity." Being congenitally resistant to religiosity in jazz, I substitute personal concerns for the artist's stated themes while listening and hope he doesn't mind. Succinct at 30 minutes total, *El Roi* leaves me wanting more.

—Howard Mandel

El Rol: Unspeakable Happiness; A Region In My Mind; Arise; My Unbelief; Purpose; Wisdom; I Believe; El Roi (29:20)
Personnel: Stevenson, piano Jacob Gryn, bass; Joel Waters, drums; Josh Short, trumpet, flugelhom (1, 2, 8); Soweto Kinch, tenor saxophone (1, 2, 8)

Ordering info: editionrecords.com









SEPTEMBER 26-28, 2025

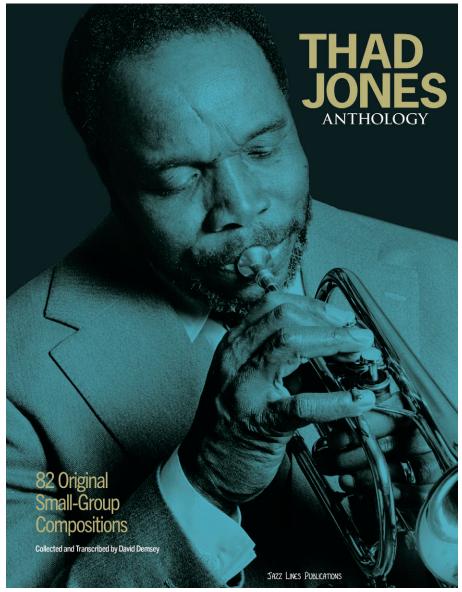
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The cover image from David Demsey's new book, Thad Jones Anthology: 82 Small Group Compositions (eJazzLines)

Stealing from the Best

Finding Connections Between Thad Jones' Early Small Group Compositions & His Later Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra Arrangements

rumpeter/cornetist, bandleader and Thad Jones charts. composer Thad Jones (1923-'86) is certainly one of the most influential arrangers in jazz history. His famous big band arrangements are published and known worldwide: It is safe to say that every professional, college, and public school jazz band library contains at least one, if not 10,

In contrast, Thad's dozens of smallgroup compositions are not nearly as well known. I was amazed to discover in my Thad Iones Archive work that there are no less that 82 of these miniature gems, many of them every bit as ingenious as Thad's big band works.

Every Thad Jones composition is its own unique and rare adventure, featuring unexpected harmonies, angular melodies, melodic counterpoint between the horns and rhythmic counterpoint between the melody and rhythm section.

Many of these small-group compositions were featured on Thad's solo albums, again far less known that his big band recordings.

Thad's original compositions were first recorded in 1954 on his first album as a leader, titled Jazz Collaborations, under the guidance of Charles Mingus on Mingus' Debut Records. He continued to include his original tunes on various solo efforts including The Fabulous Thad Jones (also 1954), The Magnificent Thad Jones (Vol. 1 in 1956, Vol. 3 in 1957), Mad Thad (also in 1957, serving as the second volume of this set) and others.

Thad Jones' original compositions were also featured on albums where he appeared as a sideman or co-leader, and some where he did not play at all. These records were with such artists as his legendary brothers Hank and Elvin Jones, as well as musicians he came up with in Detroit, several former Basie bandmates and others, including Frank Wess, Billy Mitchell and Al Grey, Stanley Turrentine, Ben Webster, Louie Bellson, Pepper Adams, Blue Mitchell and many more.

After Thad's death in 1986, several artists recorded complete CDs of his music, including Hank Jones, Tommy Flanagan and Scott Robinson. Notably, there is also a two-CD series by an all-star group that included Frank Wess, Benny Golson, Jimmy Owens, John Mosca, Roland Hanna, Hank Jones, Richard Davis and Kenny Washington.

In the just-published Thad Jones Anthology: 82 Small Group Compositions, my challenge was to capture in my transcribed lead sheets the precise details of those recorded performances, including multiple horn parts, intros and endings, alternate blowing changes, chord voicings and other details.

Although sketches or portions of about 25 tunes are contained in the Library of Congress collection (with thanks to the late jazz journalist and historian Larry Appelbaum for his help), the rest had to be transcribed by me, with proofing assists from the great ears of Frank Basile, Pete McGuinness, Renee Rosnes and others. (All royalties from the book sales go to the Thad Jones Archive at William Paterson University, as well as to his estate.) We must

assume that, unlike big band recording sessions, the players on these small-group sessions often simply left any sheet music behind and considered the recorded master tape to be documentation enough.

COMPOSITIONAL PROGENY

One amazing discovery in my work on this book is that several of Thad's small-group melodies are actually the musical "parents" of some of his most famous big band arrangements. Two of the best examples of this are his compositions "(The) Little Pixie" and "Tip Toe," both based on the changes of "I Got Rhythm" in Ab.

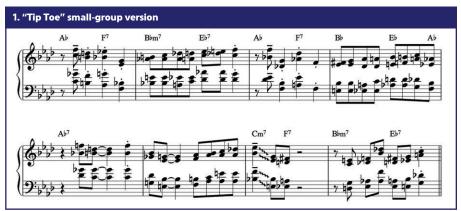
The original version of "Tip Toe" is a four-horn piece that appeared on the rare *The Birdland Story* multi-disc set in 1960, then was re-released as a part of *Minor Strain* and *Best Of Birdland*. The 32-bar head is very similar to the big band version and takes the slower tip-toeing tempo — but Thad's small group version is not just a melody head; he includes backgrounds behind the solos, and two send-offs for subsequent solos that are completely different from his big band arrangement (see Figure 1).

As an added note, there is an additional, short big band arrangement of "Tip Toe," one of a surprising total of 25 arrangements Thad wrote for big band trumpeter Harry James' band. The chart was never recorded by James, but eJazz-Lines publishes this earlier proto-chart on "Tip Toe."

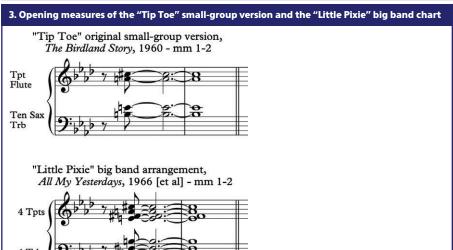
As for "Little Pixie," the title of Thad's big iconic band arrangement is "Little Pixie II." This Roman numeral has been a mystery to most; was there a big band prequel to this landmark piece?

Mystery solved: It turns out that the tune's origins are from the Louie Bellson five-horn recording *Thunderbird*, released in 1966, but apparently recorded in 1965, perhaps as early as 1963. Author/musician Bill Kirchner knew about this early version when he wrote the liner notes for the Mosaic Records Thad Jones-Mel Lewis box set, but most of us missed his reference. Thad doesn't appear on the Louie Bellson recording; Harry "Sweets" Edison holds down the trumpet chair masterfully.

The Los Angeles-based horn section also includes trombonist Carl Fontana, alto saxophonist Sam Most, Ed Scarazzo on tenor saxophone and Jim Mulidore on baritone saxophone. Thad also wrote horn section figures during the solos and a shout-style final chorus that are very different than anything on the big band chart (see Figure 2). It must be added that Thad's big band version is considered by many to be his greatest piece, with the trading interplay between the brass and saxophones, his side-slip-









ping reharmonizations, and his ear-bending voicings and phrasing.

Why are these two "Rhythm" changes tunes "twins"? First, the tempo of the original "Pixie" is, incredibly, only at quarter note = 130, the same speed as "Tip Toe"! This is so much slower than the big band arrangement that it feels like a different tune. Second, the iconic two-bar brass chord that begins the famous big band version of "Pixie" actually appears at the start of the small-group version of "Tip Toe." (See Figure 3 for the opening measures of both tunes.) Conjoined musical twins, separated at birth!

MORE SMALL GROUP GEMS

Other Thad Jones small group tunes contained in this new anthology that are early versions of later big band arrangements include these gems:

• "Three And One" was first heard as a small-group performance on the album Keepin' Up With The Joneses five years before Thad's iconic big band arrangement appeared on the debut Presenting The Thad Jones Mel Lewis Orchestra. This earlier small-group recording could have had the long-winded subtitle, "Thad, Hank, Elvin and Eddie Jones Play the Music of Thad, Quincy and Isham Jones." It's a beautiful album created because of a silly "all-Jones" theme!

In fact, this Thad/Hank/Elvin/Eddie Jones quartet is likely the origin of the title "Three And One": The track is played by three Joneses who were brothers, and one (bassist Eddie Jones, Thad's former Basie bandmate) who was unrelated. The small-group flavor is retained in Thad's big band arrangement, with pianist Hank's accented comments acting as the inspiration for full band hits on the later record. Another note here: This track is sometimes erroneously listed as "Three In One."

• "Mean What You Say" is one of Thad's great tune compositions, with its hymnlike sustained melody and outside-the-box use of the cycle of fifths. The 1966 small group and big band recordings were nearly simultaneous. Thad again retained the small group texture in the big band version, but the heavy involvement of the band is one of the great examples of Thad's big band virtuosity. One notable feature of the small-group version is its coda, which takes Thad's creative fifths progression that starts on B7 in the heart of the original tune and goes around the entire cycle of fifths to end on Gb7, the tritone substitute in the key of F (see Figure 4).

An additional note: The parts for the original version of this big band arrangement were lost over 40 years ago and have



sadly never been found; the search continues. Thad wrote a new arrangement of this tune in 1980 after his move to Denmark that is only somewhat similar to the lost version; its ending is completely different from both the small group and original big band versions.

- "Kids Are Pretty People" was one of Thad's earlier big band arrangements, a tour de force for the band that first appeared on the Jazz Casual TV program in 1968, and on the Jone-Lewis live album Monday Night At The Village Vanguard in the same year. However, the tune had first appeared as a small-group composition for two horns on the 1963 album A Little Juicy, led by Thad's old Detroit jam session mate and fellow Basie-ite Billy Mitchell. The earlier quintet version has a different groove via a faster tempo, a different ending and an added tag.
- "Evol Deklaw Ni" is a rarity for Thad Jones: It's a contrafact, a new melody composed on the chord changes of the Gershwin standard "Love Walked In" (if you hadn't guessed already from Thad's backward title). It was first recorded on the 1963 small group album *Soulmates*, when a group of younger modernists joined the unlikely leader, old-school tenor master Ben Webster. The group included Webster and Thad, Joe Zawinul on piano, bassists Richard Davis or Sam Jones, and drummer Philly Joe Jones.

Although Thad's later big band arrangement was never recorded by the Jones-Lewis big band, it does show up on their unreleased live European concert broadcasts in 1975–'76, and was eventually recorded by the Danish Radio Big Band (a group formerly led by Thad) in 1994, and by the Swedish Monday Night Orchestra in 1997, released in 2011.

• Sometimes Thad stole portions of

tunes from himself. For example, Thad's small-group tune "Let's" (from the 1957 album *Magnificent Thad Jones, Vol. 3*) has an "ending that won't end" where the melody teeters between the first and fifth scale degrees to create an ending that is sure to make any inattentive band member look a bit foolish. Thad's later Count Basie piano feature "Not Now, I'll Tell You When" (the title tune of Basie's 1960 album, one of at least 23 arrangements he wrote for the Basie Orchestra while he was in the trumpet section from 1954 to 1963) uses exactly the same ending.

For an added homework assignment, check out the online video of Count Basie and Fred Astaire verbally riffing on this tune's title, before Fred dances to "Sweet Georgia Brown" with the Basie band on his TV show.

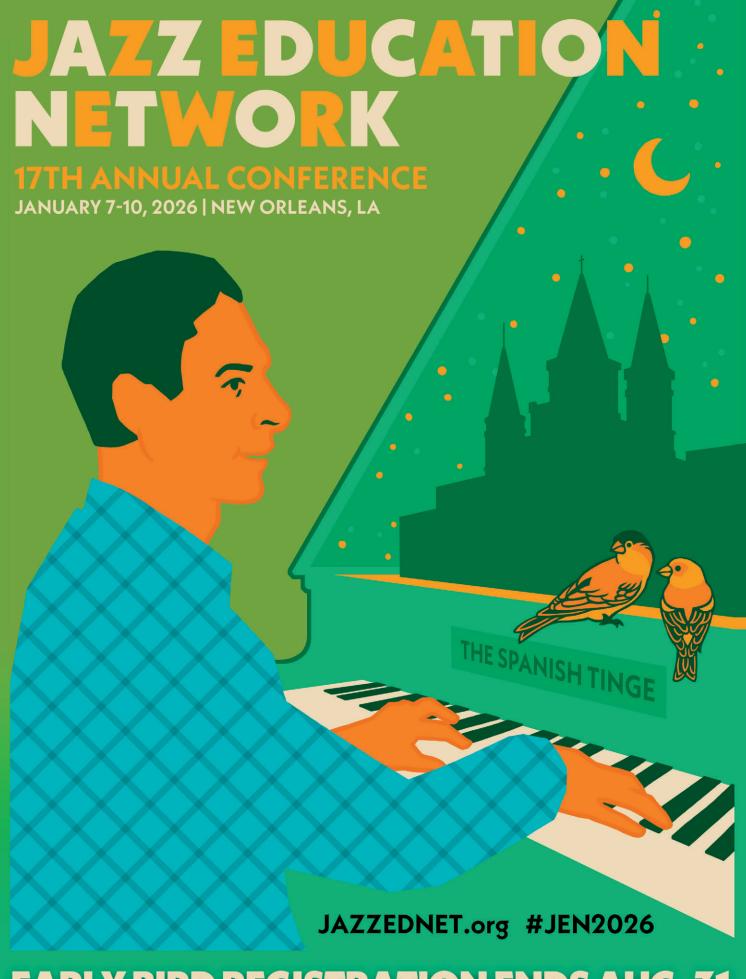
THAD'S GENIUS MANIFESTED

Thad Jones was inarguably a genius, on many levels. The word genius is overused, but in this case it goes beyond Thad's masterful talent as a trumpeter/cornetist, his gifts as a melody writer and his often surprising harmonic creativity and skill.

For those who have any doubt about his genius, consider that Thad wrote a number of his well-known big band arrangements with no score, writing out the full parts one after another — as witnessed by his band members on buses, in train stations and in airports.

The major takeaway of this new 82-tune anthology is that his genius extends to his small-group tune writing as well as his big band world. And, at times, he accomplished this by stealing from himself!

Saxophonist and educator David Demsey has been Coordinator of Jazz Studies at William Paterson University since 1992. He curates the William Paterson Living Jazz Archives, which contain the personal collections of Thad Jones, Clark Terry, Michael Brecker, Art Farmer, James Williams, Lee Konitz, Don Sebesky, Jim McNeely and more. He was named to the DownBeat Jazz Education Hall of Fame in November 2024. Demsey collected and transcribed the music for the recently published Thad Jones Anthology: 82 Small Group Compositions (eJazzLines) in an effort to bring definitive versions of small-group Thad Jones compositions the wider attention and recognition that they deserve. They are transcribed as precisely as possible from the original recorded versions. They are Thad's original versions, note for note. The collection also includes a discography, listing source recordings for all compositions, as well as a Thad Jones biography and information about the Thad Jones Archive at William Paterson University that is the basis of the project. The transcriptions contain all the details needed to create a full performance of each tune. as close to the original recorded performance as possible. Thad Jones Anthology: 82 Small Group Compositions uses a lead sheet format throughout. Two- or three-horn tunes are written using single staves; four- or five-horn tunes use a grand staff format to separate the horns. The transcriber/editor's share of the royalties from the sales of the book will be donated to the Thad Jones Archive at William Paterson University, in order to support its efforts in preserving, promoting and teaching Thad



EARLY BIRD REGISTRATION ENDS AUG. 31



Linda May Han Oh's Bass Solo on 'The Imperative'

ften in this column I've pointed out the soloist's use of space in improvisation. For Linda May Han Oh's bass solo on her composition "The Imperative," from her 2023 album *The* Glass Hours (Biophilia), she eschews space, spending most of this improvisation filling space. Granted, in bars 5 and 6 we have rests of two and three beats, but after that there's nothing longer than a quarter-note rest,

and those are rare. Even long notes don't occur very often. There's a half note in measure 38, and occasional quarter notes, but almost everything else in her solo is eighth notes or smaller.

So how does that work? Haven't I gone on numerous times about the juxtaposition of space and density? Well, for one thing, I know of no absolutes in music. Artists play what the situation calls for, and in this instance it appears Oh felt it served the moment better to dispense with space than to use it. It is a very forward-moving piece of music

Also, not having long rests or held notes doesn't mean there isn't any sense of space here. Space can be relative. When playing quarter notes, an eighth-note rest may not seem like much, but in the middle of a string of 16ths that eighth note can feel like more of a break. Also, going from 16ths to eighths makes those eighths feel more relaxed. In fact, this is a means Oh uses to create musical motion.

Opening up with some 4-against-3 polyrhythms and some quarter-note-based rhythms, even though these are larger rhythms, at this tempo they can sound kind of brisk. But then Oh goes into some eighth-note syncopation leading to a 16th-note lick in bar 11. With some more 16ths in bar 13 that followed syncopated 16ths in measure 12, the quarter notes and eighth notes in bars 14–16 sound pretty relaxed in comparison.

This becomes a sort of motif, with Oh playing phrases of eighth notes within these swaths of 16th notes and 16th-note syncopation. These bits of eighth notes produce a sort of space by inserting some relaxation within the frenetic pace. Take a listen to bars 20 and 22, where there are eighth notes in the first half and syncopated 16ths in the second half. It's an idea Oh reverses in measure 27, and revisits toward the end, in bars 51–53. She's not exactly creating space in these instances, but her choices here produce a sense of high energy balanced by relaxation (and a motif to help hold the solo together).

And how about measures 30–31? Playing all those off-beat 16ths not only adds to the dramatic tension of the solo, but it's also difficult to do, especially on such an unwieldy instrument as the double bass. In fact, the sheer chops involved in playing the 16ths throughout this solo is impressive, especially with the paucity of slurring involved.

For the bassists reading this: One "trick" that Oh uses to make this a little bit easier (and it is perhaps only a little bit) is favoring open strings when possible.

To give an example: Measure 13 uses the open D, G and A strings, which not only gives the left hand time to set up the next notes, but also those open strings are usually lower in pitch than the previous string that was played, allowing the right hand to move across the strings in a motion called "raking." Although this makes the motions involved in playing these lines more efficient, don't let this fool you into thinking these licks are easy to accomplish, especially at this tempo. Oh definitely has chops.

Another aspect of her technical facility is her command of the instrument. Often in these columns I will point out how the soloist is navigating their range to move the improvisation from its beginning to its conclusion. Oh appears to go contrary to this idea. The total range exhibited is from the E one ledger line below the staff to the C on top of the fourth ledger line above it, but the low E happens once (in bar 23), and those high C's occur twice (in measures 19 and 38). In this regard she is saving those extremes for specific points in her solo, as we have witnessed other artists do.

But the effective range is from the A in the lowest space on the staff (only dipping below this twice) to the high F or G or A (or maybe even B) near the previously mentioned high C. It's difficult to say, as Oh keeps bumping up against this high point, but not always at the same pitch. Her first foray into this upper range happens right at the beginning of her solo, the high F# in measure 2. Then the Bb in bar 9. She hits that high F# again in bar 16 but then gives us that ultra-high C three measures later (and that F# doesn't seem so high anymore).

Bar 28 ascends all the way up to a B natural, and it takes 10 more bars to get back to that high C (though there are some high F#'s along the way). She plays a high B natural again in measure 45, and then a high A in 54, almost at the end of her solo.

Oh keeps banging against that ceiling, but the "height" has changed over the course of her improvisation. There does appear to be a bit of a pattern in that she leads us up to the C, leads us there again and then scales it back. But in that space between low A and high F# (or thereabouts), Oh is continually running up and down through it. This also adds to the overall frenetic pace of the song.

Jimi Durso is a guitarist and bassist based in the New York area. Jimi can often be witnessed performing/rehearsing/leaching/ pontificating online at twitch.tv/CoincidenceMachine. Find out more about Durso's music at jimidurso.bandcamp.com.



Toolshed)

Yamaha NAMM 2025 Limited Edition 62 Series Saxes

New Alto & Tenor 'Kangakki' Models Deliver Exclusive Refinements, Standout Style

amaha usually offers something special — like a cool new twist on one of its existing instrument models — at the NAMM Show, a huge annual convention that functions as the coming-out party for most new music gear. At this year's show, Yamaha's NAMM 2025 Limited Edition "Kangakki" 62 Series Tenor and Alto Saxophones were the hot item in the winds section of the company's ballroom-sized exhibit, and the exclusive horns are now available in a limited run through retail channels. Their appeal lies in the finer details.

These exquisite alto and tenor models, based on Yamaha's pro-level 62 Series and featuring all the third-generation updates made to the iconic line last year, deliver incredible sound and response — with standout style to boot. They bring new finish options to the 62 Series — gold lacquer with silver-plated keys (YTS-62IIISK NAMM25) and amber lacquer with silver-plated keys (YTS-62IIIASK NAMM25) — that provide a vintage-inspired aesthetic.

When these gold and amber color tones are juxtaposed against the saxophones' super-silvery keywork (in place of the 62 Series' standard nickel-silver keys), it creates a dramatic visual contrast of high-end sports car-level proportions. The bells offer something extra as well: an elegant engraving of the Japanese characters for "Kangakki," which translates to "wind instrument." Under proper stage lighting, they catch the eye and glimmer with a fast-lane vibe all their own.

The addition of the slightly oversized, gold-plated Yamaha Atelier Special (ASP) heavy-mass neck screw, an innovation borrowed from Yamaha's special 82Z Custom Atelier models, is another subtle yet

important appointment. The screw helps remedy a traditionally weak nodal point and adds stability to the feel while increasing flexibility of response and projection — an idea that has recently been catching on among saxophone players.

Along with these alluring new variations, the NAMM 2025 "Kangakki" 62 Series saxes have the universally recognized sound, response, reliability and pitch consistency of Yamaha's 62 Series, which have been long established on the pro market and have recently been upgraded (with the designations YAS-62III, YTS-62III, etc.). So, you get all the recent tweaks and improvements to the line, including a slightly narrower bore that provides faster response and more control.

The new 62-style neck allows for a comfortable flow of air that helps players find a solid tonal core. An upgraded neck receiver makes the neck-to-body transition feel more seamless, improving tonal consistency over the full range of the horns. Saxophonists can choose between the included 62-style neck and necks designed for Yamaha's Custom Z and Custom EX models (sold separately).

The NAMM 2025 "Kangakki" 62 Series tenor and alto play with plenty of brightness and an overall feel that's nice and light, with moderate resistance. They have a teardrop-shaped front F key that's adjustable, and the left-hand seesaw key lends a more comfortable feel to low B-flat, B-natural and C-sharp — making it real easy to get around down there.

On the amber-lacquered tenor and gold-lacquered alto versions, I was able to play vibrant bottom tones that resonated with presence and color. The middle range responded with a burnished timbre, and the keywork felt fluid and buttery with no slippage. After wailing away in the upper registers, I took a more chill approach and coaxed some beautiful pianissimo high notes out of these two breathtaking instruments.

Like all YAS-62III and YTS-62III models, the "Kangakki" horns are stabilized with a two-point-contact brace, and the bells are made from two pieces of brass sheets jointed together by hand and shaped with a machine. Separate key guards feature adjustable screw cap stoppers, which make it possible for players and technicians to perform a range of useful technical adjustments and get their setups just right.

A semi-hard case is included, offering an appropriate amount of protection and ease of transport to these distinctive, highly refined and ultimately collectible instruments. -Ed Enright

usa.yamaha.com



Toolshed GEAR BOX

1. Streamlined Eclipse

The LTD Deluxe EC-01FT is a streamlined take on the single-cutaway ESP Eclipse design. With its flat-top body and clean electronics layout, it features a comfortable 24.75-inch scale with a smooth set-through heel construction. It provides a classic mahogany body and three-piece mahogany neck to prioritize huge tones, and adds a distinctive brushed matte black pickguard. It features a Macassar ebony fingerboard with pearloid block inlays and 22 extra-jumbo stainless steel frets.

More info: espguitars.com

2. Nuanced Monitor Control

The Nuance Select from Radial Engineering is a completely transparent studio monitoring system that provides control over two sets of monitors and a subwoofer with zero sonic coloration. Transparency is achieved through a Clarity Circuit that allows you to hear the true mix through your speakers without any sacrifice in audio quality. The Nuance Select features two sets of stereo source inputs, along with two sets of balanced TRS outputs for powered speakers.

3. True Cab Circuitry

More info: radialeng.com

The PowerStage 100 Stereo compact power amp from Seymour Duncan provides stereo inputs and outputs that each drive 100 watts of transparent sound. Suitable for amplifying the sound of modern modeling units to onstage cabinets, the PS100 Stereo also offers an extended five-band EQ section and balanced line outs with switchable analog cabinet simulation.

More info: seymourduncan.com

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The CAD Stage7 is a seven-piece drum microphone pack that includes one D10 cardioid dynamic kick drum mic, three D29 dynamic tom mics, one D19 dynamic snare drum mic, with integrated clip and two C9 instrument condensers for hi-hats, cymbals or overheads. All mics come with integrated clips. The pack includes a vinyl protective carrying case with strap for easy transport and storage.

More info: cadaudio.com

5. Sturdy Tablet Holder

The sturdy tablet PC stand from K&M is designed for professional use. The clamping range of the holder is between 158mm and 280mm, and it is particularly suited for tablets with a protective cover or case of up to 18mm thickness. The overlapping clamping jaws with integrated rubber pads provide for a secure hold.

More info: k-m.de/en

6. All-Inclusive

Gretsch's Renegade Series offers five drums with every piece of hardware needed, including a bass drum pedal, hi-hat stand, snare stand, straight cymbal stand and drum throne. Also included is a set of brass cymbals (13-inch hi-hats, 15-inch crash/ride). Renegade is available in four colors: Grey Sparkle, Ruby Sparkle (pictured), Blue Sparkle and Black Mist.

More info: gretschdrums.com





ALEX 'APOLO' ALAYA KEEPS THE BAMBULA FLAME BURNING

Afro-Puerto Rican Jazz (PMC/Miel) is not just the title of bassist/composer Alex "Apolo" Alaya's follow-up release to his acclaimed debut album, Bámbula (Truth Revolution). It's the entire genre it encompasses.

"I named it Afro-Puerto Rican Jazz because a lot of people haven't heard Afro-Puerto Rican jazz like this before," explained Alaya when reached at his apartment in Brooklyn's Prospect Park. Aided and abetted by his vibrant Bámbula Project ensemble — Andrew Gould on saxophones, Fernando Garcia on drums and Victor Pablo Garcia on percussion — he skillfully blends Puerto Rican music and folklore with bebop, avant garde and contemporary jazz.

It's also a deeply personal album that pays tribute to his hometown of San Juan, Puerto Rico, where he was raised in the projects by his single mother, and recounts a recent devastating family struggle in the three-movement "Agonia."

"I decided to put everything my family was going through into my music because music is about life, about feelings and emotions," he explained. "I was always inspired by Charles Mingus and Wayne Shorter and other composers that used music as a tool for expressing their own emotion and feelings. Yes, there's a lot of melodic and harmonic content, but also it has a message. It is storytelling. And that is something I strive to do."

Alaya had a thriving career in Puerto Rico before he moved to New York more than a decade ago, drawn like so many others to the "jazz capital of the world," where his big band recently played a sold-out show at Lincoln Center and he's a mainstay of the Latin jazz scene. But his heart remains in Puerto Rico, as his latest album attests

During this conversation, Alaya discussed everything from the alchemical process of transmuting his family struggles into music, to the hilarious story about how he became a musician almost by chance, to his serendipitous connection with saxophonist Miguel Zenón that led to *Afro-Puerto Rican Jazz* being released on Zenón's independent Miel Music label.

The following has been edited for length and clarity.

Cree McCree: How did you get the nickname "Apolo"?

Alexis "Apolo" Ayala: When I was in middle school, I used to box a little, and one of the senior students saw me and called out, "Hey, Apollo!" As in Apollo Creed from *Rocky*. The next day, even the teachers were calling

me Apollo. [laughs]

McCree: DownBeat gave a great review to your first album, Bámbula, with a quote from you: "Bámbula means the memory of a forgotten place."

Ayala: It is the act of remembering a forgotten place that existed in the past and reconnecting with the ancestors. That album was very personal, because a lot of the compositions were about my family, my mother and my grandmother.

McCree: Your new album is also deeply personal. The three-part "Agonia" suite is about struggles your family was going through.

Ayala: It was a long, hard process, and I decided to put it in music. I cannot just write music for the sake of writing music. Music is my way of expressing life.

The first movement, "Reckoning," is when we found out what happened and had to face the music. It was an ever-evolving situation. The second movement, "Hopelessness," is in the middle of the process, and we didn't see a light at the end of the tunnel. There's no percussion moving us forward, only the sax-

ophone playing. The third movement, "Uncertainty," is when we saw a little bit of light. A candle, not a whole window. There's no resolution. And that's exactly what I wanted to portray.

McCree: And did turning it into music help you rise above all that?

Ayala: Yes. Yes. Music is a powerful tool for life.

McCree: When you were growing up in San Juan, how did you first get into music?

Ayala: I had no idea I was gonna be a musician. God put music on my plate. My mother wanted me to attend middle and high school, so she enrolled me in different schools with different specialties. One of the schools specialized in music, and when I took the admission test I failed that test. But the principal of the school knew my situation with a single mother, three kids, so she said we're gonna take him anyway.

That was two weeks after the semester had started, and you have to select an instrument to learn. And because this is Puerto Rico, everybody wants to play percussion, everybody wants to play piano or trumpet. So all the instruments were taken. The only two available were the

double bass and the tuba. They explained what a tuba was: It's a wind instrument, and it's big. And I said I don't really like that. What is the other instrument? They said the double bass, it's a string instrument, like a giant violin, so I chose that.

Next day, when I went to introduce myself to my bass teacher, I saw the double bass on the floor and was like, oh, my God. [laughs] It's gigantic! And in the beginning, when you start playing, you get calluses on your fingers and they hurt. But once I started practicing, I fell in love with the instrument.

McCree: As a bass player, you're very subtle and don't step into the spotlight that often. But when you do, like the long solo you take on "Cuembé," it's glorious. I wanted more bass, actually.

Ayala: That is something I have to keep in mind for the next album. [laughs] Play more bass!

McCree: Afro-Puerto Rican Jazz was the first record by another artist released on Miguel Zenón's Miel Music label. How did that come about?

Ayala: Well, it's a funny story. When the record was done and I was searching for a label to release it, I kept getting offers that were not

really good offers, and I was getting a little bit frustrated. So I emailed Miguel, who's an idol of mine, asking him for advice, and we talked on the phone for over an hour. And in the end he was like, "Man, listen, you are already doing everything. You are composing the music. You are recording the music. You are paying the musicians, you are doing everything. What exactly does a label have to offer?" And I was like, "Yeah, 100%." So the next day I went to the computer and did all the due process and opened my own label, PMC records. And I was gonna release it myself.

A couple of weeks later, he called to talk to me about an idea that he had in his mind for a long time: "How about I help you with the distribution of the album and sponsoring your music and put it out under my label Miel Music?" Which was also a sign from The Almighty, because when I originally called him, that's exactly what I wanted to pitch him.

McCree: And he ended up pitching it to you.

Ayala: Yes, and when he called me and said,
"I want to get behind you on this project," I
thought I must be doing something right. Every now and then, we need something that
gives us fuel to keep going. And Miguel putting
my record out on his label gave me a million
gallons of fuel.

—Cree McCree





TRUMPETER RACHEL THERRIEN EXPLORES FINDING 'HOME'

What constitutes a home? Is it a physical place, a space shared with loved ones? A feeling? Montreal/New York trumpeter Rachel Therrien's eighth album is entitled *Mi Hogar II*, Spanish for "my home," recorded with an expanded constellation of her longstanding Latin Jazz Project.

Her physical home is "a bit of a moving target," with Therrien spending time between New York and Montreal, as well as on the road. For her, home is more about "community, connection and the people who inspire me," she shared following the album's Montreal launch, and "the musical and cultural roots that shape us."

Born in Rimouski, Québec, Therrien is no longer flying under the radar. A trumpeter, composer and producer, she now has eight solo albums to her credit, and has been nominated for Juno and Grammy awards (for her 2020 recording *VENA*, and for her work on the Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra's *Virtual Birdland*). Having studied jazz in Canada and Afro-Cuban music in Havana, she has toured extensively across North and South America, Europe and Africa, and has performed with Ron Carter, Arturo O'Farrill, Roberto Fonseca, Jon Faddis and Tony Allen, among others.

Therrien immersed herself in the study of Latin music at the Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA) in Havana, where she focused on classical trumpet, Cuban percussion, rhythmic

phrasing and the deep connection between jazz and Afro-Cuban traditions. "Being there was a total immersion," she said, "not just in the classroom, but in everyday life. I would go to jam sessions, play in the streets and learn directly from trumpeters, percussionists and other musicians, absorbing the culture first-hand." That experience shaped the understanding of "how rhythm and melody interact in a way that you can't fully grasp from the outside. It also taught me how to feel the music differently; it's not just about notes and time signatures, but about storytelling, history and deep cultural roots."

Self-produced and released on Lulaworld Records, *Mi Hogar II* blends contemporary jazz with Afro-Cuban, bolero, changüí and mambo. Launched in Havana, a celebration tour continued through the U.S. and Canada, ending at the Blue Note in New York.

Expounding on her 2023 release *Mi Hogar*, the new album showcases Therrien's signature sound on both trumpet and flugelhorn, as well as her unique amalgamation of contemporary jazz with Afro-Caribbean rhythms,

of tradition and innovation. Offering collaborations with a stellar ensemble of 21 musicians, the recording features bassist John Benítez, Puerto Rican saxophonist Iván Renta, Grammy-winning vocalist and violinist Mireya Ramos, trombonist Rafi Malkiel and several Cuban musicians — pianists Danae Olano and Manuel Valera, drummer Michel Medrano Brindis, percussionist Keisel Jiménez and others — all enriching the album's soundscape.

The sold-out Montreal launch featured a fiery, percussion-forward sextet, consisting of mostly Montreal-based Cuban musicians: pianist Willy Soto Barreto, drummer Lazaro Martinez and percussionists Diomer Gonzales and Dayron Luis San Juan, as well as Montreal bassist Alex Bellegarde. Introducing the vibrant "Back Home," one of her original compositions, she mentioned the significance of her collaboration with bassist and mentor John Benítez, who helped transmit the history of Latin jazz and the Latin influence on jazz since its inception.

Benítez contributed the album opener — the spirited "Fiestas Campesinas," an evocative Changüí (one of the earliest styles of Cuban music), played live that night for the first time. "I met John years ago through the NYC Latin jazz scene," she said, "and he has been a major influence. He has this deep, authentic understanding of the music, and working with him is always a lesson in groove, soul and storytelling."

From his New York home, Benítez expressed his appreciation for the way Therrien feels the odd meters, and the clave. "And I love the way she has freedom in her music," he said. "She likes to play with freedom, and very lyrical, very melodical."

The set also included Therrien's "Sueños de Cambios." an emotive bolero featuring the Cuban-Canadian violin-and-percussion duo OKAN on the recording, and "Orun," Harkening to the Afro-Cuban roots and Yoruban influences of this music, the intricate percussion and melodic call-and-response between instruments created what Therrien was striving for: "a deeply emotional yet uplifting atmosphere." One of her oldest compositions. "Soucy," written in 2008 during her studies in Havana and featuring intricate rhythmic patterns, highlights her deep affinity for Cuban percussion, Willy Soto Barreto offering a gorgeous piano solo. Returning for an encore, the band played "Mambo 'Chucho' Influenciado," a potent arrangement "built through years of collaboration with incredible artists from different parts of the world," she said. "It's the friendships, the shared experiences and the rhythms and harmonies that tie us together across cultures. This musical community includes mentors, peers and collaborators I've met along the way ... people who have welcomed me into their musical traditions and pushed me to grow as an artist."

—Sharonne Cohen

Rachel Therrien



INDIE LIFE

Lieu of Flowers SHIFTING IN THE MIDWEST

Artist-run labels have long played key roles in jazz history. Many, like Debut (co-founded by Charles Mingus and Max Roach), Cecil Taylor's Unit Core and Rashied Ali's Survival, were small-scale efforts aimed at maintaining artistic independence in the face of a disinterested industry.

But others, like Detroit's Strata-East and Oakland's Black Jazz, had bigger ideas, and provided outlets for a wide range of music by all sorts of artists.

Shifting Paradigm, a label based out of Minneapolis, is definitely in the latter category. Founded almost 15 years ago by guitarist Zacc Harris, drummer JT Bates and pianist Bryan Nichols, it began as a way for them to promote their own music, but before long other artists were reaching out. As of 2025, Shifting Paradigm has released well over 100 titles by musicians from around the U.S. in a variety of styles.

"It all started maybe 2010 or 2011," Harris recalls. "There is a pianist in town named Jeremy Walker who organized a bunch of us Twin Cities jazz folks for a meeting, asking the question, What can we do to try and elevate the Twin Cities jazz scene? And there were maybe 15 or so people there, and as you can imagine with that many creative people, there were a lot of different ideas and opinions and the idea I had was, 'What if we started a record label?'" Bates and Nichols agreed, and in May 2012, Harris' The Garden became the first Shifting Paradigm release.

The label held a kind of coming-out party a few years later with a concert — part of a series Harris was curating — and requests to release work on Shifting Paradigm began to roll in. "I have always tried to make it as artist-friendly as possible," he says. "These are my colleagues, my peers, and I want everybody to feel like this is a cooperative endeavor."

One key early relationship that raised the label's profile was with brass player John Raymond, a Minnesotan who'd headed for New York. After one independent release and another on Fresh Sound New Talent, he approached Shifting Paradigm about a new project. Real Feels was a trio with guitarist Gilad Hekselman and drummer Colin Stranahan whose repertoire included versions of gospel songs like "I'll Fly Away" and "Amazing Grace" alongside pop and rock songs by the Beatles, Paul Simon and Atoms For Peace. They released a live FP and a studio album in 2016. "L think that that album represented this kind of Midwest homecoming sensibility for him, and it just made sense for him to do it [with us], but that was for sure kind of a big moment for the label in terms of gaining more national



and international notoriety."

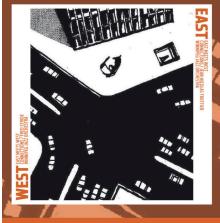
More than a decade in, the label has become a respected brand name in the Midwest, and receives a steady flow of submissions. Many of the albums Harris selects for release arrive market-ready; he offers access to distribution and PR, but the work is entirely the product of its creators, and as such, there's no way to describe a "typical" Shifting Paradigm release. Harris' own Chasing Shadows is an energetic and thoughtfully composed post-bop quintet date; vocalist Julia Danielle's self-titled debut offers folk-tinged versions of standards, occasionally augmented by a vocal ensemble or a string quartet; baritone saxophonist Jimmy Farace's Hours Fly, Flowers Die showcases retro compositions for a small group plus strings; while Outside The Sphere's Full Potential is an electroacoustic duo improv session featuring saxophone, drums and electronics.

Shifting Paradigm's brand identity may have been Midwestern to start, but "as more artists have become part of the label from different places, I think that they have brought with them their audience, their fan base," Harris said. "Then they benefit from the audiences that have already been brought into the label, and I think everyone benefits from it."

—Philip Freeman

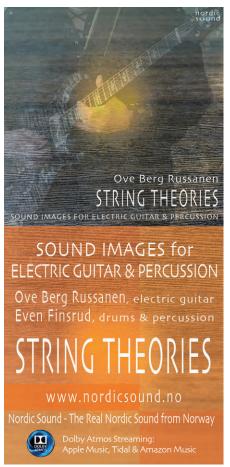


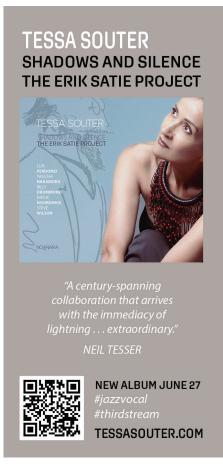
WINNIPEG JAZZ ORCHESTRA "CONNECTIONS"

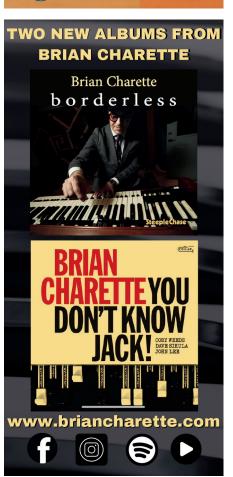


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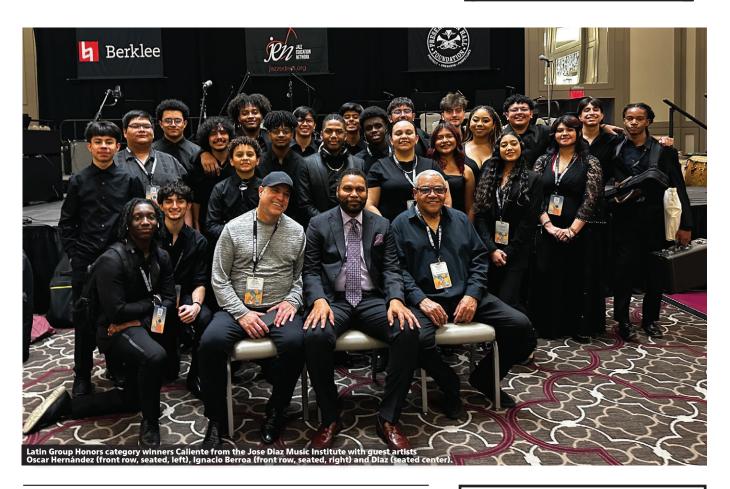


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FEATURES



82 THE SOLOISTS

To win a DownBeat Student Music Award in the Soloist category, musicans must have the talent to deliver a well-crafted improvisa-

tion. To get there, they must also commit to hard work, receiving mentorship and developing confidence to make sure that solo moves the music and connects



90 SMALL ENSEMBLES

Musicians aspiring to win a Small Jazz Combo award must have the ability to create music as a group, transcending their individu-

al talents and blending seamlessly with their bandmates. They also can benefit from the valuable input and advice that a dedicated educator can provide.



100 COMPOSERS

From Billy Strayhorn and an heirloom plant to Pat Metheny and Snarky Puppy, this year's Original Composition Small Ensemble Student Music Award winners drew from myriad sources of inspiration. Each honoree that DownBeat spoke with looked inward to express their personal vision.

WINNER LISTINGS

- 72 Jazz Soloists
- 74 Small Jazz Combos
- 84 Large Jazz Ensembles
- 92 Vocal Jazz Soloists
- 94 Small Vocal Jazz Groups
- 96 Large Vocal Jazz Ensembles
- 99 Blues/Pop/Rock Soloists
- 102 Blues/Pop/Rock Groups
- 103 Latin Jazz Groups
- 104 Original Composition Small Ensemble
- 106 Original Composition Large Ensemble
- 107 Jazz Arrangement
- 109 Engineered Live Recording
- 110 Engineered Studio Recording
- 111 Judging Criteria

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Graduate College Winner

Small Vocal Jazz Group Frost Extensions Kate Reid, faculty mentor

Undergraduate College Outstanding Soloists

Small Jazz Combo
The Stamps Jazz Quintet
Jacob Smith, Drums
Joshua Polion, Trumpet
Brian Lynch, faculty mentor

Small Jazz Combo Kevin Venier's Trio Nolan Slate, Tenor Saxophone John Hart, faculty mentor

Undergraduate College Outstanding Performances

Vocal Jazz Soloist Leah Rutherford Kate Reid, faculty mentor

Graduate College Winner

Blues/Pop/Rock Soloist Kevin Venier, Guitar John Hart, faculty mentor

Undergraduate College Outstanding Performance

Blues/Pop/Rock Soloist Will Ryan, Vocalist Kate Reid, faculty mentor

Graduate College Winner

Blues/Pop/Rock Group Frank Zappa Ensemble Renato Diz, faculty mentor

Graduate College Outstanding Performances

Blues/Pop/Rock Group Frost Fusion Ensemble Steve Rucker, faculty mentor

Graduate College Outstanding Performances

Blues/Pop/Rock Group Kevin Venier's Fusion Experience John Hart, faculty mentor

Undergraduate College Outstanding Performances

Blues/Pop/Rock Group Frost Funk Ensemble Steve Rucker, faculty mentor

Graduate College Winner

Original Composition Small Ensemble
Dan VanZeeland, "Ralph"
Stephen Guerra, faculty mentor

Graduate College Outstanding Composition

Original Composition Small Ensemble Joseph Palmer, "Falling Fronds" Chuck Bergeron, faculty mentor

Graduate College Winner

Jazz Arrangement - Big Band
Jorge Machain, "If You Could See Me Now"
Stephen Guerra, faculty mentor

Jazz Arrangement - Studio Orchestra
Dan VanZeeland, "Frevo"
Stephen Guerra, faculty mentor

Graduate College Outstanding Arrangements

Jazz Arrangement - Studio Orchestra Thomas Wenglinski, "Escape from the City" Stephen Guerra, faculty mentor

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JAZZ SOLOIST

Junior High School Winners

Ishan Alur

Piano

DrumsNewark Academy
Julius Tolentino
Livingston, New Jersey

Jonas Ballantyne

Stroudsburg Junior High School Benjamin Pritchard Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania

Junior High School Outstanding Performances

Jeremy Yip

Baritone Saxophone
Valley Christian Jr. High School
Michael Jones
San Jose, California

Julia Vaughan

Flute

Eckstein Middle School Moc Escobedo Seattle, Washington

Junior High School Honors Winner

Yaolong Zhang

Jazz Guitar Shanghai Conservatory of Music (Affiliated Middle School) Xiongguan Zhang Shanghai, China

Junior High School Honors Outstanding Performance

Isaac Smelcer-Zhang

Guitar New School of Music, Austin Jay Leach & Joe Morales Austin, Texas

High School Winners

Benjamin Collins-Siegel *Piano*

Newark Academy Julius Tolentino Livingston, New Jersey

Jasper Zimmerman

Piano
Hastings High School
Eric Day
Hastings-on-Hudson,
New York

High School Outstanding Performances

Clayton Bristol

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

Salome Ospina

Piano
Rio Americano High
School
Joshua Murray
Sacramento, California

Performing Arts High School Winner

Ryan Kaplan

Tenor and Alto Saxophones New World School of the Arts Jim Gasior Miami, Florida

Performing Arts High School Outstanding Performance

Julian Chiu

Trumpet
Los Angeles County High School
for the Arts
Alex Hahn
Los Angeles, California

High School Honors Winner

Ronnie Elliott

Guitar Homeschool/Fine Arts Center Jonathan Kreisberg Brooklyn, New York



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High School Honors Outstanding Performance

Joaquin Garde

Guitar Colburn Community School Lee Secard Los Angeles, California

Community College Winner

Aidan Farrell

Tenor Saxophone Santa Monica Community College Keith Fiddmont Santa Monica, California

Community College Outstanding Performance

Roman Goron

Piano Shoreline Community College Matt Jorgensen Shoreline, Washington

Undergraduate College Winner

Eli Rachlin

Trumpet Michigan State University Anthony Stanco East Lansing, Michigan

Undergraduate College Outstanding Performances

Dalton Stanland

Tenor Saxophone University of Kentucky Miles Osland Lexington, Kentucky

Joshua Wong

Piano University of California, Los Angeles Otmaro Ruiz Los Angeles, California

Michael Farina

Tenor Saxophone University of Connecticut John Mastroianni Storrs, Connecticut

Simon Comte

Tenor and Soprano Saxophones Manhattan School of Music Jaleel Shaw New York, New York

Yukai Yang

Drums Berklee College of Music Tiger Okoshi Boston, Massachusetts

Graduate College Winners

Gavin Allen-Dunn Piano

University of Northern Colorado Dana Landry Greeley, Colorado

Samuel Taylor

Tenor Saxophone DePaul University Scott Burns Chicago, Illinois

Graduate College Outstanding Performance

David Bernot

Tenor Saxophone University of Northern Colorado Dana Landry Greeley, Colorado

SMALL JAZZ COMBO

Junior High School Winner

Jazz Combo

Timothy Edwards Middle School Frank Marci South Windsor, Connecticut

Junior High School Outstanding Performance

Jazz Explorers

Harvard-Westlake Middle School Starr Wayne Los Angeles, California



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National Trumpet Competition (jazz division)

- Eli Rachlin, first place

- Andrew Kim, winner
- Nanami Haruta, winner

Betty Carter's Jazz Ahead

– Nanami Haruta, awardee

Carl Fontana Jazz Trombone Competition

– Nanami Haruta, winner

ITA Kai Winding Award and American Trombone Workshop Award

- MSU Jazz Trombones, winner

ATW Jazz Soloist

- Pablo Muller Santiago, winner

Yamaha Young Performing Artist Detroit Jazz Festival, Collegiate Combo Competition

– Jauron Perry Quintet, first place

Michigan Jazz Festival Rising Star Horn Competition

- Jauron Perry, first place
- Andrew Brown, finalist

Jazz Aspen Snowmass Academy Big Band Acceptances

- Jauron Perry, trumpet
- Jonathon Muir-Cotton, bass

United States Air Force Bands (jazz trumpet position)

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JAZZ HISTORY Kenneth Prouty

TRUMPET Anthony Stanco

BASS

Rodney Whitaker director of jazz studies

ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE Kevin Jones, hand drums Lolly Allen, vibraphone



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High School Winner

Plano West Jazz Octet

Plano West Senior High School Preston Pierce Plano, Texas

High School Outstanding Performance

Red in Blue

Ann Arbor Community High School Jack Wagner Ann Arbor, Michigan

Performing Arts High School Winner

Hamilton High School A Combo

Alexander Hamilton High School Academy of Music and Performing Arts Philip Topping Los Angeles, California

Performing Arts High School Outstanding Performance

Combo Prime

Las Vegas Academy of the Arts Patrick Bowen Las Vegas, Nevada

High School Honors Ensemble Winner

Colburn Jazz Workshop **Thursday Night Band**

Colburn Community School Lee Secard Los Angeles, California

High School Honors Ensemble Outstanding Performances

Advanced High School Jazz Workshop I

The Jazzschool at California Jazz Conservatory Peter Horvath Berkeley, California

Advanced High School Jazz Workshop II

The Jazzschool at California Jazz Conservatory Colin Hogan Berkeley, California

Charlie Parker Combo

Jazz at Lincoln Center High School Jazz Academy Mason Millard New York, New York

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Jaylen Ward Trio

Kansas City Kansas Community College





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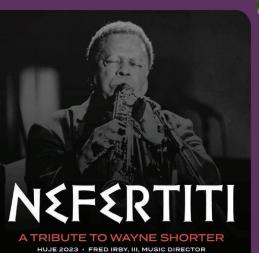
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RCC Combo Blue

Riverside City College Steven Ragsdale Riverside, California

Outstanding Soloist:

George Ramos III, Trumpet

Undergraduate College Winner

Leo Codiga & The Southwest Corridor

McGill University Kevin Dean Montreal, Quebec Canada

Undergraduate College Outstanding Performances

Coltrane Tribute Ensemble

University of Massachusetts, Amherst Thomas Giampietro

Thomas Giampietro Amherst, Massachusetts

Juno 3

McGill University Kevin Dean Montreal, Quebec Canada

Undergraduate College Outstanding Soloists

Angel McCray

Tenor Saxophone
CR Quartet
University of North Carolina,
Greensboro
Steve Haines
Greensboro, North Carolina

Danny Lock

Vocalist
Fusion Ensemble
Columbia College Chicago
Bill Boris
Chicago, Illinois

Jacob Smith

Drums

Joshua Polion

Trumpet
The Stamps Jazz Quintet
University of Miami, Frost
School of Music
Brian Lynch
Coral Gables, Florida

Nolan Slate

Tenor Saxophone

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Lex V. Crump
Blues/Pop/Rock Soloist
Performing Arts High School
Winner



MHSA Vocal Jazz Ensemble
Latin Group
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Outstanding Performance



Raymond Roberts, director



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Small Jazz Combo

Graduate College

When KC Meets Simon Coached by Jaleel Shaw (MM '02)

Outstanding Soloists

Chet Carlson (BM '27), double bass Simon Comté (BM '27), tenor saxophone



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Kevin Venier's Trio University of Miami, Frost School of Music John Hart Coral Gables, Florida

Graduate College Winners

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University of Tennessee, Knoxville Keith Brown Knoxville, Tennessee

When KC Meets Simon

Manhattan School of Music Jaleel Shaw New York, New York

Outstanding Soloist:

Chet Carlson, Double Bass Simon Comte, Tenor Saxophone

Graduate College Outstanding Performances

Aidan Gould Jazz Trio

University of North Texas Lynn Seaton Denton, Texas

Kevin Du Trio

New York University Michael Wolff New York, New York

Graduate College Outstanding Soloists

Edoardo Lacala

Bass

Joe Williams Scholarship Combo University of Nevada, Las Vegas Dave Loeb Las Vegas, Nevada

David Bernot

Tenor Saxophone

Jonathan Bumpus

Trombone Vanguard Octet University of Northern Colorado Erik Applegate Greeley, Colorado

Kori Park

Alto Saxophone
Paschall Combo
University of North Texas
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Latin Group Outstanding Performance

Dr. Marc Widenhofer, Director













SOLOISTS TAKE CENTER STAGE

TO WIN A DOWNBEAT STUDENT MUSIC Award, a young musician must first have the talent to deliver a strong, well-crafted solo. But to get there, they must also have a strong commitment to hard work, the mentorship of dedicated teachers and the confidence to make sure that solo moves the music forward and connects with other musicians and listeners. The winners in this year's Soloist category all showcase these skills.

Ben Collins-Siegel, a senior at Newark Academy, has won as a soloist for three of the last four years. According to Julius Tolentino, Newark Academy's band director, when he first met Collins-Siegel he recognized a pianist with great potential.

"I first met Ben when I was teaching a middle school Jazz House Kids class," Tolentino said. "He was also part of a New Jersey Youth Symphony jazz ensemble. Ben had started playing piano at age 4, but it took him a while to get to jazz."

"I played in one of Mr. T's NJYS big bands in 2019," said Collins-Siegel. "He challenged me to play a stride intro to Count Basie's 'Counter Block.' I'd only been playing jazz for one year and had never played stride before. I was intimidated to play it in front of hundreds of people, but somehow Mr. T's confidence allowed me to believe that I could perform something that seemed beyond my skill level. That moment encouraged me to want to continue pushing the limits of what I thought I was capable of and to pursue this music for the rest of my life."

"Ben's a senior now, and has begun playing in professional settings," added Tolentino. "He's already played with Christian McBride and John Pizzarelli."

Guitarist Ronnie Elliott also has multiple wins in the Soloist Home Schooled/Fine Arts Center category — repeating his 2024 award again this year. Just 15 years old, Elliott lives

in Greenville, South Carolina, and takes Zoom and occasional in-person lessons from noted jazz guitarist Jonathan Kreisberg, based in New York.

"I started teaching Ronnie when he was 13, and I've been working with him for about three years," recalled Kreisberg. "He has a lot of support at home and was very advanced at that young age. Since I've been teaching him, he's grown at least two feet, and I no longer have to avoid certain chords because of the size of hands. His physicality has caught up with his great ears. I'm working on getting him better so that when he does record and tour, he can have it all together."

Elliott is well on his way toward those goals. He's already performed with Etienne Charles and recently sat in with Pat Bianchi's trio.

Tenor and alto saxophonist Ryan Kaplan won the soloist award in the Performing Arts High School category. A student at New World School of the Arts in Miami, Kaplan was touring with the Herbie Hancock Institute of Jazz's Peer-to-Peer Sextet in March when DownBeat caught up with him.

"I started playing classical piano in the 6th grade, and I didn't really get exposed to jazz until I went to Interlochen and heard Bird for the first time," he said. "I'm playing alto with the Peer-to-Peer Sextet, but I prefer tenor now. Marquis Hill is on the tour, and his playing has been really inspirational to me"

Jim Gasior, associate professor of jazz and instrumental studies at New World School of the Arts, has established a strong program that's produced numerous Student Music Award winners over the years. "Ryan is exceptional," he said. "He has an great combination of talent and natural ability — and a pretty ferocious work ethic."

Eli Ranchin, a trumpeter enrolled at Michigan State University with a double major in jazz studies and jazz education, is the winner in

the Undergraduate College category. He has put together an impressive resume as he completes his junior year. He was recently named the winner in the National Trumpet Competition—Jazz Division. And he's a semifinalist in the International Trumpet Competition, held in May.

"Although Eli actually enrolled as a classical major, he just couldn't stay away from the jazz band," explained Anthony Stanco, assistant professor of jazz trumpet at MSU. "He's also been doing transcriptions of Roy Hargrove's music, has played with Terell Stafford, Benny Benack III, Rodney Whitaker, Michael Dease, Geoffrey Keezer and Marquise Hill — and is an energetic presence in almost everything involved with jazz at MSU."

"Jazz gives me a freedom to express myself, and it became the center of my musical identity and the driving force behind my passion for music," said Ranchin.

Gavin Allen-Dunn, a keyboardist set to earn his doctorate in jazz studies at the University of Northern Colorado, is the soloist winner in the Graduate College category. A native of Washington State, Allen-Dunn also received his master's from UNC. "I played piano from the time I was 4, but I didn't take it seriously until high school," he explained. "I decided to major in it, and at UNC, Dana Landry, director of jazz studies, was a big influence."

"Gavin's dynamic musical personality and fearless exploration of styles make his performances captivating," said Landry. "His passion is undeniable, drawing audiences in with his boundless energy and infectious spirit."

While at UNC, Allen-Dunn expanded his keyboard repertoire from piano to include Hammond organ and synthesizer. After graduation he plans to play in the Denver area for a year, then head to New York or Chicago. "I just want to play with the next level of musicians," he said.

—Terry Perkins

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Richard Dole - trombone, ensembles

Kent Hickey - trumpet, ensembles

Chelsea Hughey - drums, ensembles

Sean Imboden - arranging, ensembles, piano

Pavel Polanco-Safadit - Latin ensemble

Sandy Williams - guitar, ensembles

Jesse Wittman - bass, ensembles



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Sam Taylor

Tenor Saxophone

Seth Finch

Piano
Ben Fox Band
University of New Orleans
Brian Seeger
New Orleans, Louisiana

New Orleans, Louisiana New York, New York

LARGE JAZZ ENSEMBLE

Junior High School Winners

Beaumont Jazz Ambassadors

Beaumont Middle School Cynthia Plank Portland, Oregon

Jazz Ensemble

Hinsdale Middle School George Andrikokus Hinsdale, Illinois

Junior High School Outstanding Performances

Jazz Ensemble I

Grand Prairie Fine Arts Academy Mark De Hertogh Grand Prairie, Texas

Jazz Ensemble I

Sequoyah Middle School Christopher Leslie Federal Way, Washington

Ligon Jazz Band

Ligon Magnet Middle School Renee Todd Raleigh, North Carolina

Junior High School Honors Winner

2024 Middle School All-State Jazz Band

Florida Music Education Association Robert Keating, Gulliver Preparatory School Pinecrest, Florida

Junior High School Honors Outstanding Performance

The Little Big Band

Caleb Chapman's Soundhouse Kaden Larm Pleasant Grove, Utah

High School Winners

Jazz Ensemble

Mount Si High School Bill Leather Snoqualmie, Washington

Jazz Ensemble

Newton South High School Lisa Linde Newton, Massachusetts



Downbeat 2025

Large Jazz Ensemble
Graduate College Winner
COMPASS JAZZ ORCHESTRA
Dana Landry, Director

Jazz Soloist Graduate College Winner GAVIN ALLEN-DUNN, Piano

Dana Landry, Professor

Jazz Soloist
Graduate College Outstanding Performance
DAVID BERNOT, Tenor Saxophone
Dana Landry, Professor

Small Jazz Combo
Graduate College Outstanding Soloists
DAVID BERNOT, Tenor Saxophone
JONATHAN BUMPUS, Trombone
Vanguard Octet
Erik Applegate, Professor

Vocal Jazz Soloist Graduate College Winner

HANNAH RODRIGUEZ

Marion Powers, Professor

Jazz Arrangement
Graduate College Winner, Vocal
HANNAH RODRIGUEZ, "Ocean Avenue"
Marion Powers. Professor

Cade Guiterrez, saxophone UNC Compass Jazz Orchestra



JAZZ.UNCO.EDU

Student Music

Award Winners









Northwest Jazz Orchestra

Northwest High School Chris Strohmaier Waukee, Iowa

Plano West Jazz Orchestra

Plano West Senior High School Preston Pierce Plano, Texas

High School Outstanding Performances

Big Band I

Marryatville High School Mat Noble Adelaide, South Australia

Jazz Ensemble

Valley Christian High School Michael Jones San Jose, California

Performing Arts High School Winners

Jazz Band A

Osceola County School for the Arts Jason Anderson Kissimmee, Florida

Jazz Band

Las Vegas Academy of the Arts Patrick Bowen Las Vegas, Nevada

Jazz Ensemble I

Alexander W. Dreyfoos School of the Arts Christopher De León West Palm Beach, Florida

Performing Arts High School Outstanding Performances

Ambassador Jazz Orchestra

Orange County School of the Arts John Reynolds Santa Ana. California

Jazz Ensemble I

Douglas Anderson School of the Arts Don Zentz Jacksonville, Florida

Tarpon Springs Jazz Ensemble

Tarpon Springs Leadership Conservatory for the Arts Dr. Timothy Sexton Tarpon Springs, Florida

High School Honors Winners

LPAA Jazz Band

Live Performing Arts Academy Curtis Gaesser Folsom, California

SFJAZZ High School All-Stars Big Band

Eastman Congratulates its 2025 *DownBeat* Student Award Winners

Eastman Jazz Voice Ensemble

Sara Gazarek

Large Vocal Jazz Ensemble
Outstanding Performances
Undergraduate College
Kiersten Conway on

"Round Midnight"

Outstanding Soloist

Juan Saus Ruiz, "Lost" Christine Jensen

Jazz Arrangement Big Band Outstanding Arrangements Graduate College

Jack Snelling, "Under a Willow Tree"

Christine Jensen

Original Composition Large Ensemble Graduate College

Steven Hardy, "The Module Approach" Dave Rivello

Outstanding Compositions Graduate College



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Congratulations to our winners in Downbeat Magazine's 48th Annual Student Music Awards!

Jazz Soloist
Graduate College Winner
SAMUEL TAYLOR
TENOR SAXOPHONE
Scott Burns, faculty

Vocal Jazz Soloist
Graduate College
Outstanding Performances
LIZZI TRUMBORE
Kathryn Sherman, faculty

Large Vocal Jazz Ensemble
Undergraduate College
Outstanding Performances
DEPAUL VOCAL JAZZ ENSEMBLE
Kathryn Sherman, faculty

Jazz Arrangement
Graduate College
Outstanding Arrangements,
Small Ensemble
MILLIE AHEARN, "MAIDEN VOYAGE"
Scott Burns, faculty











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SFJAZZ Paul Contos San Francisco. California

High School Honors Outstanding Performances

Colburn Jazz Workshop Big Band

Colburn Community School Lee Secard Los Angeles, California

Jazz House Big Band

Jazz House Kids Nathan Eklund Montclair, New Jersey

Jazzschool Studio Band

Jazzschool Dave Eshelman Berkeley, California

Triangle Youth Jazz Orchestra

Triangle Youth Music Lisa Burn Raleigh, North Carolina

Community College Winners

RCC Jazz Ensemble

Riverside City College James Rocillo Riverside, California

RCC Jazz Orchestra

Riverside City College

Charles Richard Riverside, California

Community College Outstanding Performance

Oceanside Jazz Orchestra

MiraCosta College Steve Torok Oceanside, California

Undergraduate College Winners

Jazz Ensemble

Butler University Matthew Pivec Indianapolis, Indiana

Jazz Ensemble

Lawrence University Patricia Darling Appleton, Wisconsin

Undergraduate College Outstanding Performances

Fresno State Jazz Orchestra

California State University, Fresno Richard Lloyd Giddens Jr. Fresno. California

Ryota Sasaki Big Band

Berklee College of Music Bob Pilkington Boston, Massachusetts



Jaylen Ward Trio

Small Jazz Combo **Community College Winner**

KCKCC Blue Devil Funk Band

Small Vocal Jazz Group Community College Outstanding Performance Dr. Justin Binek, Director

Felicia Chance

Engineered Live Recording Community College Outstanding Recording

Heidi Eberhardt, "Dichotomy" Original Composition for Small Ensemble **Community College Winner**

The Standard Vocal Jazz Ensemble

Community College Outstanding Performance John Stafford II, Director

Felicia Chance

Engineered Studio Recording Community College Outstanding Recording

Ashlyn Reece

Large Vocal Jazz Ensemble Community College Outstanding Soloist Soloist on "Love Me or Leave Me" Fusion Vocal Jazz Ensemble John Stafford II, Director

Also, congratulations to The Standard Vocal Jazz Ensemble (John Stafford II, Director) for feature performances at the 2025 Jazz Education Network Conference and Kansas Music Educators Association In-Service Workship and to the 1:00 Jazz Combo (Brett Jackson, Director) for being named an Outstanding Ensemble at the 2025 Elmhurst University Jazz Festival!

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Full tution scholarships are still avaliable for 2025-26. Contact our faculty for more information!

Dr. Justin Binek - jbinek@kckcc.edu, Music Theory & Commercial Music Brett Jackson - bjackson@kckcc.edu, Instrumental Music

Dr. lan Corbett - corbetti@kckcc.edu, Audio Engineering John Stafford II - jstafford@kckcc.edu, Choral Music











BIG SOUND FROM SMALL JAZZ COMBOS

MUSICIANS ASPIRING TO WIN A SMALL Jazz Combo Student Music Award must have the ability to create music that transcends their individual talents and blends seamlessly with their bandmates. They also need the valuable input and advice that a dedicated educator can provide. All of this year's Small Jazz Combo winners have those assets in abundance.

According to Philip Topping, jazz director at Alexander Hamilton Senior High School in Los Angeles, the school's A Combo won in the Performing Arts High School category this year thanks to that combination of talented young musicians and a dedicated combo instructor: Kevin Kanner.

"One of my first goals as director was to put more effort into the combo program," said Topping. "By my third year we had expanded the combos from two to three. Kevin runs Combo A, Bruce Eskovitz does B and I run the C combo, which is mostly freshmen."

Combo A's winning lineup included Jackson Petty on guitar, Noah Farag on piano, Max Weiner on bass and Victor Cyrus-Franklin and Noah Steinman on drums.

"All the students in the group are great musicians and are gigging already," added Topping. "Our guitarist, Jackson Petty, was a real leader. He's been a big part of the group for the last two years. The A Combo also won last year in our category and received an Outstanding Performance in 2023 as well."

The Jaylen Ward Trio, representing Kansas City Kansas Community College, took home a win in the Community College category — one of many Student Music Awards that KCKCC has won over the years. Ward played drums in the trio along with Nick Gasser on bass and Josiah Assefa on tenor saxophone. According to Brett Jackson, director of instrumental music at KCKCC, the school typically has two jazz combos and two big bands every year in addition to a vocal music program.

"The recordings submitted to DownBeat actually came about through a noon-hour performance at our annual jazz summit," Jackson said. "A combo from our school plays during the break, and when I asked our students if their group might like to play, Ward said he had a trio that could do it. It was a special moment for Jaylen, Nick and Josiah, and when I listened to the recording of the set, we ended up submitting three tunes."

Leo Codiga and the Southwest Corridor, consisting of students at McGill University in Montreal, won in the Undergraduate College category. Saxophonist Codiga, guitarist Zacharie Winter and pianist August McKinney are from the U.S., and drummer Julian Ferrer and bassist Mason Jeffery-Off are from Canada.

Kevin Dean, professor of music in jazz studies since 1984, developed the jazz curriculum at McGill, which includes 20 to 25 jazz combos every academic year. He explained that the combo members came together on their own. "They've been playing together off and on for over two years," Dean said. "Leo writes all the original music for the combo. That's not surprising, since McGill requires two years of jazz composition as a requirement for an undergraduate degree. Musicians making a name for themselves almost all have original music as their voice, so we encourage our students to write original music."

"The guys in the group are some of the most dedicated young musicians I've ever met," said Codiga. I wrote the music for the project with them in mind, so I think that helps the group pull together. It's always a collaboration. We're definitely trying to keep the group together after graduation. We have our own practice space in Montreal that's also large enough to present performances."

The Harbingers, led by drummer Braden Jones, now a graduate student at the Eastman School of Music, won in the Graduate College category this year. The combo also in-

cluded Parker Bakall on bass, Margherita Fava on piano and Jack Roben on guitar. Originally from Memphis, Jones won a scholarship to attend the University of Tennessee Knoxville, where he met and began playing with future members of the Harbingers.

"I've always been entranced by music," he recalled, "and the music of Basie, Armstrong, Miles really opened my eyes and ears to new ways to approach the music I grew up hearing in Memphis — blues, country, rock. Greg Tardy was a mentor for me at UT as well as Eric Reed. They helped me to connect the dots and find new musical avenues. I'm now studying at Eastman, and trying to branch out even further, working with Gary Versace, Rich Thompson and Christine Jensen. I've never lost the desire to learn, and I'm still finding connecting points between many musical styles."

When KC Meets Simon, a trio of students at the Manhattan School of Music, earned a Jazz Combo win in the Graduate College category. The members are Simon Comte on saxophones, Chet Carlson on bass and Kabelo Mokhatla on drums.

"Simon's one of my students," said Jaleel Shaw, who teaches alto saxophone and small ensemble at Manhattan School of Music. "At Manhattan, students put their combo together, then choose their faculty instructor. Simon, Chet and Kabello chose me. They all brought in original compositions for the trio, and I worked with them throughout the semester. They're all incredible musicians, and all play at a super high level."

"We'd played together in different settings, but never together," added Comte. "Kabelo got us together, and we really wanted to work with Jaleel. We're all grateful for his mentorship and learned so much from him. It was a joy to explore a chordless trio and have the opportunity and time to develop a group sound. We're definitely going to keep playing together."

—Terry Perkins

2025 DOWNBEAT STUDENT MUSIC AWARD WINNERS





Large Vocal Jazz Ensemble
Graduate College
Outstanding Performance
KU Jazz Singers
Kerry Marsh, director

Outstanding Soloist: Shreya Bhatia



Blues/Pop/Rock Soloist Undergraduate College Outstanding Performance John Fraka, guitar



Engineered Lived Recording Undergraduate College Outstanding Recordings Keegan Kaiser



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Graduate College Winner

Compass Jazz Orchestra

University of Northern Colorado Dana Landry Greeley, Colorado

Graduate College Outstanding Performances

Jazz Ensemble I

University of Nevada, Las Vegas Dave Loeb & Nathan Tanyoue Las Vegas, Nevada

Oregon Jazz Ensemble

University of Oregon Paul Krueger Eugene, Oregon

VOCAL JAZZ SOLOIST

Junior High School Outstanding Performance

Julia Baron

Timothy Edwards Middle School Frank Marci South Windsor, Connecticut

Junior High School Honors Winner

Kate Chapman

Caleb Chapman's Soundhouse Caleb Chapman Pleasant Grove, Utah

Junior High School Honors Outstanding Performance

Savannah Lawrence

Dean Kaelin Vocal Studio Dean Kaelin Holladay, Utah

High School Winners

Elle Michelson

Valencia High School Christine Tavares Mocha Valencia, California

Stella White

Oak Bay High School Tina Horwood Victoria, British Columbia Canada

High School Outstanding Performances

Joshua Prabhakar

Valley Christian High School Michael Jones San Jose, California

MacKenzie Stiles

Heritage High School Billy Buhl Vancouver, Washington

Performing Arts High School Winners

Miri Izenberg

Orange County School of the Arts John Reynolds Santa Ana, California

Kalai Brockington

Ramon C. Cortines School of Visual and Performing Arts Drew Lewis Los Angeles, California

High School Honors Winner

Madison Kate

Rio Americano High School Bob Williams Sacramento, California

Community College Winner

Natalie Holsey

Southwestern Community College (The School for Music Vocations) Tobi Crawford Creston, Iowa

Community College Outstanding Performances

Brittney Tang

Mt. San Antonio College Jeremy Fox Walnut, California

Daniel Munoz



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CONGRATULATIONS!

DOWNBEAT 48TH STUDENT MUSIC AWARD WINNERS

·Large Vocal Jazz Ensemble High School Honors **Outstanding Performances**

Northwestern ACDA Jazz Honor Choir Northwestern American Choral Directors Association Jennifer Barnes, director

Small Jazz Combo Graduate College Outstanding Performances Aidan Gould Jazz Trio

> **Small Jazz Combo Graduate College Outstanding Soloists**

Kori Park, Alto Saxophone **Paschall Combo** Lynn Seaton, coach

Vocal Jazz Soloist Graduate College Outstanding Performances Julie Coggiola

Small Vocal Jazz Group **Undergraduate College** Winner Surround Sound

Jennifer Barnes, director

Large Vocal Jazz Ensemble Undergraduate College Winner

Avenue C Katelyn Robinson, director 💰

Outstanding Soloist

Marisa Cravero on "Stella by Starlight"

Large Vocal Jazz Ensemble **Graduate College Outstanding Performances**

UNT Jazz Singers Jennifer Barnes, director

Blues/Pop/Rock Soloist **Graduate College Outstanding Performances** Liz Townsend Vocalist

Latin Group Graduate College Winner Greenhouse Combo José Aponte, coach

Jazz Arrangement Graduate College Outstanding Arrangement, Vocal Julie Coggiola, "Taking A Chance on Love"

Jazz Arrangement Graduate College Winner, **Small Ensemble** Anthony Casolari,

"The Brightheaded One"

Jazz Arrangement Graduate College Outstanding Arrangements Big Band

Jack Lanhardt. "Lush Life"

Jazz Arrangement Graduate College Outstanding Arrangements Big Band

Naphatraphee Um, "Aung San Suu Kyi"

Jazz Arrangement Graduate College Outstanding Arrangements Studio Orchestra

Brian Lawrence, "Chega De Saudade (No More Blues)"

Engineered Live Recording Graduate College Outstanding Recording Brian Lawrence

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Mt. San Antonio College Jeremy Fox Walnut, California

Undergraduate College Winners

Marit Deanna Granmo

California State University, Long Beach Bob Cole Conservatory of Music Christine Helferich Guter Long Beach, California

Marly Mitchell

California State University, Long Beach Bob Cole Conservatory of Music Christine Helferich Guter Long Beach, California

Undergraduate College Outstanding Performances

Leah Rutherford

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

Morgan Delaney

California State University, Long Beach Bob Cole Conservatory of Music Christine Helferich Guter Long Beach, California

Sophia Matute

Florida International University

Lisanne Lyons Miami, Florida

Graduate College Winners

Alex Baird

California State University, Long Beach Bob Cole Conservatory of Music Christine Helferich Guter Long Beach, California

Hannah Rodriguez

University of Northern Colorado Marion Powers Greeley, Colorado

Graduate College Outstanding Performances

Julie Coggiola

University of North Texas Jennifer Barnes Denton, Texas

Lizzi Trumbore

DePaul University Kathryn Sherman Chicago, Illinois

SMALL VOCAL JAZZ GROUP

High School Winner

Vocal Jazz Ensemble

Leyden High Schools Stacy Cunningham Franklin Park, Illinois

High School Outstanding Performance

Measure 25

Valencia High School Christine Tavares Mocha Valencia, California

Community College Winner

JAZZ-ology

Contra Costa College Stephanie Austin Letson San Pablo, California

Outstanding Soloist:

Sheyrian Harris on "Wanna Know What I Want"

Community College Outstanding Performances

First Take

Southwestern Community College (The School for Music Vocations) Tobi Crawford Creston, Iowa

KCKCC Blue Devil Funk Band

Kansas City Kansas Community College Justin Binek Kansas City, Kansas

Undergraduate College Winner

Surround Sound

University of North Texas Jennifer Barnes Denton, Texas







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The Fourtunate Cats Small Vocal Jazz Group Undergraduate College Outstanding Performances

Afro Latin Jazz Ensemble
Latin Group
Undergraduate College
Outstanding Performances











Undergraduate College Outstanding Performances

The Fourtunate Cats

Western Michigan University Gregory Jasperse Kalamazoo, Michigan

The McGill Jazz Conglomerate

McGill University, Schulich School of Music Camille Thurman & Darrell Green Montreal, Quebec Canada

Jazz Singers

The University of Memphis, Scheidt School of Music Jack Cooper Memphis, Tennessee

Graduate College Winner

Frost Extensions

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

Graduate College Outstanding Performance

Panthonics

Florida International University Lisanne Lyons Miami. Florida

LARGE VOCAL JAZZ ENSEMBLE

Junior High School Winner

Eckstein Vocal Jazz Combo

Eckstein Middle School Moc Escobedo Seattle, Washington Outstanding Scat Soloist: Aviley Nossumon on "Centerpiece"

High School Winner

Wizardry

Windsor High School Amy Murphy Windsor, Colorado

High School Outstanding Performance

Avenue Jazz

Waukee High School Jeff Knutson Waukee, Iowa

High School Outstanding Soloists

Daniel Heringer

Soloist on "How Sweet It Is" Soundwaves Vocal Jazz Ensemble Valencia High School







Christine Tavares-Mocha Valencia, California

Tanvi Vibhakar

Soloist on "Was I in Love Alone" Voltage Vocal Jazz Ensemble Liberty High School Robert A. Williams North Liberty, Iowa

Performing Arts High School Winner

Vocal Ensemble

Natomas Charter School Jesse Crosson Sacramento, California

Outstanding Soloist:

Layla Ahmann on "Everything Happens to Me"

Performing Arts High School Outstanding Performances

Singers At Grand Arts

Ramon C. Cortines School of Visual and Performing Arts Drew Lewis Los Angeles, California

Outstanding Soloist:

Kalai Brockington on "Ain't No Sunshine"

Treble on Grand

Ramon C. Cortines School of Visual and Performing Arts Drew Lewis Los Angeles, California

High School Honors Winner

2024 Colorado All-State Treble Jazz Choir

Various Colorado High Schools Guest Conductor: Christine Helferich Guter California State University, Long Beach

Bob Cole Conservatory of Music Long Beach, California

High School Honors Outstanding Performances

SCVA Vocal Jazz Contemporary A Cappella

Honor Choir Southern California Vocal Association Jamie Shew Los Angeles, California

Northwestern ACDA Jazz Honor Choir

Northwestern American Choral Directors Association Jennifer Barnes University of North Texas Denton, Texas

Congratulations to the BMCC Award-Winning Musicians!

Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC) proudly celebrates our talented students, who were recognized in this year's DownBeat Student Music Awards! Your dedication, artistry, and passion continue to inspire us all.



Temitope IdowuWinner, Soloist Category*



Elias Solomon
Outstanding Performance, Soloist Category*



BMCC Jazz Ensemble
Outstanding Performance, Ensemble Category*

*Blues/Pop/Rock, Community College

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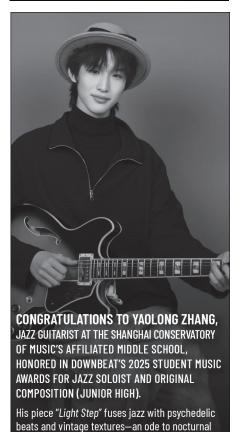
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Community College Winner

Singcopation

Mt. San Antonio College Bruce Rogers Walnut, California

Outstanding Soloists:

Brittney Tang and Lyric Guidry on "Hurry on Down"

Community College Outstanding Performance

Frequency Vocal Jazz

MiraCosta College Matt Falker Oceanside, California

Community College Outstanding Soloist

Ashlyn Reece

Soloist on "Love Me or Leave Me" Fusion Vocal Jazz Ensemble Kansas City Kansas Community College John Stafford II Kansas City, Kansas

Undergraduate College Winner

Avenue C

University of North Texas Katelyn Robinson Denton, Texas

Outstanding Soloist:

Marisa Cravero on "Stella by Starlight"

Undergraduate College Outstanding Performances

DePaul Vocal Jazz Ensemble

DePaul University

Kathryn Sherman Chicago, Illinois

Eastman Jazz Voice Ensemble

Eastman School of Music Sara Gazarek Rochester, New York

Outstanding Soloist:

Kiersten Conway on "'Round Midnight"

Undergraduate College Outstanding Soloist

Melvys Barrios

Soloist on "A Case of You" 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:

Marit Deanna Granmo on "Fly"

Graduate College Outstanding Performances

KU Jazz Singers

University of Kansas Kerry Marsh Lawrence, Kansas •Shreya Bhatia on "Green Finch and Linnet Bird"

UNT Jazz Singers

University of North Texas Jennifer Barnes Denton, Texas

Xiongguan ZHANG.

BLUES/POP/ROCK SOLOIST

Junior High School Winner

Jack Murphy

Tenor Saxophone Derby Academy Brian Martin Hingham, Massachusetts

Junior High School Honors Winner

Savannah Lawrence

Vocalist Dean Kaelin Vocal Studio Dean Kaelin Holladay, Utah

Junior High School Honors Outstanding Performance

Jacie Nelson

Vocalist Mountaintop Music Institute Jaden Bueno Saratoga Springs, Utah

High School Winner

Laesio Littlejohn

Bass Plano West Senior High School Preston Pierce Plano, Texas

High School Outstanding Performances

Andrew Wood-Sue Wing

Guitar Concord Academy Christopher Gagne Concord, Massachusetts

Chloe Langford

Vocalist Mundelein High School Andy Sturgeon Mundelein, Illinois

Performing Arts High School Winner

Lex Crump

Vocalist Milwaukee High School of the Raymond Roberts Milwaukee. Wisconsin

High School Honors Winner

Sadie Hull

Vocalist Mountaintop Music Institute Jaden Bueno Saratoga Springs, Utah

High School Honors Outstanding Performances

Cami Errami

Vocalist Lincoln High School Timothy Buchholz University of Wisconsin-Stevens Stevens Point, Wisconsin

Grey Nielson

Guitar

Mountaintop Music Institute Jaden Bueno Saratoga Springs, Utah

Community College Winner

Temitope Idowu

Drums **CUNY Borough of Manhattan** Community College Can Olgun New York, New York

Community College Outstanding Performance

Elias Solomon

Guitar CUNY Borough of Manhattan Community College Quentin Angus New York, New York

Undergraduate College Winners

Dalton Stanland

Alto and Tenor Saxophones University of Kentucky Miles Osland Lexington, Kentucky

Matt Incontro

Alto Saxophone State University of New York at Fredonia Nick Weiser Fredonia, New York

Undergraduate College Outstanding Performances

Alex Merk

Drums University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music Scott Belck Cincinnati. Ohio

John Fraka

Guitar University of Kansas Eddie Moore Lawrence, Kansas

Will Ryan

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













COMPOSERS CONFESS THEIR INSPIRATIONS

FROM BILLY STRAYHORN AND AN HEIR-loom plant to Pat Metheny and Snarky Puppy, this year's Original Composition Small Ensemble Student Music Award winners drew from myriad sources of inspiration. But whether early or well into their compositional journey, each honoree looked inward to express their vision.

"The piece was spurred by a motif that just popped into my head while thinking of the concept of reaching an unattainable goal," said William Robinson, High School division winner, of his "Chasing The Horizon" submission. "I was struggling with a lot of thoughts of self-doubt and not being able to reach what I thought would be obtainable.

"I feel like I'm constantly hearing ideas as I listen to more and more music," he continued. "This one, I just thought, was one that was really worth writing out and making into a full fledged composition." A junior at Westlake High School in Thousand Oaks, California, Robinson, a drummer, had only been writing material since last September, and "Chasing The Horizon" was one of his first originals.

High School Honors division winner Max Roston-Saul, composer of "Nocturne For The Summer Solstice," said he's learned so many jazz standards, "I'm starting to be able to emulate the structure. The 'A' section really feels like a Tin Pan Alley kind of song with some gospel influences. Then the 'B' section ... has these sus chords going throughout in different keys."

"Max is one of those kids who shows up excited every time for his lessons," said fellow pianist Colin Hogan, Roston-Saul's jazz ensemble instructor at The Jazzschool at California Jazz Conservatory in Berkeley. "He shows up to almost every lesson saying, 'Hey, Colin, can I play you the three new songs I wrote this week?' And he's a really advanced student, especially when it comes to his harmonic language."

The compositions of Erik Jekabson (Jazzschool Young Musicians program director) and Billy Strayhorn had been influencing Roston-Saul, a junior at Head-Royce School in Oakland. "I was trying to learn as many Billy Strayhorn songs as possible — especially his ballads — trying to get my ear acquainted with what chords he loved to use the most and when he used them," he said.

Heidi Eberhardt is the rare Original Composition honoree who receives both music and lyrics songwriting credit for her piece "Dichotomy." "I've been singing for quite a while and have been writing my own original music since I was maybe 13," explained the Community College division honoree, who is currently finishing up at Kansas City Kansas Community College with plans to transfer to University of Kansas upon graduation to be its first-ever jazz voice major with Kerry Marsh.

"I grabbed that title because I was doing a lot of very black-and-white thinking," she said of her song, which sounds like the title of a lost bebop classic. "I was exiting a rougher period in my life. But I was on the up-and-up and was thinking, 'OK, cool. Now I can have some self-reflection.'"

"Heidi is a very smart young woman who writes really heady lyrics," said Justin Binek, associate professor of music at KCKCC. "She's a 4.0 student who also is an incredibly hard worker and a truly serious musician. This semester, she began studying bass so that she could better write for rhythm section."

Guitarist and composer Jiaqi Dai has the distinction of being the first Original Composition Small Ensemble winner from Shanghai Conservatory of Music, which, at 20 years old, boasts China's longest-running undergraduate jazz program. "He's been doing a lot of writing for small groups in really different genres," said Xiongguan Zhang, associate professor of guitar at the conservatory. "Something that we're trying to do here in China is blend different music elements together."

"The piece was actually an assignment (in) our jazz composition class by Xiongguan. He assigned us to create a blues piece in any style," Dai wrote of "Pharoah's Blues," in an email translated by Zhang. "Inspired, I decided to write an 'Egyptian'-style blues incorporating rock elements and adding new sections. ... The melody follows a blues structure but carries an Egyptian musical flavor, evoking a sense of adventure inside the pyramids — hence the name.

"While composing this piece, I drew inspiration from Snarky Puppy, one of my favorite bands," he continued. "Their music maintains intricate complexity while remaining memorable, and their style is incredibly diverse."

"I didn't start writing until my senior year of college and didn't do the real deep dive until COVID," said Graduate College division winner Dan VanZeeland. When asked who the inspiration was for his piece "Ralph," he replied, "It's actually about a plant."

Though he's currently finishing up his master's degree at University of Wisconsin–Madison, VanZeeland was enrolled in a graduate seminar while at the University of Miami's Frost School of Music when the seeds for "Ralph" were planted.

"The assignment was to write a piece based on the shape of an object that you found near and dear to yourself — the skyline from the town that you're from or a baseball," he said. "I picked a plant that my mom had actually gotten years ago. She's been taking off clippings and giving them to her children and even strangers, and now I hand them away."

"Dan is hard working and meticulous," observed Stephen Guerra, assistant professor at Frost. "His music is informed by the history and tradition of the music, yet it's forward-looking. He's always looking at new ways to spin old sounds."

In addition to composing, performing and teaching, VanZeeland has a unique post-graduate goal: "My dream one day would be to run a big band or a large ensemble of all writers."

—Yoshi Kato

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JAZZ







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Andres Rico, "Nature Boy"

Associate Professor, Dr. Ben Haugland

About the Texas Tech Jazz Program

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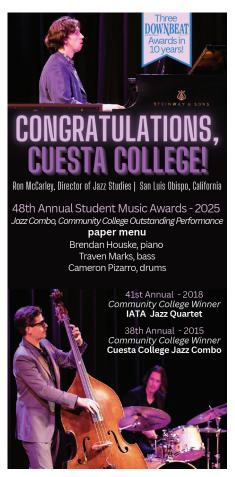
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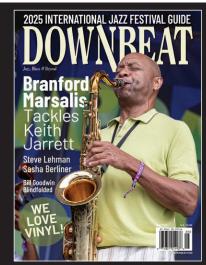
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Graduate College Winner

Kevin Venier

Guitar
University of Miami,
Frost School of Music
John Hart
Coral Gables, Florida

Graduate College Outstanding Performances

Liz Townsend

Vocalist
University of North Texas
Rosana Eckert
Denton, Texas

Ryan Dong

Drums

California State University, Long Beach Bob Cole Conservatory of Music Jeff Jarvis Long Beach, California

BLUES/POP/ROCK GROUP

Junior High School Winner

The Derby Dynasty Trio

Derby Academy Brian Martin Hingham, Massachusetts

Junior High School Honors Winner

Soundhouse Junior Rock Project

Caleb Chapman's Soundhouse Damon Morreale & Jordan Saucier Pleasant Grove. Utah

High School Winner

Cary-Grove Jazz Combo

Cary-Grove High School Patrick Whalen Cary, Illinois

High School Outstanding Performance

Concord Academy Vocal

Jazz & Pop Ensemble

Concord Academy Christopher Gagne & Terry Doyon Concord, Massachusetts

Performing Arts High School Winner

Kinder HSPVA Jazz Combo 2

Kinder High School for the Performing and Visual Arts James Westfall Houston, Texas

Performing Arts High School Outstanding Performance

The Midi Fusion Jazz Ensemble

Booker T. Washington HSPVA Terence Hobdy Dallas, Texas

High School Honors Ensemble Winner

Crescent Super Band

Caleb Chapman's Soundhouse Caleb Chapman Pleasant Grove, Utah

High School Honors Ensemble Outstanding Performances

Vicious Beat

Caleb Chapman's Soundhouse Caleb Chapman & Kaden Larm Pleasant Grove, Utah

Voodoo Orchestra

Caleb Chapman's Soundhouse Caleb Chapman & Kaden Larm Pleasant Grove, Utah

Community College Winner

Calhoun Community College Show Band

Calhoun Community College Dr. Matt Leder Decatur, Alabama



Community College Outstanding Performance

BMCC Jazz Ensemble

CUNY Borough of Manhattan Community College Can Olgun New York, New York

Undergraduate College Winners

Fredonia Jazz Flextet

The State University of New York at Fredonia Nick Weiser Fredonia, New York

Stink Stank Stanland

University of Kentucky Miles Osland Lexington, Kentucky

Undergraduate College Outstanding Performances

Frost Funk Ensemble

University of Miami, Frost School of Music Steve Rucker Coral Gables, Florida

Lakeshore

Samford University Steven Potaczek Homewood. Alabama

Graduate College Winner

Frank Zappa Ensemble University of Miami,

Frost School of Music Renato Diz Coral Gables, Florida

Graduate College Outstanding Performances

Frost Fusion Ensemble

University of Miami, Frost School of Music Steve Rucker Coral Gables. Florida

Kevin Venier's Fusion Experience

University of Miami, Frost School of Music John Hart Coral Gables. Florida

LATIN GROUP

Performing Arts High School Outstanding Performances

HSPVA Latin Ensemble

Kinder High School for the Performing and Visual Arts James Westfall Houston, Texas

Vocal Jazz Ensemble

Milwaukee High School for the Arts Raymond Roberts Milwaukee, Wisconsin

High School Honors Ensemble Winner

Caliente

Diaz Music Institute José Antonio Diaz Houston, Texas

High School Honors Ensemble Outstanding Performances

Kian T. Linam Trio

Virginia & Maryland High Schools Dan Nimmer New York, New York

La Onda Caribena

Caleb Chapman's Soundhouse Caleb Chapman Pleasant Grove, Utah

Community College Outstanding Performance

The Standard Vocal Jazz Ensemble

Kansas City Kansas Community College John Stafford II Kansas City, Kansas

Undergraduate College Winner

Latin Jazz Ensemble

Lawrence University José Encarnacion Appleton, Wisconsin

Undergraduate College Outstanding Performances

Afro Latin Jazz Ensemble

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Large Vocal Jazz Ensemble Performing Arts High School Outstanding Performances Singers At Grand Arts

Outstanding Soloist Kalai Brockington on "Ain't No Sunshine"

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Ramon C. Cortines School of Visual and Performing Arts Los Angeles, California Drew Lewis, Director





Western Michigan University Carlo De Rosa Kalamazoo, Michigan

Vanderbilt Latin Jazz

Vanderbilt University Marc Widenhofer Nashville, Tennessee

Graduate College Winner

Greenhouse Combo

University of North Texas José Aponte Denton, Texas

ORIGINAL COMPOSITION SMALL ENSEMNBLE

Junior High School Honors Winner

Yaolong Zhang, "Light Step"

Shanghai Conservatory of Music Affiliated Middle School Xiongguan Zhang Shanghai, China

Junior High School Honors Outstanding Composition

Jenny Yu, "Musical Passport"

Mayflower Art Center Yiming Wu Andover, Massachusetts

High School Winners

Laesio Littlejohn, "Evolution"

Plano West Senior High School Preston Pierce Plano, Texas

William Robinson, "Chasing the Horizon"

Westlake High School Brian Peter Westlake Village, California

High School Outstanding Compositions

Benjamin Collins-Siegel, "Daybreak"

Newark Academy Julius Tolentino Livingston, New Jersey

Dylan James Shaw, "Above the Sky Possibilities"

Plano West Senior High School Preston Pierce Plano, Texas

High School Honors Winners

Max Roston-Saul, "Nocturne for the Summer Solstice"

The Jazzschool at California Jazz Conservatory Colin Hogan Berkeley, California

Saoirse Sipes, "Dracula Flow 6"

Colburn Community School Lee Secard Los Angeles, California

High School Honors Outstanding Compositions

Charlie Cohn, "Walking in Leaps"

Colburn Community School Lee Secard Los Angeles, California

Joey Kim-Weigandt, "A Little Reminiscing"

Young Lions Jazz Conservatory Gilbert Castellanos San Diego, California

Jordan Klein, "Jab Cross"

Colburn Community School Lee Secard Los Angeles, California

Manos Vourgorakis, "The Valley"

Colburn Community School Lee Secard Los Angeles, California

Olex Donghao Li, "Songbirds"

Mayflower Art Center Yiming Wu Andover, Massachusetts

Zhuocheng (Tony) Li, "The Awakening"

Mayflower Art Center Yiming Wu Andover, Massachusetts

Community College Winner

Heidi Eberhardt, "Dichotomy"

Kansas City Kansas Community College Justin Binek Kansas City, Kansas

Community College Outstanding Composition

Roman Goron, "Fern"

Shoreline Community College Matt Jorgensen Shoreline, Washington

Undergraduate College Winner

Jiaqi Dai, "Pharoah's Blues" Shanghai Conservatory of Music

Shanghai Conservatory of Music Xiongguan Zhang Shanghai, China

Undergraduate College Outstanding Compositions

Jayson Verrett, Danny Lock, Miles Pretel, Dante Notolli & Paris Catura, "Never Be Free"

Columbia College Chicago

Bill Boris Chicago, Illinois

Sam Hicks, "Flournoy"

Berklee College of Music Neal Smith Boston, Massachusetts

Graduate College Winner

Dan VanZeeland, "Ralph"

University of Miami, Frost School of Music Stephen Guerra Coral Gables, Florida



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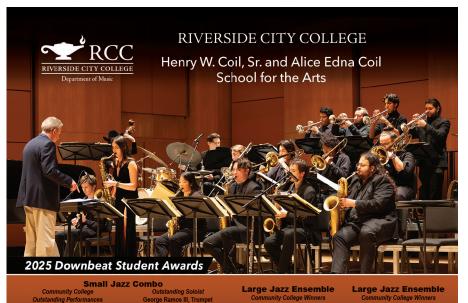
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Dr. Lisanne Lyons

Director, FIU Jazz Vocal Ensembles

Dr. Jamie OusleyArea Coordinator, Jazz Performance

















Graduate College Outstanding Composition

Joseph Palmer, "Falling Fronds" University of Miami, Frost School of Music Chuck Bergeron Coral Gables, Florida

ORIGINAL COMPOSITION LARGE ENSEMBLE

High School Winner

Ethan Liao, "By Candlelight"

San Francisco University High School Terrence Brewer San Francisco, California

High School Outstanding Composition

Elaina Stuppler, "Opener"

Lakeridge High School Daniel Hartley Lake Oswego, Oregon

Performing Arts High School Winner

Seb Olsen, "Dee-Dee Papa"

Idyllwild Arts Academy Dan Radlauer Idyllwild, California













High School Honors Winner

Evan Wiederanders, "Ask the Professor"

SFJAZZ Paul Contos San Francisco, California

High School Honors Outstanding Composition

Joaquin Garde, "Don't Even Know"

Colburn Community School Lee Secard Los Angeles, California

Undergraduate College Winner

Zhengtao Pan, "On That Bus"

Berklee College of Music Bob Pilkington Boston, Massachusetts

Undergraduate College Outstanding Composition

Sylvia Khouri, "Bonsai" Berklee College of Music

Ayn Inserto
Boston, Massachusetts

Graduate College Winners

Jack Snelling, "Under a Willow Tree"

Eastman School of Music Christine Jensen Rochester, New York

John Kosch, "Syncing..."

University of Nebraska-Lincoln Greg Simon Lincoln, Nebraska

Graduate College Outstanding Compositions

Bruno Bišćan, "Clowning Around"

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

Jean-Baptiste Rousseaux, "Rosa Idiel Luvi"

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

Steven Hardy, "The Module Approach"

Eastman School of Music Dave Rivello Rochester, New York

JAZZ ARRANGEMENT

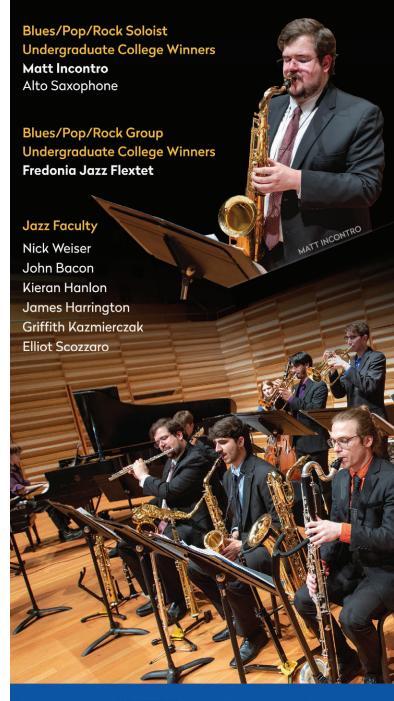
High School Honors Winner

Jackson Petty, "Autumn in New York"

Colburn Community School Lee Secard Los Angeles, California

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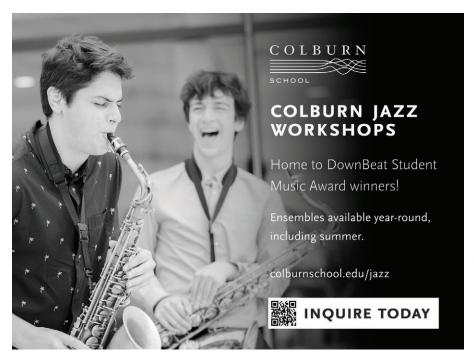
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Pictured from left: Charlie Hux, Jack Murphy, and Benji Stuart

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Blues/Pop/Rock Soloist -Junior High School Winner:

> Jack Murphy, Tenor Saxophone

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The Juilliard School Michael Mossman New York, New York

Undergraduate College Outstanding Arrangements

Sylvia Khouri, "Days of Wine and Roses"

Berklee College of Music Ayn Inserto Boston, Massachusetts

Zhengtao Pan, "Liu Yang River"

Berklee College of Music Bob Pilkington Boston, Massachusetts

Graduate College Winner, Vocal

Hannah Rodriguez, "Ocean Avenue"

University of Northern Colorado Marion Powers Greeley, Colorado

Graduate College Outstanding Arrangement, Vocal

Julie Coggiola, "Taking A Chance on Love" University of North Texas

Jennifer Barnes
Denton, Texas

Graduate College Winner, Small Ensemble

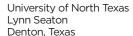
Anthony Casolari, "The Brightheaded One"











Graduate College Outstanding Arrangements Small Ensemble

Andres Rico, "Nature Boy"

Texas Tech University Ben Haugland Lubbock, Texas

Jean-Baptiste Rousseaux, "Airegin"

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

Millie Ahearn, "Maiden Voyage"

DePaul University Scott Burns Chicago, Illinois

Graduate College Winner Large Ensemble

Jorge Machain, "If You Could See Me Now"

University of Miami, Frost School of Music Stephen Guerra Coral Gables, Florida

Graduate College Outstanding Arrangements Large Ensemble

Jack Lanhardt, "Lush Life"

University of North Texas Richard DeRosa Denton, Texas

Juan Saus Ruiz, "Lost"

Eastman School of Music Christine Jensen Rochester, New York

Naphatraphee Um, "Aung San Suu Kyi" University of North Texas Richard DeRosa Denton, Texas

Graduate College Winner Studio Orchestra

Dan VanZeeland, "Frevo"

University of Miami, Frost School of Music Stephen Guerra Coral Gables, Florida

Graduate College Outstanding Arrangements Studio Orchestra

Brian Lawrence, "Chega De Saudade (No More Blues)"

University of North Texas Richard DeRosa Denton, Texas

Thomas Wenglinski, "Escape from the City"

University of Miami, Frost School of Music Stephen Guerra Coral Gables, Florida

ENGINEERED LIVE RECORDING

Performing Arts High School Winner

Liam Gillespie

Tarpon Springs Leadership Conservatory for the Arts Dr. Timothy Sexton Tarpon Springs, Florida

Community College Outstanding Recording

Felecia Chance

Kansas City Kansas Community College John Stafford II Kansas City, Kansas





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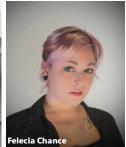
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Jim Anderson **Jeff Baker Janice Borla Don Braden Jeff Coffin** John Daversa **Orbert Davis Monika Herzig** Fred Irby III **Bart Marantz Miles Osland Bob Parsons Dave Rivello Albert Rivera John Santos Gregory Tardy Roger Treece Ryan Truesdell James Warrick**



















Undergraduate College Outstanding Recordings

Jack Dobosh

Cornell University Paul Merrill Ithaca, New York

Keegan Kaiser

University of Kansas Brock Babcock Lawrence, Kansas

Graduate College Outstanding Recording

Brian Lawrence

University of North Texas Robert Parton Denton, Texas Coral Gables, Florida

ENGINEERED STUDIO RECORDING

Performing Arts High School Outstanding Recording

Josiah McKinnev

New Orleans Center for Creative Arts Dylan Hunter New Orleans, Louisiana

High School Honors Winner

Saipele Fredricksen

Caleb Chapman's Soundhouse Dean Kaelin Pleasant Grove, Utah

Community College Outstanding Recording

Felecia Chance

Kansas City Kansas Community College John Stafford II Kansas City, Kansas

Undergraduate College Winner

Leith McLeod

University of Denver Michael Schulze Denver, Colorado

Undergraduate College Outstanding Recordings

Ben Mini

University of Miami, FrostSchool of Music Chuck Bergeron Coral Gables, Florida

Trevor Briggs

University of Denver Peter Stoltzman Denver, Colorado

Graduate College Outstanding Recording

Samuel Vaughn

University of Central Oklahoma Brian Gorrell Edmond, Oklahoma

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?)
- 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?
- Extraneous noises, clicks, hum, etc. (For a nonlive 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.

HIDGES

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

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

Janice Borla: Vocalist; Former Director of Vocal Jazz, North Central College; vocal jazz camp founder. Don Braden: Saxophonist, flutist, composer,

arranger; Director, Harvard Jazz Combo Initiative. **Jeff Coffin:** Saxophonist, composer, bandleader, 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 and conductor of the Chicago Jazz Philharmonic.

Monika Herzig: Pianist, composer, author, Vice Rector and Professor of Artistic Research at Jam Music Lab University, Vienna.

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.

Rest in peace to long-time adjudicator **Claire Daly:** Baritone saxophonist, recording artist, composer, educator and lovely human being.



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Blindfold Test) BY TED PANKEN

Rodney Whitaker

t 56, Rodney Whitaker, professor of jazz bass and director of jazz A studies at Michigan State University, is equally distinguished in his parallel careers as educator and performer. A son of Detroit, Whitaker's performance c.v. includes consequential tenures with Roy Hargrove (1991-'95) and the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra (1996-2004) and 13 leader albums, most recently Mosaic: The Music Of Gregg Hill (Origin). This is Whitaker's first Blindfold Test.

Eric Reed Trio

"Harlemania: Drop Me Off In Harlem/Harlem Nocturne/Take The 'A' Train" (Manhattan Melodies, Verve, 1999) Reed, piano; Reginald Veal, bass; Gregory Hutchinson, drums; Duke Ellington, composer.

This could be so many people. It sounds a bit like John Clayton. Or Russell Hall. Martin Wind? The piano player sounds like Benny Green. No? I don't know who it is. [afterwards] You totally fooled me. I wasn't expecting that. I remember this. Great record. I should have guessed Eric because he's one of my favorite pianists to play with — great touch, so adventurous, can play any style of jazz. I played with Greg every night with Roy Hargrove, and we made a lot of records together — he's one of my favorites. He and Reginald sound good together. I joined Wynton after he and Ben Wolfe left. I also followed him and then Bob Hurst with the Harrison-Blanchard Quintet after Bob left in 1988 to go with Tony Williams. Veal has such a big sound, a beautiful touch and great intonation. He was one of the first people in the '80s to play without an amp. I hadn't heard many recordings where he plays solos. 5 stars.

Kaisa Mäensivu

"Moon Waves" (Moving Parts, Greenleaf Music, 2025) Mäensivu, bass, composer; Sasha Berliner, vibraphone; Max Light, guitar; Eden Ladin, piano; Joe Peri, drums. Linda Oh? Dave Holland? I'm thinking of this bassist's lyricism and a similar sound. The piece is beautiful. Because I grew up in a hard-bop town, people typically think that I might not like something like this but I do. I like the guitarist's sound, too. 4 stars. [afterwards] It's great to hear the conclusions young musicians come to. I think more people are

playing at a high level now than when I was a kid. But they don't have

any gigs.

Ornette Coleman "Mob Job" (Sound Museum: Hidden Man, Verve/Harmolodic, 1996) Coleman, alto saxophone, composer; Geri Allen, piano; Charnett Moffett, bass; Denardo Coleman, drums. Ornette Coleman. The bass player is playing a Charlie Haden style but with more chops. I heard him double up the bass line a bit. Gary Peacock? This is tough. The pianist reminds me a lot of Keith Jarrett. 5 stars. [afterwards] I've listened to this. I always looked up to Charnett musically. He was six, seven months older than me. He came out of the gate as a teenager, playing with Wynton and Ornette. He was an extraordinarily gifted player who died too young. I should have known that was Geri. I wasn't thinking of her. I could hear a little Keith Jarrett and Andrew Hill in her playing. She's my hometown hero. Such an influence. I recorded with her, and in 2017 I started a group in Detroit called the Gathering Orchestra, named for one of her tunes. It's amazing that she knew so much music at such a young age and was exposed to so many different things. 5 stars.

Robert Hurst

"3 For Lawrence" (Bob A Palindrome, Bebob, 2001/2013) Hurst, bass, composer; Bennie Maupin, flute: Marcus Belgrave, trumpet: Branford Marsalis, tenor saxophone: Robert Glasper, piano; Jeff "Tain" Watts, drums; Adam Rudolph, percussion.

I'd know Bob's sound anywhere, especially his arco playing. It's very cre-



ative. He has a unique approach to the instrument, influenced by masters like Paul Chambers and Ron Carter, but also deeply influenced by Dave Holland in his virtuosity and rhythmic freedom. He's always been a mentor-hero, just a few years older than me, and I tried to do the things I saw him do, make my own recordings and so on. That's Marcus Belgrave, who was one of my mentors. 5 stars. [afterwards] I didn't know Robert Glasper recorded with Bob.

Scott Colley/Edward Simon/Brian Blade

"The Thicket" (Three Visitors, GroundUP, 2024) Colley, bass, composer; Simon, piano; Blade, drums.

Is this a 1960s recording or more modern? I really dig the drummer, who reminds me of Gerald Cleaver. Nice pianist, too. Likes Cecil Taylor. They were burning. It's good to hear music like that, with no chord progressions, and people playing it at such a high level, with great chops and swinging in its own way. I don't know who they are. 5 stars. [afterwards] Three of the best. Scott is an incredible bass player. I had a chance to play with Brian on Kenny Garrett's album, Pursuance, and with Edward when we were both with Terence Blanchard.

James Carter

"Composition 40Q" (Conversin' With The Elders, Atlantic, 1995) Carter, bass saxophone; Hamiet Bluiett, baritone saxophone; Craig Taborn, piano; Jaribu Shahid, bass; Tani Tabbal, drums; Anthony Braxton, composer.

James Carter. He's flying all over the horns. [There are two saxophonists.] Is the other one Hamiet Bluiett? I remember they did a project together. Hamiet was one of the most underrated musicians ever. When people decide to play on the avant-garde side of jazz, they're sometimes undervalued by the public. Craig Taborn on piano, and I venture to guess Jaribu Shahid and Tani Tabbal. I grew up checking out Jaribu, and I've been playing with Craig since he was 17 or 18. He's not from Detroit, but he went to the University of Michigan, when he played in a group with all of us — Gerald Cleaver, James, Cassius Richmond and Dwight Adams. I grew up with a strong bebop and hard-bop tradition, but our heroes were the musicians from the AACM. I used to do my homework to this kind of music. 5 stars.

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



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