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# DOWNBEAT

**JULY 2025**

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President	Kevin Maher
Editor & Publisher	Frank Alkyer
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Creative Director	Žaneta Čuntová
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**Record Companies & Schools**  
 Jennifer Ruban-Gentile  
 Associate Publisher  
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**Musical Instruments & East Coast Schools**  
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## OFFICES

188 W. Industrial Dr., Ste. 310, Elmhurst, IL 60126  
 630-941-2030  
<http://downbeat.com>  
[editor@downbeat.com](mailto:editor@downbeat.com)

## CUSTOMER SERVICE

877-904-5299 / [service@downbeat.com](mailto:service@downbeat.com)

## CONTRIBUTORS

### Senior Contributors:

Aaron Cohen, Howard Mandel, John McDonough

**Atlanta:** Jon Ross; **Boston:** Frank-John Hadley, Allen Morrison; **Chicago:** Alain Drouot, Michael Jackson, Jeff Johnson, Bill Meyer, Paul Natkin, Howard Reich; **Chicago:** Ayana Contreras; **Indiana:** Mark Sheldon; **Los Angeles:** Gary Fukushima, Josef Woodward, Scott Yanow; **Michigan:** John Ephland; **Minneapolis:** Andrea Canter; **Montana:** Philip Freeman; **Nashville:** Bob Doerschuk; **New Orleans:** Cree McCree; **New York:** Herb Boyd, Bill Douthart, Kira Grunenberg, Stephanie Jones, Ashley Kahn, Matthew Kassel, Jimmy Katz, Suzanne Lorge, Phillip Lutz, Jim Macnie, Ken Micallef, Bill Milkowski, Ivana Ng, Dan Ouellette, Ted Panken, Tom Staudter, Jack Vartoogian; **Philadelphia:** Shaun Brady; **Portland:** Alexa Peters; **San Francisco:** Mars Breslow, Yoshi Kato; **Seattle:** Paul de Barros; **Washington, D.C.:** Willard Jenkins, John Murph, Michael Wilderman; **Canada:** J.D. Considine, James Hale; **France:** Jean Szlamowicz; **Germany:** Peter Margasak, Hyou Vielz; **Great Britain:** Ammar Kalla, Tina Edwards; **Portugal:** José Duarte; **Romania:** Virgil Mihailescu; **Russia:** Cyril Moshkov. **Contributor Emeritus:** Fred Bouchard.

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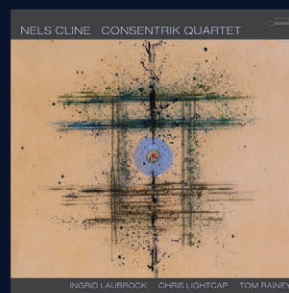
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**JULY 2025**

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#### *Life, Lessons & Friendship*

BY BILL MILKOWSKI

DownBeat caught up with the longtime friends and fellow six-string marvels separately as they were preparing to hit the road independently — Vai going out on tour with the King Crimson tribute band BEAT, Satriani doing a nine-date Las Vegas residency with Sammy Hagar — before reuniting for their electrifying “Surfing with the Hydra” tour.

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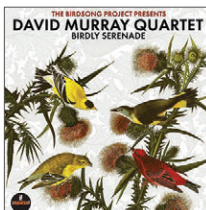
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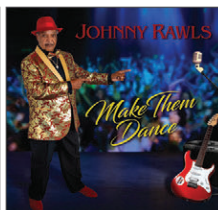


Terri Lyne Carrington, left, and Christie Dashiell honor the late Max Roach and renew his call for social justice with *We Insist 2025!*

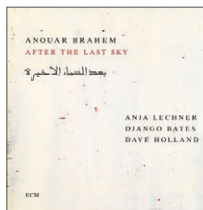
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From left: Marcus Tenney, Andrew Randazzo, DJ Harrison, Corey Fonville and Morgan Burrs.



Andrew  
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## First Take > BY FRANK ALKYER



# Between Divisiveness & Understanding

**WE LIVE IN DIVISIVE TIMES. A FEW WEEKS** ago, we learned that the gifted composer, band-leader and trumpeter Nicholas Payton was fired from his gig as the brass department chair at Berklee College of Music after two conservative media outlets wrote scathing articles about his perceived anti-Semitic remarks.

If you'd like to look them up, feel free to go online and search Nicholas Payton, Jews and anti-Semitic. You'll find the articles and plenty of social media chatter. We're not giving it the space here.

At the same time, Payton started a beef on social media with pianist Connie Han. He reposted a former bandmate's trash talk about the pianist not being able to swing and worse, presumably because she's Asian and a woman. It was part of a back-and-forth between the two artists, with Han saying Payton "does not deserve his position at Berklee." All of this led to an online petition on change.org demanding his dismissal from Berklee. At press time, the petition had more than 5,000 signatures.

Payton, who got a promotion at Berklee in the fall of 2024, was fired in mid-April of this year. One thing to note: He made plenty of inflammatory online comments that pre-dated his promotion. That's how Payton rolls. After all, brash talk and heated disagreements have been part of jazz culture for more than a century.

Did Payton cross the line? I think so. But I'm an old white guy who married a Jewish girl and raised his daughter in the faith. Take what I say with a grain of kosher salt.

Should he have lost his gig? I don't know. Maybe there's more to this than has come out. But I'd like to say no. At an institution of higher learning, where the marketplace of ideas should

be championed, this could have been a teaching moment. What if there was an opportunity for deep discussion and debate? How about a series of conversations in front of an audience of students and faculty? It would be interesting and instructive to hear where Payton is coming from. Bring in other viewpoints, including Han's, to hear where they are coming from, too. It could be an opportunity to separate fact from fiction, and maybe even change some minds.

While all this was going on, DownBeat had scheduled a feature on Terri Lyne Carrington and Christie Dashiell's reimagining of Max Roach's classic 1960 protest album *We Insist!* That article about *We Insist!* 2025! appears on page 30 of this issue.

Here's the rub. Carrington teaches at Berklee and led the founding of the Berklee Institute of Jazz and Gender Justice back in 2018. As we all know, diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives are under attack in this country. Carrington has concerns about the safety and future of this vital organization in the current political climate.

It's complex. At a glance, you'd think these two artists and educators would operate on opposite sides of a very tall fence. But here they were, working at the same institution. And Payton has been featured with Carrington's band Social Science. He played on Carrington's Grammy-winning album *New Standards Vol. 1*.

People's opinions and sociopolitical controversies are nearly impossible to fully grasp in the context of social media. It's easy to be provocative when hiding behind a cell phone. It feels perfectly *right* to cancel viewpoints you don't agree with. But it's damn hard to have real, honest conversations and arrive at any sense of mutual understanding in our very divisive world. **DB**



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## Chords & Discords



### STEVE LEHMAN MAKING THE MUSIC OF ANTHONY BRAXTON

BY GARY FUKUSHIMA, PHOTO BY RI SOUTHERLAND CHEN

It's a little after seven in Berkeley, California. 50 minutes have passed since Lehman's last performance. He's sitting in a chair, looking at the camera. He's wearing a dark shirt and a dark jacket. He's looking at the camera with a slight smile. The background is dark and out of focus.

### We Love L.A.

Profound thanks to Gary Fukushima for the superb encapsulation of the state of Los Angeles' jazz scene — and how it blossomed into this unique 21st century wonder — in his finely layered profile of Steve Lehman (May issue), one of numerous East Coast transplants receiving and transmitting nourishment and inspiration with the homegrown talent here.

MARTIN WISKOL  
HUNTINGTON BEACH, CALIFORNIA

### Black Power

Having been born in 1941, I consider myself part of an undeclared lost generation that ran into the fear of darkness. It was time for me to embrace Black power, Black studies. The racial and geographical places of jazz have been made more complex by incorporating musical styles that are identified as jazz, and the difficult ways in which the music is marketed and distributed. Jazz is not fusion or rock, jazz is the blues!

AL CARTER BEY  
DJ, WDCB

### A Positive Word

Let me say a word of positivity concerning John McDonough. He has written many fine articles for DownBeat, very informative and well considered. As for his reviews of recordings, any DownBeat reader should know in advance his tastes in music and react accordingly. I find his reviews interesting and well thought out even if I don't always agree with them.

MARTIN CABLK  
VIA EMAIL

### 'Let's Go!'

Hey, DownBeat, are you going to digitally archive all your issues since your beginnings starting in 1934? You started it, now finish it! It would be the greatest thing in the world!

LUKE CASIPE  
DOWNBEAT READER FROM THE BEGINNING OF TIME  
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

**Editor's Note:** Luke, we know. We know! We're working on it. It's a big project for a small, hard-working group of people.

### Iverson's Blindfold Test

Just a note to say I've been reading DownBeat for decades. Ethan Iverson's Blindfold Test is the most fascinating that I can remember. What insight. It's why we love the "moosic."

JON ALIC  
VIA EMAIL

### Stop the Hate

I am a long-time subscriber that loves jazz and blues music. But I have had just about enough of the "hate and lies" against President Trump in many of your articles. If this continues I will be cancelling my subscription (such a shame!).

MARK TINO  
VIA EMAIL

**Editor's Note:** Mark, we understand that these are divisive times. We invite jazz artists to sit down and express their thoughts. Currently, many of them are worried about a perceived assault on the arts from the federal government, and that puts President Trump in the crosshairs. DownBeat has reported on the history of the last 10 decades through the eyes of jazz and blues musicians. We do our best to be fair to all parties and respect all viewpoints. But we cannot tell artists what they should and should not say, even when they're taking shots at DownBeat. Even if you don't agree, and I don't always agree, either, I hope you can try to understand why they are speaking out, and maybe we can find ways to unify and not divide us.

### A Perfect Package

Thank you! The DownBeat May edition has safely arrived, perfectly packed! Good luck, and have an eye on democracy in the USA. Jazz has always been on the side of democracy!

REINHARD HOLLUNDER  
HAMBURG, GERMANY

### Corrections

It was a bad month for getting proper names right in the June issue of DownBeat. We truly regret any and all errors and have corrected them in our digital edition. We will do better in the future.

- We misspelled guitarist Frode Kjekstad's name in the Organ Jazz column (page 50).
- We misspelled pianist Stanley Cowell's name in our Historical column (page 52).
- We misspelled bassist/composer Alex "Apollo" Ayala's name in Indie Life (page 62).
- The CUNY VMCC Jazz Ensemble was mislabeled in a photo caption on page 102.

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A close-up portrait of Jason Moran, a man with a short beard and mustache, looking slightly to the left. He is wearing a blue patterned shirt and a dark jacket with a red and white striped pocket square.

2025 ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE

# JASON MORAN

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The Westerlies, from left, Riley Mulherkar, Chloe Rowlands, Addison Maye-Saxon and Andy Clausen.

## The Westerlies Shape-Note Explorations

“Have you ever gotten together with 40 strangers and belted out songs for three hours?” Andy Clausen asks. “It’s a healing thing. It’s what we’re meant to do as humans, commune around beautiful experiences and feel free.”

No stranger to communal musical experi-

ences, Brooklyn-based trombonist Clausen has spent the past 15 years with his brass quartet The Westerlies writing and performing intricate musical repertoire with the aim of bringing audiences together. From 2014’s debut album *Wish The Children Would Come On Home*, which reworked the repertoire of American

composer Wayne Horvitz, to the gospel, jazz and Americana stylings of 2020’s *Wherein Lies The Good* and 2023’s *Move*, which paid homage to composer Nico Muhly, The Westerlies have developed a unique reputation for exploring the emotional textures of American music. On the group’s latest album, *Paradise*, Clausen and his bandmates are now delving into their most historic American musical tradition yet: Sacred Harp music.

Originating as hymnal music in 18th-century England, by the early 19th century these songs took root in New England and the American South thanks to their shape-note arrangements, where sheet music was arranged with different shapes to signify vocal sounds and meanings that those without any musical training could join in and learn to sing along. The 1844 publication of *The Sacred Harp* tunebook went on to popularize and secularize this choral music, transforming the practice of shape-note singing into an American choral folk tradition that continues today.

“I first came across shape-note singing through [singer-songwriter] Sam Amidon, since his parents are avid shape-note singers, and they recorded a definitive collection of the music in the 1970s for Nonesuch,” Clausen says over a video call from his home studio. “Sam introduced this music into his repertoire, and then we began covering those songs also. By 2020, I was heading to these shape-note sings in Brooklyn, and it was amazing to see people of all walks of life and creeds come together to produce such raw and janky music. People sing at the top of their lungs and the harmonies are so fascinating — it made me realize that this is a singular American tradition that would be perfect for The Westerlies to explore.”

Along with fellow bandmembers Riley Mulherkar and Chloe Rowlands on trumpet and trombonist Addison Maye-Saxon, the group began going through the Sacred Harp hymnals to see which repertoire they could adapt and rerecord, as well as finding inspiration to write new music that could add to the tradition. The result is the 10 journeying and fascinatingly complex tracks of *Paradise*. Opener “Fight On” sets the tone, transforming a 19th-century Sacred Harp hymnal into a barrage of 16th-note ostinatos that bubble atop the bassy punctuation of trombone phrases, showcasing the group’s tight interplay and appetite for technical virtuosity, while other historical renditions like 1835

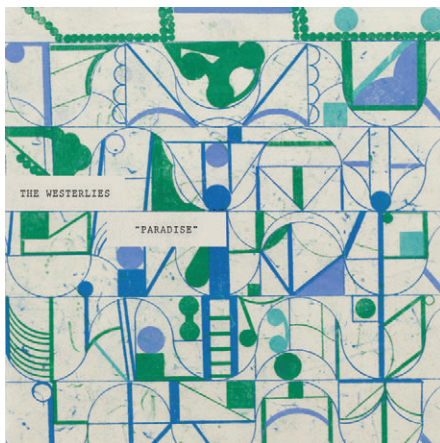


tune “Louisiana” produces a more lively fanfare and the haunting ballad “Parting Friends” takes on a whispering, intimate intonation.

Seamlessly interwoven with these historical interpretations are collaborations with Sam Amidon and singer Aoife O’Donovan, as well as a series of new compositions such as Clausen’s rollicking, polyrhythmic “The 5:10 To Ronkonkoma” and Rowlands’ deep-swinging, soulful melodies on “Kerhonkson.” The cumulative effect produces a record that feels both historical, yet strikingly modern; full of muscular technicality and also the type of full-throated melodies that could easily get a crowd singing along instantly.

“The way we approach any music from contemporary works by Nico Muhly to 200-year-old compositions like ‘Parting Friends’ is to simply get at the emotional core of the material,” Clausen explains. “Sometimes we have to go through radical changes to get at that core, but other times we play it as written, which is exactly what we did with the 1848 tune ‘Paradise For Petra’ on the album.”

With Amidon being the “gateway drug into shape-note singing,” as Clausen describes him, his inclusion on the album felt like a no-brainer, although it proved challenging to find a Sacred Harp song that he hadn’t already played or recorded. “One day I was sitting at my piano,



and I came across this song ‘Paradise,’ which opens on the IV chord, not the I, which is something Sam does a lot of in his music, and I knew it would be perfect for him,” Clausen says. “We recorded ‘Weeping Mary’ with Aoife O’Donovan since that was a song we were already playing on tour with her a couple years ago as an encore. When we got into the studio, her first take was absolutely perfect. It’s so rare for that to happen, especially since most of her part is improvised.”

Already performing the record live across a handful of dates in 2025, Clausen has found audiences to be especially responsive, reflecting

the communal nature of the shape-note songs themselves. “We’re always looking for just one person to come up to us after the show and say that the music resonated with them, and with this repertoire more and more people are doing that,” he says with a smile. “The album asks the question of what paradise means, and to us it’s gathering around art and fostering empathy, which is something music instinctually does. With the state of division especially in the U.S. today, that feels more important than ever.”

Following the release of *Paradise*, Clausen says the group has “at least 20 records in the pipeline” waiting to be developed and recorded. Most immediately, they will be producing a double album of unreleased material written by one of their heroes, guitarist Bill Frisell.

“Growing up, Bill Frisell’s ethos of openness in improvisation was so inspiring,” Clausen says. “He gave us a collection of material he wrote during the pandemic and said we could do whatever we wanted to it. He’s so humble, he said he wasn’t sure there would be anything good in there, but of course there’s golden nuggets in everything.”

With that project scheduled to record early next year, it seems there will be ample opportunity for audiences to continue gathering with The Westerlies, to listen, feel and ultimately heal.

—Ammar Kalia

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"Playing duo is one of the most difficult things to do, after playing solo," says drummer Lesley Mok, here with duo cohort pianist Phillip Golub.

# Lesley Mok & Phillip Golub

## *Listening with an Ear for Form*

**IN THE WANING DAYS OF COVID, WHEN THE** world was learning how to reconnect, two New York artists began meeting across Boston to improvise and talk. Drummer and interdisciplinary artist Lesley Mok and pianist-composer Phillip Golub were both students at the time. They'd met before, and chatted at shows and various gatherings. But when they came together for their duo sessions, they began connecting on similar interests and mutual points of reference: a deep love for Nancy Wilson, a fascination with their instruments' timbres and resonances, a reverence for space. They started mapping new contours together. And soon, a dynamic emerged.

Over the next three years, Mok and Golub honed a duo sound that would become *Dream Brigade*. Its elements would shift and renew, giving way to their self-titled March release on Infrequent Seams. What they uncovered through these explorations, among many discoveries and surprises, was an ability to expand their individual instincts, together.

"Playing duo is one of the most difficult

things to do, after playing solo," laughs Mok, who has collaborated with Tomeka Reid, William Parker, Ingrid Laubrock, Mary Halvorson, Kenny Barron, Adam O'Farrill and other distinctive leaders. "Trying to create the same breadth and the same depth and relational dynamics or more complex dynamics that might exist more easily within a trio or a larger instrumentation, that's something that, for me, has been a really important discovery and learning process." In such an exposed setting, tendencies and reflexes also began changing. "The things that might feel more instinctual as a decision in a larger ensemble ... don't work as easily in a duo."

Instinct, according to Mok and Golub, is pliable. It's absorbing and expandable. In playing together, they've developed new instincts that materialize across *Dream Brigade*, from a kind of spatial listening to a deep-access restraint and, finally, to the different ways they intuit each other's receptions and responses. "Your instincts," says Golub, "are composed. They're affected by what you practice, by what you think about,

by what you hear, by what you talk about. And they change. And they develop. And they hopefully get better."

*Dream Brigade* documents six improvised tracks plus "Darn That Dream" (by Jimmy Van Heusen) and "Conception" (by George Shearing). The music traces the artists' intention in each moment and over the arc of each form they create together. For the listener, these gestures can sound and feel like one section is either blossoming or worm-holing into the next, particularly on pieces like "Reverse Palindrome" and "Tunneled Throat." But each track has structure and a narrative of motion.

"That's something I've realized we can do; we can both listen with an ear for form," says Golub, who has worked extensively with esperanza spalding, Cecil McBee and the late Wayne Shorter. As the duo listened and responded, erector-setting their way through each improvisation, one question became increasingly urgent and specific for both of them: What is this?

"You don't know how long it's going to be when you play," says Golub. "When you



sit down, it could be two minutes, it could be 20.” He remembers really listening for an answer to that question when they recorded “Invisible Ink,” which serves as something of a fulcrum on *Dream Brigade*. In its sparseness, the music captures the very human feeling of waiting to receive, then choosing how to proceed from the moment of reception.

“There’s something mysterious about it to me,” says Mok, who remembers thinking, “I don’t even want to press down on the brushes. ... [It] feels like we’re almost voice-leading our emotions

***‘The things that might feel more instinctual as a decision in a larger ensemble ... don’t work as easily in a duo.’***

—Lesley Mok

or something like that. I felt like [Phillip] really set the tone for how I wanted to play. I knew I didn’t want to develop the piece as we were going: this is just what it is, this vignette.” After they recorded the track, Golub’s response to its playback almost undermined the intention both artists put into the composition: “There can be a sense, after you listen to it, that it was always obvious that it was like that. But it wasn’t, actually. That was a decision that came in the middle of the piece.”

Melody plays an interesting role throughout *Dream Brigade*, on the improvised gestures and the standard tunes. Mok frequently explores phrasal-melodic relationships in the form of cadences, both in tempo and out of time: “It’s this in-between space of decorating Phillip’s phrases but also punctuating. And I think that’s how I’m often thinking about melody and phrasing and, in particular, the melodic contours of ‘Darn That Dream’ and ‘Conception.’” For Golub, trusting Mok’s treatment of the songs allows his own melodic inventions to stretch through the progressions.

“I can hear in what Lesley plays that they know the song and the cadences of the song and where the resolutions are,” he says. “And even when you’re playing rubato and stretching out the time so that everything is 50 times slower than it normally is, all those things are still there. ... Even if we’re decorating it in this abstract way and playing a bunch of notes that don’t fit and doing all this other stuff, the song is still going. It’s all still happening. And I trust Lesley to hear that. And I know that they are hearing it.”

As Mok and Golub explore their duo voice, they develop new perspectives together, stretching instincts in their individual practices. Their choices in the studio might feel momentary, but they’re the result of expanding ideas. And they leave a lasting impression on the artist and the listener. “In a way,” says Mok, “those fleeting instances of a feeling — or just a momentary way to something — are the most magical. And in some ways those are the most true. It’s hard for me to say anything definitively because I think the nature of the world and of people is that it’s always changing and it’s transient in some way. In a musical way, that’s what I’m really interested in exploring in art.”

—Stephanie Jones

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"I'm not getting any younger, and in my later years I want to make sure my own visions can be realized," says pianist George Colligan on splitting his leader and sideperson responsibilities.

# George Colligan's Vision Realized

**FROM ONE PERSPECTIVE, THE EMINENTLY** versatile pianist George Colligan claims membership in the population of jazz musicians best-known as first-call collaborators in sideperson mode. His name and reputation are familiar in the footnoted zone just outside the main stage spotlights and on countless album credits over the past 30-something years. A short list of the

many liaisons the now 55-year-old can boast includes Cassandra Wilson, Michael Brecker, Miguel Zenón, Gary Bartz, Nicholas Payton, Mark Turner, Stefon Harris, Christian McBride, Gary Thomas (who he considers a strong influence) and many others, and on multiple jazz sub-genre fronts.

Meanwhile, Colligan has also built an

impressive legacy and discography of more than 25 titles under his own name, the latest addition a piano-trio gem rescued from the archives. *Live At The Jazz Standard* manages to document a potent trio setting with legendary drummer Jack DeJohnette and a young Linda May Han Oh on bass, while also commemorating one of New York's most nurturing and beloved jazz clubs, which closed in 2020, a victim of the COVID shakedown/lockdown.

Colligan, born in New Jersey and raised mostly in Maryland, studied classical trumpet and music education at the Peabody Institute before plunging deep into his busy life as a go-to jazz pianist. After spending 15 years living in New York, he headed west to Portland 14 years ago with his wife, jazz pianist Kerry Politzer, and children. He is now a tenured professor at Portland State University.

One of Colligan's notable students is saxophonist Nicole Glover, who studied with him at the Peabody Institute before going on to considerable fame, playing with Artemis, Wynton Marsalis, Christian McBride and sometimes with Colligan. She appears, for instance, on Colligan's multifaceted 2014 album *You'll Hear It*, which might be considered a "this is my life" portrait of the artist, wending through New York and Portland connections.

"In general," says Colligan, "I am a fan of variety, and I like to make albums that have a lot of different aspects, whether they be different musicians, instrumentation or types of songs or repertoire, etc. I think there's a way to maintain consistency without being boring, and there's a way to go a lot of different places musically without losing focus."

"There are a lot of opinions out there regarding the idea of versatility, and I think versatility can be viewed negatively at times — sort of the 'jack of all trades, master of none' idea. Conversely, I think to be a successful musician, you must be versatile in order to make a living — until you find your niche. *You'll Hear It* was an opportunity to showcase some different musical moods, but also different musicians whom I admire and have extensive musical relationships with."

*Live At The Jazz Standard*, recorded in August 2014, is an example of an archival release waiting to happen and be discovered, brought out into public light and public record. Officially, the live set was a promotional gig for Colligan's 2013 trio album *Endless Mysteries* (with DeJohnette joined by Larry Grenadier on bass). Colligan explains that "the recording of that one night at the Jazz Standard sat on a computer hard drive for many years."

"In December 2021, I was stuck in New York: I had caught COVID, and I was quarantining in a hotel in Brooklyn. I was bored and found this recording on my computer. I listened to it, and I said, 'I need to release this as an album.' It was



truly a special night.” Whirlwind Records head Michael Janisch stepped in to make the release a reality.

Colligan has worked with DeJohnette in many contexts, as part of the drummer’s own band, in a special project with tap dancer wizard Savion Glover and other settings. He enjoys a special *sympatico* with DeJohnette, commenting, “I think the most obvious thing that connects Jack and me is the piano and drums connection; he started on piano and switched to drums, while I was a trumpeter who played drums and then switched to piano. The connection in general between piano and drums in a jazz band is distinct because you both share the rhythmic space. Also, with piano and

***‘Jack DeJohnette is the type of collaborator that never lets you down.’***

drums is the idea that there is both your traditional role and much room for interaction and interpretation.

“Jack is the type of collaborator that never lets you down. He’s in it to win it, and he also wants you to win it. He will keep going as long as you want to keep going. His energy is tremendous.”

Considering influences, Colligan goes far and wide, starting with Wynton Marsalis. “As far as pianists go,” he adds, “the big ones are obvious — Herbie Hancock, McCoy Tyner, Chick Corea, Keith Jarrett, Kenny Kirkland, Mulgrew Miller, Wynton Kelly, Ahmad Jamal — but I try to have a wide spectrum. To just count pianists as influences is limiting. I’m honestly more influenced by trumpeters. My earliest transcriptions were Freddie Hubbard, Lee Morgan, Clifford Brown. I just took licks I learned from them and played them on piano.”

At this point in Colligan’s development, the paths of sideman and bandleader make for symbiotic parallels. He knows and ponders the subject as a matter of course.

“In some ways,” Colligan points out, “the realm of the sideman versus the realm of the bandleader are so different. Certain instruments tend to lead people more toward being a sideman because they tend to be viewed as accompanists. If you play drums or bass or piano or guitar, you can go your whole life without being a bandleader. Some people are completely content with that.

“I did an interview with Buster Williams for my blog, *Jazz Truth*, and he said something about how being a sideman was the highest honor. I came up as a musician identifying with this idea. For me, the highest compliment and the truest validation of one’s musicianship is to be asked by another musician to join them for a performance.”

In his case, though, he admits, “I wanted to be, and I still want to be, a bandleader because I want to play my own compositions. Plus, I want to have more influence over the direction of the music and to sort of chart my own destiny as opposed to waiting for the phone to ring. But there’s so much more responsibility as a bandleader. Plus, there is so much more luck and intangibility involved.

“As I get older, I am focusing more on my own stuff. It’s not to say that I don’t want to play as a sideman at all, because, honestly, I love the challenge, and I still love to collaborate and make music as long as it’s with great people and great musicians. But I’m not getting any younger, and in my later years I want to make sure my own visions can be realized.” —Josef Woodard



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"All those female voices are choirs of women coming to heal the world from the imbalance of the masculine and feminine," Meza says of her new album, *Portal*.

# Camila Meza's Celebration of Women

**CAMILA MEZA HAS BEEN ON A JOURNEY** of self-discovery since the multifaceted vocalist, guitarist and composer first emerged from her hometown of Santiago, Chile, and migrated to New York to study at the New School of Jazz, where she quickly became a recognized force. Six years after the release of her critically acclaimed *Ambar* (Sony Masterworks), she returns with *Portal* (GroundUP Music), her first all-originals album and, by far, her most personal project to date.

"What is interesting is that I didn't name the album *Portal* because of this personal transformation," she said from her second home in Guatemala, near Lake Atitlán. "I actually wrote most of this music in 2019 to fulfill a Jazz Gallery Commission, and composed it in kind of a trance. But a lot of these songs really made sense three, four, five years later. So it was a very prophetic album."

By the time Meza actually started recording during the pandemic, compositions celebrating women and female archetypes blossomed in the studio when she became pregnant and gave birth to her son. Throughout that time, she worked out of a DIY home studio that she continued to use while the baby was sleeping, then joined forces with her keyboardist and co-producer Shai Maestro to enhance the tracks in a professional studio.

Featuring drummer Ofri Nehemya and harpist Margaret Davis, *Portal* boasts a panoply of special guests: vocalists Gretchen Parlato and Becca Stevens; drummer Caleb Van Gelder; pianist Gadi Lehavi; and the Mapuche artist and poet Faumelisa Manquepillán, who recites a poem in her south Chilean indigenous language.

But Meza herself is the sun around which the other planets revolve, helping her tell a story from deep inside her soul that is both intimately personal and sweepingly universal. During the following conversation, edited for length and clarity, she discussed what that means to her.

**Cree McCree:** *This is a very personal album about what it means to be a woman, and on the pensive opening track, "Utopia," you sing, "I breathe slow." Do you practice meditation?*

**Camila Meza:** Yes, meditative breathing and yoga. I feel like yoga has actually saved my life. It really anchors me and gives me the renewal I need to keep going in this chaotic world.

**McCree:** *What was it like recording the album in your own home studio?*

**Meza:** It was really fun and totally different from everything that I've done before. On all my previous albums, everybody went to the studio and played at the same time, and in two

days you have an album. This process took literally years, because every layer was worked on through time.

**McCree:** *You co-produced it with Shai Maestro?*

**Meza:** Yes, and he really is a maestro. I sent him demos and recordings of the songs, a live recording from the Jazz Gallery and some arrangements. But Shai enhanced my vision. He would send me ideas and I'd be like, "Oh my God, that part with the synth here, it's amazing." We'd go back and forth with constant feedback.

**McCree:** *He really enhanced the vocals and also your guitar. Was guitar your first instrument?*

**Meza:** Well, I always sang. It was so natural that I didn't consider myself a singer until way later. It was just something that I did. There were acoustic guitars at home, and my mom put us into folklore guitar lessons. Then, when I was 15 years old, I asked for an electric guitar and got it for Christmas. And that changed my life, because of the possibilities of that instrument.

**McCree:** *You are very fluent in English and sing in both English and Spanish. How do you decide which language you want to use?*

**Meza:** It's usually a very natural decision. Some syllables work better in certain grooves,



depending on whether it's English or Spanish. That said, this album has a couple of instances where I surprised myself. Like in "Portal," which actually has a line of Spanish in it. In the process of creation, suddenly this melody came out and I was singing it in Spanish, and I was like, oh, hold on. I can actually do this. I don't have to choose all the time.

**McCree:** On the track "Nieno La," the Mapuche poet Faumelisa Manquepillán recites a poem in her indigenous language. What drew you to her work?

**Meza:** When I was writing these songs, I was urgently trying to find a harmonious resolution to all the negativity in the world, and the archetype of a wise woman came to me in a dream. I had this very incidental piece of music that was meant to bring that sense of entering a different realm, and went looking for poetry to embody that spirit. I found Faumelisa online and fell in love with her work, and she recorded that track in the south of Chile and sent it to me. Every time I hear it, I get goosebumps because I feel like we're reconnecting with that wise woman spirit we need right now.

**McCree:** This is your first all-originals album. Do you want to do more in the future?

**Meza:** Definitely. I spent many years not allowing myself to write, because I would judge everything I wrote and not feel confident about it. My last two albums have had a lot of my own material, but it's been a slow process. So for me to say this is my new album and it's all my personal songs is a pretty big deal.

**McCree:** The album is being released when women and the work they do is under assault in America. Can *Portal* help women live through these unsettling times?

**Meza:** It definitely has that energy behind it. All those female voices are choirs of women coming to heal the world from the imbalance of the masculine and feminine. "Harvesting Under The Moon," with the moon being representative of feminine energy that fluctuates, also talks about revisiting history so we can bring love to the world instead of war and destruction.

**McCree:** What would you most like people to take away from listening to *Portal*?

**Meza:** That we have so much power as individuals and collectively to create harmony and beauty. I truly believe we can fulfill those utopian scenarios and transmute the negativity that is so present right now into something beautiful and harmonious. And if this music can help you go through that process when you listen to it, then I will have accomplished something.

DB

# A New Fest in Chicago

**CHICAGO-BASED CONSTELLATION PERFORMING Arts** will present *Sound & Gravity*, a five-day musical event scheduled for Sept. 10–14 at multiple venues around the city. Billed as an immersive experience, the inaugural festival will cater to adventurous, creative listeners and include a diverse roster of artists from a range of musical genres that span jazz, experimental, contemporary classical, electronic and indie music, according to organizer Mike Reed, a locally based musician and presenter who operates Constellation, a hub for innovative musical practices that produces approximately 200 shows per year. In 2006, Reed founded the acclaimed Pitchfork Music Festival, which ran each summer in Chicago's Union Park until last year.

Participating *Sound & Gravity* venues include Beat Kitchen, Hungry Brain, Constellation, Rockwell Patio, Judson & Moore, Guild Row and Rockwell on the River Event Space, all of which are located within a 15-minute walk of each other and span either side of the Chicago River. The easily navigable setup allows attendees to take in the local culture while enjoying cutting-edge music.

Scheduled *Sound & Gravity* performers include Tarbaby, Chicago Underground Duo, The Messthetics and James Brandon Lewis, Bill Callahan, Mdou Moctar, Third Coast Percussion, Darius Jones Trio, Ken Vandermark Edition Redux, Anna Webber's Simple Trio, Cooper Moore, Helado Negro, Mary Lattimore, Irreversible Entanglements, Jeff Parker Expansion Trio, Julianna Barwick, Mary Halvorson, Steve Gunn, William Tyler,



Sound & Gravity founder Mike Reed

Rafiq Bhatia, Michael Zerang's Puzzle House, Luke Stewart's Chicago Quartet and numerous others, as well as surprise sets curated by Electrical Audio studios.

*Sound & Gravity* also serves as a fundraiser for Constellation Performing Arts, a not-for-profit organization Reed founded in 2013 that has become a cornerstone of Chicago's forward-thinking music scene. Since its inception, Constellation has filled a void in Chicago's cultural landscape by providing a high-end performance platform for avant-garde and experimental music. *Sound & Gravity* extends this mission, offering a concentrated dose of the venue's innovative spirit across multiple locations in one of the city's more creative neighborhoods.

Individual concert tickets and day passes are available, and all Sept. 14 events will be free to the public. The *Sound & Gravity* Festival Pass provides access to all festival events, subject to capacity. For more information, visit [soundandgravity.org](http://soundandgravity.org). —Ed Enright

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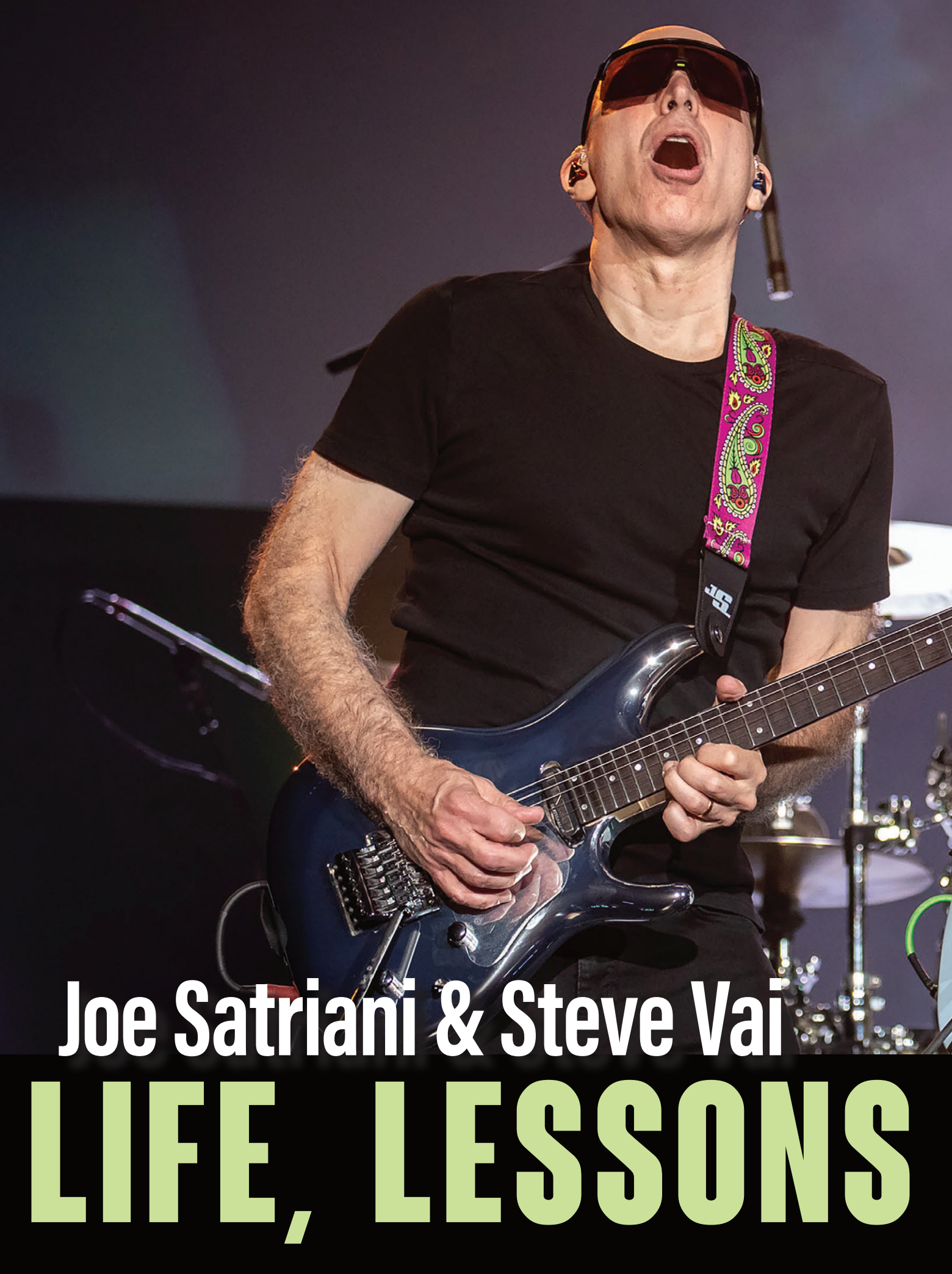
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# Joe Satriani & Steve Vai

# LIFE, LESSONS





By Bill Milkowski Photo by Jon Luini

# & FRIENDSHIP





"Joe and I look back at our joined-at-the-hip careers and it's just phenomenal the way everything has worked out," says Steve Vai.

**They are the offspring of Jimi Hendrix, forever changed by hearing "Purple Haze" and "Voodoo Child (Slight Return)" while growing up on Long Island during the '60s. On a recent video interview with Rick Beato on his popular YouTube channel, Satriani proclaimed Hendrix's "Machine Gun" (from 1970s *Band Of Gypsys*) "the greatest live performance ever on electric guitar, hands down!" Vai heartily agreed, calling it "the voice of God."**

**A**nd though Hendrix may have provided the impetus for their respective guitar experimentation — the match that lit the fuse — each of them would go on to achieve a kind of staggering virtuosity on the instrument, marked by unprecedented speed, mind-boggling technique, melodic invention and a willingness to push the envelope, that raised the bar for instrumental rock guitar in the '80s and '90s.

The two chopsmeisters have been friends for over 50 years, going back to when Vai began taking guitar lessons with Satriani in 1973 when they both attended Carle Place High School on Long Island. They would later go their separate ways — Satriani leaving for the San Francisco Bay Area near the end of 1975, Vai to Boston's Berklee College of Music in

1978 — and ultimately achieve fame for their separate endeavors. Vai would become a valued member of Frank Zappa's band from 1980 to 1983, appearing on such pivotal albums as *Joe's Garage*, *Tinseltown Rebellion*, *Them Or Us*, *You Are What You Is* and *Ship Arriving Too Late To Save A Drowning Witch* as well as the all-instrumental *Shut Up 'n Play Yer Guitar*. In concert, Zappa would alternately refer to Vai as a "stunt guitarist" whose job it was to provide "impossible guitar parts," while also calling him "our little Italian virtuoso."

Vai's "in" for that gig with Zappa came during his stint at Berklee, when he sent the demanding and often irascible auteur letter-perfect transcriptions of Edgard Varese's music along with Zappa's own notoriously difficult instrumental, "The Black Page." In the

middle of his fourth semester at Berklee in 1979, Vai would move to California, just down the street from Zappa, who put him on salary as his official transcriptionist before he eventually joined the band in late 1980. Vai's subsequent stints in the '80s with Alcatraz, Whitesnake and the David Lee Roth Band (replacing guitar hero Eddie Van Halen in the lineup) elevated his status in the guitar world. In 1996, he would reunite with his former teacher Satriani for the first of several G3 tours featuring a third special guest guitarist. The inaugural tour featured fellow guitar virtuoso Eric Johnson, and subsequent G3 tours would pair Satriani and Vai with such guitar stars as Dream Theater's John Petrucci, neo-classical metal god Yngwie Malmsteen, King Crimson's Robert Fripp and Steve Lukather. Last year, they reunited with original G3 member Johnson.

Along with all that activity, Vai has released a dozen albums as a leader, beginning with 1984's *Flex-Able* and including 1990's *Passion And Warfare*, 1993's *Sex & Religion*, 1996's *Fire Garden*, 2005's *Real Illusions: Reflections* (the first installment in an ongoing three-part trilogy concept album), 2012's *The Story Of Light* (part two of the trilogy) and 2016's *Modern Primitive*, which contained the jazzy tune "Bop!" His most recent outing was 2022's *Inviolable*, on which he unveiled his three-necked Hydra guitar (named for the many-headed serpent-like beast defeated by



Hercules in Greek mythology), which accounts for part of the name of his upcoming “Surfing with the Hydra” tour with Satriani.

Satriani’s debut as a leader, 1986’s *Not Of This Earth*, introduced his remarkable virtuosity and two-handed tapping skills on tunes like “The Headless Horseman,” “Hordes Of Locusts” and “Ice 9” to an eager audience of slack-jawed guitar enthusiasts. But it was the mainstream success of 1987’s *Surfing With The Alien* that broke Satriani through a new level of visibility, along with a stint the following year in Mick Jagger’s band for his *She’s the Boss* tour, the singer’s first solo endeavor outside of the Rolling Stones.

Satriani has since recorded 18 albums as a leader, including 1995’s *Joe Satriani* (which includes the persuasively swinging “Killer Bee Bop”), 1998’s *Crystal Planet*, 2002’s exotic *Strange Beautiful Music*, 2010’s more experimental *Black Swans And Wormhole Wizards* and 2020’s brilliant *Shapeshifting*. His most recent recording is the wildly imaginative 2022 pandemic project *The Elephants Of Mars*, which contains his jazziest song to date in “E. 104th Street NYC, 1973,” a nod to his time studying with guitarist Billy Bauer and pianist-composer Lennie Tristano when he was still living on Long Island.

Satriani and Vai reunited in 2024 for their international “Satriani/Vai” tour, performing separate sets with their respective bands before joining for an encore on a few hair-raising jams. Their tour this summer through Europe and later this year in the States will mark the debut of their SatchVai Band (backed by bassist Marco Mendoza, guitarist Pete Thorn and drummer Kenny Aronoff) and showcase new material they co-composed for an album to be released in 2026. They’ve already released two singles from that upcoming release — “The Sea Of Emotion, Pt. I” and the anthemic “I Wanna Play My Guitar,” the latter featuring Deep Purple vocalist Glenn Hughes.

DownBeat caught up with the longtime friends and fellow six-string marvels separately as they were preparing to hit the road independently — Vai going out on tour with the King Crimson tribute band BEAT, Satriani doing a nine-date Las Vegas residency with Sammy Hagar — before reuniting for their electrifying “Surfing with the Hydra” tour.

#### STEVE VAI: BIRTH OF A FRIENDSHIP

**Bill Milkowski:** *I first saw you at Zappa’s Halloween show at the Palladium in 1981 and then again a couple of weeks later at the Ritz when Frank brought Al Di Meola out as a spe-*

*cial guest and introduced him as “another great Italian.”*

**Steve Vai:** Oh, wow! That’s going all the way back.

**Milkowski:** *And I’ve been following your career ever since through all your different situations over the decades. But the story of your ongoing friendship with Joe Satriani is one for the ages.*

**Vai:** It’s kind of a miracle. Joe and I look back at our joined-at-the-hip careers and it’s just phenomenal the way everything has worked out. Last year we wanted to extend the G3 tour but Eric Johnson had scheduling issues, so Joe and I decided to hit the road as two separate bands. And we didn’t want to call it G2, so we went out as the “Satriani/Vai” tour.

And we thought we should have a new piece of music for this tour, so Joe wrote two tracks and sent them to me — “The Sea Of Emotion, Pt. I and Pt. II.” I thought they were fantastic, and I wrote the third part of that three-movement suite. And that’s when the light bulbs started going off. You know, “We haven’t done this before, and we’ve always talked about doing this. Maybe now’s the time. Let’s make a record!” And it just organically developed from there.

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Steve Vai with his outrageous Hydra Guitar outfitted with separate bass, seven-string and 14-string necks.

**Milkowski:** *How did the process begin?*

**Vai:** We started sharing files, and it was just such a wonderful discovery of how nicely co-creative it is working together. Joe and I are similar in many ways, or we kind of play in the same playground, to a degree. And he also taught me how to play, so a lot of those similarities are apparent. There's a lot of crosstalk when we play because our techniques are not so wildly different. I mean, it's not like he's a classical player, and I'm a jazz player; we're both rock players. But our musical DNA is different. When you listen to Joe's catalog, it's very distinctly Joe. And when you listen to my catalog, it's me. It's my interest in music being manifested. That's what every artist does. So bringing those two musical DNAs together really creates a sweet spot. The songs are just turning out great and we're looking really forward to eventually getting the record out.

**Milkowski:** *You have such a nice blend together. Aside from being virtuosos, you're both melodic players.*

**Vai:** Yeah, we both love melody. And for me,

every time I am able to figure out how to get the melody, the bass and the chords into a seamless piece of music, it's just like a surprise and delight that keeps you going. Every time you get something to line up nicely, you get a little dopamine rush.

**Milkowski:** *How did you come by your incredible work ethic over time? Whether it was doing transcriptions for Zappa, playing the impossible guitar parts in his band, or creating your own outrageously challenging music, you've always demonstrated a willingness to tackle challenges.*

**Vai:** It's just a deep interest and enthusiasm for a good idea. And I always seem to be attracted by challenges. Like all that Zappa music I transcribed and played, that was a challenge. Replacing Eddie Van Halen in the David Lee Roth band — you know, being the guitar under the voice that most people knew as Edward — that was the challenge. Then launching a solo career and doing something like *Passion And Warfare*, that was a challenge. And then when the BEAT gig came along, that was a challenge. And I just said yes to all of it. I don't know why,

but I just like doing difficult things. I was working 13 hours a day on those transcriptions for Zappa and loving every minute of it. Because when you find something that's really interesting to you, you don't need discipline. It just happens in and of itself. Your interest is enough. So really I just chase good, compelling ideas.

**Milkowski:** *Was that instilled in you when you were taking lessons as a kid with Joe Satriani?*

**Vai:** Joe fueled it because he was giving me the tools to discover more, allowing me to expand my enthusiasm of the instrument, so to speak. It was always there, for some reason. The interest in doing something and enjoying it ... that was always there. I'm terrible at doing things I don't want to do. I have no discipline. But with the guitar, it was always a wonderful kind of a journey for me.

**Milkowski:** *How did you forge your relationship with Joe Satriani back in the early '70s?*

**Vai:** I was 12 when I started taking lessons with Joe, so it's been about 52 years that we've known each other. I was always enamored with the guitar but I never actually started playing it, because I always saw it as this sacred thing that I was unworthy of touching, until finally I heard Led Zeppelin. And that's when I decided, "I gotta play the guitar."

My friend down the street, John Sergio, was taking lessons from Joe and he gave me Joe's number. And I had this little Tesco Del Rey guitar at the time and didn't know anything about it. I didn't know how to change the strings or anything. So I would just play it, but I didn't know what I was doing at all. I'd break a string and keep playing, and it got to the point where I only had like two strings on the guitar. So I saved up from my paper route money and bought some strings and started taking lessons with Joe. And those lessons were sacred to me. That's all I gave my attention to. I took lessons from him for like three years on and off, because he was going in and out of town at that time. And eventually Joe and I really created a bond when I was relatively mature enough to musically communicate. He nurtured that out of me.

**Milkowski:** *How did your lessons with Joe evolve over time?*

**Vai:** After learning the fretboard, our lessons eventually turned into these glorified jam sessions. We'd sit in his backyard, literally back to back, and just play electric guitars with no amp, sitting under the tree. And I clocked one of those jams at six hours. Going that deep with somebody musically requires intense presence of listening and responding. And you're not going to just respond with scales and riffs that you already know. After a while, that gets really boring and repetitive. So we pushed each other.



We just explored, explored, explored. And I developed my listening ear through those experiences. And I also developed with Joe our connection, which never left us. That's always been there. And it's evolved because now when Joe and I are just exchanging and playing together, freewheeling, it's remarkable to us how funny some of the ways that we connect are. It might be our own little secret, but it's really rewarding. It's tremendously fulfilling to do that.

#### JOE SATRIANI: GUITAR TEACHER TO THE STARS

**Milkowski:** *This upcoming tour and album mark the first time that you and Steve Vai will tour together as a band. And you're also writing songs together. How has that been going?*

**Satriani:** I enjoy that process of creating. It's cathartic, and it drives me crazy, but it's really fun. Working on this album with Steve now is a perfect example of that, where the two of us are throwing songs back and forth to each other, and it just puts us in this spot where we've never been before, where we wouldn't have been had we not agreed to push each other and our individual limits, just to see what would happen. So we come up with things we would have never have come up with if the other partner had not pushed us into some new creative space. And as we

go over the songs, the ones that stay on the list are the ones that have strong melody and interesting harmony that we think is innovative in some way. And then, of course, we're just goofball guitar players, so we also just love to throw guitar-y things back and forth to each other, just for fun. It's that old question of, "What can I do with my fingers on these strings that I haven't done before?" We both like that whole process of questioning what we've done before and trying to come up with something different.

**Milkowski:** *What were your lessons like?*

**Satriani:** Steve was physically gifted to play the guitar, and he progressed so fast it was amazing. He went from beginner to advanced in like six months. So by the time he was about to go to Berklee, there was not much else that I could teach him. He had already mastered all the scales and all the chords. That was the one thing that was so great about teaching Steve: He did his homework, and he was so eager to make music that he would learn everything.

I mean, he excelled so quickly that we didn't have to spend much time working on the fingerings. After we got over the informational hump of where are the notes, what are the names of the scales, when do you use them, what are

names of all the chords and can your fingers play them, it became all about, "How do you express it?" And we could sit around and just talk about, like, how to play more sad. What's really sad, what's happy, what's in-between?

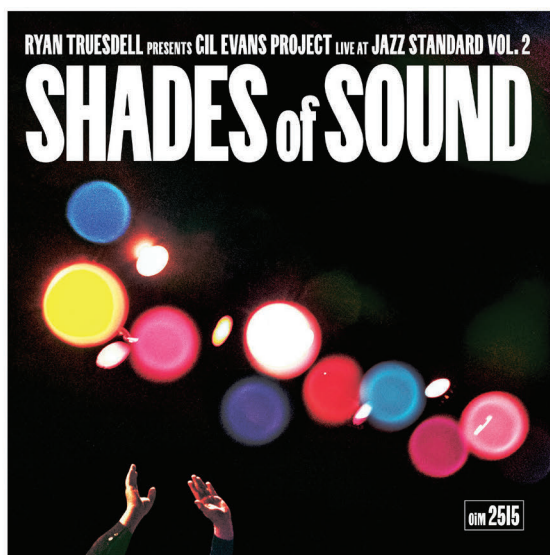
So we spent a lot of time trying to figure out what modes we would want to use to make people feel a certain way. I remember there was a book out, *Psychology of Music*, that really was focusing on how to use scales and intervals and chords to evoke emotion. It was very much like what a soundtrack composer would do on their job — putting music to a particular scene that a director gives them.

But it was all really interesting stuff at the time because we had already jumped over those hurdles of what are the scales, where can you play them, and how fast can you play them. We were both advanced players by then, but you can arrive at that point and still not know how to make people happy with music. And Steve and I knew that was primarily our job. Part of it is making ourselves happy, but the most important part is giving music to people so they can use it in their lives. So we do have to get a hold of the effect of our notes and how they affect people.

**Milkowski:** *How did Vai seek you out for lessons?*

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OUTSIDE IN MUSIC



# Satriani's Tristano/Bauer Connection

The musical lineage from teacher to student passed from Joe Satriani to Steve Vai. On the flip of that, two of Satriani's influential teachers were jazz pianist Lennie Tristano and guitarist Billy Bauer.

**Bill Milkowski:** On your 2022 album *The Elephants Of Mars*, there's a distinctly jazzy element on the track "East 104th Street, New York City, 1973." Where does that come from?

**Joe Satriani:** Those are my memories. When you're in a studio you tend to want to be professional and play things that can be recorded at the moment and are usable. But when you're in your home studio and there is no deadline, which was the case with *The Elephants Of Mars*, which was done during COVID lockdown, you tend to drop all that and start to entertain different creative pathways of expressing yourself. And because I'm not thinking about the end result in that situation, I'm only thinking about the moment of expression. And that really opens up the creative floodgates.

**Milkowski:** That jazzy aspect also comes across on the track "Killer Bee Bop" [from Satriani's 1995 self-titled album], which is underscored by Nathan East's uptempo walking bass lines and drummer Manu Katche's swing factor on the kit.

**Satriani:** Again, that was me harkening back to my teenage years; that brief period where I was studying with Lennie Tristano and just coming to grips with what the bebop generation had created, what they had achieved.

**Milkowski:** Can you talk about your time with Tristano?

**Satriani:** I was attending Five Towns College, and I was very discouraged by the kind of education I was getting there. And one day I was complaining to a schoolmate and said, "I'm not cut out for school anymore. I'm looking for a genius to teach me the mysteries of music." And he says to me, "Oh, you have to go see Lennie." And I'm like, "Who's Lennie?" I literally did not know who Lennie Tristano was at that point. And after he berated me for not knowing who Lennie Tristano was, he told me the whole history of Lennie and said, "He lives right over in Queens, like 20 minutes from your house. He's exactly what you're looking for. I'll get you his number." Then he warns me: "He's really tough, though." But I was just so ready for him at that point.

What I learned from Lennie Tristano was what being a musician is really about. What I had been doing was playing with the idea of being a musician, until I met Lennie. And then I realized, "Damn, I really don't know what I'm doing." And Lennie's thing was, "Learn everything so you never have to think and be judgmental while you're playing, because that means you're not in the moment. So you're not improvising."

It was the opposite of what people were think-



A young Joe Satriani took lessons with jazz royalty in the form of pianist Lennie Tristano and guitarist Billy Bauer (pictured here with saxophonist Warne Marsh).

ing around that time, which was, "Do whatever you want, be free." But that wasn't what he meant. His whole thing was learn everything, know everything, learn how never to make a mistake. But don't you dare think about anything when you're improvising. Just be in the moment." And that's the hardest thing in the world to do. It's easy to practice something and then stand up and perform it. But to perfectly improvise, that's a zen state of mind, born out of the soul of Lennie Tristano.

**Milkowski:** You must've heard recordings by Tristano's band with Lee Konitz, Warren Marsh and guitarist Billy Bauer.

**Satriani:** You know, I actually took lessons from Billy Bauer before I studied with Tristano. Here's how that happened: I had been complaining to my mother that I was frustrated searching for information about music. This was before the internet or instructional videos or anything, so it was really hard to find people to teach you certain things about music. And I don't know how she knew that Billy Bauer taught not far from us. We lived in Westbury and he lived in Glen Cove, which was pretty close.

So she drove me to a couple of lessons at Billy Bauer's house. I remember after my first lesson with him I came back home and thought, "Wow, this guy is heavy. I gotta find out who he is." But it was really hard to find the albums back then. Again, there were no streaming services. None of my friends knew who Billy Bauer was and my parents didn't have any Tristano albums. So that made it difficult. But eventually I did start to listen to the albums that Billy Bauer made, and I was shocked at the modernity of it all. He was the first one that showed me three-octave scales and different arpeggio exercises. I only lasted about three weeks with him, but it's very interesting that my path would cross with Billy Bauer before Lennie Tristano.

DB

**Satriani:** I was teaching a bunch of people at the high school we both attended in Carle Place. I had been asked to leave Catholic school because I was a troublemaker, so I convinced my parents to send me to public school. That's where I thrived, at Carle Place High. Anyway, I started playing high school dances and backyard parties, and other kids started to ask for lessons. I think I even gave a couple of teachers at the high school lessons as well. One of Steve's good friends, John Sergio, was a student of mine. And I think at some point John said, "Oh, you gotta go see Joe." That's how it began.

**Milkowski:** Although your music is very intense, you've had acoustic moments over time where you're very tastefully letting it breathe on some of your phrasing.

**Satriani:** Oh, I think it's so important that when you're playing any piece of music for somebody, you're trying to get them to feel, to imagine, to inhabit the story behind the song, so you try to touch on all kinds of textures. Whether it's like a song like "Tears In The Rain" [from 1995's *Joe Satriani*] which is pretty minimal, or if it's somewhat whimsical, like "Yesterday's Yesterday" [from 2020's *Shapeshifting*], I don't ever discourage myself from playing simply, if that's the part that puts a smile on your face.

The level of difficulty should have nothing to do with how you feel about the quality of the music or how it makes you feel on an emotional level. I guess I hold in my heart things like "Moonlight Sonata" and "Sleepwalk" and I think, "These are unbelievably beautiful pieces of music that are not technically difficult. They don't shine a light on the performer like, 'Hey, look what he can do!'" It's not about that at all, it's all about the music. That's kind of like me in a nutshell.

**Milkowski:** And you actually recorded that classic 1959 Santo & Johnny tune, "Sleepwalk," on your 2002 album *Strange, Beautiful Music*.

**Satriani:** Yeah, I actually talked to Johnny (Farina) about that before I recorded it because I wanted his approval. I just wanted him not to be offended, because you really can't play it on guitar. There's no way to reach the harmonics the way he did it on lap steel. But "Sleepwalk" is my earliest memory of being mesmerized by music. That song, to me, is just so beautiful that you're not even thinking about the person as a technician. It creates an instant memory.

**Milkowski:** So, for you, "Sleepwalk" came before Hendrix and Led Zeppelin.

**Satriani:** Yeah, I have a really strong memory of it. I'm in the backseat of my parents' old '49 Dodge. The car was falling apart and the radio was on. And I remember every time that song came on, it was a golden, magical moment for me. I just thought the whole thing was ... that was the world I wanted to inhabit.

DB



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Terri Lyne Carrington, right, and Christie Dashiell



TERRI LYNE CARRINGTON  
& CHRISTIE DASHIELL

# Rediscovering 'We Insist!'

BY JOHN MURPH PHOTOS BY ERICK BARDIN

***We Insist 2025!*, the new album by Terri Lyne Carrington and Christie Dashiell, resonates from its core with echoes of déjà vu that are impossible to ignore.**

**"I**t's crazy! I don't know how I keep doing it," says Carrington, the Grammy-winning drummer, composer, bandleader and educator, sitting on the patio of the Watergate Hotel. We're discussing obvious similarities between the nation's socio-political climates in late 2019, when she released her masterpiece *Waiting Game* (Motéma), and in the increasingly turbulent spring of 2025.

The Watergate, a Washington, D.C., landmark infamously associated with a political scandal of presidential proportions, makes for an appropriate setting as Carrington reflects on the inspiration behind reimagining Max Roach's seminal 1960 LP *We Insist!*

During the first 100 days of Donald Trump's second U.S. presidency, he has doubled down on a perceived disdain for many of the beliefs Carrington holds dear through a barrage of legally questionable executive orders. His administration has sought to upend higher education and some of the nation's most heralded arts and cultural institutions — including the Kennedy Center, the Smithsonian, Voice

of America and the National Endowment for the Arts — in an aggressive onslaught against "woke" culture. The blitzkrieg targets diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, and seeks to silence dissenting voices.

Carrington says that she's "praying" that the Berklee Institute of Jazz and Gender Justice, which she spearheaded in 2018, will be secured. "[The Trump administration] would come after the school before they will come after us individually," she says, before mentioning a concert that the Institute held a few weeks prior, which attracted some social media trolls posting negative comments advocating for the end of DEI. "But I can't really worry about that. This is not the time to say, 'Oh, I'm not going to make space for people anymore.'"

#### **Sisyphus and Strange Loops**

*"... I think that the past is all that makes the present coherent, and further, that the past will remain horrible for exactly as long as we refuse to assess it honestly."*

—James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*





"Terri maintains an uncompromising vision," says guitarist and collaborator Matthew Stevens. "Yet, she moves her collaborators by inviting input and encouraging authenticity. The result is a collective process in the music and the messages behind it."

Six years ago, Carrington released the double album *Waiting Game*, which showcased her leading a new ensemble, Social Science. The seeds of that combo germinated in the aftermath of the 2016 U.S. presidential election in which Trump defeated Hillary Clinton. Disappointed with a candidate she perceived as misogynistic, racist and having no experience in government running against Clinton, a candidate with her own baggage yet bona fide political expertise, Carrington had some meaningful conversations with pianist Aaron Parks and guitarist Matthew Stevens about the path the country was embarking on.

The conversations led to the formation of Social Science and the making of *Waiting Game*, a brooding protest album that captured the Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements as well as the plight of Native Americans and the LGBTQ community in the U.S.

*We Insist 2025!* (Candid) arrives months after Trump was elected a second time. He defeated Kamala Harris, the former U.S. vice president, who stepped into the race after President Joe Biden withdrew his candidacy.

When Carrington was in the studios last September recording *We Insist 2025!*, she was "cautiously hopeful" that Harris would win and become not only the first woman president, but also the first Black female and the first Middle East Asian-descended U.S. president. Back then, Carrington said, she thought it was nearly inconceivable to elect Trump again.

"Honestly, I was certain that [Harris] was going to win," Carrington laughs. "I wasn't thinking so much about the election when we were making this record. I thought the album was going to be a celebratory record."

### It's Time

*"If now isn't a good time for the truth I don't see when we'll get to it."* —Nikki Giovanni

For all of the sociopolitical-contextualized coincidences between the making and timing of *Waiting Game* and *We Insist 2025!*, the latter was mostly inspired by last year's 100th-anniversary celebration of Max Roach, a major influence who passed away in 2007. Carrington had already written several arrangements of Roach's "Freedom Day" prior to the centennial.

As his 100th birthday approached, Carrington continued to conceive ideas about how she would like to salute the pioneering drummer, composer, conceptualist, educator and social activist. She'd also begun a relationship with Candid Records, the imprint owned by Archie Bleyer in 1960 for which veteran jazz writer and social activist Nat Hentoff acted as A&R director.

Not only has Candid risen from the ashes with reissues of its storied catalog, but it has also been releasing new material from the likes of trumpeter Milena Casado, vibraphonist Simon Moullier and multi-instrumentalists Zacchaeus Paul and Morgan Guerin — all of whom appear on *We Insist 2025!* It's no coincidence. Carrington also happens to be Candid's A&R consultant.

"I thought it would be cool for the Max Roach centennial to do something," explains Carrington regarding her working relationship with Candid. Her original idea was to have five drummers, including her, interpret each of the compositions from the original *We Insist!* But with her schedule, time slipped away.

"I never got around to do it. Then the cen-

tennial happened, but the idea was stuck in my head, 'Damn, I was supposed to do that.'" Carrington recalls. "When we got to August, I said, 'I still got time to do something.'"

Carrington jettisoned the idea of a project featuring five drummers in favor of releasing her own interpretation of *We Insist!* for the sake of time and personnel management. And since she was instrumental in signing a lot of emerging artists on Candid, she marshalled the aforementioned musicians for the project.

"I did that so that it would feel like a Candid family record in a sense," she says. Concept in hand, the project came together rather quickly.

The first arrangement for *We Insist 2025!* was "Freedom Day." Unlike the original, on which Abbey Lincoln sings atop of Roach's fast-paced arrangement while conveying a sense of urgency, Carrington's arrangement takes a more serene stance. Dashiell sings the triumphant lyrics calmly, channeling an enchanting vibe of 21st-century soul balladry. Moullier's glistening vibraphone and Casado's tart trumpet beautify the interpretation. With a cinematic splendor worthy of an Ava DuVernay movie, "Freedom Day, Part 1" sounds like secured liberty after a hard-fought battle.

Carrington thought it was great to have two interpretations for "Freedom Day," so she asked Dashiell for another arrangement. "Freedom Day, Part 2" retains the future-forward soul sheen, but it shuffles with uptempo ebullience.

Dashiell also arranged the regal a capella opening for "Driva'man" on which stirring vocal harmonies insulate her emotionally piercing yet poised vocal, which depicts the relentless work in the cotton fields and flagellation many Black Americans historically faced at the hands of white people.

"I've never had a bandleader call upon me to use that part of my artistry," recalls Dashiell. "In my own band, I write and arrange everything. But when working with other leaders, I'm normally just singing. But [Carrington] said, 'This is your record, too. Arrange. Be creative. I want you to have as much input as you can.' She made me feel empowered."

Carrington also felt that it was important to co-bill *We Insist 2025!* with Dashiell because the singer carries so much weight on the project.

### The Blueprint

*"I will never again play anything that does not have social significance. We American jazz musicians of African descent have proved beyond all doubt that we are master musicians of our instruments. Now what we have to do is employ our skill to tell the dramatic story of our people and what we've been through."*

— Max Roach

The original *We Insist!* was recorded in late summer of 1960, on the eve of another land-



mark election. This time it was John F. Kennedy, who became the country's first Roman Catholic president, narrowly defeating Richard Nixon. The Cold War with the Soviet Union loomed large, and so did the civil rights movement. The sociopolitical turmoil of that era feels all too familiar today.

The original artwork of three well-dressed Black men sitting in a diner manned by a white

cious lyrics, Dashiell remembers compositions such as the somber "Driva'Man" and the scorching "Triptych: Prayer/Protest/Peace" being emotionally and physically challenging.

"We're talking about the consummate storyteller," Dashiell says of Lincoln. "She really embodied the lyrics. Some people will be listening to our version expecting to hear me sing like Abbey. But there is no way that I can. I had to

serts Lincoln's invaluable contribution to both Roach's music and to the jazz canon.

"There are some hidden meanings in the poetry of 'Dear Abbey' because she was complicated," says Carrington, who spent time with both Roach and Lincoln. Carrington argues that even though both musicians were social progressives, they were in some respects people of their time. "Abbey tended to believe that men were to play jazz; and women were to sing it."

"When *We Insist!* was released, I don't think it gave Abbey the credit that she deserved," Dashiell says. "She was just as important as Max Roach on that record. I think Terri writing 'Dear Abbey' was a way to reclaim how important she was to this record."

## *'The longer you try to express yourself artistically, the more you become yourself.'* —Terri Lyne Carrington

waiter references the civil rights "sit-ins" that began in February 1960 in Greensboro, North Carolina. The burgeoning movement inspired jazz musicians such as Roach to explicitly address the sociopolitical plight of Black America. That sense was spreading globally, with African nations such as Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia and Togo declaring independence.

A year prior, Roach was working with singer/songwriter Oscar Brown Jr. on an extended work to be performed in 1963 to commemorate the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation. The events of 1960 helped shape some of those original compositions into music for *We Insist!*

In addition to incorporating Brown's lyrics, Roach assembled a masterful ensemble that included tenor saxophonists Coleman Hawkins and Walter Benton, percussionist Olatunji, Ray Mantillo and Tomas du Vall, trombonist Julian Priester, trumpeter Booker Little, bassist James Schenck and, most significantly, singer Abbey Lincoln.

Roach performed *We Insist!* for the first time in January 1961 at New York's Village Gate. The Congress for Racial Equity sponsored that date. From there, he performed it at the NAACP National Convention in Philadelphia. Yet, for all of its eminence, the album received mixed reviews, with some critics proclaiming that it was too bitter and too controversial.

The potency and fury of the album was nonetheless undeniable, so much so that it was banned in apartheid South Africa.

Dashiell was already familiar with the original *We Insist!* when Carrington requested her involvement. "But I had never really sat with it, dissecting and digesting it," Dashiell says. "So, I can't say that I was as familiar with it as I was with, say, Miles Davis' *Kind Of Blue* or Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On*."

In terms of embodying the album's fero-

identify what Abbey did that I really liked and that I could take on; and I had to identify parts of her sound that I knew that I couldn't emulate."

Such was the case with "Triptych: Prayer/Protest/Peace." Instead of blood-curdling screams on the revised "Triptych: Resolve/Resist/Reimagine," Dashiell's harmonies and wails both caress and convey soulful pain atop Carrington's turbulent drums, Casado's darting trumpet lines, Devon Gates' haunting bass prowls and Guerin's lurking saxophone and bass clarinet asides.

As with Dashiell, Carrington encouraged other band members to contribute fresh arrangements of the original five compositions. Moullier co-arranged for "Driva'man" with Carrington; Guerin arranged the propulsive "Tears For Johannesburg" and Gates helped Carrington reconfigure "Triptych." Carrington handled the gorgeous arrangement of "All Africa."

### **Love Letters to Max and Abbey**

*"I, Abbey Lincoln, sing about what is most important to me, and what is most important to me is being free of the shackles that chain me in every walk of life that I live."*

—Abbey Lincoln, Smithsonian Oral History

*We Insist 2025!* features contributions from Priester, who performed on the original album. "[He's] an elder statesman in the jazz community; and I am grateful to have him on the recording," Carrington says. "I think we, the jazz community, have to do better with honoring and celebrating our elders. There is so much to learn from them."

Carrington extends *We Insist!*, however, with several original compositions such as the hip-hop-influenced drum and spoken-word pieces "Boom Chick" (for Roach) and the poignant "Dear Abbey," the latter of which reas-

The ensemble for *We Insist 2025!* reflects Carrington's cosmopolitan outlook even when most of the album centers on racial equality. Not only is the band intergender, it's also interracial, international and intergenerational. The ensemble includes Ghanaian percussionist Weedie Braimah, Dominican Spanish trumpeter Milena Casado, French vibraphonist Simon Moullier and Canadian-born guitarist and frequent collaborator Matthew Stevens.

"Terri maintains an uncompromising vision," Stevens says. "Yet, she moves her collaborators by inviting input and encouraging authenticity. The result is a collective process in the music and the messages behind it. Terri's passion for social justice is inseparable from her music."

Moullier echoes Stevens about working with Carrington. "Terri has been a guiding force in helping us understand how music can be a powerful tool for social justice and creating real change," he says.

Casado didn't listen to the original *We Insist!* until she arrived in the U.S. Nevertheless, as an Afro-Latina, the themes resonated. "Interpreting a lot of this music was really personal for me," Casado says. "I also struggled with some of those [racial inequalities] in Spain as a Black woman growing up."

Regarding the role of artists in fighting inequities worldwide, Carrington says, "We just have to keep on doing the work. We may have to work even harder, because so many things now seem more critical. But on the other side, I'm not going to let the fight kill me. I'm getting older. Before all this madness, I was trying to think of ways to work less and explore more."

"I'm going to figure out a way to fall in love again with the drums, practice and reinvent myself," she insists. "Right now, there are so many other things pulling at me. But the music takes care of me. Music is my happy place." **DB**





RYAN TRUESDELL

# FOR THE LOVE OF GIL EVANS

BY TED PANKEN     PHOTOS BY TODD CHALFANT

**"I originally set out to give two years of my life to Gil," Ryan Truesdell said of his mindset in 2009, when he embarked on the Gil Evans Project.**

Sixteen years later, three weeks into April 2025, the 44-year-old arranger, composer and producer spoke with DownBeat in the tidy living room of his Upper West Side Manhattan apartment, soon to be crammed with 14 LP boxes containing the Project's third album, *Shades Of Sound: Live At Jazz Standard, Vol. 2* (Outside in Music), recorded at the now-shuttered venue during the May 13–18, 2014, engagement that also generated its predecessor, the 2015 release *Lines Of Color* (ArtistShare/Blue Note).

The two albums contain 19 tracks culled from the 46 charts the orchestra performed that week. Truesdell programmed

and sequenced them via the template he'd established on the Project's debut, the studio-recorded *Centennial: Newly Discovered Works Of Gil Evans* (ArtistShare), a 10-tune program released in May 2012 for Evans' 100th birthday, juxtaposing choice charts Evans wrote between ages 30 to 60 — extravagantly lush, bebop-sufused orchestrations for Claude Thornhill's 1940s dance band; obscure one-offs from the '50s; alternate and contemporaneously unissued versions of songs that generated the apothecotic 1964 LP *Individualism Of Gil Evans*; as well as several well-known Evans arrangements.









Band members backstage in 2014, from left, the late Frank Kimbrough, Lewis Nash, Ryan Truesdell and Jay Anderson.

“Bringing together all this music demonstrates Gil’s expanse and scope,” observes Maria Schneider, Truesdell’s mentor and employer for much of the 2000s, who apprenticed with Evans during the 1980s. “Most people know Gil’s period with Miles Davis, and maybe that he wrote for Thornhill, but not the depth and breadth of his full body of work.”

Comprising a cohort of elite New York session players and jazz soloists, the 2014 edition of the orchestra — scaled as large as 25 pieces for the Thornhill orchestrations, which include bassoon, oboe, French horns and other instruments less-traveled in commercial jazz of that era — inhabits and animates Evans’ often high-degree-of-difficulty scores with impeccable musicianship and creative intention. Fueled by the nonpareil rhythm section of pianist Frank Kimbrough (who passed away in 2020), bassist Jay Anderson and drummer Lewis Nash, they soar nonchalantly through Evans’ vertiginous bebop orchestration of “Laughing At Life,” rejected from the 1956 date he wrote it for, Truesdell speculates, “because it was too hard to play.” Wendy Gilles swings the Billie Holiday-associated lyric with relaxed time-feel and spot-on intonation; Tom Christenson (tenor) and Steve Wilson (clarinet) signify with pungent solos; lead trumpeter Augie Haas casually tosses off a stratospheric passage in the shout chorus.

In the Holiday manner, Gilles transmutes

dross into diamonds on Evans’ previously unknown Tadd Dameron-esque treatment of the 1946 Bob Wills hit “I Had Someone Else Before I Had You.” Truesdell situates it in 1950, two years after Evans began working with Miles Davis on *Birth Of The Cool*.

“You can date Thornhill’s arrangements like tree rings, because his instrumentation changed over time,” Truesdell says, citing Thornhill’s pared-down-for-touring-purposes unit of five reeds, one horn, two trombones and no tuba.

The orchestra also nails the spare, intense, beautifully orchestrated, never-issued “Neetie’s Blues,” and two charts recorded for but not included on the LP release of *Individualism*. Each is in line with Evans’ post-*Out Of The Cool* attitude of loosening the reins and, in Truesdell’s words, “creating atmospheres for soloists to do their thing” as he shifted from his highly controlled writing for Thornhill in the 1940s and the 1957–60 Miles Davis collaborations *Miles Ahead*, *Porgy And Bess* and *Sketches Of Spain* that made him famous.

Thad Jones and Phil Woods contributed memorable solos in 1963 to Willie Dixon’s CD-only-issue “Spoonful.” Here, tenor saxophonist Donny McCaslin uncorks a soul-stirring declamation. McCaslin does the same on “The Barbara Song,” which traces the *Individualism* version, featuring Wayne

Shorter’s “magical, otherworldly” solo, and not Evans’ 1971 arrangement for a huge ensemble in Berlin that Truesdell presented on *Centennial*. “We’ve been playing it for 14 years, and it’s always been Donny’s,” Truesdell said. “I told him: ‘You can do it different every time. Don’t do Wayne, don’t do anybody — just do you.’”

“We all respected the older music, which was groundbreaking and forward-thinking in its time, and tried to give the audience a view of what it actually sounded like, not trying to make it sound ‘modern’ — although of course we brought our contemporary sensibilities,” said Nash, who Truesdell recruited at Schneider’s suggestion in 2012. From then until 2019, he propelled the pan-idiomatic flow each annual Jazz Standard residence, re-assuming the chair in 2022, when the Project relocated to Birdland, through 2024.

“It appealed to me to play like a swing drummer circa 1940, but not sound hokey or corny, and I enjoyed the challenge of creating something without much information on the charts,” Nash continued. “Evans was incredible at creating tension-and-release with subtle rhythmic or harmonic deviations that you might miss if you aren’t listening carefully. I tried to emphasize those subtleties and the dynamic contrasts while capturing the dance.”

Immersed in the nuances of Evans’ music since he was a 17-year-old alto saxophone aspi-



rant in Madison, Wisconsin, Truesdell traces his catalytic Evans epiphany to a summer afternoon in 2003, when Schneider — whom he'd met a few months before at their mutual alma mater, the University of Minnesota — played him "The Barbara Song" during a lesson at her apartment. "It was supposed to be an hour, but it stretched to three," Truesdell recalled. "She told me, 'I think this is going to blow your mind.' Thinking about it makes the hairs on

with Bob Brookmeyer, Schneider's mentor 20 years before. For the next few years, Truesdell (who manages the Bob Brookmeyer Musical Estate) commuted to New York "two or three weekends a month" as he helped Schneider generate the album *Sky Blue*. After NEC, Truesdell started road-managing Schneider's band tours, and gradually, with Schneider's encouragement, transitioned to a producer role.

"Ryan is very good at everything he does,"

birthday week to frame *Centennial's* release.

*Centennial's* critical and commercial success thwarted Truesdell's intention to move on. "People kept asking when the next record was coming," he said. "I was holding these gems by one of the world's greatest jazz composers that no one knew existed. It was historically and auditorily significant to present this music. Since no one else was doing it, I felt it was my responsibility to bring it to life. So I decided to record the music live at the Standard and release it over time."

Truesdell attributed his hesitancy to release volume two from the Jazz Standard to the already ongoing transition to streaming between 2012 and *Lines Of Sound's* 2015 release. "People kept telling me they'd buy the record but had nothing to play it on," he said. But by 2019, it became evident that "for us to continue, we needed something new."

The COVID lockdown and its chaotic aftermath scuttled his plan to release *Shades Of Sound* in conjunction with a performance of *Sketches Of Spain* in May 2022 for Evans' 110th birthday. Truesdell "got sidetracked," absorbing himself in the gestation and execution of last year's protean, three-CD release *Synthesis*, for which he drew on personal savings to commission 13 composers to write 17 pan-genre string quartets. Last fall, after coordinating the many moving parts involved in that much-praised release, Truesdell "realized I'd never actually released *Shades Of Sound*" and applied himself to the mixing and editing.

As we spoke, the Project's next annual Birdland gig was three weeks away. On the first two nights, Truesdell would perform *Out Of The Cool*, 15 years after his debut concert at the Jazz Standard. Following was a one-night release party for *Shades Of Sound*, and two all-Thornhill nights including Evans' charts for a vocal quartet and a more Thornhillian-scaled big band of six reeds, four trumpets, three trombones, two French horns, tuba and three rhythm.

Truesdell considered a question about the Project's sustainability and his own compositional ambitions. "I have plans for 2026 and 2027, but purely from a logistical standpoint, it gets harder and harder to pull this off," he said. "But whenever I ask band members, 'What if this was the last one?' — just hypothetically — everyone says, 'It would be a shame; this music is so great; it's my favorite gig of the year.'"

"I love this music, I love Gil and his family, and I love the place that fate or whatever has positioned me in his life and legacy. I'm very proud of what I've done and continue to do with Gil's music. I also love being able to write my own music. But it's hard for me to sit at home and think about me all day long. It's not fun. Ultimately, I love being in a collaborative setting."

DB

## 'I love the place that fate or whatever has positioned me in Gil Evans' life and legacy.'

my arms stand up. I couldn't identify what I was hearing. I wasn't thinking, like, 'Oh, now is the shout chorus' — all the things I focused on in my studies. Suddenly, I was in this world of existence that was just Gil. It was magical."

At another point, Truesdell mentioned his affinity for Evans' Thornhill corpus, citing "Polka Dots And Moonbeams" as a favorite arrangement. "She rifled through one of her file cabinets and brought out photocopies of the original parts," he recalled. "I offered to make her a score, and she said, 'Sure.' I flew home with them like they were the Dead Sea Scrolls. After I completed the score, she asked me to work on 13 charts she had to write in three or four months for an Ivan Lins-Toots Thielemans project with the Danish Radio Big Band. I copied about 10. Every morning the FedEx guy was at my door with new pages. I'd get on the speaker phone and say, 'Wait, this chord doesn't look right.' She'd say, 'Which one?' and then flip back and play it.

"Toward the beginning of that project, I was in Minnesota while Maria was visiting her parents there, and she invited me for dinner. We had a lovely time. Then we listened late into the night to the 200 or so Ivan Lins tunes she had with her, as she asked what I thought of this or that. It was a beautiful bonding moment."

A year later, Schneider brought Truesdell to serve as an extra pair of ears for the recording session of *Concert In The Garden*, which he'd copied in its entirety, and to help with post-production. Meanwhile, he'd enrolled at New England Conservatory to study composition

Schneider said. "He's meticulous, professional, hard-working and a self-starter, with very good ears and judgment and great taste — and he became more and more integrated into my life. He was becoming ever more enamored of Gil Evans' music, and I was confident in his abilities, so I thought he could be very helpful to the Evans family in organizing Gil's music, and I made that introduction."

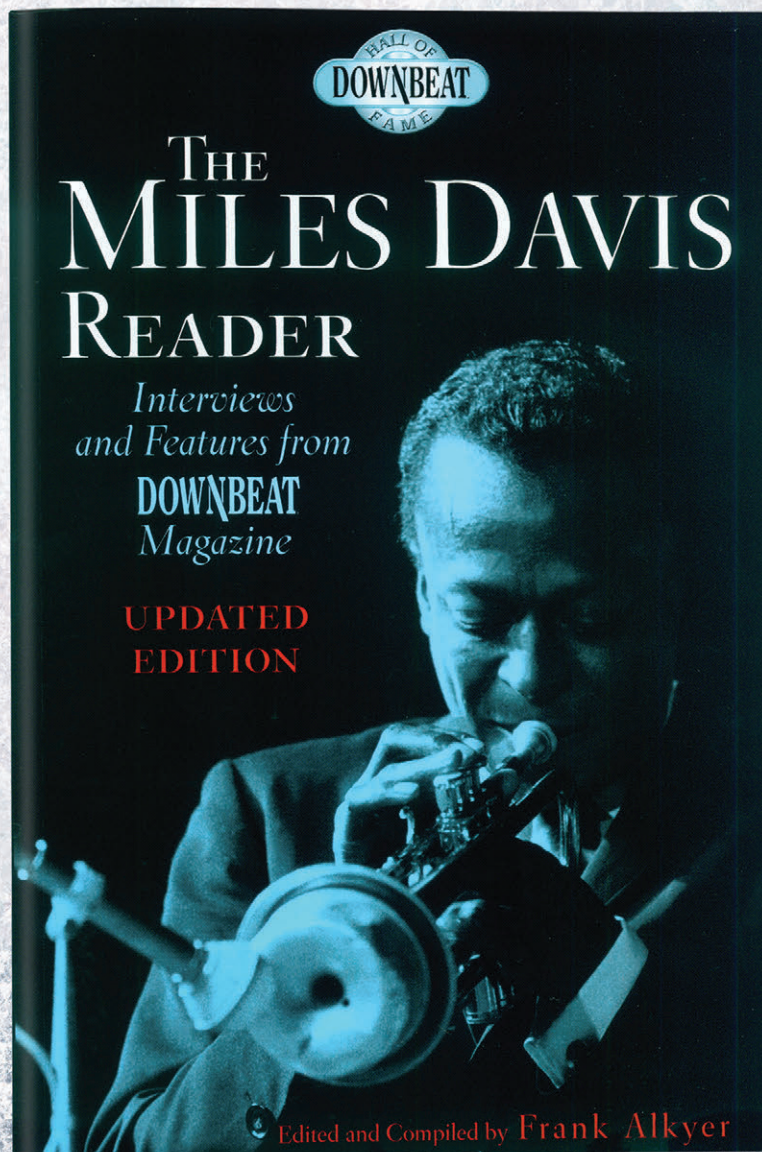
With the family's blessing, Truesdell scanned some 5,000 pages of Evans' scores and began his forensic investigations into their provenance. "I was uncovering a tremendous amount of unknown, unrecorded music, much of it of high quality, and I wanted to hear the colors Gil came up with on these arrangements," he said. In 2008, Schneider suggested that Truesdell record his discoveries to coincide with Evans' looming centennial. Truesdell set up a three-day reading session at Eastman School of Music to winnow the 70-plus charts he'd accumulated to about 30 of the strongest. "My initial plan was to record them all over a week in the studio for release in a massive box set, but it became apparent that the cost was not feasible," he said. "So I decided to do one record, and then be done with it."

Meanwhile, in 2011, the just-relaunched Impulse! label was planning a 50th anniversary celebration at the Jazz Standard, for which Schneider was asked to perform *Out Of The Cool*. She had a conflict and suggested Truesdell. He convened a 15-piece band, played a "very successful" three-set evening. Soon thereafter, he was booked for Evans' 100th



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SAM HARFOUCHE/ECM RECORDS

From left, Slawomir Kurkiewicz, Joe Lovano, Marcin Wasilewski and Michal Miskiewicz.

## Joe Lovano & Marcin Wasilewski Trio

### *Homage*

ECM

★★★½

I bumped into [Ahmed] horn player Seymour Wright on a Knoxville street during March's Big Ears fest, and he was hot to check out Joe Lovano's upcoming set: He'd never seen the saxophonist in person. "That sound," he enthused, "I want to hear that sound."

Working through Lovano's second album with the Wasilewski trio — a delicious, meandering affair — it's indeed his blend of inflection and sonority that dominates. The design of his improvised lines are as wise as ever (which makes them pretty damn wise), but the rich

personality of his instrument's tone and timbre, with its palette of cooing, buzzing, sighing and wailing, is the main attraction.

Just shy of 40 minutes, *Homage*'s program feels like a hazy dream of textures and turnabouts, one that trades overt melodies for a series of intriguing sketches. You can occasionally hear thematic material offer guideposts, but the 72-year-old veteran, who authored all the pieces save the opening Zbigniew Seifert gem, leads a lyrical excursion rather than a mere set of tunes. Referencing the title track's compositional approach, Lovano says that he "used no notes — just feelings written in a sequence of events." That makes *Homage* a reverie of phonetics, an intriguing shift from the foursome's 2020 *Arctic Rift* debut, where songcraft was more pronounced.

Within this realm, pianist Wasilewski's

unit calibrates its moves with italicized poise. Adept at open-ended forms, their well-heeled expressionism actually winds up forging an impressionistic feel, enhancing the music's reflective personae regardless of the tempo or tumult at hand. Through it floats Lovano's tenor and taragato musings. From the solo radiance of "Giving Thanks" to the bumpy beauty of "This Side-Catville," each of his phrases, regardless of trajectory, proves its value by forming a sumptuous allure.

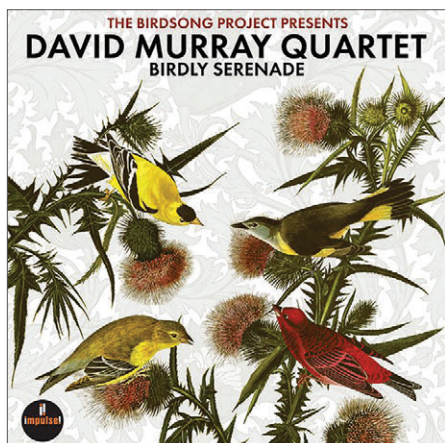
—Jim Macnie

**Homage:** Love In The Garden; Golden Horn; Homage; Giving Thanks; This Side-Catville; Projection. (39:02)

**Personnel:** Joe Lovano, tenor saxophone, taragato, gongs; Marcin Wasilewski, piano; Slawomir Kurkiewicz, bass; Michal Miskiewicz, drums.

**Ordering info:** [ecmrecords.com](http://ecmrecords.com)





## David Murray Quartet *Birdly Serenade*

IMPULSE

★★★★½

The synergy between David Murray and his quartet is dynamic and freewheeling on their sophomore album, *Birdly Serenade*. Compared to their 2024 debut, *Francesca*, this outing features even bolder experimentation and a deeper level of harmony that can only be developed over years as a working band. Commissioned by the Grammy-winning Birdsong Project, *Birdly Serenade* celebrates both the serenity and wildness of the natural world.

## The Empress *Square One*

CELLAR MUSIC

★★★★

As impeccably well-made as it may be, one must ask from time to time what one gets out of a straight-ahead standards album some 70 years after the form of this specific pocket of sound best gelled. Even with the collective of female saxophonists that Pureum Jin put together to spotlight their impressive talent, the frame provided for that spotlight seemingly wipes out whatever statement this group is trying to say by proudly but merely proclaiming more of the same.

The few original Michael Lutzeier compositions fit so seamlessly with these standards, one could easily feel they're forgotten pages out of the *Real Book*. Nothing in *Square One* feels out of place; in fact, every piece of this album feels a bit too neatly in its place without any room to blossom into something more, something a bit messier if given the opportunity.

That being said, this group burns. If we're going to hear a bunch of standards and seemingly jam as much music as possible onto a compact disc, these are very lively versions of tunes largely out of the Great American Songbook.

Francesca Cinelli, Murray's wife and collaborator, wrote the poems that lay the foundation for the opening title track, "Song Of The World" and "Oiseau du Paradis." Guest singer Ekep Nkwelle's vibrant, sun-drenched voice breathes life into Cinelli's words. On the bluesy "Bald Ego," bassist Luke Stewart and drummer Russell Carter build an irresistible groove for Sánchez's extended solo. Murray switches to bass clarinet on "Song Of The World," giving way to an understated yet powerful solo by Stewart. Dedicated to the Indigenous musician Lee Mixashawn Rozie, it evokes a spiritual connection with nature that is beautifully embodied in Nkwelle's silky voice.

Lush soundscapes and dissonant squawks take over on "Black Bird's Gonna Lite Up The Night" and "Capistrano Swallow." Murray's saxophone becomes blustery and full-throated amidst Sánchez's angular piano and Stewart's muscular yet understated bass. Throughout the record, the quartet moves from bebop to blues to free-jazz seamlessly like changes in season, coalescing into a free-jazz aesthetic that is both fresh and new, yet accessible.

—Ivana Ng

**Birdly Serenade:** Birdly Serenade; Bald Ego; Song Of The World (for Mixashawn Rozie); Black Bird's Gonna Lite Up The Night; Nonna's Last Flight; Capistrano Swallow; Bird's The Word; Oiseau du Paradis. (61:14)

**Personnel:** David Murray, tenor saxophone, bass clarinet; Marta Sánchez, piano; Luke Stewart, bass; Russell Carter, drums; Ekep Nkwelle (1, 3), Francesca Cinelli (8), vocals.

**Ordering info:** [davidmurray.xyz](http://davidmurray.xyz)



The arrangements are direct and to the point and every player here is top notch. However, you may be unlikely to think of *Square One* to have one of the most remarkable versions of "Caravan" you've ever heard in your life, as remarkable as it may be. I'm not sure what creatively this album adds to the conversation: It plays more like a mere remark.

—Anthony Dean-Harris

**Square One:** Instant Composure; But Not For Me; Caravan; Everything Happens To Me; Bolivia; Stablemates; Mr. Syms; Nica's Dream; Milestones; Reminiscing; Yearnin'. (70:28)

**Personnel:** Pureum Jin, Erena Terakubo, alto saxophone; Lauren Sevan, baritone saxophone; Chelsea Baratz, tenor saxophone; Steve Ash, piano; Joey Ranieri, bass; Pete Van Nostran, drums.

**Ordering info:** [theempressmusic.bandcamp.com](http://theempressmusic.bandcamp.com)



## Béla Fleck/Edmar Castañeda/Antonio Sánchez *BEATrio*

BÉLA FLECK PRODUCTIONS/THIRTY TIGERS

★★★★

However odd a banjo-harp-drums trio might seem on the face of it, conventionality is not the point. When it comes to Béla Fleck, instrumentation matters less than the musical personalities he's working with, and in the case of *BEATrio*, what makes the album work has less to do with how the instruments fit together than with the way rhythm and harmony coalesce in the playing.

Of the two, it's rhythm that matters most. Both in the writing and the improvising, Fleck and company underscore the various ways in which beats can be subdivided. Sánchez is a key player in that regard, given how deftly he places polyrhythmic crosscurrents behind the interlocking melodic lines, but all three add spice to the mix. Fleck may push a little more than the others, but there are plenty of places — for instance, the cascading triplets on the bluesy "Cloak And Dagger" — where one could easily imagine the interplay as a three voice drum soli.

Although Castañeda's almost pianistic approach to harmony makes a nice contrast to Fleck's relentless arpeggiating, it's the harpist's left hand that's the album's secret strength, routinely creating the illusion that the three have somehow snuck a bass player into the session.

Still, as admirable as this plucky ensemble is, the occasional sustained tone would make a welcome contrast. So, next time, maybe banjo, harp, drums and ... uh, bagpipes?

—J.D. Considine

**BEATrio:** Archipelago; Pellucidar; Kaleidoscopes; Country Side; Cloak And Dagger; Whispers Of Resilience; Coda; Walnut And Western; Three Is Not A Crowd; Hooligan Harbor; Touch And Go. (65:40)

**Personnel:** Béla Fleck, banjo; Edmar Castañeda, harp; Antonio Sánchez, drums.

**Ordering info:** [belaflleck.com](http://belaflleck.com)



# The Hot Box

	Critics	Jim Macnie	Ivana Ng	Anthony Dean-Harris	J.D. Considine
<b>Lovano/Wasilewski Trio</b> <i>Homage</i>		★★★½	★★★★	★★★	★★★
<b>David Murray Quartet</b> <i>Birdly Serenade</i>		★★★½	★★★½	★★★★	★★★★
<b>The Empress</b> <i>Square One</i>		★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★
<b>Fleck/Castañeda/Sánchez</b> <i>BEATrio</i>		★★★	★★★½	★★★★	★★★★

## Critics' Comments

### Joe Lovano & Marcin Wasilewski Trio, *Homage*

Spiritual jazz in an ever-shifting modal framework. The ebbs and flows of lyrical melodies and percussion-driven free-jazz make this an irresistible listen. —Ivana Ng

Lovano plays boldly and boisterously with all the space this group provides, leaving him with nothing to hold him back. However, some restraint could have helped the overall feel in some places. —Anthony Dean-Harris

Elegiac, atmospheric and deeply wistful, Lovano's second collab with the Wasilewski trio is a quietly contemplative set that shines brightest when the music is spare and slow to unfold. The solo gong track may be an acquired taste, however. —J.D. Considine

### David Murray Quartet, *Birdly Serenade*

The nature conceit provides the program with nice cohesiveness, and the band feels tighter than it did on its debut. Plus: the suite's breadth of tempos and attacks keeps you on your toes. —Jim Macnie

In every musical direction Murray and this quartet earnestly travel, they arrive there accomplishing everything to which they aspire with their best intentions and land that plane on every type of terrain. —Anthony Dean-Harris

Murray's Impulse! debut is a suitably ambitious affair, with its Big Concept and not one but two guest vocalists. But its strengths derive entirely from how well his young, hard-swinging rhythm section drives these tunes. Well, that and his enduringly expressive bass clarinet. —J.D. Considine

### The Empress, *Square One*

Lots of capability in the air, and the ebullience is palpable. Anachronism also wafts through, however — shades of yesteryear's Supersax hijinks give this one an antique vibe. —Jim Macnie

Jazz standards are given new depth and energy through the lens of this all-women saxophone quartet. Their mastery is understated yet undeniable. —Ivana Ng

There's nothing here you haven't heard before, nor does there need to be. A straightforward blowing session with four sax soloists, nicely harmonized heads and a smooth-as-silk rhythm section is more than enough, and the arrangement of "Caravan" slays. —J.D. Considine

### Béla Fleck/Edmar Castañeda/Antonio Sánchez, *BEATrio*

If you're searching for virtuosity, you've found it. But the trio's jaw-dropping skills are in the service of rather academic pieces that feel mechanical despite the impressive performances. Head scratcher... —Jim Macnie

A whimsical blend of swinging grooves, introspective musings and effervescent melodies. Harpist Edmar Castañeda is outstanding as the harmonic foil to Fleck's frenetic banjo and the rhythmic complement to Sánchez's methodical percussion. —Ivana Ng

The trio play with all the big, sweeping, prickly aplomb one would hope to hear from this exciting combo and more. —Anthony Dean-Harris

# THE SOUND OF SMOKE

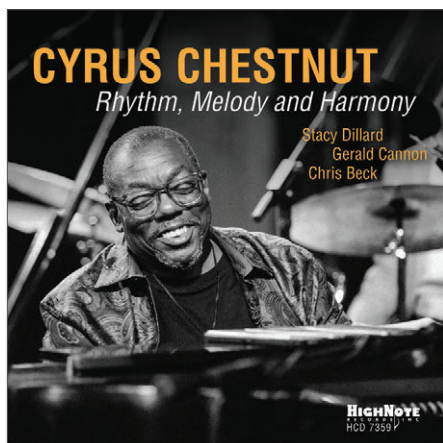
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**Cyrus Chestnut**  
*Rhythm, Melody  
 And Harmony*  
 HIGH NOTE  
 ★★★★★½

There's an old British saying, since popularized by a paint company, about reliability: that someone or something "does what it says on the tin." Cyrus Chestnut's new album could easily adopt the slogan, modified to tight, sharp but relaxed rhythm, a palpable love for melody and a deep harmonic intelligence. Right back to fine Atlantic records like *Revelations* and *Dark Before The Dawn*, Chestnut has stood up for

mainstream values in jazz, and 30 years on he has refined them to the nth degree.

Take the opening pair here. "Cured And Seasoned" offers jazz that sounds as if it has been preserved from the vagaries of fashion weather by that paint company's product. It's old-fashioned hard-bop with modern materials, suffused with post-bop surprise but also an old gospel feel; more moving gospel occurs later on with "There Is A Fountain." Often, sitting in a club, one hears the intro to "Autumn Leaves" with a faint sigh, not from nostalgia, but in fear of another hackneyed wander through a fall landscape. And what does Cyrus do? He suckers the listener with the cliché (the old chestnut, you might say) before swirling off into a dance that will convince you autumn is the *first* season of the year. "Ami's Dance" and "Twinkle Tones" confirm Gerald Cannon's importance to the group, and Chris Beck's, while "Song For The Andes" shows that far from being a plus-one Stacy Dillard is absolutely central to the group sound.

What it doesn't say on the tin, it shows on the tin. Cyrus' smile on the cover is the clincher. This is a man who loves the music immoderately, and it spills out of him. —Brian Morton

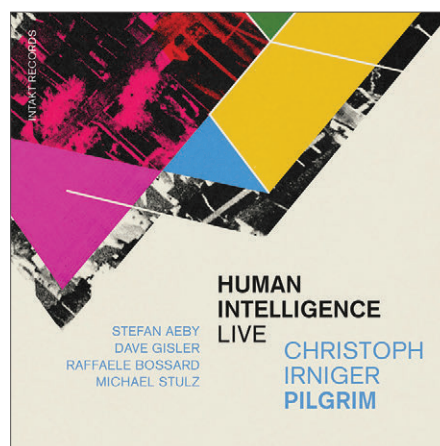
**Rhythm, Melody And Harmony:** Cured And Seasoned; Autumn Leaves; Ami's Dance; Prelude For George; Twinkle Tones; Song For The Andes; Big Foot; Moonlight In Vermont.  
**Personnel:** Cyrus Chestnut, piano; Stacy Dillard, soprano saxophone; Gerald Cannon, bass; Chris Beck, drums

Ordering info: [jazzdepot.com](http://jazzdepot.com)

**Christoph Irniger Pilgrim**  
*Human Intelligence Live*  
 INTAKT  
 ★★★★★

It's hardly news that jazz is a music best experienced live. Swiss tenor saxophonist Christoph Irniger clearly embraces this reality, recognizing what his long-running quintet Pilgrim can bring to the stage, where spontaneous decisions about shifting arrangements or even a set list can energize and inspire any given performance. *Human Intelligence Live* is the band's second live album among the six records they've released since 2011, and when you hear them navigate the opening of a piece like "Calling The Spirits," feeling out ambiguous terrain and trusting in a deep internal rapport, the simultaneous excitement and sense of vulnerability produces a livewire vibe that can't be replicated in the studio. About 8:40 into the piece, drummer Michael Stulz drops a snare bomb that elicits a sudden cry from one of the musicians, a pinpoint rupture of its cool vibe.

Balancing previously recorded gems with a passel of new tunes, Pilgrim hypercharges the contrapuntal sophistication that marks the leader's compositions and arrangements. The music occupies a modern mainstream sensibility built upon extended melodies and volatile introspection, where at any moment the



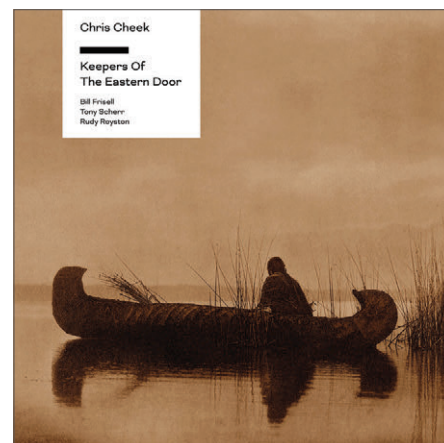
music can erupt only to rediscover its equanimity without a hiccup. Stulz and bassist Raffaele Bossard routinely shake up the poised lines of Irniger, guitarist Dave Gisler and pianist Stefan Aeby, injecting tension and conflict within lines that are otherwise marked by cool, controlled repose. Irniger is a traditionalist with a contemporary flair, trusting in the interactivity of his crack ensemble to elevate the music into rarefied terrain.

—Peter Margasak

**Human Intelligence Live:** Hendrix; Calling The Spirits; Secret Level; Human Intelligence (Interlude); Seven Down Eight Up; The Kraken; Human Intelligence; Emergency Exit; Back In The Game. (64:46)

**Personnel:** Christoph Irniger, tenor saxophone; Stefan Aeby, piano; Dave Gisler, guitar; Raffaele Bossard, bass; Michael Stulz, drums.

Ordering info: [intaktrec.ch](http://intaktrec.ch)



**Chris Cheek**  
*Keepers Of The Eastern Door*  
 ANALOG TONE FACTORY  
 ★★★★★

On this beautiful and deceptively understated gem of an album, ever-tasteful saxophonist Chris Cheek makes a gentle-but-firm alliance with another notoriously tasteful musician, guitarist Bill Frisell, in clean-tone mode. The empathic front line is comfortably enmeshed with members of Frisell's regular bandmate coterie, bassist Tony Scherr and drummer Rudy Royston. The result is magical, especially given the intriguing and sometimes offbeat program laid out in Cheek's originals: a conceptual plan rooted in the archival Native American photographs of Edward Curtis and re-arranged "covers" from unexpected sources.

Not many jazz albums can boast versions of music by French modernist Olivier Messiaen ("O Sacrum Convivium!") and British Baroque master Henry Purcell ("Lost Is My Quiet"), but Cheek's supple conceptual arrangements of these pieces respect the sources while folding them into a jazz-flavored fabric. The Purcell piece involves some contrapuntal interplay and linear dodge-and-weave between Frisell and Cheek. Other covers range from a standard, "Smoke Rings," a playful "On A Clear Day" and a breezy-ethereal spin on the Beatles' "From Me To You."

Cheek's originals are infectious and beguiling, with sinuous melodies handled by the savory duality of guitar/sax texturing: the first sound we hear on the opening tune "Kino's Canoe." The rumble-pulsed title track, inflected by Cheek's interest in Mohawk culture, segues into the bittersweet balladic sigh of the finale, "Go On, Dear." All told, the album is a thing of subtle beauty and neo-hip grace.

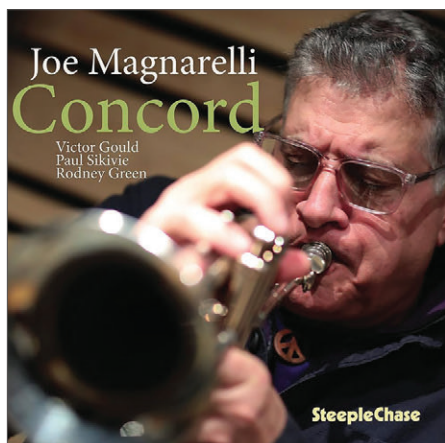
—Josef Woodard

**Keepers Of The Eastern Door:** Kino's Canoe; Smoke Rings; O Sacrum Convivium!; On A Clear Day; Lost Is My Quiet; From Me To You; Keepers Of The Eastern Door; Go On, Dear. (41:35)

**Personnel:** Chris Cheek, tenor and soprano saxophone; Bill Frisell, guitar; Tony Scherr, bass; Rudy Royston, drums.

Ordering info: [analogtonefactory.com](http://analogtonefactory.com)





## Joe Magnarelli *Concord*

STEEPLECHASE

★★★½

Trumpeter Joe Magnarelli has a tone to die for. Firm yet gentle; bright with burnished depth; sleek, warm and graceful: The veteran New Yorker's sound throughout his third Steeplechase release (and sweet 16th as a leader) is ideal. He uses it with masterful melodic command and mature confidence, leading his sympatico younger collaborators in warm, entertaining, sophisticated, bluesy, swinging jazz.

## Spike Wilner Trio *Contrafactus* *The Children & The Warlock*

CELLAR MUSIC GROUP

★★★★

With an album title like *The Children & The Warlock*, you may expect this recording to sound something like a love child of Jeremy Steig and Jethro Tull. But this album is no one-trick pony. It's dedicated to the late Harry Whitaker (Wilner's late teacher, and a stalwart member of Roy Ayers Ubiquity among others), and the title track is a composition by Whitaker that's as languid and lovely as the eternal John Coltrane composition "Alabama."

This album is rendered with layers of homage. Besides showcasing the work of the under-sung Whitaker, a rendition of "Theme For Ernie" is a rollicking cut plucked from Coltrane's repertoire that was originally written by Fred Lacey in tribute to alto saxophonist Ernie Henry.

And speaking of Coltrane, a version of Coltrane's "Miles' Mode" sparkles and glows with percussive energy courtesy of drummer Anthony Pinciotti. It's a fine showing and fitting showcase for the drummer, who suddenly passed away shortly after the recording session.

George Garzone is stellar here as well: While the intention was for him to merely sit in

Magnarelli's stance is poised, his statements and beat generally up, if tinged as with unavoidably weary, real-life experience. The trumpet phrases flow easily and unfurl without repetition, precisely articulated, consistently intoned, spinning deftly in and out of the pocket kept lively by drummer Green's ride cymbal, among other hits (his brushwork's cool, too).

"Brooklyn" is a highlight of the group's cohesion and each player's personal skill, the trumpeter's well-supported flourishes and Gould's subtlety giving way to an unaccompanied moment for Sikvie and a 100% in-sync head-out. The quartet's version Monk's "Ruby" is admirably tender, the trumpeter's extension daring in a personable way, the rhythm trio taking a star turn. "Concord," the title track finale, throws back to mid-'60s Blue Note boogaloes, with casual freshness of spirit.

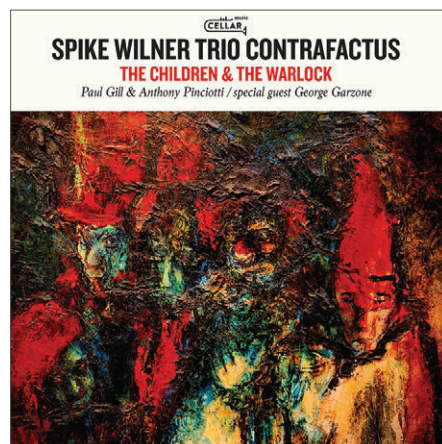
There's little youthful brashness, anxious overreach or outbursts of unrestrained energy here, but rather lyricism that Magnarelli has derived from the post-Clifford Brown standard of jazz brass virtuosity. *Concord* may not be trailblazing, but it is elevating.

—Howard Mandel

**Concord:** It's A Blue World; Veneration; Moonlight In Vermont; Brooklyn, Patti; Look For The Silver Lining; Ruby My Dear; Hargrove (for Roy); Baubles, Bangles And Beads; Concord. (64:59)

**Personnel:** Joe Magnarelli, trumpet; Victor Gould, piano; Paul Sikvie, bass; Rodney Green, drums.

Ordering info: [steeplechase.dk](http://steeplechase.dk)



with the core trio, he winds up sounding like an integral member. According to Wilner, "George is, in fact, the warlock and Trio Contrafactus (me, Anthony and Paul) the children. We run nervously through the woods towards his lair, terrified but exhilarated. What will we find?"

In short, *The Children & The Warlock* is a lovingly crafted testament to jazz's way of honoring the past while breathing new life into tried and true things.

—Ayana Contreras

**The Children & The Warlock:** Hey, Open Up!; The Child And The Warlock; Benediction; Miles' Mode; Theme For Ernie; Moment To Moment (for Harry Whitaker); Re-Solution. (48:15)

**Personnel:** Spike Wilner, piano; George Garzone, tenor saxophone; Paul Gill, bass; Anthony Pinciotti, drums.

Ordering info: [cellarlive.com](http://cellarlive.com)



## Ayelet Rose Gottlieb/ *Dream Keepers*

*Dust*

INDEPENDENT RELEASE

★★★½

*Dust* embraces globally minded composition, performance and collaboration with strong intention and thoughtful imagery. The perspectives of authors and poets from around the world ensure that neither the album's music nor its messages become complacent or predictable.

Snare with a slowly marching brush-stroked rhythm gently propels opening track "The Dream Keeper." "Beads," by contrast, fosters nervous tension that's fueled by rapid percussion, dissonant synth tremolo and accidental-laden guitar against plainly spoken words. The title track adds to this unease with colliding half-step motif on guitar, repeated percussive scraping and Gottlieb's vocals. The latter oscillate between following the chords and bending between them, much the way the words on several tracks slide between languages in the same song. Some performances feel vast while others feel intimate and direct.

Seven languages — English, French, Hebrew, Yiddish, Ladino, Arabic and Farsi — and so many approaches to their musical framing lead *Dust* to beckon for undivided attention. Yet, for all that might feel lost without consulting the liner notes, it's refreshing to experience and process the album in its natural state before having to multitask and read the words. The obvious upside to this is an abundance of inherent revisitation and discovery. Everything is blended with fluidity, articulation and grace. *Dust* sounds the way well-executed dance choreography looks: intriguing, decisive and, at times, just a bit unbelievable — in the best way.

—Kira Grunenberg

**Dust:** The Dream Keeper—Tfila; Summons; Amal Zo Tikva; Beads; I Heard Your Voice; Dust; Three Kisses; Azoy vi mayn blik der fartrterer; Demain dès l'aube; By Night; Home; One Voice Of All. (48:02)

**Personnel:** Ayelet Rose Gottlieb, vocals; Bernard Falaise, guitars, keyboards, electronics; Hamin Honari, Persian hand percussion; Stéphane Diamantakiou, contrabass, synthesizer.

Ordering info: [cornebrume.bandcamp.com](http://cornebrume.bandcamp.com)



# You Can Feel All That Soul

**Johnny Rawls: *Make Them Dance* (Catfood; ★★★★★½ 36:03)** Johnny Rawls gives his position as a top soul-blues vocalist a sense of style that circumvents mannerism or stale formula. Produced by Jim Gaines (his last project before passing away) and aided by bassist-songwriter Bob Trenchard on their eighth album together, the Mississippi native again displays his masterly command of timing and rich emotion. Grooves are worked up by some of the leading musicians in El Paso, Memphis and Muscle Shoals (a shout-out to guitarist Will McFarland).

Ordering info: [catfoodrecords.com](http://catfoodrecords.com)

**Charlie Musselwhite: *Look Out Highway* (Forty Below; ★★★★★ 39:58)** Charlie Musselwhite's testifying, roughhousing and searching for resolve in heartache through his harmonica has long had a nonchalant kind of visceral power. His singing voice, casually welling up in the gut of a song, is among the most identifiable in the blues. The youngish 80-year-old's new album, the first with his well-tested road band of recent years, affirms the aforementioned attributes. Relish how he allows different strains of feeling to seep through 10 original songs that fit him like a custom-made suit. Evidenced by the instrumental "Blue Lounge," Musselwhite's special affinity with melody and phrasing extends to his slide guitar playing.

Ordering info: [fortybelowrecords.com](http://fortybelowrecords.com)

**Tad Robinson: *Soul In Blue* (Delmark; ★★★★★ 42:50)** Southern soul-blues comes naturally to Midwesterner Tad Robinson, a vital representative of the tradition of Johnny Rawls, O.V. Wright and Mighty Sam McClain. On his first album since 2019, he sticks to his successful stock-in-trade: singing and playing harp on tunes percolating with humanity and tough-minded tenderness. Robinson's voice has worn a little over time but he's essentially still the outstanding singer he's been since the 1990s. This time out, seven perfectly good originals have Robinson comfortable, never complacent, in Indianapolis with intergenre colleagues (notably keyboardist Kevin Anker) who he's recorded prosperously with in the past. Four more songs derive from a tolerable session in Chicago with the blues-inclined Delmark All-Stars.

Ordering info: [delmark.com](http://delmark.com)

**Carolyn Wonderland: *Truth Is* (Alligator; ★★★★★½ 47:32)** Texas roadhouse warrior Carolyn Wonderland's latest effort collects blues, rock, Tex-Mex and honky-tonk songs in middle-energy or relaxed settings, employing guests like lap steel guitarist Cindy Cashdollar and keyboardist Red Young. The most striking facets of this Dave Alvin-produced album are her emotionally direct guitar work and her insightful lyrics of strong moral fiber about courage, justice and honesty. Wonderland's



Johnny Rawls serves blues with a side of style.

singing at times comes across as overdone, but it always has the air of a person who knows what she's about. She covers Houston tunesmith Greg Wood's "Wishful Thinking" (here's her best vocal) and salutes the late pianist Gene Taylor on "Blues For Gene."

Ordering info: [alligator.com](http://alligator.com)

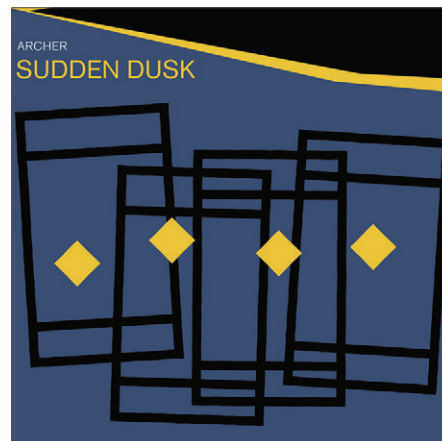
**Joe Louis Walker: *Cold Is The Night—Relmaged* (Bluesifym/Sledgehammer Blues; ★★★★★½ 40:21)** The re-appearance of major modern bluesman Joe Louis Walker's debut record, from 1986, has two remixed-and-remastered songs and a new vocal by Eliza Neals on another. It's moderately enjoyable but comes with a caveat. Walker, used to playing straight blues in Bay Area clubs, wasn't seeing eye to eye with producer-songwriter Dennis Walker (no relation), who wanted the ace guitarist-singer to embrace the alchemic blues-rock-soul sound that had worked so well for Dennis when producing surprise young hitmaker Robert Cray. Dennis left mid-session, leaving behind some excellent songs and the slightly askew Joe.

Ordering info: [valley-entertainment.com](http://valley-entertainment.com)

**Jesse Ed Davis: *Tomorrow Might Not Be Your Day* (Real Gone; ★★★★★½ 74:09)** Jesse Ed Davis, a Native American raised in Oklahoma, was the first-choice guitarist for records and/or tours commanded by elites like Eric Clapton, Bob Dylan, George Harrison, B.B. King and John Lee Hooker. Surfacing now are 17 formerly lost studio tracks that didn't make it onto Davis' 1970-'71 ATCO albums *Jesse Davis!* and *Ululu*. Self-willed Davis is a superb hand at his sensible, nonaggressive guitar craft, not intimidated by special guest Clapton unleashing lightning storms in either party-hearty "Saturday Night" or Kiowa-heritage manifesto "Washita Love Child" (four versions in all). But give wide berth to Ben Sidran's electric piano showcase "Pat's Song," over-sentimental and scarily long (10:42).

Ordering info: [realgonemusic.com](http://realgonemusic.com)

MARILYN STRINGER



## Archer *Sudden Dusk*

AEROPHONIC

★★★★★

Musically and geopolitically, this is a time when some folks really like their borders. *Sudden Dusk*, the first recording by Archer, defies that stance. The quartet includes a first-generation Dutch punk guitarist turned sui generis improviser; a saxophonist and organizer who has been a mainstay of Chicago's music and arts scenes for a quarter century; and a Norwegian bass-drums team whose work together in the groups Friends & Neighbors, All Included and Universal Indians has provided constant proof that staunch support and assertive creative input are not incompatible methods.

Archer exists solely on the road. It first convened in 2023 for a tour of Norway, and the three lengthy tracks on *Sudden Dusk* were recorded on a follow-up journey through the U.S. Thus, its commitment to making music through total improvisation is balanced by the evolutionary dynamic that only occurs when musicians play together night after night. This synergy of instant response and self-aware development informs the quartet's music.

The opening "Omen" builds with remorseless logic from a tersely scratched guitar rhythm to a brewing storm of probing soprano sax forays, pulsing strings and a whirlwind of contrastingly lighter-than-air percussion. As the action progresses, different players take on that contrarian role; at one point on "Half Stack," a melancholy alto melody unfolds over a shimmering surface of shaken metal and a bristling tussle between plucked bass and a guitar detuned so that it sounds like a thumb piano. While this music is deeply concerned with process, the outcomes of the musicians white-knuckled interactions are deeply satisfying.

—Bill Meyer

**Sudden Dusk:** Omen; Half Stack; Bright Side. (52:40)

**Personnel:** Dave Rempis, soprano, tenor and baritone saxophones; Terrie Ex, guitar; Jon Rune Ström, bass; Tollef Østvang, drums.

Ordering info: [aerophonicrorecords.com](http://aerophonicrorecords.com)





**Gaia Wilmer & Ra Kalam Bob Moses**  
*Dancing With Elephants*  
SUNNYSIDE  
★★★★

**Samo Salamon/  
Ra Kalam Bob  
Moses Orchestra**  
*Dream Suites, Vol. 1*  
SAMO  
★★★★½

Despite a career spent creating music alongside artists like Gary Burton, Pat Metheny and Steve Swallow, 77-year-old drummer Ra Kalam Bob Moses remains woefully under-recorded as a leader or coleader. These latter-day works, which provide titular coleader status with Brazilian composer-saxophonist Gaia Wilmer and Slovenian guitarist Samo Salamon, respectively, offer an exceptionally broad portrait of his sturdy-yet-fluttery work.

*Dancing With Elephants* pursues an interesting conceit: melding composition to what Moses calls his “extremely organic sonic percussion beds.” Like many artistic works that doggedly pursue an organizational theme, it delivers varied results. The outcome can be potent when the threads come together ideally: Witness the sharp blend of clattering percus-

sion, Song Yi Jeon’s extraordinarily expressive voice and George Garzone’s deeply textured tenor saxophone on “Blue Desert” or the surging power of the African-tinged “When They Meet,” where Garzone and Wilmer tangle like a latter-day Trane/Sanders mashup over churning drums.

Even when things don’t quite come together — such as the way the horns of Wilmer, Gustavo D’Amico, Daniele Germani and Neta Ranaan are awkwardly layered over Moses’ drum pattern on “Leaving With The Herd” — there’s a sense of adventure layered over everything.

Talk about adventure: Imagine 23 musicians — out of a total of 27 — improvising freely with Moses behind one of two kits. The scenario gets even more intriguing when you consider some of the improvisers involved: Dave Ballou, Curtis Hasselbring, Ben Goldberg, Ernst Reijseger and Vinny Golia, among others. But *Dream Suites, Vol. 1* is a recording of collective improvisation that sets itself apart from other albums of its type by its measured reserve.

To be sure, there are sections of the type of all-out blowing expected when Goldberg, Golia, Chet Doxas, Adam Kolker, Ned Rothenberg, Dan Willis and Andrew Rathbun simultaneously have reeds between their lips. But there are long sections that are anchored by a sturdy bass figure like the one Chris Lightcap works hard throughout “Djembe Suite” or the inevitable, trundling movement that dominates “Freedom March Suite” under the steady propulsion of Moses’ light-handed drumming.

In his breadth, technique and longevity, Moses is reminiscent of another underappreciated drum master, the late Jerry Granelli. Like Granelli, the groove Moses brings to any recording extends beyond what he does with his drums.

—James Hale

**Dancing With Elephants:** Dancing With Elephants; Leaving With The Herd; Turning The Tide; Finding Water; When They Meet; Blue Desert; Jellyfish Lake; Whales Part To Play; Chase Machine; Finding Water. (53:58)

**Personnel:** Song Yi Jeon, vocals (1, 5, 6, 8, 9); Yulia Musayelyan, flute, alto flute, bass flute (1, 3, 7–9); Gaia Wilmer, alto saxophone, baritone saxophone (1–3, 5, 8, 9); Gustavo D’Amico, soprano saxophone (1–4, 8, 9); Daniele Germani, alto saxophone (1–3, 8, 9); George Garzone (1, 4–6, 9, 10), Neta Ranaan (1–3, 8, 9), tenor saxophone; Leo Genovese, piano, keyboards (1, 4–6, 9, 10); Leandro Pellegrino, electric guitar (1, 2, 9); Ra Kalam Bob Moses, drums, percussion.

**Ordering info:** [sunnysiderecords.com](http://sunnysiderecords.com)

**Dream Suites, Vol. 1:** Drums Suite; Djembe Suite; Freedom March Suite. (60:36)

**Personnel:** Samo Salamon, Rez Abbasi, Jonathan Goldberger (1), electric guitar; Mike Baggetta, acoustic guitar (1, 3); Jerome Harris, pedal steel guitar; Dave Ballou, Russ Johnson (2), trumpet; Tom Varner, French horn; Curtis Hasselbring (2, 3), Steve Swell (1, 2), trombone; Jeb Bishop, trombone, electronics (1); Ben Goldberg, clarinet; Vinny Golia, clarinet (3), soprano saxophone, alto saxophone; Chet Doxas, clarinet (1, 2), tenor saxophone; Adam Kolker, clarinet, tenor saxophone; Ned Rothenberg, alto flute, bass clarinet, alto saxophone; Dan Willis, alto flute, bass clarinet, soprano saxophone, tenor saxophone; Andrew Rathbun, tenor saxophone; Michael Cain, piano (1); Steve Hunt, piano, synth; Ernst Reijseger, cello (1, 3); Matt Pavolka, electric bass; Jimmys Haslip, electric bass (3); Eivind Opsvik, bass (1, 3); Chris Lightcap, bass (2); Tim Daisy, drums; Ra Kalam Bob Moses, drums, percussion.

**Ordering info:** [samosalamon.bandcamp.com](http://samosalamon.bandcamp.com)

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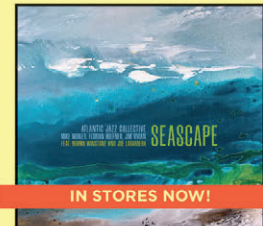


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## Panorama of Pockets Past

Jaki Byard's 1960 album debut as a leader, *Blues For Smoke* (Candid; ★★★★★ 38:50), packs so much joyous ebullience that 65 years later, the music still leaps forward with fresh, energetic pianism and plucky imagination. A solo piano outing that captures a 38-year-old Byard sounding like a fully formed maverick, it finds him delving into ragtime and stride piano idioms with hints of swing, bebop and free-jazz. Nothing comes across as didactic as he tips his hat to such pioneers as Jelly Roll Morton, Willie "The Lion" Smith and Fats Waller. But the true revelation is that as he deftly navigates historic touchstones of his past, Byard's singular voice comes through on such stunning originals as "One Two Five" and the slinky title track.

Ordering info: [candidrecords.bandcamp.com](http://candidrecords.bandcamp.com)

Another noteworthy solo piano recording from yesteryear is more recent. Recorded five months before his untimely death at the age of 64, *The Call* (Sunnyside; ★★½ 60:10) is a testament to Frank Kimbrough's prowess as a pianist and composer who can command a listener's attention through the power of a sensitive touch, spatial awareness and fluid melodicism. His solo piano rendition of "I Loves You, Porgy" is a blissful moment that demonstrates his ability to go vertically into the composition and imbue the melody with enormous warmth without the need to overly razzle-dazzle it. The same can be said about the tranquil "Reflections In D." Moreover, his version of "A Night In Tunisia" illustrates that he could switch gears and deliver a rambunctious performance without sacrificing lyricism.

Ordering info: [sunnysiderecords.com](http://sunnysiderecords.com)

William Hooker's *A Time Within: Live At The New York Jazz Museum, January 14, 1977* (Valley of Search; ★★½ 48:48) is both a document of incredible stamina as Hooker's lacerating cymbal crashes, serrated snare drum patterns and combusive bass-drum thumps course insistently underneath saxophonists David S. Ware and Alan Braufman's howling improvisations and a litmus test for listeners. Hooker was still in his early 30s when he documented this arresting concert during the zeitgeist of New York's fecund loft jazz scene. That same year saw the release of Hooker's debut album, ... *Is Eternal Life*, which featured Ware reaching for the stars on "Passages (Anthill)." This intense live date is a companion release, with Hooker alongside Ware and Braufman going for broke. Ecstatic free-jazz at its most unalloyed and uncompromising, it demands full attention even when ear fatigue and ennui start setting in.

Ordering info: [valleyofsearch.com](http://valleyofsearch.com)

To commemorate jazz legend James Moody's centennial birthday celebration,



Marian McPartland in 1972.

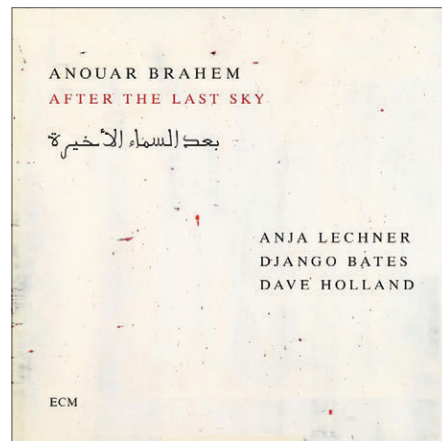
Origin Records releases the sanguine James Moody: *80 Years Young—Live At The Blue Note* (Origin; ★★½ 90:09). The album captures both a March 2005 birthday party and a victory lap for Moody as he fronts a stellar and rotating cast of musicians that includes trombonist Slide Hampton, pianist Cedar Walton and alto saxophonist and clarinetist Paquito D'Rivera. The vibes are as relaxed as they are humorous as Moody digs into his musical treasure chest and re-contextualizes his signature vocal number "Moody's Mood For Love" for the hip-hop generation and uproariously croons at the tail end of "Benny's From Heaven." But it's not all jokes. The zigzagging "Bebop" and "Birks' Works" are two examples among many on the album of Moody as a force to be reckoned with as a thrilling saxophonist and flutist.

Ordering info: [originarts.com](http://originarts.com)

Celebrating a jazz icon entering her octogenarian period, *At The Peninsula Library 1972* (Liberation Hall; ★★★ 60:20) provides a glimpse of pianist Marian McPartland in front of live audience, delivering a relaxed set that illustrates undeniable musical bona fides. In this case, it's McPartland leading a sleek piano trio that includes bassist Rusty Gilder and drummer Joe Corsello at a Long Island, New York, library. McPartland was 54 years old and had long established herself as a torchbearer of blues-laden bebop pianism, as a staunch jazz advocate, as a radio host and as a critic for DownBeat. Her playing on this date reveals an elegant touch, great control of dynamics and masterful interpretation, whether it's Thelonious Monk's "Straight No Chaser," John Coltrane's "Giant Steps" or B.J. Thomas' country hit "Raindrops Keep Fallin' On My Head."

Ordering info: [liberationhall.com](http://liberationhall.com)

COURTESY JOE CORSELLO/EASTMAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC



### Anouar Brahmeh *After The Last Sky*

ECM

★★★★½

No drums beat on *After The Last Sky*, Tunisian oud master Anouar Brahmeh's 12th album for ECM. It falls to the listener's heartbeat to imply the rhythm on this album. A mesmerizing work infused with Brahmeh's grief over the situation in the Gaza Strip, it is both timeless and topical.

All but one of the 11 tracks on *Sky* were written by Brahmeh. Bassist Dave Holland, long a Brahmeh soulmate, shares credits with him on "The Eternal Olive Tree." That tune and several other tracks evoke a time of peace that seems unimaginable today. Brahmeh's solo here is both playful and poignant. His absence on "Vague," the finale, makes welcome room for Anja Lechner's lush cello, Django Bates's calming piano and Holland's moving rumble. Despite its gravitas, *Sky* clears ground for joy. The beautifully shaped "The Sweet Oranges Of Jaffa," featuring Bates at his most careful and bell-like, seems virtually fragrant.

While each song has its own character, the album should be considered as a whole. Its flow, whether the tune calls for Lechner's cello washes or Brahmeh's pungent oud, is captivating and engulging.

It's also a commentary on Brahmeh's own background and on the Middle East. Brahmeh says in the liner notes that the ongoing tragedy in Gaza strongly influenced his compositions, prompting him to ask scholar-writer Adam Shatz to craft an essay about the work. Shatz's words make for challenging reading about an album that is a singular act of healing.

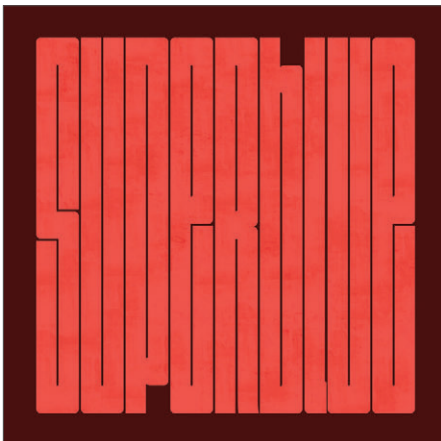
—Carlo Wolff

**After The Last Sky:** Remembering Hind; After The Last Sky; Endless Wandering; The Eternal Olive Tree; Awake; In The Shade Of Your Eyes; Dancing Under The Meteorites; The Sweet Oranges Of Jaffa; Never Forget; Edward Said's Reverie; Vague. (58:43)

**Personnel:** Anouar Brahmeh, oud; Django Bates, piano; Dave Holland, bass; Anja Lechner, violoncello.

Ordering info: [ecmrecords.com](http://ecmrecords.com)





## Kurt Elling and Charlie Hunter featuring the Huntertones *SuperBlue: Guilty Pleasures Vol. 2*

BIG SHOULDERS

★★★

Vocalist Kurt Elling is known to collaborate with A-list musicians like Branford Marsalis and Danilo Pérez. He's spent considerable time pumping out records with guitarist Charlie Hunter, going back to Hunter's 2001 release *Songs From The Analog Playground*. Since then, the duo expanded their genre-blending amalga-

mation of funk, jazz and lyrical splendor with the SuperBlue series, which they debuted in 2021.

On *SuperBlue: Guilty Pleasures Vol. 2*, released on Elling's new label Big Shoulders Records, the duo continues to stretch the lines of jazz fusion with catchy funk grooves, signaling the musicians' boundary-breaking creativity. The original Superblue album was more R&B and hip-hop, while this new offering is more bluesy.

On the opener, "Turn To Stone," Elling struts his stuff vocally on the classic ELO song, pairing nicely with the brass section, the Huntertones. Hunter's bluesy guitar licks hit hard on Fleetwood Mac's "Say You Love Me." There are more blues elements on "Sharp Dressed Man" where Hunter's electric guitar riffs are sharper than glass shards, supported by the horn section and Elling's powerhouse vocals.

Throughout the album, the duo's chemistry never wavers. The rhythm section's energy is the backbone of each arrangement. The only downside to the record as there aren't enough tunes to get a full party started. The duo only recorded six tunes. Let's hope that there is a volume three coming to continue the series. —Veronica Johnson

**SuperBlue:** Guilty Pleasures Vol. 2: Turn To Stone; Say You Love Me; Sharp Dressed Man; Desperado; Gangster Of Love. (21:36)

**Personnel:** Kurt Elling, vocals; Charlie Hunter, guitar; Kiefer, keyboards; Marcus Fennie, drums; Victoria Victoria, background vocals (2, 5); Dan White, saxophone; Chris Ott, trombone; Jon Lampley, trumpet.

**Ordering info:** [kurtelling.bandcamp.com](http://kurtelling.bandcamp.com)

## Winther/Andersson/Watts

### *Steep Steps*

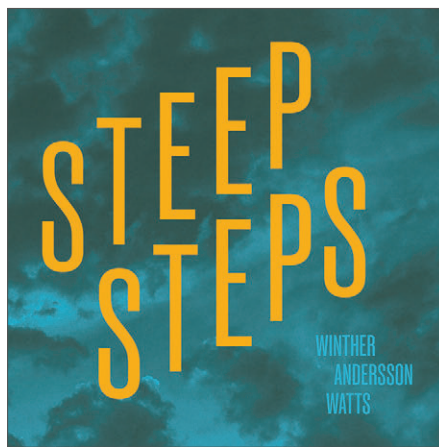
HOBBY HORSE RECORDS

★★★

What stands out on "Steep Steps," the second album by the Carl Winther, Richard Andersson and Jeff "Tain" Watts trio, is the way they synthesize and synchronize individual speed and agility into a collective whole. In one sense, they are much like a well-tuned relay team — no, make that melody team — passing fragments of sound in effortless precision and tonality.

This process is best realized on the title track and "Inner Glimpse." Each seems interested in keeping pace with the other, all the while maintaining a tuneful balance between rhythmic and harmonic modes. The trio alternates between introspective ballads and uptempo tunes, often garnished with a glaze of bebop and classical gloss. Winther's solos best exemplify this tendency with his quicksilver sprints up and down the keyboard, ones that build into cascades of modulations before morphing into trickling notes that invites Watts' embellishments, his own special musical intuition.

If the album opens with a slow, probing mood on "You Know," the trio brings things to an end with a thorough embodiment of where they have



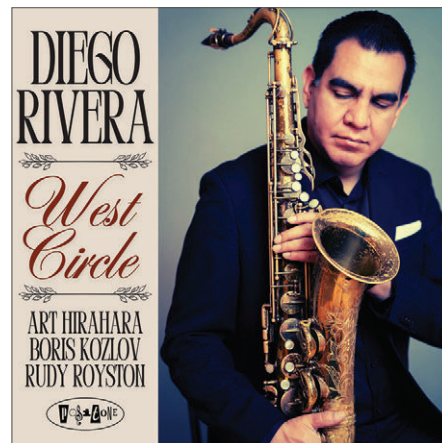
been and where they are bound, and together they have taken decisive steps, passionate leaps into a vibrant journey of sound and cohesion.

In this second iteration, moving as one, there is a continuation of the group's affinity, the knowing sense of jazz history and how to make it meaningful to the current generation. In short, this is a carefully calibrated step or steps toward merging American motifs with the traditional genres of Europe. —Herb Boyd

**Steep Steps:** You Know; Inner Glimpse; Soultrane; Steep Steps; Turning Chapter. (42:21)

**Personnel:** Carl Winther, piano; Jeff "Tain" Watts, drums; Richard Andersson, bass.

**Ordering info:** [richardandersson.bandcamp.com](http://richardandersson.bandcamp.com)



## Diego Rivera *West Circle*

POSI-TONE

★★★½

Listening to the new recording from tenor saxophonist Diego Rivera, it's easy to imagine a scene from the musician's youth. He's in his room with friends and surrounded by artwork, but not paintings; instead, the art is album covers by Reid Miles and Francis Wolff and maybe an Andy Warhol thrown in for good measure. There'd definitely be a Wayne Shorter, maybe *Night Dreamer*; certainly a Johnny Griffin, perhaps *The Congregation*; and it's a fair bet that Joe Henderson's *Mode For Joe* is near the turntable.

The scene is easy to conjure from the music on *West Circle*, which feels like a savvy updating on that revered era; it's classicism, but not fussy. It's an album that is proud of its cornerstones but willing to build on them.

Rivera has been on the scene for more than a quarter century; the Michigan native is director of jazz studies at the University of Texas in Austin. He brings a professorial sense of duty to his warm, muscular tenor and probing soprano lines.

The album opens with the pensive title track, which conveys Rivera's response to the 2022 mass shooting in East Lansing, Michigan, where he lived and taught for many years. "The Maze" is an enthusiastic cover of the Herbie Hancock cover (perhaps the legend's *Takin' Off* is in that youthful scene, too). The interplay between bassist Boris Kozlov and drummer Rudy Royston highlight "Both-Siding," a stern critique of faux neutrality in these terrifying and complicated times. —Martin Johnson

**West Circle:** West Circle; The Maze; Ebb And Flow; Both-Siding; Frida; Cumbia; Fungue; Debatable; Just Before Silence: Mr. Styx. (53:15)

**Personnel:** Diego Rivera, tenor saxophone, soprano saxophone (3, 9); Art Hiraehara, piano; Boris Kozlov, bass; Rudy Royston, drums, percussion (6).

**Ordering info:** [posi-tone.com](http://posi-tone.com)



# Voices Without Boundaries

**Tyreek McDole** cements his place as a vocalist to watch with his debut, *Open Up Your Senses* (Artwork; ★★★★★ 50:52). He's only the second male to win the Sarah Vaughan International Jazz Vocal Competition and follows up his win with this collection of jazz classics. On most tracks McDole sings with the band, integrating his phrasing, melismas and asides into the arrangements, making his voice one more instrument. Standouts are his affectionate reading of "Under A Blanket Of Blue" and "The Umbrella Man." On the more intimate side, he sings "Ugly Beauty" as a duet with pianist/arranger Caelan Cardello, impressively showing off his emotional and musical range.

Ordering info: [tyreekmcdole.com](http://tyreekmcdole.com)

*Explorations In Sound* (Independent Release; ★★★★★ 101:12), a collaboration between **Gabriela Martina** and Ukrainian pianist **Maxim Lubarsky**, lives up to its title with five improvised originals, one standard and a cover of Bette Midler's "The Rose." They're performed as duets, with Martina singing and Lubarsky adding melodies and rhythmic flourishes. Together, they push the boundaries, with unexpected twists and turns. "One Note," "In Momentum" and "Crazy" were improvised on the spot, with Martina scatting up and down the scale and Lubarsky adding bass notes and trills that follow her as she explores the limits of her voice, blending growls, trills and percussive syllables. "Gertrude" uses the words of Gertrude Stein's poem "Rooms," from her book *Tender Buttons*. The words don't rhyme, but Martina makes them dance. Lubarsky's piano weaves around Martina's phrasing.

Ordering info: [gabrielamartina.com](http://gabrielamartina.com)

*At Home* (Turtle Bay; ★★★★★ 53:30), the latest offering by **Champion Fulton**, was recorded in the living room of her producer, Turtle Bay Records founder Scott Asen. With the help of Swedish saxophonist/clarinetist/composer Klas Lindquist, she revisits standards from the American Songbook, delivering them with intimate, impressive arrangements. There are several instrumentals, including a rendition of "Serenade In Blue," that lets Lindquist show off his clarinet chops, but most of the album is devoted to songs of lost love, perfect vehicles for Fulton's heartfelt style. "Tea For Two" includes the often excluded introductory verse that sets its bittersweet tone. Fulton emphasizes the ambivalent lyrics, letting listeners know this is all a daydream that won't come true.

Ordering info: [turtlebayrecords.com](http://turtlebayrecords.com)

On *Brand New Key* (Café Pacific; ★★★★★ 45:48), **Jeffrey Gimble** is backed by a quartet of L.A. regulars as he romps through 10 tracks, standards and more recent offerings. Pianist/



Champion Fulton at (someone else's) home.

ANTONIO NARVAEZ DUPUY

composer Josh Nelson arranged the music and, for the most part, Gimble delivers with a relaxed approach. "Bye Bye Blackbird" is reinvented as an R&B jam, with Larry Koonse's guitar and Nelson's organ soloing between Gimble's rhythmic phrases. They take a similar approach on the title track, with Dan Lutz laying down a popping bass line to accompany Gimble's jovial approach. Gimble sings "A Rã," by Sergio Mendes, in Portuguese, with drummer Dan Schnelle and bass player Dan Lutz laying down a mellow bossa nova beat.

Ordering info: [jeffreygimble.bandcamp.com](http://jeffreygimble.bandcamp.com)

**Ute Lemper** revisits the music of Kurt Weill on *Pirate Jenny* (Audiophile Society; ★★ 42:06). The set was produced and arranged with the help of composer and pianist David Chesky. They plot a unique course, creating minimal rhythmic soundscapes that focus your attention on Lemper's delivery of the melody and her improvised fills. This approach works better on the sung/spoken numbers, like the title tune, than on sung standards like "Speak Low."

Ordering info: [utelemp.com](http://utelemp.com)

Originally from Argentina, **Roxana Amed** has lived, performed and taught in the U.S. since 2013. On *Todos Los Fuegos* (Sony Music Latin; ★★★★★ 56:46), she takes tunes by some of Argentina's best-known rock performers and sings them in new settings created with the help of pianist Leo Genovese, another Argentinian expat. Most of the material doesn't differ much from the originals, which already stretched boundaries with jazzy excursions and poetic lyrics. The Spinetta-Páez hit "Asilo en tu Corazón" gets a tranquil arrangement. Amed's vocal downplays the drama in the original, shining a light on the desperate lyrics. "Corazón Delator," another tale of unattainable love, is sung softly, Amed saving her anguished improvisations until the song's closing moments. The set also includes "Diamonds," an original by Amed and Genovese that holds up well against the older hits. **DB**

Ordering info: [roxana-amed.com](http://roxana-amed.com)



## José Luiz Martins *Odyssey Mixtape*

ORIGIN

★★★★½

Full of spice, bristling with energy, *Odyssey Mixtape* plays like a party album, engaging anyone inclined who has an urge to move, if not dance. Produced by pianist/keyboardist/composer José Luiz Martins and flutist/vocalist Alex Hamburger, the music pops along from track to track.

Its Brazilian harmonies and rhythms spread across an eclectic mix of music styles. Very radio-friendly, these seven tunes are easy on the ears with well-played originals and two covers: Milton Nascimento's and Ronaldo Ribeiro's festive, propulsive and lyrical "Cravo e Canela" featuring Hamburger's lively flute playing, and Tania Maria's equally peppy "Yatra-Te" with more Hamburger chirping in 7/4 opposite some serious chops from Martins on piano. Call it Brazilian jazz flying across the blues with a touch of fusion, courtesy of John Lee's guitar.

"Cravo e Canela" offers some of the best loose-limbed work on *Odyssey Mixtape*, thanks to Hamburger's flute combined with Martins' equally inventive electric keyboard and piano and Romeir Mendez's interactive bass playing, it all reminiscent of early '70s CTI collaborations. The smooth jazz of "Bloom" might appeal to the slow-dancing set, Hamburger now singing around a more involved arrangement that features another fusion-y touch from guitarist Lee. Hamburger returns as vocalist on the alternatively mournful, reflective 5/4 swing of "Metamorphosis," a Martins acoustic piano solo eased back in with subtle synth voicings as a kind of cushion. Hamburgers's vocals help to bring *Odyssey Mixtape* to a close with "Tierra Externa," with Martins' piano once again providing a dialog of sorts with Hamburger. —John Ephland

**Odyssey Mixtape:** Incertezã; Don's Act Like; Cravo e Canela; Bloom; Yatra-Te; Metamorphosis; Terra Externa. (42:51)

**Personnel:** José Luiz Martins, piano, keyboards, synths; Alex Hamburger, flute, voice (4, 6, 7); Romeir Mendez, bass; Dana Hawkins, Florian Haas (2), drums; John Lee, guitar (1, 4, 5); Nakama, voice (2); Tyrone Allen II, electric bass (2).

Ordering info: [originarts.com](http://originarts.com)





## Eric Scott Reed *Out Late* SMOKE SESSIONS ★★★★

The title of Reed's fifth Smoke Sessions outing is a clever bit of double entendre, referring to both the late-night hang that is a part of every New York jazz musician's life and also to his recent coming out in terms of his sexuality. The music is imbued with that same spirit of openness and liberation that Reed has now embraced in his own personal life.

That late-night vibe is conjured up on the opener, "Glow," setting a mellow tone while also showcasing the conversational approach of the quintet, with some particularly sparkling interplay between tenor saxophonist Eric Alexander and trumpeter Nicholas Payton on the front line. "All'umfrs," a contrafact on the standard "All Of Me," swings hard right out of the gate with Payton and Alexander locked in easy, old-school unisons on the intricate head. Payton unleashes a bold solo here, quoting from a hard-bop staple and a traditional Irish jig along the way, and Alexander follows with some emphatic double-timing over the swinging pulse. The leader follows with a relaxed, blues-tinged, Red Garland-ish solo that stretches to some outre territory.

Farnsworth cuts up the beat in loose, synopated fashion on the loping "Shadoboxing," which has Payton and Alexander delivering muscular solos. The lone trio number, "They," is an all-out burner paced by Washington's walking bass and Farnsworth's spang-a-lang on the ride cymbal that showcases Reed in unfettered fashion. And the closer, "Delightful Daddy," pulls apart the fabric of "Melancholy Baby" in delightfully provocative ways.

—Bill Milkowski

**Out Late:** Glow; All'umfrs; Shadoboxing; They; Out Late; The Weirdos; Delightful Daddy. (45:39).

**Personnel:** Eric Scott Reed, piano; Nicholas Payton, trumpet; Eric Alexander, tenor saxophone; Peter Washington, bass; Joe Farnsworth, drums.

**Ordering info:** [smokesessionsrecords.com](http://smokesessionsrecords.com)



## Esthesis Quartet *Sound & Fury* SUNNYSIDE ★★★★

The first half-hour of Esthesis Quartet's third album of original music by its members consists of homages by Dawn Clement and Elsa Nilsson to their mutual mentor, the superb Denver-based trumpeter Ron Miles, who died 10 months before the January 2023 recording session. Miles' own significant mentor, guitar shaman Bill Frisell, embeds himself with the collective group, characteristically comporting himself like "one of the cats," attending to ensemble imperatives in his sui generis voice.

Clement's four-part "Suite For Ron Miles" evokes a broad array of emotions: "Fit Of Fury" brings forth extended dialogue between Nilsson's and Frisell's electronically modified lines; "Is There A Message" opens with a stalwart bass solo by Emma Dayhuff, followed in short order by Clement's contemplative to

ascendant piano declamation, signified upon throughout by drummer Tina Raymond, a close listener.

Frisell also contributes effectively to the speculative atmosphere of Dayhuff's "Capricorn," based on a bespoke astrological reading and intended to "assay the limits of collective breath," responding to Clement's percussive chordal statement and Nilsson's fleet, overtone-rich solo flight with timbrally apropos counterlines, before offering his own variations over a smoking vamp.

Metaphysics are also the subject of Raymond's tarot-inspired, album-closing "Ace Of Pentacles," a sometimes bittersweet, sometimes jaunty melody that inspires Frisell's most "Frisellian" playing of this accomplished session, which will reward multiple listenings.

—Ted Panken

**Sound & Fury:** Where I Begin; Together; Fit Of Fury; Is There A Message; Just Come Play; Capricorn; Ace Of Pentacles. (44:20)

**Personnel:** Elsa Nilsson, flute; Dawn Clement, piano; Bill Frisell, guitar; Emma Dayhuff, bass; Tina Raymond, drums.

**Ordering info:** [sunnysiderecords.com](http://sunnysiderecords.com)

## Winther / Andersson / Watts Steep Steps – new album out





## Cenk Esen

### *Endlessly*

XVI

★★★★

On his sophomore LP *Endlessly*, Cenk Esen, London-based keyboardist and son of Turkish keyboardist Aydin Esen, bears his father's torch and adds his own flair. Likewise, the use of tender vocals on *Endlessly* suggest the influence of Cenk's mother, eclectic vocalist Randy Esen.

At the same time, 26-year-old Cenk's own contemporary musical voice shines through wholeheartedly on *Endlessly*. While he often nods to the fusion era, particularly on the funky "A&C" and the ever-evolving "They're Just Not That Into Me Anymore," which convey obvious Weather Report and Herbie influence, the effect of his Millennium-era youth also shapes the record.

The album's namesake track, "Endlessly, I'm Erased," highlights vocals from Leyla, delivered with pop sensibility and a mellowness reminiscent of 2000s-era neo soul. Meanwhile, electronica influences like Aphex Twin and Floating Points shine through on tracks like "H E R?," which interweaves vocalizations, shimmering electronics and sweeping piano to create an ambient, ethereal quality. *Endlessly* is a decisive and fully formed work.

—Alexa Peters

**Endlessly:** Phased I; Air Traffic Controller; They're Just Not That Into Me Anymore; H E R?; Phased II (Feat. Güya); Endlessly, I'm Erased (feat. Leyla); A&C; 23 (Live In Istanbul). 34.00

**Personnel:** Cenk Esen, piano and keyboards; Tom Driessler, bass; MckNasty, drums; Kristina Rhodes, cello (4); Lucy-Anne Daniels (4, 5); Leyla Huysal (6), vocals.

Ordering info: [cenkessen.bandcamp.com](http://cenkessen.bandcamp.com)



## Milena Casado

### *Reflection Of Another Self*

CANDID

★★★★

Trumpeter Milena Casado's debut album is described as "an artist exploring her heritage, dealing with racism in her upbringing in Spain, unpacking personal traumas, and finding her voice." But little of that is apparent in the music. Casado, who is originally from Spain, is a fluent trumpeter who often displays the inspiration of early 1970s Miles Davis. She's joined by an ensemble that includes Morgan Guerin on EWI and synthesizers, brief cameos from some notable guests and unpredictable grooves. The tunes (all originals except Geri Allen's "Unconditional Love") offer moods rather than memorable melodies. Most substantial among these are the purposely eccentric "O.C.T.," the picturesque ballad "Lidia y los Libres," "Let's Paint The World" and "Self Love." While the ensembles often have a lot going on at once, there is an inconclusive feel to the music, as if these are excerpts from lengthier performances. Casado has an attractive sound and displays some creative ideas, but *Reflections Of Another Self* is primarily an early step in her development.

—Scott Yanow

**Reflection Of Another Self:** This Is My Hair; O.C.T. (Ode To The Crazy Times); Yet I Can See; Introspection I-I; Lidia y los Libros; Unconditional Love; Introspection II-Preguntas; Circles; Let's Paint The World; Introspection III-Courage; Resilience; Circles (Retrospection); Self Love. (42:54)

**Personnel:** Milena Casado, trumpet, flugelhorn, vocals, synths, electronics, percussion, spoken word; Morgan Guerin, EWI, synths, bass clarinet, percussion; Kris Davis, Mike King, Lex Korten, piano, keyboards; Kanoa Mendelhall, Meshell Ndegeocello, bass; Jongkuk Kim, Terri Lyne Carrington, drums; Kokayi, vocals; Nicole Mitchell, flute; Brandee Younger, harp; Daniel Sadowick, percussion; Val Jeanty, turntables.

Ordering info: [candidrecords.shop.musictoday.com](http://candidrecords.shop.musictoday.com)



## Jackie Myers

### *What About The Butterfly*

577

★★★★

Jackie Myers is a singer, pianist and songwriter, lately moved from Austin to Kansas City, but here releasing on Brooklyn's 577 Records. Myers has produced a mildly strange combination of three aspects. Firstly, her songs could inhabit the off-Broadway side streets, but secondly she incorporates a string section with off-kilter framing tendencies. Thirdly, Myers has alto saxophone master Bobby Watson standing to her side and partnered with tenor, baritone and trumpet. The music is mostly dreamlike and yearningly silken.

Instead of a common string quartet formation, an upright bass serves in place of the second violin. Meanwhile, several mood-quivering solos supplely cream out of Watson's horn. There's a retro synth solo near the beginning, presumably provided by Myers, even though she's only credited with piano. Then there's a fur-glove tenor solo, undulating softly. An underwater guppy style is facilitated by liberal reverb on the various parts, with "Brown Dirt Shuffle" possessing a particularly decelerated, submerged quality, although soon graduating to some swift walkin'. On "Another Time," there are tiny cello filigrees — just one example of the many details to be discovered when spinning this out-of-time record.

—Martin Longley

**What About The Butterfly:** You Won't Miss Me My Dear; Brown Dirt Shuffle; Last Year; Just Past The Waves; What About The Butterfly; When You Think You've Seen It All; Another Time. (46:00)

**Personnel:** Jackie Myers, vocals, piano; Bobby Watson, alto saxophone; Rich Wheeler, tenor saxophone; Aryana Nemati, baritone saxophone; Trent Austin, trumpet; Matthew Bennett, violin; Alyssa Bell, viola; Sascha Groschang, cello; Seth Lee, Blake Shaw, basses; Matt Leifer, drums.

Ordering info: [577records.bandcamp.com](http://577records.bandcamp.com)



## Nordkraft Big Band/Remy Le Boeuf/ Danielle Wertz

### *Silent Course*

GATEWAY

★★★★

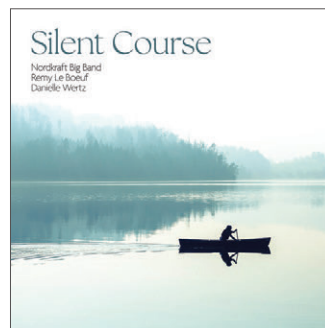
The entities on this album are separated by swaths of land and sea: 14 hours by plane from Denver to Denmark, a commute that American alto-ist/composer/arranger Remy Le Boeuf must endure as conductor of the Nordkraft Big Band. Vocalist Danielle Wertz is based in New York, adding to the space between. There is, however, no disunion of sentiment and spirit, as Nordkraft and Le Boeuf have achieved a rarity for large jazz ensemble: something remarkably intimate, expressive and poignant, an extension of Wertz's own evocative, finely attuned instrument. Le Boeuf crafted all the arrangements to match Wertz's soft brilliance, cultivating a sound garden of delights. He also picks his spots to unleash Nordkraft's potency, as in his title track "Silent Course," when the muted voyage is shattered by a shipwreck of cataclysmic proportions. As such, bandleader, band and singer unfurl an impressive range of dynamics and emotion, as they sail off together into the uncharted waters of the future of big band.

—Gary Fukushima

**Silent Course:** Rest Your Head; I Had A King; Silent Course; Where Do I Go?; First Snow; Something To Believe In; Aberdeen; Turn In. (46:34)

**Personnel:** Remy Le Boeuf, conductor, alto saxophone; Danielle Wertz, vocals; Sophus Bech Lauesen, Claus Veis Sørensen, Uffe Markussen, Jonas E. Andreason, Nis Hellerøe Myrtue, reeds; Nicholai Andersen, Rolf Thofte Løkke, Thomas Fryland, Dan Hejslet, trumpets; Thomas Skovlund Hansen, Jonathan Bruun Meyer, Jonas Lindh, Kristian Kloster, trombones; Martin Granum, guitar; Luka Dgebuadze, piano; Anders Ammitzbøll, bass; Peter Lund Paulsen, drums.

Ordering info: [nordkraftbigband.dk](http://nordkraftbigband.dk)





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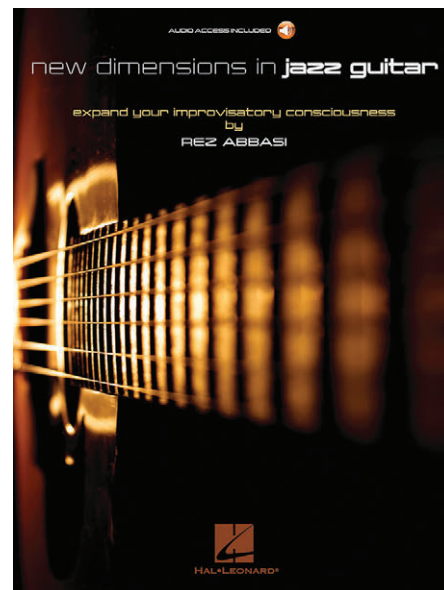
Rez Abbasi goes deeper into the topic of guitar technique in his book *New Dimensions in Jazz Guitar*.

# Technique with Musical Purpose

Students often ask me about my right-hand technique. It's a question I both love and despise.

Love, because it can open up a real conversation. Despise, because it's often asked just

for the sake of building chops. So before I proceed, I always ask them: What's behind technique? In other words, what are you using it for? I also add: The right hand is only as good as the vocabulary it is launching from the left



hand (or vice versa if you're a lefty).

If your musical vocabulary is narrow and undeveloped, then technique becomes aimless. But once you start building that vocabulary — your phrasing, your sound, your ideas — then technique becomes what it should be: a tool to serve your musical voice. I always set that paradigm first. Once that's clear, I feel good about diving in.

Guitar technique is personal. Every player develops quirks, habits and idiosyncrasies. But at its core, good guitar technique comes down to synchronization: getting your left and right hands to work together seamlessly.

The tighter that coordination, the more fluid your playing becomes. And when you're not distracted by mechanical issues, your mind and body are free to focus on music. That's the goal. Always.

In my book *New Dimensions in Jazz Guitar* (Hal Leonard), I go deeper into this topic. There's a chapter specifically on synchronicity, and I include several exercises. One in particular has helped a lot of players, so I'll share it here.

## A Simple, Powerful Drill

I came up with this exercise (see Example 1) in college while studying with the late, great Joe Diorio. Joe has a book called *Intervallic Designs*: a game-changer at the time. His approach was out of the box, emphasizing wide intervallic leaps as melodic logic. If you've heard Pat Metheny's *Bright Size Life* (Joe and Pat met in Miami), you've heard that influence. Some of those tunes are full of intervallic shapes that break out of scalar thinking.



At first, the exercise was merely what I thought was a hip-sounding idea. But I quickly realized it had technical value, especially as a warm-up for synchronizing both hands.

The pertinent feature that emphasizes the sync-up comes from the fact that each plucked/picked string (right hand) engages one note (left hand), each on a different string. This causes the player to sync up both hands immediately as opposed to having two or three notes on each string, where we can hammer-on or pull-off using only the left hand. It also teaches us to play more vertically as the wider intervals force our fretting hand to move in wider shapes.

Once this exercise feels natural, try running it through the diatonic modes. Now it starts to sound more melodic, not as mechanical. You'll also notice it's now couched in 11/8. As a side note, I'm usually not a fan of multitasking, however, when the opportunity presents itself with various tasks naturally coming together, why not? In this case we're working on synchronicity and feeling 11/8 time. (See Example 2.)

**Bonus:** Try repeating each note two or three times to practice alternate picking. This turns it into a muscle-building drill as well.

Example 3 features another simple exercise that also carries a lot of weight. Here, we skip strings entirely — playing every other string. The strength in this exercise is not only that the right hand needs to be precise in skipping strings, but the left hand now is also working harder to connect the leap from string to string. Furthermore, notice how the first finger needs to jump strings with each new phrase as it is the lead finger that ends one phrase and starts the next phrase.

I'd suggest picking everything at first, and then you can mix up your right- and left-hand techniques by throwing in hammer-ons and pull-offs. I like to try all combinations because it makes me feel even more connected to the instrument.

To get the most out of Example 3, I like to change up the lead finger of the left hand — the finger that is working the hardest. In Example 4, you will notice that I switched up the order of the notes in order to push the pinky finger harder. Similarly, you can mix this up and do the same with the remaining two fingers. It will strengthen each finger more precisely, all the while strengthening the right hand. Here, I've also given no directive for rhythm, which will grant you freedom to play it in eighths, triplets, quintuplets, 16ths, etc.

Improvising demands quick reflexes in order to catch ideas in the moment. These exercises help reveal some of the guitar's inherent quirks that, if not dealt with, can

quietly trip us up. They don't just boost your chops: They strengthen your musical focus. That is the real purpose of technique. **DB**

Rez Abbasi is a guitarist, composer, faculty member at The New School and 2021 Guggenheim Fellow whose work bridges innovation and tradition. Driven by deep musical curiosity and technical mastery, he's carved a distinct path in contemporary music. Born in Karachi, Pakistan, removed at age 4 to Southern California, schooled at the University of Southern California and the Manhattan School of Music in jazz and classical music, along with a pilgrimage in India under the guidance of master percussionist Ustad Alla Rakha, Abbasi is a vivid synthesis of numerous influences and genres. Currently based in New York, Abbasi is considered to be one of the foremost modern jazz guitar players the world over. He has honed his skills with performances throughout Europe, Canada, the U.S., Mexico and India and has performed and recorded with many jazz greats including Ruth Brown, Peter

Ersine, Kenny Werner, Barre Phillips, Tim Berne, Michael Formanek, Billy Hart, Gary Thomas, Dave Douglas, Rudresh Mahanthappa, Mike Clark, Tim Hagans, John Beasley, Ronu Majumdar, Kadri Gopalnath, Min Xiao-Fen, Vijay Iyer, Marilyn Crispell, Greg Osby, Howard Levy and others.

With 17 albums of mostly original compositions under his belt, Abbasi continues to find new groups of musicians to help his musical vision come to life. *Sound Remains*, his new release (on Whirlwind Recordings), is a personal tribute to his late mother and a powerful meditation on impermanence. His instructional book *New Dimensions in Jazz Guitar: Expand Your Improvisory Consciousness*, published by Hal Leonard, is designed to help the intermediate to advanced player gain more control over the guitar. Through a variety of exercises and self-explorations that challenge on every level, the book/audio pack focuses the guitarist's awareness on often-overlooked aspects of music performance and practice. The exercises are provided in audio tracks online for download or streaming and include PLAYBACK+, which allows users to slow down audio without changing pitch, set looping points, change keys, and pan left or right. Visit Abbasi online at RezTone.com.

### Example 1



### Example 2



### Example 3



### Example 4







Jimi Durso's Jim Hall-inspired technique involves converting three-string triads into "simple sevenths."

# Smaller Guitar Voicings To Improve Soloist Interactions

In the '90s, I was fortunate to attend a master class put on by guitar maestro Jim Hall. One thing he said that stuck with me was that when comping, playing smaller voicings makes it easier to interact with the soloist (and the rest of the ensemble). With that in mind, we're going to explore a means of creating some small voicings.

It starts with knowing triads on every group of three strings on the guitar. There will always be three on any group, with the root located on the top, in the middle or on the bottom. I've shown the ones on strings 1, 2 and 3 in Figure 1 on the following page. Do two things: Figure out what the three patterns would be on the remaining groups of strings, and convert these into the other triad forms: minor, diminished, augmented, suspended fourth and suspended second.

Something I did when learning this was to take some simple rock, pop and folk tunes like "Hey Joe" and "Knockin' On Heaven's Door" and learn to play them with these small voicings. This actually came in handy when I was playing this repertoire in performance situa-

tions with another guitarist who was playing standard voicings.

The next step is to convert these into what I call "simple sevenths." We can make these seventh chords in two ways: by putting the seventh in place of either the tonic or the fifth. Generally we use these voicings in ensemble contexts, so we can trust the bass player to provide the root and often the fifth as well, though the fifth is such a strong tone that the ear doesn't necessarily miss it if it's absent. Typically the third isn't omitted because it's what defines a chord as major or minor, but in these voicings there is also the fact that the seventh is so distant from the third that it's unreachable.

Figure 2 shows the six voicings we get applying this for a major seventh chord on the first three strings. Derive the voicings for the other voicings on these and the remaining strings on your own.

One thing I found difficult at first about the rootless voicings was being able to "see" what chord I was playing when the tonic was absent. I would try to "see" where the root was and the voicing around it even though I wasn't playing

it. Maybe you won't have that issue, but if you do, give my technique a try.

Another thing you may notice about the rootless voicings is that they are also something else (e.g., Cmaj7 without the root = Em). This makes sense since our system of harmony is built on thirds, therefore 3, 5 and 7 of one thing must be R, 3 and 5 of something else.

Now you have a vocabulary of small voicings you can use to comp. You could stop there if you wanted, but if you desire more color in your harmonies, there's a simple way to achieve that. If the fifth is in the voicing, replace it with the sixth. If the root is in the voicing, replace it with the ninth. Another option is to put the fourth in place of the fifth. I've given examples of these for a maj7(#11) chord in Figure 3.

A word about extensions: Use your ear to guide you as to which ones are appropriate in any given scenario. Sometimes the #11 might sound wrong on a major 7 chord. Or a flat 9 or flat 13 might fit a dominant chord better than the natural extensions, or the other way around (or both might seem to fit). Sixths can be tricky on minor sevenths, with either flat sixth or nat-



ural sixths sounding more appropriate, but on occasion neither seem to be at home. This can highly depend on what sort of mood you and the ensemble are creating.

A bit about practicing these: There are a few ways about it, and the most effective method may be determined by how well you know your fretboard and chord construction and how your brain best learns things. Rather than trying to memorize these as if you're cramming for an exam (which most of us find painful, but if you enjoy cramming, then have at it), another way to familiarize yourself with them is to pick one triad voicing (e.g., the one with the root in the middle), convert it to all the various triads, then all the simple seventh chords, then add in the ninths, then the sixths and then the 11ths.

Then do this with another triad voicing. Some people find it more effective to go straight on to the next group of voicings and then cycle back again to the first one, but some find they learn better by sticking with one set until they feel completely familiar with them and then move on to the next group. If you don't know which sort of person you are, try both methods and find out.

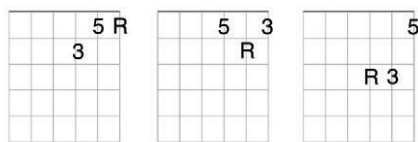
The way I tended to do it was to take a chord progression and work through the voicings in close position. Example 4 shows this for "Rhythm" changes (Bbmaj7-G7-Cm7-F7). Notice I chose not to put the seventh in the Cm7 chord. Hal Galper once said, "The first rule of comping is 'nobody needs you.'" I don't see my role as an accompanist being to define every chord but to provide the textures and colors that fit what the ensemble is expressing, so I don't think we need to feel beholden to have to play certain notes on any particular chord or any notes at all. (I remember the revelation when I noticed Herbie Hancock sometimes letting chords go by without playing them.)

When first attempting the above, I didn't do it in time (I couldn't think that fast). Some guitarists seem to do better with parallel voicing. Take one voicing and move it up and down the neck to fit the changes, altering the quality to fit. This gets you very acquainted with that particular shape and how to alter it to fit different harmonies.

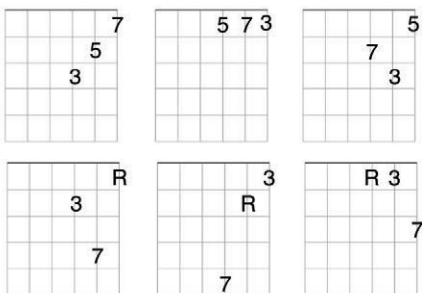
Another thing you can do is use this to make your melodies thicker. In Figure 5, I apply these voicings to the opening bars of a Great American Songbook standard. Use the concepts we've explored this summer to harmonize the remainder of the tune. **DB**

Jimi Durso is a guitarist and bassist based in the New York area. He has released an album of Indian classical music played on the string bass titled *Border Of Hiranyaloka*. Find out more at [jimidurso.bandcamp.com](http://jimidurso.bandcamp.com). Durso can often be witnessed performing, rehearsing, teaching and pontificating online at [twitch.tv/CoincidenceMachine](http://twitch.tv/CoincidenceMachine). He has been a regular contributor of articles to DownBeat's Woodshed department for 25 years.

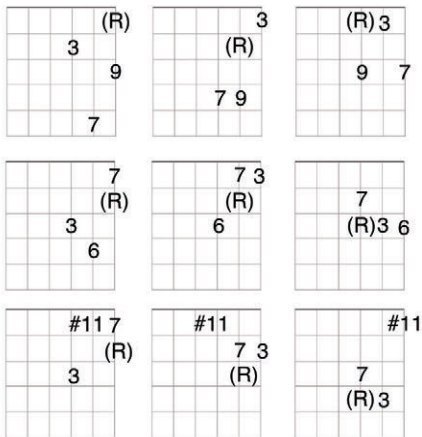
## 1: Triads on Strings 1–3



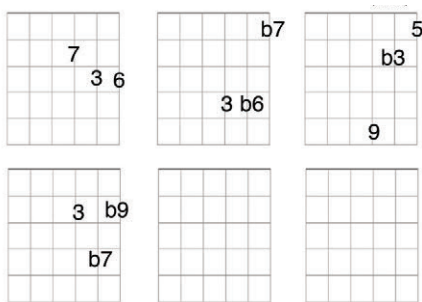
## 2: Major 7th Voicings on Strings 1–3



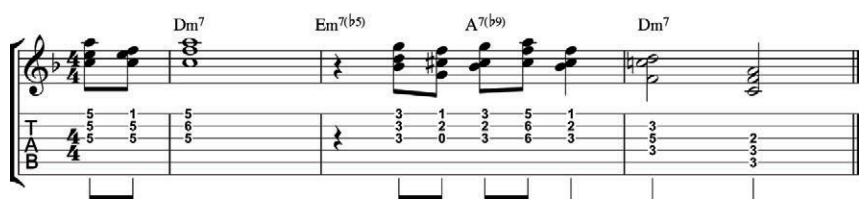
## 3: Major 7ths with Extensions



## 4: "Rhythm" Changes in Close Position



## 5: Using 3-Note Voicings To Thicken a Melody Line







HEIKE LISS

Fred Frith brings a musicality and intelligence to whatever he puts his hand to.

## Fred Frith's Solo Breaks on 'Too Much, Too Little'

If you listen to this track, some of you may be wondering, "Why is this in DownBeat?" or, "Is this even jazz?" I feel that any music that creates an emotion is worth examining, regardless of what emotion it is or what genre it originates from. The whimsical nature of the vocals and the oddity of the accordion-and-bass backing are furthered by the quirkiness of the guitar solo breaks. Also, I happen to really enjoy guitarist Fred Frith's work and think the entire album that "Too Much, Too Little" came from is brilliant (*Step Across The Border*, released in 1990 in Switzerland and reissued by Morpheus Records in 2002). Frith can exist within multi-

ple and wide-reaching genres, and comfortably. He brings a musicality and intelligence to whatever he puts his hand to.

First, Frith's tone. It's not your mellow jazz hollowbody, or your overdriven Stratocaster or folk acoustic (which, given the nature of the lyrics, might've made this sound more like a '60s protest song). It's very high-end, almost surf-like (but without the reverb). I have a suspicion that Frith is "up-tuned" a whole step for this one (F#-B-E-A-C#-F#). This is partly because the final chord is such a typical open D shape, but transposed to E (which could be done with a capo), and also because his fourth

and final solo break (starting at measure 21, 1:45 in) hit an ultra-high E. Though some guitars do have 24 frets, most terminate at the 22nd, which would be a high D, but in this tuning it would be an E. Also, the way the A and G# overlap in bars 3 and 4 make the A's come off like open strings.

Speaking of range, Frith uses this element masterfully to move this song along. Each of his breaks moves higher in range. The first doesn't go higher than middle C (guitar is octave-transposed, so middle C sits on the second space from the top of the treble clef), the second tops out at the B above that and the third the G# above that (which is bent up to an A in bar 18). The fourth and final one starts on that ultra-high E. Notice each chorus starts at the high points and works its way down. This makes the final chorus even more effective. Starting in the highest range exhibited but working its way all the way back down to the (almost) lowest note, the low B from the end of the first break (there is a lower A in measure 5, but it doesn't get as much attention as the low B). It's subtle, but effective, leading our ear up into the stratosphere and gently bringing us back to Earth.

The final break also kicks off with a wonderful polyrhythm. It's a 3-against-4, but a somewhat atypical one. It could be heard as a 16th-note rest with an eighth note. Creating a polyrhythm with a rest on the first beat can obscure the rhythm. Add to that the pattern starting before the downbeat, and the doubled notes, and it makes it sound like the polyrhythm is twice as long, or 16th rest-eighth note-16th rest-eighth note.

There's another rhythmic motif that Frith employs. It's 32nd notes on the second 16th of the beat, which we hear in the penultimate measure and the bar before that. The contour of the notes is even similar in each of them. Varying a motif is an effective way of creating variety but also producing continuity. In this case, this rhythmic idea had already appeared in measure 18's final beat. So he foreshadowed this idea but didn't explore it until the end.

The improvisations are almost completely modal (E ionian). The only instances where Frith deviates from this scale are when he bends (to the minor third in measures 8 and 16 and the flat seventh in bar 26). This creates a bluesy quality to these licks, and Frith makes a point of not overusing this. I've made the analogy in other articles of a chef knowing just how much spice to add, and this is a good example of that. There's also the chromatic passing tone at the very beginning, which in itself is a curiosity since, to me, it sets us up to hear more swing vocabulary that never appears.



An important element of playing in a scale such as this is to not get too predictable, but not to sound random, either. Frith does a fantastic job of this. His first solo break is all stepwise, and then the second break kicks off with an arpeggio. The remainder of this section is mostly stepwise, but Frith does throw in some larger intervals. The third solo break begins

with arpeggios, and proceeds to be mostly larger intervals, with fewer steps, which sets up his final section, where he starts out with larger intervals (combined with the polyrhythm) and then works us back to scalar motion (along with bringing the range back down).

So, although this transcription comprises four separate solos between verses, when put

together the breaks create a story, moving the energy up and back — exactly what we enjoy hearing in music of any genre. **DB**

Jimi Durso is a guitarist, bassist and educator based in the New York area. He can often be witnessed performing, rehearsing, teaching and pontificating online at [twitch.tv/CoincidenceMachine](https://twitch.tv/CoincidenceMachine). Find out more about Durso's music at [jimidurso.bandcamp.com](https://jimidurso.bandcamp.com).

0:26 E B7 E

5 B7

7 0:52 E B7 E

11 B7 E

14 1:19 8va E B7 E6

18 B7 E

21 1:45 8va E B7 E

25 B7

27 E



# Eastman FullerTone Series Electric Guitars

## Affordable SC '52 & DC '62 Solidbody Models Rooted in D'Ambrosio Series

After a decade of success in the violin-making business, a chance encounter with a book on archtop guitars led Eastman founder Qian Ni to the realization that building these instruments required many of the same techniques already being used by his craftsmen. This ignited a spark that eventually launched Eastman's guitar division, which has expanded from its initial archtop roots into offering a full line of electrics and acoustics.

The latest addition to Eastman's guitar arsenal is the FullerTone Series, two models that feature premium electronics, innovative construction techniques, and are the company's first electrics priced under \$1,000.

Frustrated by a lack of quality in moderately priced violins, violas, cellos and string basses, Qian felt he could do better. His vision proved to be a success, and Eastman permanently raised the standards for Asian-manufactured stringed instruments. After realizing his luthiers already possessed the skills needed to build an archtop guitar, Qian had them study renown luthier Bob Benedetto's definitive book and video *Making an Archtop Guitar*. Eastman soon unveiled its first archtop model, introducing a hand-carved, professional-quality instrument at a surprisingly affordable price point.

Realizing the market potential, Eastman began expanding its guitar line, eventually adding thinline electrics, solidbodies and even flattop acoustics. As the brand began to focus more on its successful guitar division, Eastman brought onboard designer and luthier Otto D'Ambrosio, who has become a major force in guiding the development of the company's offerings. D'Ambrosio actually apprenticed with master guitar maker John Monteleone, one of the most respected archtop builders in the world. Now Eastman's head designer and master luthier, D'Ambrosio has created several innovative designs and even offers a California-built D'Ambrosio model.

The new FullerTone line features two models, the SC '52 and DC '62. Eastman wanted to offer traditional quality craftsmanship along with some distinct design innovations that are firmly rooted in D'Ambrosio's genius. In addition, they wanted these guitars to be affordable but without any compromise in quality.

Both guitars are solidbody models that share many common features. The single cutaway SC and the double cutaway DC feature roasted black limba bodies and a roasted maple neck with D'Ambrosio's custom designed peghead boasting six staggered in-line tuners with straight-through string pull.

Perhaps the most notable innovation on these instruments is the unique two-bolt neck attachment, which D'Ambrosio calls the "long-tenon neck system." Traditional bolt-on necks use four screws to mount the neck to the body, with only a small, flat, rectangular area making contact. The Eastman design actually uses carved-out pockets to create a more secure fit and increase the neck-to-body contact area by 30%. This results in significantly enhanced stability and sustain.

"Introducing 3D geometry creates the advantages of a traditional dovetail joint but with the convenience of a bolt-on," D'Ambrosio says. "By pulling out as much neck-to-body connection as you can, you create maximum tone stability and sustain."

Available in three colors, the FullerTone guitars are finished in Eastman's signature Truetone Satin and offer aluminum pickguards,

creating a very cool retro vibe. The pickups are all built by Tonerider, and the FullerTones feature a stacked single coil and a Soapbar humbucker, with the DC '62 having the humbucker at the bridge and two single coils at the neck and center positions. The humbucker has a custom-designed gold foil cover created by D'Ambrosio. The SC '52, which is the model I received for play-testing, carries a humbucker at the neck and a stacked single coil at the bridge position, reminiscent of the Telecaster.

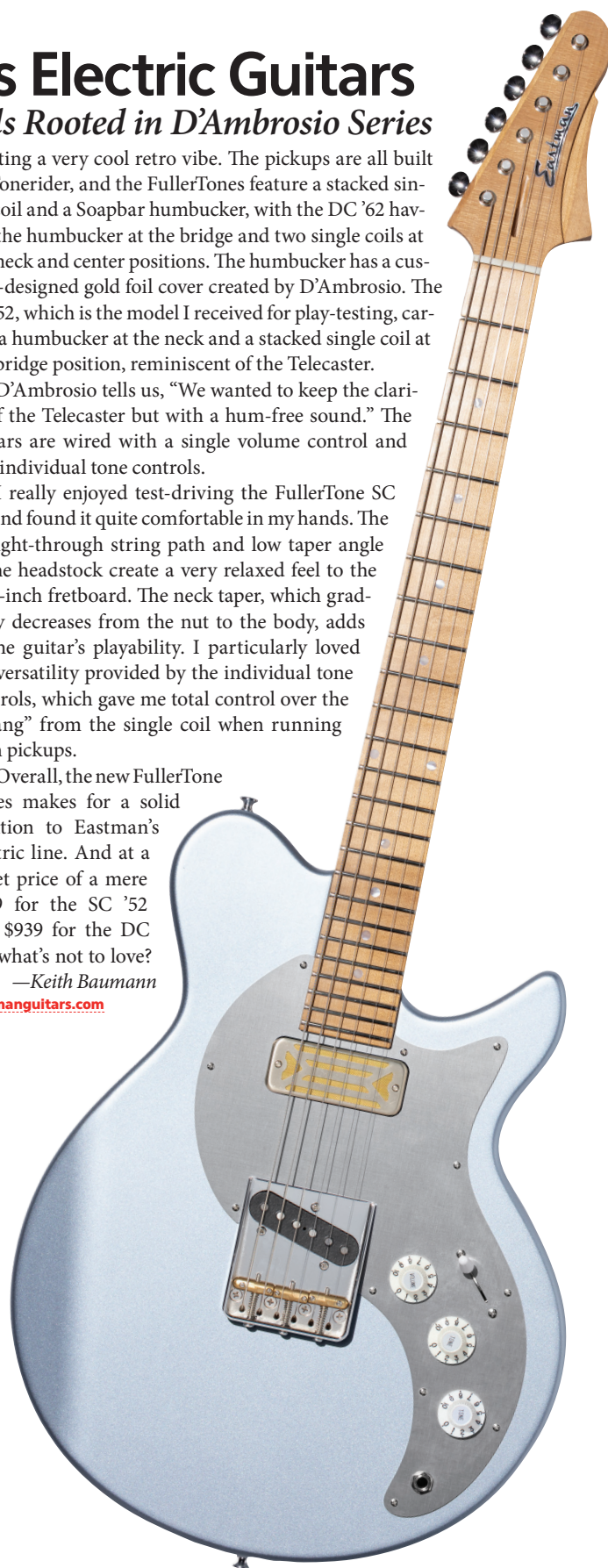
D'Ambrosio tells us, "We wanted to keep the clarity of the Telecaster but with a hum-free sound." The guitars are wired with a single volume control and two individual tone controls.

I really enjoyed test-driving the FullerTone SC '52 and found it quite comfortable in my hands. The straight-through string path and low taper angle at the headstock create a very relaxed feel to the 25.5-inch fretboard. The neck taper, which gradually decreases from the nut to the body, adds to the guitar's playability. I particularly loved the versatility provided by the individual tone controls, which gave me total control over the "twang" from the single coil when running both pickups.

Overall, the new FullerTone Series makes for a solid addition to Eastman's electric line. And at a street price of a mere \$839 for the SC '52 and \$939 for the DC '62, what's not to love?

—Keith Baumann

[eastmanguitars.com](http://eastmanguitars.com)





## 1. Choice Picks

Nik Monnin of Apollo Picks crafts custom guitar and mandolin picks from a variety of fine materials to suit the needs of any musician. Born out of Monnin's love for acoustic music and the pursuit of better tone, the company also offers a selection of more than 100 ready-made picks designed to accommodate a wide range of player preferences and performance styles. Monnin currently makes picks for such high-profile players as Mary Halvorson, Bill Frisell, Julian Lage and Chris Eldridge. Apollo Picks also offers pick boxes in cherry wood and padauk wood, Manouche Pickups for gypsy jazz guitarists and Kimble Mandolin strap buttons.

More info: [apollopicks.com](http://apollopicks.com)



## 2. Boom Goes the Amp Stand

The Frameworks Amp Stand with Boom Arm is a versatile tool for any musician or sound engineer. Designed to safely support amplifiers weighing up to 100 pounds, the stand has five adjustable leg-tilt positions, allowing players to find the perfect angle for their amp. The included mic boom arm provides a convenient solution for amp miking, eliminating the need for additional stands and reducing stage clutter. EVA foam padding on all contact surfaces protects amps from scratches and vibrations.

More info: [gatorco.com](http://gatorco.com)



## 3. Guitar Amp on the Go

The OS TGA01 Travel Electric Guitar Amp from On-Stage features a lightweight lithium battery that offers seven hours of playing time off a single charge. Its portable design lets musicians play from almost anywhere. At 4 inches tall and weighing less than 1 pound, the OS TGA01 Travel Electric Guitar Amp is almost pocket-sized. Users can choose between two full range Bluetooth speakers and headphone connection.

More info: [on-stage.com](http://on-stage.com)



## 4. 100-Loop Capacity

Zoom's MS-90LP+ MultiStomp Looper Pedal offers up to 90 minutes of recording per loop, with a total capacity of 13 hours, and can store up to 100 loops. Its advanced analog circuitry, dual AD converters and 32-bit float processing ensure superior audio quality, letting musicians layer sounds without compromising clarity. Key features include up to 13 hours of recording, eight loop effects, real-time waveform display, MIDI connectivity, stereo inputs/outputs and flexible power options, which include an AC adapter, USB battery or AA batteries.

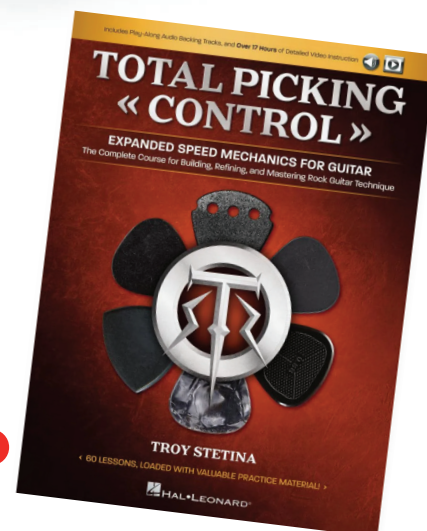
More info: [zoomcorp.com](http://zoomcorp.com)



## 5. Picking Mastery

*Total Picking Control* is a comprehensive guide for intermediate to advanced guitar players who aim for complete mastery over their instrument. The course encompasses 60 sequential lessons, each accompanied by a full song study, and is the brainchild of Troy Stetina, a musician and educator known for his expert techniques and deep understanding of guitar mechanics. The course features 17 hours of video performance and instruction, as well as 60 full-band audio playalong backing tracks.

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## Butcher Brown

The band known as Butcher Brown has enjoyed the last half-decade basking in the glow from the twin engines of critical acclaim and popular appeal. The band got to that spot through a unique blending of soul-jazz with funk, R&B and hip-hop, the latter thanks to saxophonist Marcus “Tennishu” Tenney’s secondary gift of verbalizing his rapacious knowledge of the spoken word. In April, the band headlined the Reno Jazz Festival and took a live Blindfold Test in front of an audience of students and educators. Tenney, along with drummer Corey Fonville, guitarist Morgan Burrs, bassist Andrew Randazzo and special guest keyboardist Jacob Mann, commented on the selections below.

### Herbie Hancock

“Steppin’ In It” (*Man-Child*, Columbia, 1975) Hancock, keyboards; Paul Jackson, bass; Mike Clark, drums; Bill Summers, percussion; DeWayne “Blackbyrd” McKnight, Melvin “Wah Wah Watson” Ragin, guitar; Stevie Wonder, harmonica.

**Tenney:** If this isn’t Herbie, this is someone who loves Herbie.

**Burrs:** That bass patch gave it away.

**All:** Stevie.

### Robert Glasper

“Think Of One” (*Double Booked*, Blue Note, 2009) Glasper, piano; Vicente Archer, bass; Chris Dave, drums.

**Fonville:** It’s Robert Glasper.

**Mann:** The record is *Double Booked*.

**Randazzo:** The song is “Think Of One.” We’re arguing a bit about the personnel over here. We think it’s Vicente Archer on bass.

**Fonville:** Chris Dave on drums. Christopher “Daddy” Dave.

**Randazzo:** 2008–’09? It was a big deal when this went public.

**Burrs:** 5 stars. I love this album. I used to listen to it all the time.

**Fonville:** I mean, it’s cool ... [*everyone laughs*] 5 stars, for sure.

**Randazzo:** It’s worth checking out the whole thing on the other side, because it’s Derrick Hodge [on bass], right? The electric band.

**Tenney:** I’m kind of blown away right now, because this does not sound like Rob at all to me. I had a bootleg of Rob playing “Butterfly.” I listened to that bootleg at least a thousand times that year that I got it. And then I saw Robert [in] a trio in Indianapolis. I’ve been a Rob fan for so long. I hadn’t listened to this particular album, because at the time people were already into him, I guess.

**Mann:** He has a bunch of older records, like *Canvas* and *Mood* — that stuff is amazing. It’s kind of two parts for me. There are two eras of Glasper: a trio era, and then this album is like him stepping over.

**Fonville:** In between a little ...

**Mann:** Yeah, exactly. My freshman year of college, all I wanted to do was sound like Glasper. And through Glasper, I found J Dilla and all the stuff ... Yeah, this changed the game, for sure.

### Kneebody

“Reach” (*Reach*, GroundUp, 2025) Ben Wendel, tenor saxophone; Shane Endsley, trumpet; Adam Benjamin, keyboards; Nate Wood, drums and electric bass.

**Fonville:** Sounds like Kneebody, Jason Lindner, somewhere in that way. I feel like I’m hearing Tim Lefebvre or somebody.

**Randazzo:** Or it might be Kaveh Rastegar ...

**Fonville:** Yeah, we’re in that room. Nate Wood on drums?

**Mann:** At first instinct, it was Kneebody. That’s Ben Wendel doing some crazy, distorted sax stuff. And then the bass came in and this weird sense came, like, could that be Donny McCaslin, with Jason Lindner doing something? But when the trumpet came, I was like, it’s gotta be



Butcher Brown took the challenge of a live Blindfold Test. The band is, clockwise from top left, Marcus Tenney, DJ Harrison, Morgan Burrs, Corey Fonville and Andrew Randazzo. (Keyboardist Harrison couldn’t make the gig, so special guest Jacob Mann sat in with the band at the Reno Jazz Festival.)

Kneebody. Nate on bass?

**Tenney:** This music sounds like what humans are thinking in April 2025. That groove, different time signatures that feel as common as 4/4. That, to me, is pushing the limits, like watching the difference between Karl Malone and Michael Jordan, watching the difference between Michael Jordan and Kobe Bryant. You see the evolution of it in real time.

**Fonville:** It also sounds like a group of musicians that spent some time going out to nightclubs. Sounds like Brooklyn at 3 a.m. Berlin in some sick basement club. Yeah, they be tapped into that sound.

### Mark de Clive-Lowe/Melanie Charles/Shigeto

“Kanzawa” (*Hotel San Claudio*, Soul Bank, 2023) De Clive-Lowe, keyboards and electronics; Charles, flute and vocals; Shigeto, drums.

**Tenney:** Sounds like Melanie Charles.

**Fonville:** Yeah, you flexin’ ... is it Zacche’us [Paul], the piano player?

**Tenney:** I like it because it brings an energy that doesn’t really exist as much as we should have. Music a lot of times is wrapped up in provocation — you know, let’s shoot a video and let’s take all the clothes off. It’s nice to hear a song that’s like riding in a car, going somewhere. When did that become so uncool? Why do I gotta light my television on fire just to get you to listen to my song?

### Thundercat

“For Love (I Come Your Friend)” (*The Golden Age of the Apocalypse*, Brainfeeder, 2011) Thundercat, bass and vocals; Flying Lotus, producer; George Duke, composer.

**Tenney:** Oh ... got it. [*everyone exchanges knowing glances*]

**Tenney:** Shout out to George Duke.

**Fonville:** Those keyboards sound like water, bro. I feel like I’m in the ocean.

**Tenney:** It sounds like the ’80s, walking out to the warehouse, gettin’ out the Firebird.

**Burrs:** This is some bad shit.

**Fonville:** Man, that year was special, ’cause Brainfeeder just, like, kicked the door open. *Cosmogramma* came in just before this.

**Mann:** *Cosmogramma* in 2010 and this in 2011 — it was like the same two people produced both albums. It was a special time. I moved to L.A. in 2010, and to be there as this stuff was happening ... I’ve had a lot of deep phases with music. I feel like Flying Lotus/Thundercat one was the biggest for me. That’s always going to be my DNA, forever.

**Fonville:** Shoutout to the late Austin Peralta. [*to the audience*] Check him out, prolific piano player. He was very pivotal, especially during that era.

**Mann:** His album came out also in 2011 on Brainfeeder, *Endless Planets*. **DB**

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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