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# AUGUST 2025

# Inside



ON THE COVER

## 24 Anthony Braxton

*Enters the Hall of Fame*

BY BILL MEYER

Anthony Braxton turned 80 in June, and his productivity this year alone exceeds that of some other artists' entire careers. The composer, musician, educator and philosopher of positivity has released more than 14 hours of music. That includes his latest opera, *Trillium X*; a wooly collaboration with Wolf Eyes; and *Quartet (England) 1985*.

### FEATURES

30 TITO PUENTE  
*Enters the Hall of Fame, too*  
BY AARON COHEN

32 JAMES BRANDON LEWIS  
*Artist of the Year,*  
*Tenor Saxophonist of the Year*  
BY AMMAR KALIA

36 PATRICIA BRENNAN  
*Album of the Year,*  
*Vibraphonist of the Year*  
BY JIM MACNIE

40 CRITICS CAPSULES  
*Immanuel Wilkins*, by Jon Newey  
*Ambrose Akinmusire*, by Alexa Peters  
*Meshell Ndegeocello*,  
by Eugene Holley Jr.  
*Ingrid Laubrock*,  
by Thierry De Clemensat  
*Brian Blade*, by Filipe Freitas  
*Michael Dease*, by Mark Ruffin  
*Mary Halvorson*, by A.D. Amorosi  
*Isaiah Collier*, by Ayana Conteras  
*Adrian Younge & Ali Shaheed*  
*Muhammad*, by Tom Ineck  
*Susan Alcorn*, by Peter Margasak

48 COMPLETE POLL LISTINGS



Cover photo by Peter Gannushkin

# 36

"As a composer, as a performer, the fact that the message got across is awesome," says Patricia Brennan of *Breaking Stretch* being honored as Album of the Year.



68 James Brandon Lewis Quartet



68 Mary Halvorson



70 Theon Cross



70 Marty Erlich Trio

### DEPARTMENTS

8 First Take  
10 Chords & Discords  
13 The Beat  
13 Scott Robinson  
16 Van Gelder Studio  
18 Brittany Davis  
20 Mark Masters  
22 Final Bar  
60 Indie Life  
67 Reviews

80 Master Class  
by Karrin Allyson  
82 Transcription  
James Brandon Lewis solo, by Jimi Durso  
84 Toolshed  
• JodyJazz DV JC 'Jody Custom'  
Alto Saxophone Mouthpiece  
• Odisei Music's Travel Sax 2  
86 Gear Box  
90 Blindfold Test  
Buster Williams





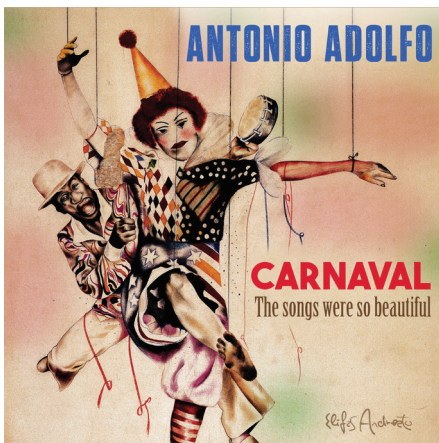
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**Rafael Rocha**  
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**Andre Siqueira**  
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## First Take > BY FRANK ALKYER



DAVID LOBATO

She was no newcomer to jazz, but in a sweet tribute, the critics honored pedal steel guitarist Susan Alcorn as Rising Star Beyond Instrumentalist of the Year after she passed away in January.

# A Poll for the Record Books

**YOU SEE BEFORE YOU WHAT WE BELIEVE IS** the largest and most comprehensive Critics Poll in the history of jazz. DownBeat annually asks for viewpoints from a robust committee of critics, but this year we decided to seek out even more of the world's top sources on the creative music scene, sending ballots to 409 critics. Completing the task were 251, and a daunting task it was.

The ballot for the Critics Poll contained nearly 4,000 line items (artists, albums and groups) across 62 categories. It is an act of time, attention and dedication to complete, and we are thankful for every voter for their interest.

This poll serves as a labor of love for music that never will fit neatly under any one label or format. It's too big, too unwieldy, too fantastically free to conform to being neatly tucked into any box. As multi-instrumentalist supreme Scott Robinson says in a great feature on page 13, "To me, it's like a big river. I can't separate one part of the river from another because it's only a river if it's all connected and flowing."

As for the poll results ... pretty darn cool. There's something for everyone here.

Along with writeups on Anthony Braxton, Tito Puente, James Brandon Lewis and Patricia Brennan, we asked 10 critics to express why they voted for an honoree. Their responses inspire.

One, in particular, really touched this old editor's heart. Peter Margasak's note on why he voted for pedal steel guitar player Susan Alcorn really hit home. Alcorn passed away in January after a wonderful career making some of the most adventurous music ever heard, but she never placed in the polls. Her passing was an opportunity to correct that. We placed her in the Rising Star category for Beyond Instrument

because I, frankly, thought she might have a chance to place higher there. When she won, it became a proper honor we wish she could have been here to receive.

It also demonstrates that the critics have big hearts. They also honored Zakir Hussain as Percussionist of the Year one more time after he passed away last December. Hussain, Lou Donaldson and Albert "Tootie" Heath all placed in the Hall of Fame voting after passing away in the past year. Dear friend of this magazine Claire Daly placed fourth in Baritone Saxophonist of the Year after passing last October. Russell Malone placed in Guitarist of the Year after passing away last August. Sadly, others appearing in their last poll include Hall of Fame drummer Roy Haynes, kora artist Toumani Diabaté, vocalist Andy Bey and legendary producer Michael Cuscuna. They will be missed.

But because of the dedication and mentorship of these older generations, a crop of exciting new artists are raising the roof as rising stars: Isaiah Collier, Yazz Ahmed, Natalie Cressman, Ingrid Laubrock, Immanuel Wilkins, Sam Gendel, Sarah Hanahan, Chet Doxas, Ava Mendoza, Brandon Lopez, Sasha Berliner, Jessica Pavone, Ulysses Owens Jr. and more!

One final note: Women instrumentalists are coming on strong! Check out Albums of the Year — Patricia Brennan, Kris Davis (whose Pyroclastic label is killing it), Sylvie Courvoisier & Mary Halvorson, Amina Claudine Myers, the Tomeka Reid Quartet, the Marta Sánchez Trio, Nicole Mitchell, Melissa Aldana, Jenny Scheinman, Renee Rosnes all grace the category.

It's still a work in progress, but things are changing. It's good for all of us. More great new music to dig into!

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### SatchVai Shock!

As a proud graduate of Carl's Place High School [on Long Island, New York], I was shocked to see the cover of the July issue with Joe Satriani and Steve Vai! I graduated well before them, but they were well known in our small little town. I never thought they would be on the cover of DownBeat. We knew them as rockers. Thanks for bringing them into the jazz orbit. Now can you do a cover with my nephew, pianist Emmet Cohen? That would REALLY blow my mind!

PAUL PERMAKOFF  
VIA EMAIL

**Editor's Note:** Paul, thanks for the note! Sometimes we need to take the blinders off and just appreciate amazing musicianship from two artists who make music their way. And Emmet's the real deal. We hope to see him on the cover, too!



many businesses, got caught in the tariff wars. When China was temporarily hit with the 145% tariff, our musical instrument advertisers that import goods from China shut down their advertising. It was like COVID all over again. With a temporary halt on tariffs, the spine is back. Hopefully, the U.S. and China (and other countries) can strike a reasonable deal.

### The Complicated Nicolas Payton

I'm writing as a lifelong admirer of jazz and a member of a community that has been deeply hurt by the antisemitic rhetoric of Nicholas Payton — a figure who held a prominent leadership position at Berklee College of Music.

Mr. Payton's talent as a musician is undeniable. However, his social media over the years has also become a platform for repeatedly sharing antisemitic conspiracy theories, tropes and hate speech. These are not isolated missteps or comments taken out of context. They include statements like:

"All these so-called Jews mad, because how dare I make them face the facts of their sordid past and present ... Expose how Jewish people have exploited us. Apologize for it and atone and do better."

"They still control a large portion of the media and entertainment industry."

"Amazing how Jews always have a 'negligible' role in every historic horror that they've been irrefutably associated with ... but Jews, magically, are clean as a whistle! INCREDIBLE!"

These are not mere political critiques. They are classic antisemitic tropes that have long been used to justify violence and discrimination. That they continue to be broadcast without consequences — and that Berklee saw fit to appoint Payton to a role that influences young musicians — is deeply troubling.

Jazz has always been a space for pushing boundaries, telling truths, and building bridges across racial and cultural divides. But it must also be a space that stands firmly against hate in all its forms. Payton's repeated, explicit antisemitism violates that spirit.

I urge DownBeat to cover this issue. Not to sensationalize it, but to reckon with it. To ask how the jazz world can reconcile artistic genius with moral responsibility. To consider the line between free expression and hate speech. And to help ensure that our community remains one that welcomes, rather than targets, people based on their identity.

Silence, especially from institutions and media outlets that shape culture, is complicity.

OLIVER STEINBERG  
VIA EMAIL

### Spineless DownBeat

I have collected this fine magazine for the past 20-plus years. The vast majority of my collection sits in cases where I can quickly glance at the back ("spine") of the magazine and see not only the date but several topics of said issue as well. During COVID, as I recall there were many issues that were, dare I say, spineless?

These issues are held together by staples and there is no indication available "edgewise" of what is inside. Most important to this reader is the date! Worse still, on the current July 2025 issue my mailing label hides the date on this "spineless" issue. (I think this is the first stapled publication in the last year or so.) Labels were once easily removed but now that is not the case. If I may be so bold as to express a preference: having the info available on the spine is important to me if I have a choice or word in the matter. This method of printing has always represented DownBeat to me. Thank you for your kind attention.

STEVE MOON  
LUBBOCK, TEXAS

### Of Staples & Shredders

The new magazine construction (cost saving?) has compromised the quality of your publication. The chances of future issues being able to navigate through the U.S. Postal system intact are virtually zero. Add to that, this new format featured two guitar "shredders" on the partially disintegrated cover. The horror, the horror.

L.R. COLE  
PANAMA CITY BEACH, FLORIDA

**Editor's Note:** Yes, for the July issue, having no spine was a cost-saving matter. We, like so

Have a Chord or Discord? Email us at [editor@downbeat.com](mailto:editor@downbeat.com) or find us on Facebook & Twitter.



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*Oh Snap*

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—Slate



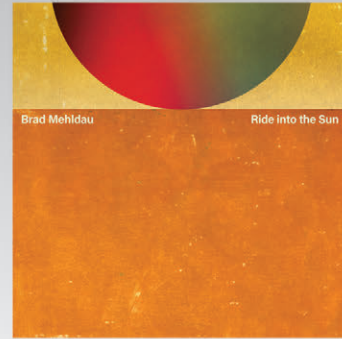
**Mary Halvorson**  
*About Ghosts*

"However edgy and angular Mary Halvorson's music gets, powerful melodies and inviting harmonies always drift below even the stormiest surface, giving the much-lauded New York composer and guitarist an appeal way beyond the avant garde...."

—Guardian,

*Jazz Album of the Month,*

\*\*\*



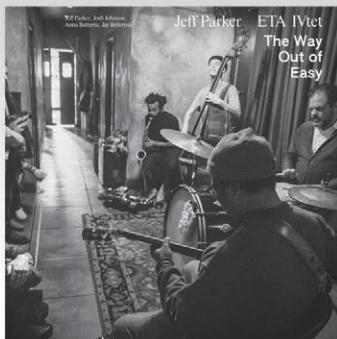
**Brad Mehldau**  
*Ride into the Sun*

(Songs of and inspired by Elliott Smith)

"There's no one whose pathways between thought and delivery are less obstructed."

—Chris Thile  
(Punch Brothers,  
Nickel Creek)

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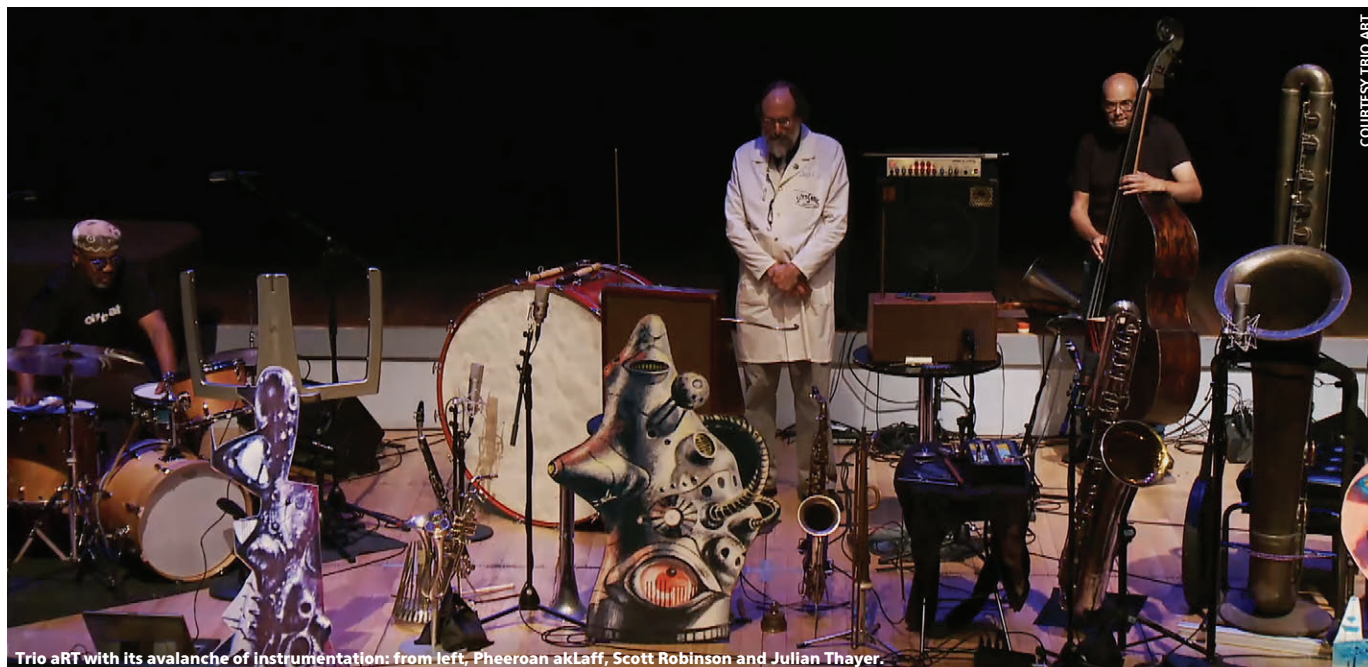
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Trio aRT with its avalanche of instrumentation: from left, Pheeroan akLaff, Scott Robinson and Julian Thayer.

COURTESY TRIO ART

## Trio aRT: Music at ScienSonic Speed

Trio aRT, a working unit since 1988, shockingly released its very first studio recording this summer. Recorded in January 2024, *aRT* (ScienSonic Laboratories) — titled for the surnames of Pheeroan akLaff, Scott Robinson and Julian Thayer — contains 20 scratch-improvised vignettes on which the trio postulates and interacts with extreme fluency and compositional intention with a mountain of instruments. Robinson plays tenor, bass and electric contrabass saxophones, contrabass sarrusophone, alto clarinet, dizi, F tuba, jazzophone (a double-belled trumpet), sheng, theremin, bass marimba, tremolo, soundsheets, bells and gongs. Thayer is on bass, and akLaff mans the drums, cymbals, gongs, yunluo and boo bams.

It's the most recent entry in the 15-album catalog of Robinson's ScienSonic label, named for the laboratory he created in 2010 in the garage of his Teaneck, New Jersey, home to access his vast array of "instruments of every description, some quite rare ... and make as much noise as I want at any time of day or night."

Their backstory starts in 1977 at Berklee School of Music, where Robinson and Thayer, randomly assigned roommates at the start of freshman year, bonded upon finding numer-

ous common interests in their respective record collections. Soon they formed a group called Medium Jazz with Czech pianist Emil Viklicky (with whom they played in Prague last October), and coalesced "Baryon Octet," an outcat quintet named by Thayer for a subatomic particle, foreshadowing his 40-year career as a widely published neuroscientist who studies the physiological effects of listening to music. Robinson, a skilled practitioner of multiple saxophones, clarinets and flutes since his high school years in Herndon, Virginia, played "a forest of instruments, including all kinds of crazy car parts, hanging racks of percussion and weird sculptures I made."

"We'd play anywhere up to four hours without a break," Robinson continued. "We free-improvised a lot, but we also wrote compositions. We occasionally brought in dancers and other musicians. It was an important step in my process. I recently reconvened and recorded Baryon at the lab, and I look forward to representing both versions on my label."

During freshman year, Robinson and Thayer heard akLaff, then 22, play an "unforgettable" engagement with Oliver Lake and Michael Gregory Jackson at Lulu White's in Cambridge. "We were amazed," Thayer said. "I decided I had to play with Pheeroan." Robinson played with

akLaff first, soon after moving from Boston to New York in 1984, in composer Tom Pierson's venturesome big band. Thayer was also in New York, earning his Ph.D. at New York University while occasionally subbing on gigs for bassist Art Davis, his classmate, but they didn't perform again until Thayer arrived at Penn State ("my first job"), where he doubled as faculty advisor for the university's jazz club and then-annual jazz festival.

Thayer booked the trio to play there in 1987. Soon thereafter, they collaborated on a multimedia performance with the Pennsylvania Dance Theater, for which Rob Fisher, an environmental sculptor described by Thayer as "a pioneer of using computers in the arts," did the set design. Their next encounter was an interactive video project at New York's Knitting Factory based on a sculpture Fisher made in Saudi Arabia. "We played improvised music, while he improvised the video images, which were interspersed, interwoven, sort of superimposed upon each other," Thayer said. "In 1996 we did another interactive 3D project in Pittsburgh based on cell biology images called 'Night of the Living Cell.'"

Four years Robinson's and Thayer's senior, akLaff — whose discography already included important albums by Lake, Anthony Davis, Wadada Leo Smith, Roscoe Mitchell, Henry



Threadgill's Sextett and New Air, Geri Allen, Baikida Carroll and Craig Harris — recalled how impressed he was by their devotion to “creative impulses and digging deep into unknown territories more than the display of virtuosity, which didn't always occur with some of the brilliant folks I was connected with. I'd never seen or been part of people interested in working with neuroscience and behavioral science and the body and music. Also, Scott's prowess on all his instruments was super-impressive — the completeness most musicians really want, but are unable to or afraid to execute.”

He opined that Fisher's death in 2006

changed the nature of the trio's interaction. “The video and/or the sculpture and/or the video being combined with our images while playing had been our musical score,” akLaff said. “Our score became our deeper creative ideas reflecting upon our history, reflecting upon the moment and, of course, a certain amount of intuition as to the most sensitive way to react to each other.”

By 2006, Robinson had earned the deep respect of the upper echelons of both the outcat/experimental and “straightahead” jazz communities, bringing equivalent panache and brio to rubato textural improvising with brother sound scientist Roscoe Mitchell, freewheeling with Sun

Ra alumni Marshall Allen and Michael Ray in the Cosmic Crew, rendering the charts of Maria Schneider and Toshiko Akiyoshi, and functioning as a master practitioner of an Armstrong-to-Coltrane span of jazz vocabulary on most of his instrumentarium, as showcased on a series of ingeniously programmed swing-to-bop leader albums on Arbors and sideman dates with, among others, pre-boppers Ruby Braff and Marty Grosz.

“Playing music of a different era doesn't mean sacrificing your personality or sounding like another earlier player,” Robinson said. “These areas are still unlimited and untapped. It's possible to be appropriate to any musical situation while giving it some kind of growth. I love all this music. To me, it's like a big river. I can't separate one part of the river from another because it's only a river if it's all connected and flowing.”

“When I created ScienSonic I had a lot of outlets for mainstream-type playing, but not these other adventurous things I wanted to do. I wanted to balance those worlds.”

In 2015, Robinson invited Milford Graves to the lab to record *Flow States* with Mitchell and Allen. Soon thereafter, Robinson introduced Thayer to Graves, whose long-standing autodidactic research into mapping the rhythms of the heart paralleled Thayer's academic investigations into psychophysiological phenomena. They planned a project whereby Thayer helped Graves publish and present his research to the scientific community, followed by prospective events opening with a lecture on Graves' research and concluding with an aRT-plus-Graves quartet concert. When it became apparent to Graves that his severe cardiac condition made it impossible to play, he provided the trio with recordings of his heart rate, breath and other physiological data transmuted into musical sound, which they incorporated into the flow in a filmed concert shown at an exhibit of his work at Philadelphia's Institute of Contemporary Art in November 2020, a few months before Graves transitioned.

Robinson's own intimations of mortality after a diagnosis of prostate cancer on Christmas Eve 2023 spurred him finally to document the trio. “It seemed ridiculous that time was marching on, and we didn't have an album,” Robinson said. “We have tapes representing our important projects of the past. But I wanted to start with a fresh, straightforward representation of the music we play.” Over the next few months, even the morning of and night after a successful six-hour operation, he worked on the album every day in his laboratory, “fiddling with the mixes and mastering, designing the package and booking a few gigs for us to launch the album.”


“This has given us what we need, given me what I need and given the music what she needs for all these years, so we've stuck with it,” Robinson said. “Every gig is important because we're playing the music we love. I hope to keep it going as long as possible.”

—Ted Panken


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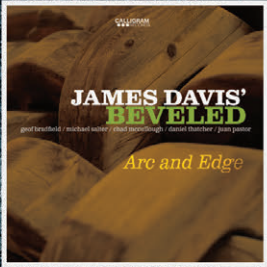


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Don and Maureen Sickler serve as the keepers of engineer Rudy Van Gelder's flame at Van Gelder Studio, perhaps, the most famous recording studio in jazz history.

# Keeping the Flame at Van Gelder Studio

**ON THE LAST SUNDAY OF 2024, IN THE** control room of Van Gelder Studio, Don and Maureen Sickler, co-owners since Rudy Van Gelder willed it to Maureen in 2016, reminisced about day one of her 30-year tenure as his trusted assistant and eventual heir. Maureen, 78, sat on an ergonomic kneeling chair beside a stack of audio equipment on the left of Van Gelder's custom Nieve console from 1972. Then, as now, that stack established the invisible line (a.k.a. the "bridge") that only Van Gelder, famously secretive about his methods, was permitted to cross.

Don, a week shy of 81, stayed on the "civilian" side of the control room, his back to the glass wall that separates it from the main area, an acoustic marvel with a spire-like ceiling, made of Douglas fir ascending 39 feet at its apex, complemented by concrete floors. "I've played and produced records all over the world, and never found a studio whose acoustics match this," he said. "There's no echo, just the natural decay of the sound."

They time-traveled to October 1986, when Van Gelder was considering whether to record Tommy Flanagan at the Village Vanguard for Uptown Records, a label for which Sickler had produced 14 albums at VGS since 1983. A pioneer in location recording whose resume included iconic Vanguard recordings by Sonny Rollins (1957) and John Coltrane (1961 and 1966), Van Gelder, then approaching 62, wanted an assistant.

"Rudy said, 'How about Maureen?'" Don remembered. "She'd always joined me at the studio. On dates where I played trumpet, and couldn't constantly listen to everything else, I trusted her ears to make sure everything was in

tune or the bass player wasn't going to the bridge in the wrong place. Rudy recognized how smart she is, how quickly she learns." Once on location, Maureen ran the cassette machines and headphones, and carried cables from the truck into the club. "Nobody was allowed to touch anything at Van Gelder's," Don said. "That was big."

By then, the Sicklers were running a bustling rehearsal studio and Don's expanding publishing company, Second Floor Music, from their West 28th Street loft. They'd married and moved to New York in 1967, where Don enrolled at Manhattan School of Music after graduating from Gonzaga University. Maureen — a baritone hornist, trombonist, pianist and percussionist — had matriculated there on scholarship. For five years, she worked as a blackjack-carrying Federal Marshal, then earned an English degree. Meanwhile, Don established himself as a trumpeter on New York's Broadway and session scenes, while also working as production manager and managing editor for Big Three Music, a subsidiary of United Artists that owned the Blue Note and Pacific Jazz catalogs as well as Duke Ellington's music. Don created study scores of Ellington's "Koko" and "Main Stem," and then transcription books of Joe Henderson's compositions and solos (vetted by Henderson) and John Coltrane's pieces from *Blue Trane* and *Whims Of Chambers* for United Artists. Maureen helped oversee the process.

Don left United Artists to form Second Floor Music in 1979. In 1981, he began to alert jazz composers and their heirs about expiring copyrights, helping artists like Benny Golson and

Gigi Gryce, and Clifford Brown's widow, LaRue Brown, retain ownership of their intellectual property. "We'd search the copyright books for every year, page by page, at the 42nd Street library," Maureen recalled. "Suddenly, we were bombarded by copyrights," Don said. Maureen, who'd worked in a library as a teenager, created a meticulous filing system of song cards to manage the influx. By 2000, she was spearheading their internet arm, [jazzleadsheets.com](http://jazzleadsheets.com).

Maureen's role at VGS expanded after the summer 1990 recording of Dizzy Gillespie's *Rhythmstick*, when Van Gelder, a two-finger typist, struggled with synchronizing audio and video time codes. "Maureen suggested she do the typing, freeing Rudy to focus elsewhere," Don said. "Rudy didn't allow engineers in the studio, but Maureen wasn't an engineer, plus she was non-aggressive, so she wasn't a threat."

Don elaborated: "Rudy had no children. Maureen was like the daughter he never had. She has the same sensibility — likes gadgets, can fix anything. Rudy would call for her opinion about new equipment. He'd built his stuff from the ground up, so he could figure everything out. Maureen read all the manuals." Gradually, Maureen gained a comprehensive knowledge of audio engineering through the prism of Van Gelder's process. "Rudy had to learn everything himself," she said. "It was hard-won information, and he didn't want to give it up." During his final years, she finally assisted with the console, noting every knob's position for recalibration if needed.

Van Gelder contributed his understanding and superior equipment to several thousand



albums for Blue Note, Prestige, Impulse! and CTI from the 1950s through the 1970s that, drummer Kenny Washington said, “set the standard for what the rhythm section — all the instruments — should sound like.” Washington, who played on 59 post-1980 Van Gelder sessions, added, “Rudy instilled in Maureen how he wanted the instruments to sound. She’s carrying that on.”

After 2016, the transition wasn’t instant. A pep talk from Ron Carter, who first recorded at VGS sessions in 1960 and had recently recorded his fourth duo album with Houston Person (*Chemistry* on HighNote), galvanized Maureen into action. “Ron said, ‘We’ve got to do another duo record in that studio, with that incredible sound,’” Don recalled. “‘I know you can do it.’”

“No one but Maureen monitored pianos, knew the microphones, moved the microphones, made the purchases, knew what was coming in, knew how to replace certain things,” said Carter, who once spent several months of Saturdays brainstorming with Van Gelder about optimal microphone location for various bass pickups. “When Rudy decided she was the person who could best carry on in his position, I wholeheartedly accepted that.”

Don recalled: “After that conversation, Maureen said, ‘Get your trumpet and flugelhorn and all your mutes, so I can check all these microphones.’ She wanted to hear the qualities and workings of each one.”

In 2018, Carter and Person recorded *Remember Love* (HighNote). “The result was similarly satisfactory,” Carter said. “Maureen’s product of Rudy’s studio is going to have her fingerprints on it. It’s so close to Rudy — I’m OK with that.”

“Rudy told me he took the music the musicians made to please themselves and made it listenable,” Maureen said. Don added: “He gave back what he heard *you* sound like, not what he thought a trumpet player should sound like. ... Maureen is the same.”

The studio’s pristine sound, tradition and Maureen’s fidelity to Van Gelder’s ethos continue to attract musicians like Jonathan Batiste, esperanza spalding and David Murray as well as newcomers like Isaiah Collier. “It’s put together to enable you to make great music,” said trumpeter Brian Lynch, who produced Samara Joy’s new album, *Portrait* (Verve), at VGS last summer. “It’s like a church. Church is when it makes you look up, and that space makes you want to play up to it.”

Lynch recorded his debut album, *Peer Pressure* (Criss Cross), at VGS two months after Maureen’s maiden voyage with Tommy Flanagan’s *Nights At The Vanguard*. Some 38 years later, the two-time Grammy winner booked time to record a self-produced quintet project with Charles McPherson for which Joy wrote — and sang — lyrics for one song each by the two protagonists.

“At first, I wondered whether Maureen could manage sessions,” Don said. “She doesn’t talk much. But on the mic, she’s totally in control. She sets up camera shoots, handles film editing and designs graphics. She’s the brain.”

“It’s her house,” Lynch said. “She’s the institutional memory of that space.”

As both the Sicklers and their admirers are acutely aware, preserving that institutional memory poses challenges. While VGS became a National Landmark in 2022 and secured a New Jersey easement ensuring its physical survival, maintaining the 65-year-old studio and its hefty property taxes requires constant activity. “Social Security helps, and I get a small union pension,” Don said. “But we can’t afford to hire anyone to work with us, and although we can stay in the apartment upstairs, it’s time-consuming. People want to intern, but Maureen has no time to teach them anything.” Maureen added: “We’re too old for vacations. We just want to get things done.”

The Sicklers hope to establish a nonprofit to inherit the studio one day. Would naming a successor involve briefing them on Van Gelder’s secret sauce? “If I can do it, it can’t be that tough,” Maureen demurred. “I don’t think it’s necessary.”

Perhaps. But Kenny Washington’s remark reflects the consensus wish of the hardcore jazz community: “I hope they find someone they can trust to keep it going and start training them now. They’ve got to pass it on.” —Ted Panken



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"It's energetic," says Brittany Davis of feeling the spirits of the ancestors. "It's interpretive. It's a dance of sound and vibration. It's a memory, it's a wash. It's washing over you."

# Brittany Davis Catches Some *Black Thunder*

**SINCE SHE WAS 3 YEARS OLD, BRITTANY**

Davis has been mimicking bird songs on the piano. Davis, who was born blind, also recalls growing up listening to gospel and the contemporary jazz her family would play in the house.

"But I wasn't really into ... the real juicy stuff, the jazz linguist type [music], you know what I'm saying?" Davis said. "They had the lingo, man, and I wasn't hearing that."

While Davis is bashful about associating herself with the title of "jazz musician," her sophomore LP, *Black Thunder* (Loosegroove Records), gleams with those "juicy" jazz elements she never fully understood as a kid.

*Black Thunder*, the result of a completely improvised two-day session at Seattle's Studio Litho, draws on Davis' organic connection to spirit, song and soul, and the synergy between Davis and two stalwarts of the Seattle jazz scene: drummer D'Vonne Lewis and acoustic bassist Evan Flory-Barnes.

The record includes nine songs with eight otherworldly interludes soaked in Afrocentric elements, groovy vamps and powerful lyricism sung or spoken in Davis' rich alto. Thematically, *Black Thunder* shares Davis' bittersweet reflections as a blind person of color, encourages others to connect with their true beauty and highlights a gift Davis usually keeps close to the heart — a strong spiritual sense that connects her to the voices of the ancestors.

"It's energetic. It's interpretive. It's a dance of sound and vibration. It's a memory, it's a wash. It's washing over you. It's not me going, 'I see the

spirits.' No, it's not like that," she said.

After spending most of her childhood in Kansas City, Missouri, where she played piano in church and was first exposed to gospel and jazz, Davis moved to Seattle at 15. Within a few years, she'd befriended mainstays in the Seattle rock 'n' roll scene and was regularly attending jam sessions.

Eventually, Davis was introduced to Pearl Jam's Stone Gossard. Gossard quickly became a friend and one of Davis' biggest supporters, signing her to his label, Loosegroove Records, in 2022. Gossard's help, as well as that of Pearl Jam producer Josh Evans, was instrumental in the creation of *Black Thunder*, as well as her 2022 EP, *I Choose To Live*, and her 2024 LP, *Image Issues*.

"Stone, he's like, 'Brittany, I bet you could go in the studio and make an album in three days.' And I was like, 'Yeah, no dude,'" she said, with a laugh. "But then, all of a sudden, this dude goes ahead and puts the whole [session together]."

On the first recording day, Gossard and Evans brought in Lewis, a versatile and perennially in-the-pocket drummer who's worked with Gossard, as well as Wynton Marsalis and Maria Schneider. On the second day in the studio, they also brought in Flory-Barnes, a skillful bassist and Origin Records artist who played with pianist Aaron Parks in his early trio.

"I'm telling you, it was just like fate that brought that band together again, because we had played together before, but it just bounced back into my heart," said Davis.

While making *Black Thunder*, Davis came to

the studio with nothing but an open mind and the intention of following the music wherever it wanted to go. She'd sit at the piano and start in with a groove or harmonic progression, letting Lewis and Flory-Barnes join in when it felt right.

Quickly, she felt moved to voice the pain of the African ancestors, specifically those who were removed from their homelands during the transatlantic slave trade. She was also curious to explore how the atrocities and displacement that faced the ancestors continue to shape the Black community today.

That inspiration is potent on the album's suspenseful eponymous track, "Black Thunder," as Davis speaks: "It's rainy season/ In the jungle I hear, the call of wild souls/ Who never knew, what it meant to leave their soil/ I can hear it down underneath the soil/ Tempered and wired tight/ Ready, preparing to bring forth light and fruit."

As it explores this legacy and Davis' relationship to it, *Black Thunder* incorporates African chants and rhythms, jazz harmony, soulful vocals and spoken-word verses. As pearls poured forth, Evans would carefully layer, edit and shape it all into refined tracks.

"Amid The Blackout Of The Night," featuring soft, sensitive drumming from Lewis and a bluesy piano solo from Davis, explores what it feels like for Davis to have knowledge of something visual, like the Milky Way or the construct of race, but no context to truly understand it as a blind person.

"It's a type of pain and uncertainty that will cause you to break free and become curious," she says. "[D'Vonne] picked up on it and dropped in that beat. And then it took me to the place of curiosity I needed to go."

Likewise, "Mirrors," driven by a melancholy, marimba-like keys pattern, aches with the tension between Davis' sense of her own beauty and the narrow, often racist, beauty standards of the sighted world.

"I've always believed that I'm beautiful. I've never had a problem with me. When I wake up in the morning, when I take that first deep breath, 'Oh, wow, I'm beautiful.' I've never had a problem with beauty until it becomes, 'Your hair ain't right. Your clothes ain't right,'" she said.

Throughout *Black Thunder*, time and the material plane transform at the thrum of a bass note or a cymbal splash. Meanwhile, Davis harnesses uncanny sentience and vulnerable self-reflection, aiming to reveal her authentic self, dispel society's projections and ultimately help others connect to their soul's purpose.

"I would love to see people remember their humanity. I would love to see people embrace their flaws. I would love to see people embody their fullness," Davis said. "We don't need another person that we want to be like. Because the only person we should want to be like is the one that God made. That's you." —Alexa Peters



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Mark Masters, right, with Billy Harper.



# Mark Masters Celebrates Sam Rivers & Billy Harper

**THE RISING STAR CATEGORY OF THIS PUBLICATION'S annual Critics Poll** was once called Talent Deserving Wider Recognition (TDWR). Composer/arranger Mark Masters is decidedly a TDWR who, in turn, highlights other talents deserving wider recognition.

After arranging and recording albums celebrating the likes of Dewey Redman, Alec Wilder and Grachan Moncur III, Masters released two big band albums this year via longtime label partner Capri Records. *Sam Rivers 100* celebrates the songbook of the pioneering free-jazz composer and saxophonist. *Dance, Eternal Spirits, Dance!* draws from the songbook of Billy Harper, another titanic saxophonist/composer, with Harper himself the major throughline between the two releases. And both deserve our ears in Masters' thoughtful estimation.

"I was listening to the Sam's Blue Note box set that Mosaic released (*Sam Rivers: The Complete Blue Note Sam Rivers Sessions*) and noticed that he was born in 1923, which spurred me to start this project," Masters said. Then, Masters found a simpatico collaborator in the Angel City Jazz Festival, which presented his ensemble at the Los Angeles County Museum of Modern Art in October 2023.

"I thought they'd be good partners to produce this. Some of the music isn't for the faint of heart," he shared by phone from his home in Temecula, a Southern California wine country city. All the musicians from the concert, including Harper, plus a few additional players convened in a recording studio three days later.

"There's so much great music on those '60s Blue

Note Records that I just used those as reference points," Masters explained. "I listened to the recordings, made my choices and then stopped listening."

"About half the record is orchestral settings of tracks that were free, like 'Helix' and 'Point Of Many Returns.' Other than that, everything was new material based on his harmonic structures," he continued. "So I had lead sheets with Sam's melody and chord changes for half the tunes, and the other half were free."

As for Harper, the master saxophonist is both the featured soloist and sole composer on *Dance, Eternal Spirits, Dance!* "The record with Billy's music was totally different than the one with Sam's," Masters pointed out. "Billy's music is so orchestral in nature to begin with."

"He also writes in a way that's harmonically so extremely interesting," he added. "On 'The One Who Makes The Rain Stop,' the bass line is so profound that I didn't change it at all but rather just orchestrated it to add bass clarinet and bass trombone. The bottom line is that Billy's music is much more structured than Sam's."

When discussing Harper's contribution to the album as an instrumentalist, Masters refers to another of the session's special guests, Tim Hagans. The trumpeter first recorded with the Mark Masters Ensemble on 2003's *The Clifford Brown Project* and has since contributed to nine other Masters albums.

"Tim has created his own vocabulary as an improviser. He's so unique and so spontaneous. And Billy is the same thing," Masters observed. "These are compositions that Billy's played with his quintet for a number of years. But I felt like his

playing was so inspired and so profound that we were getting the best Billy Harper that was possible on that day" in the studio last July.

Masters has been a Harper fan and later evangelist since the mid-'80s after first hearing the Houston native's playing on Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra recordings. That led to discoveries of playing on recordings by the Gil Evans Orchestra and also ones by Max Roach, Elvin Jones and Art Blakey. "He's played with all the great drummers," he said. "And I just love his sound."

"There's a quote from the liner notes of Billy's debut album for Steeplechase [*Destiny Is Yours*, 1989] that Chinyere Neale wrote: 'I find that people have either never heard Billy's music, or they are totally devoted to it. There is no in between,'" he recalled. "And I'm totally devoted to his playing." Harper first recorded with Masters on 1991's *Priestess*, and they've gone on to collaborate in the studio seven more times.

In an alternate universe, Masters might have joined Harper and Hagans on the brass-and-woodwinds side of the big bandstand. But the 67-year-old Gary, Indiana, native learned over time where his strengths lie: "I played trumpet in elementary school through college and then realized that it wasn't my calling," he said. "I played in the big bands but was never an improviser. I was meant to do something else; that something else turned out to be putting notes on paper for other people."

He was also meant to be a beloved educator, including a guest lecturing run from 1999 to 2006 at Claremont McKenna College; an after-school volunteer stint at Eagle Rock High School in Los Angeles with its big band; and serving as the president of the non-profit American Jazz Institute since 1998. "Now I also volunteer for my wife's music non-profit," he said. "So I teach beginning and intermediate band at a school here in Temecula."

A recent "Find Your Own Voice" American Jazz Institute mentoring clinic brought Masters back to his alma mater, California State University, Los Angeles. (Other Cal State L.A. alumni include the late tenor saxophonist/arranger Jack Montrose and the late alto saxophonist/composer Lennie Niehaus.) One hundred students from four schools attended, and he noted that "the kids were very receptive and played well. It's always good for them to hear it from somebody else, other than who they hear it from all the time."

Asked whether there was a woodshedding equivalent for arranger/composers, Masters pondered for a moment. "I don't know what other people do, but I listen to a lot of classical music and jazz just to be inspired by music," he replied. "And then just writing something every day, hopefully — but not necessarily — with some end product in sight. As you do this, you learn things and develop a vocabulary. And then things reveal themselves to you before you know it."

—Yoshi Kato





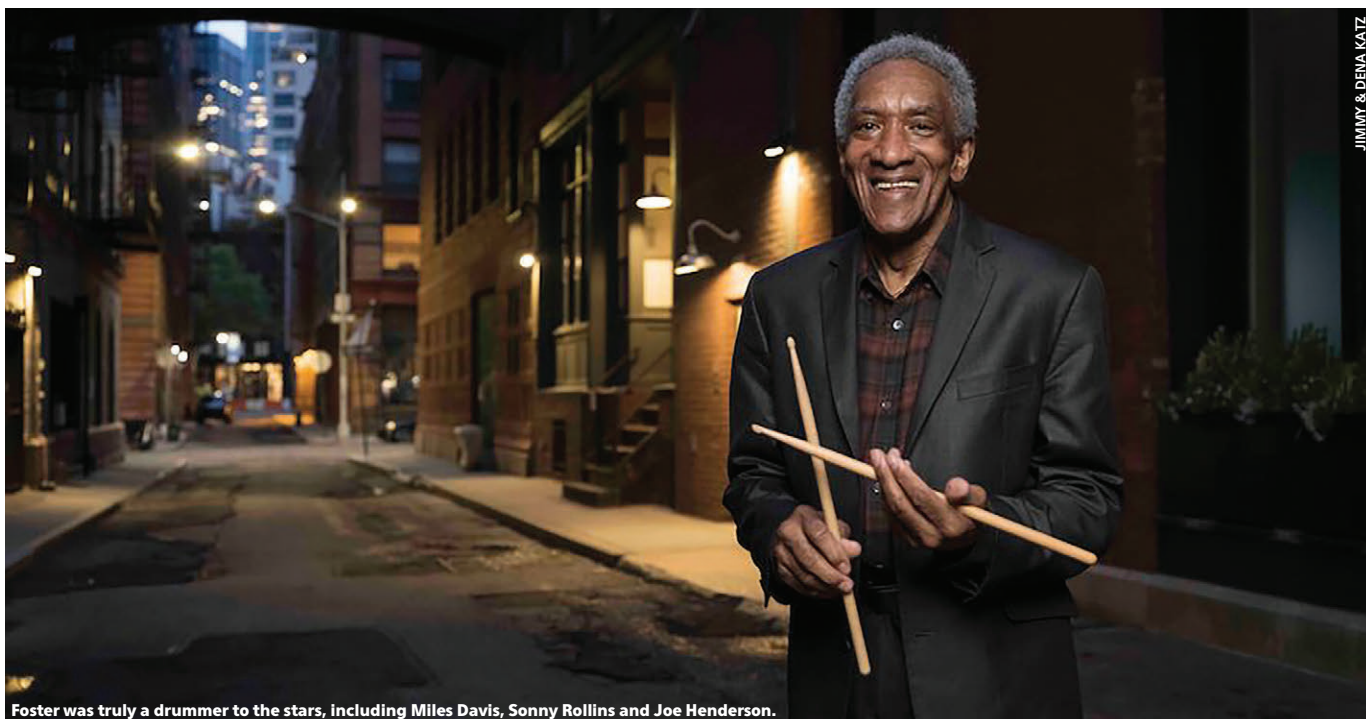
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Foster was truly a drummer to the stars, including Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins and Joe Henderson.

## In Memoriam: Al Foster, 1943-2025

**AL FOSTER, A DRUMMER REGARDED FOR** his fluency across the bebop, post-bop and funk/fusion lineages of jazz, died May 28 in New York City. He was 82. His death was announced by his daughter, Kierra Denise Foster Ba, in a post on Facebook. A cause of death was not disclosed.

Active in jazz since the mid-1960s, Foster was nonetheless probably best known for his on-and-off collaboration with Miles Davis in the '70s and '80s. Foster was the only musician to work with Davis both before and after the trumpeter's late-'70s retirement, thus working across two distinct flavors of electric jazz. Yet Foster was also a prolific partner to (among others) trumpeter Blue Mitchell and saxophonists Joe Henderson, Jimmy Heath and Sonny Rollins, all of whom were exemplars of acoustic straightahead jazz.

In all contexts and styles, he retained a signature sound, one of in-the-pocket groove and an unusually prominent hi-hat in his comping patterns. (Foster also famously kept the hi-hat in a default closed position, opening it when sounding on the cymbal pair: a technique he called "reverse hi-hat.")

Foster was deeply versed in the history of jazz drums — citing in particular the influences of Joe Chambers and Art Taylor — but was resolute that that history was a means to the end of developing a personal sound, on which he placed the highest priority.

"I hate it if I keep playing what I know," he told fellow drummer Joe Farnsworth in a 2022 *DownBeat* interview. "Show me something I don't know. I want something different."

As a leader, Foster was much less prolific — at least on records. He headed only eight sessions in nearly 50 years. However, he maintained a working band consistently from the mid-'90s to the mid-2020s. He was a frequent bandstand presence at Smoke on Manhattan's Upper West Side.

Aloysius Tyrone Foster was born Jan. 18, 1943, in Richmond, Virginia, the second son of John T. Foster Sr., a tailor's assistant, and Thelma Foster, a housewife. The family moved to New York when he was a toddler, and he grew up in the city's Harlem neighborhood. The family was a musical one: Foster's father also played bass, his older brother, congas. He recalled banging on pots and pans as a very young child before his parents bought him a practice pad when he was 6, and he began formally taking lessons at 13.

He made his professional debut in 1964 when trumpeter Blue Mitchell formed a quintet that took up residence at Minton's Playhouse in Harlem. Foster subsequently made his recording debut that summer on Mitchell's Blue Note album *The Thing To Do*. He remained with Mitchell for the next three years, then went on to play soul-jazz gigs with pianist Larry Willis and trumpeter Hugh Masekela — striving through all that time, he said, to develop a sound of his own.

That sound had arrived by the time Miles Davis heard Foster playing in 1972 and hired the drummer to replace Jack DeJohnette in his own electric jazz-rock fusion band. He first appeared on Davis' 1972 album *In Concert*, where he was immediately hailed for his funk chops. Foster remained with Davis until the trumpeter's retire-

ment in 1975, then rejoined his band after Davis came out of retirement in 1980. Foster continued to work in Davis' regular band until 1985, then sporadically until 1989. He made two electric albums of his own, *Mixed Roots* (1978) and *Mr. Foster* (1979), during Davis' retirement.

During the 1980s, however, Foster also made highly acclaimed albums with pianist Tommy Flanagan and with tenor saxophonist Joe Henderson, establishing his bona fides in bebop-based acoustic jazz and continuing to develop his fusion chops.

Freelancing dominated his career until the mid-1990s, when he formed a band with saxophonist Chris Potter, pianist David Kikoski and bassist Doug Weiss. (While many of the chairs in the band rotated, Weiss remained with Foster for over 20 years.) However, it was the release in 2003 of *Oh!* by ScoLoHoFo — a collective quartet co-led by guitarist John Scofield, saxophonist Joe Lovano, bassist Dave Holland and Foster — that jump-started Foster's career as a leader. He recorded an album at the Village Vanguard in 2008, then in the early 2010s entrenched himself at Smoke. Foster recorded his final two albums, 2019's *Inspirations And Dedications* and 2022's *Reflections*, on the club's Smoke Sessions label and made his last performance there on Jan. 18, his 82nd birthday.

Foster is survived by his wife, Bonnie Rose Steinberg, and daughters Kierra, Simone, Michelle and Monique (all from previous marriages). His son with Steinberg, Brandyn, sadly predeceased his father. —Michael J. West



## Louis Moholo-Moholo, 1940–2025

**LOUIS MOHOLO-MOHOLO**, the legendary South African drummer, passed away on June 13 in Cape Town. He was 85. Born Louis Tebogo Moholo on March 10, 1940, Moholo-Moholo formed The Blue Notes with Johnny Dyani, Mongezi Feza, Chris McGregor, Nikele Moyake and Dudu Pukwana, a group that championed free-jazz with an African sensibility during the 1960s and 1970s. The group fled the oppression of South Africa in 1964, eventually settling in the United Kingdom and becoming key members of the British jazz scene of the '60s.

"Louis was more than just South Africa's greatest living jazz drummer — he was a revolutionary rhythm-maker, a sonic freedom fighter and a keeper of ancestral memory," said fellow South African drummer Kesivan Naidoo in a tribute to his mentor on Facebook. "He carved sound from silence and turned drums into language, prayer, protest and poetry. Every beat he struck carried the thunder of exile, the ache of home and the joy of resistance. He did not sim-



ply play music — he channeled it."

"It is with the deepest sadness that we learned today that Louis Moholo-Moholo, original Ogun artist, master drummer, our beloved Tebs, died peacefully at home in South Africa today. Rest in peace, Bra," read a post from Ogun Records, which produced his first leader recording, *Spirits Rejoice!* in 1978.

Moholo-Moholo recorded with a wide array of the biggest names in adventurous music: *Sibanye (We Are One)* (Intakt) with Marilyn Crispell; *The Nearer The Bone, The Sweeter The Meat* (FMP) with Peter Brötzmann and Harry Miller; *Rememberance* (FMP) with Cecil Taylor; *Ancestors* (TUM) with Wadada Leo Smith; *Foxes Fox* (Emanem) with Evan Parker, Steve Beresford and John Edwards; and *Keep Your Heart Straight* (Ogun) with Alexander Hawkins — to name a few.

Prior to his passing, Ogun announced Moholo-Moholo's *Viva-La-Black*, from 1988, has been remastered and released for the first time on CD.

—Frank Alkyer

## Mitchell Seidel, 1957–2025

**PHOTOGRAPHER, WRITER AND EDITOR**

Mitchell Seidel passed away on June 2 at the Bayonne Medical Center in New Jersey after a struggle with congestive heart failure. He was 68.

Born in Newark, New Jersey, Seidel spent his professional career in journalism working for the Bergen Record, the Hudson Times and for decades with the Newark Star Ledger before retiring.

In the jazz world, Seidel contributed to a variety of publications, including DownBeat. His jazz photography garnered many awards and accolades. He was also an active member of the New Jersey Jazz Society.

Seidel had a quick, cutting wit and an eye for capturing artists in the moment. He had a deep passion for the music and the people who played it.

—Frank Alkyer



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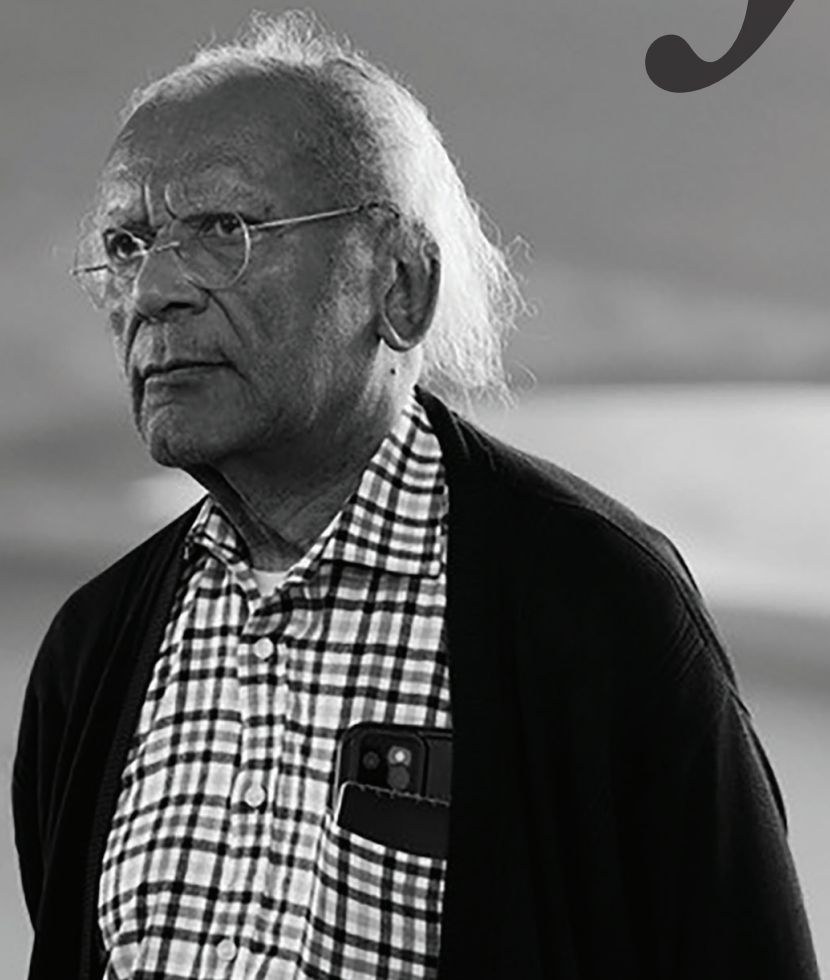
...with a special guest appearance by Grammy-winning pianist Bill Charlap (courtesy of Blue Note Records).







# *Anthony*







# *Braxton*

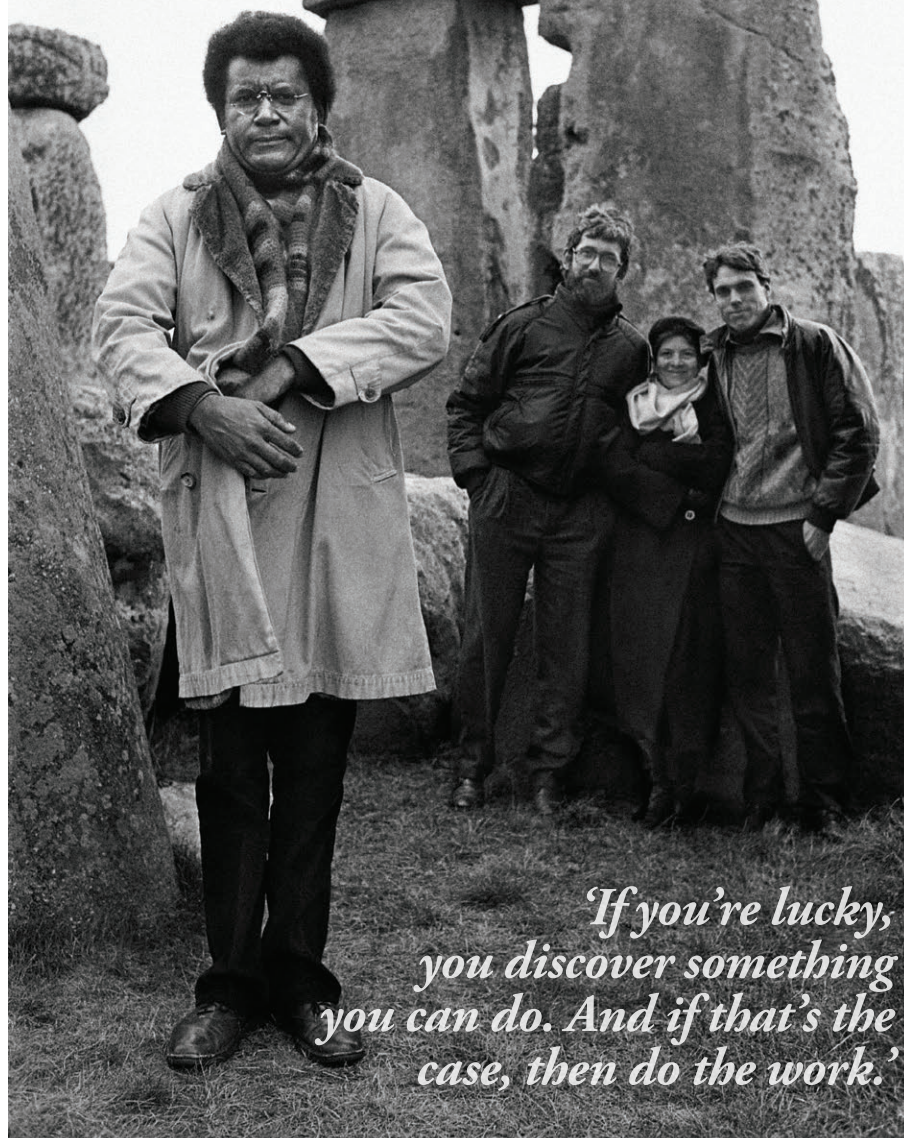
## THE COMPOSER AS PHILOSOPHER

*By Bill Meyer Photo by Marek Bouda*

Anthony Braxton turned 80 in June, and his productivity this year alone exceeds that of some other artists' entire careers. So far in 2025, the bandleader, improviser, composer, educator, unwaveringly positive philosopher and player of all the saxophones from soprano through contrabass — plus a similar range of clarinets and flutes, piano and computer — has released over 14 hours of music.



The Anthony Braxton Quartet at Stonehenge in 1985: from left, Braxton, Mark Dresser, Marilyn Crispell and Gerry Hemingway.



*'If you're lucky,  
you discover something  
you can do. And if that's the  
case, then do the work.'*

That includes *Trillium X* (on PMP), an eight-CD boxed set that presents two complete performances of his latest opera (see the 5-star review on page 72); *Live At Pioneer Works 26 October 2023* (on ESP-Disk'), a woolly collaboration with the noise group Wolf Eyes; and *Quartet (England) 1985* (on Burning Ambulance Music), a six-hour, digital-only collection of previously unreleased live concert recordings by his deservedly celebrated quartet with Marilyn Crispell, Mark Dresser and Gerry Hemingway.

Noting the content of those records, a skeptical observer might question if Braxton is really a jazz musician. They would certainly not be the first, and even though Braxton

was recognized as an NEA Jazz Master in 2014, he would not disagree with them. "I'm not a guy who at some point would call myself a jazz musician," Braxton explains during a video call from his home in Connecticut. "In fact, I've always pushed that back because the jazz musicians were angry at me because they did not like the European side of me or the Asian side of me. No, you're born on a planet. If you're lucky, you discover something you can do. And if that's the case, then do the work. Don't be put off by being a perfectionist. Do the best you can do and don't play around with it. And also, off the record, be sure to have some fun. Music is fun, demonstrating all kind of processes for a person to think of

and to become part of."

Braxton still remembers how it first felt to be smitten by the music of Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers. "I remember thinking, 'How could life get any better than this? This is it!'" Subsequent epiphanies induced by Bill Haley, Dave Brubeck, Sal Mosca, John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, John Cage and Karlheinz Stockhausen affected him just as deeply. The increasingly cosmic motivations of the music he loved informed his own ambition: to make music that would help humanity in a time of turmoil and transition. "I feel that the discipline that we call music is an all-dynamic proposition that includes discovery, momentum and transposition," he says.

During a rehearsal in 2007, Braxton told the members of the AIMToronto Orchestra, "an orchestra is a family." His ensembles, and by extension the efforts of the many musicians who have associated with him, are models for cooperative human activity that aims to do great and beautiful things. And jazz — which was so instrumental in luring him into a life of musical action and has been a touchstone ever since — is at the core of his ever-expanding practice. Tucked in with the set-length collages of Braxton's compositions on *Quartet (England) 1985* are gorgeous soundcheck performances of "All The Things You Are" and "On Green Dolphin Street." The classic quartet lineup of bass, drums, piano and horn is one of his most enduring settings. His discography includes multi-disc sets of standards and astutely interrogative investigations of the music of Charlie Parker, Lennie Tristano and Warne Marsh that amply demonstrate the depth of his understanding and mastery of post-bebop jazz. But jazz is still a subset of music, and for Braxton, the entirety of music is a vehicle to help humanity get to a better place.

Born in Chicago in 1945, Braxton grew up in a family that did not share his passion for increasingly challenging music, but did not discourage it. He began to study music at age 12, and after high school obtained more instruction from Wilson Junior College and Roosevelt University in Chicago, as well as the United States Army, which stationed him in South Korea. After discharge he returned to Chicago and joined the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), an organization that sought to further the creative growth of its members in the face of declining opportunities for the city's African American musicians. AACM members were encouraged to perform solo concerts of original music; the first time Braxton did so, he ran out of ideas after 10 minutes. His response was to devise a personal instrumental lexicon, which he dubbed Language Music, and use it to structure his improvisations. He recorded the double LP *For Alto*, the first album of



unaccompanied alto saxophone music. Its sequential exploration of select parameters set a standard for rigor that his music has upheld ever since. And the graphic titles he gave to his pieces, which looked like circuit schematics, were an early signal that Braxton would not be confined to ordinary ways of doing things.

In the late 1960s Braxton, with fellow AACM members Leroy Jenkins and Wadada Leo Smith, moved to Paris, where he found greater appreciation for his playing and connected with a larger community of freely improvising musicians from other parts of the U.S. and Europe. This began a period where he moved back and forth between the two continents. Recordings with Chick Corea, Dave Holland, Sam Rivers and Barry Altschul raised his profile as an avant-garde jazz player, but it was not until he obtained a contract with the major label Arista in 1974 that he found an opportunity to present the breadth of his musical practice. First, he gave the label several small-group recordings, which obtained strong reviews and decent sales. He followed these with *Creative Orchestra Music* 1976, an astounding big band recording that explored the continuum between Sousa marches and non-repeating contemporary composition; *For Four Orchestras*, which was scored for 160 musicians; and *For Two Pianos*, which presented his music as performed by classically identified players Ursula Oppens and Frederic Rzewski. While the association with Arista ended in 1981, the records he did with the label established the limit-defying parameters of the course he has followed ever since.

Even before his involvement with Arista, Braxton set out to contextualize his efforts. *Tri-Axium Writings*, a three-volume consideration of the history and philosophy of music, presented not only his ideas about music, but a personal language to describe its operation. Not every musician who has played with Braxton has learned the whole conceptual/technical/linguistic shebang, but all of them have had to figure out how to function and cooperate within complex, dynamic systems that require them to work in ways that they might not anywhere else. The quartet with Hemingway, Dresser and Crispell, which toured several times between the mid-1980s and the early 1990s, proved adept at dealing with the entirety of Braxton's catalog as it existed at the time. He might call sequences of pieces that had originally been conceived for very different ensembles, and the band often played two compositions simultaneously. Playing out over the course of a set, their performances were dense, angular and persistently thrilling, even for the listeners (in Braxton's parlance, "friendly experiencers") who did not know the tunes being played.

Braxton has developed a series of systems, each of which relate to the 12 basic languages that he identified after that first humbling solo concert in Chicago, that propose ways for the ensembles ranging in size from trios to unusually configured big bands to proceed. Ghost Trance Music used a steady pulse and long, non-repeating themes to impart a ritual quality. Falling River Music used graphic scores painted by Braxton to elicit music full of movement. Diamond Curtain Wall Music and Lorraine Music used electronics to interact respectively with free improvisation and densely notated scores. And musicians playing Echo Echo Mirror House Music wielded mp3 players loaded with Braxton's back catalog, which they could play during the performance. All of this to help musicians make decisions on how to navigate an overwhelming flow of data and do so with a consciousness of how their decisions will affect the musical whole.

Alongside these systems, Braxton has composed a series of operas that use the medium's bigness and spectacle as ways to explore interrelations between past, present and future. While their sound grammar conforms to the genre's conventional combinations of classically trained voices operating within orchestral environments, the dramatic action shuffles scenarios dealing with the post-Antebellum South, contemporary finance and science fiction futures. Once staged, they are available to be recombined in modular fashion. Another plus-



## Congratulations Professor Anthony Braxton!

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twenty-four wondrous years as our  
teacher and colleague.*

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**Wesleyan University**





The PMP Orchestra, under the direction of Roland Dahinden, perform's Braxton's *Trillium X*, the composer's sixth opera.

sized recurring project is the Sonic Genome. Each occurrence involves assembling a dozen local and imported groups inside a large cultural institution, such as Berlin's Gropius Bau and Turin's Egyptian Museum, for a day. The assembled musicians navigate hundreds of his compositions in a semi-autonomous but interconnected fashion while the friendly experiencers wander between them.

Of course, these projects require enormous resources. In 1994, Braxton received a MacArthur Foundation grant, which he used to launch the Tri-Centric Foundation. The non-profit organization maintains an archive of Braxton's scores and writings, and has facilitated the production of his large-scale works. The foundation's board is composed of individuals who have played and studied academically with Braxton. In 1985 he took a teaching position at Mills College, and from 1990 to 2013 he was a professor of music at Wesleyan College, teaching ensemble and lecture classes. Saxophonist and multimedia artist Chris Jonas was Braxton's assistant at Wesleyan from 1997 to 2000, has co-conducted the Sonic Genome and is currently the board vice president of the Tri-Centric Foundation. He wrote from Berlin to share his perspective on Braxton's practice as an educator:

"His approach to mentorship is as idiosyncratic as is the case for almost everything else

in his world. I believe that the starting point for his paradigm of mentorship is probably Muhal Richard Abrams, albeit through Braxton's affirmative and kind approach to the developing work of the young musicians in his sphere. He certainly has philosophies and approaches that I think many of us have adopted and adapted to our own work, well known through his writing. But I think it is probably the more first-hand experience of working inside his projects that has had the most significant impact on his former students. In this way, if teaching is what you call it, he teaches by example. And I don't think he is terribly concerned with what specific messages or lessons are being conveyed. I think that is part of the tradition that we all now come from. It is across generations that this stuff is learned. Iterated.

"Among the things I believe may be shared between many of us who have come through this informal school include the necessity to put in many hours. Under all conditions to do your best, a kind of due diligence. Make big, hard-to-imagine things. Another is the idea that an ensemble or a project is a living, breathing community. He is famous for not providing music to performers until the moment they are walking on stage so that there is no chance of practicing the music. This would seem counterintuitive for a composer who has spent dozens of hours creating compositional

structures for a concert. By doing so, he forces everyone not only to tap into a developing set of skills of creating music that is extraordinary on the fly, but most significantly, relying on one another to do so."

Braxton's own response attests to the seriousness with which he has approached his educational work. It is one more way in which he is trying to help humanity.

"I've tried with my students to give them good flex logic options, so they won't be trapped in one space. OK? I have also tried to encourage not to get locked in anyone's space, but to go outside of your sweet spot and see what kind of things are happening. All of those kind of experiences will help you to define your composite formulations as it relates to the discipline of music, as it relates to the experience of constructing structure, or the experience of transcendence through fusion into spiritual dynamics or narrative logics. Plus, I've tried to have fun with my students. It's beautiful to see a young person discover something and then start just moving up, growing up quickly, because something pushed his button. I feel kind of like 'mother hen Braxton' when I think of my incredible students and how fortunate I have been that I would have students who didn't just run away from me at the end of the class, but rather became part of my family."



# M Manhattan School of Music

## CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR WINNERS of *DownBeat's* 73rd Annual Critics Poll



### ALBUM OF THE YEAR

Patricia Brennan, *Breaking Stretch*

#### FEATURING

Jon Irabagon (MM '03), alto and  
soprano saxophones

Mark Shim, tenor saxophone (faculty)

Adam O'Farrill (BM '16), trumpet



### GROUP OF THE YEAR

Mary Halvorson, *Amaryllis*

#### FEATURING

Adam O'Farrill (BM '16), trumpet

Jacob Garchik (BM '98), trombone



### LARGE ENSEMBLE OF THE YEAR

Maria Schneider Orchestra

#### FEATURING

Donny McCaslin, woodwinds (faculty)

Jay Anderson, bass (faculty)

Nadje Noordhuis (MM '05), trumpet/flugelhorn

Ryan Keberle (BM '01), trombone

Tony Kadleck (BM '89), trumpet/flugelhorn



### TRUMPETER OF THE YEAR

Ambrose Akinmusire  
(BM '05)



### KEYBOARDIST OF THE YEAR

Herbie Hancock  
('61, HonDMA '23)



### ARRANGER OF THE YEAR

Darcy James Argue  
(faculty)



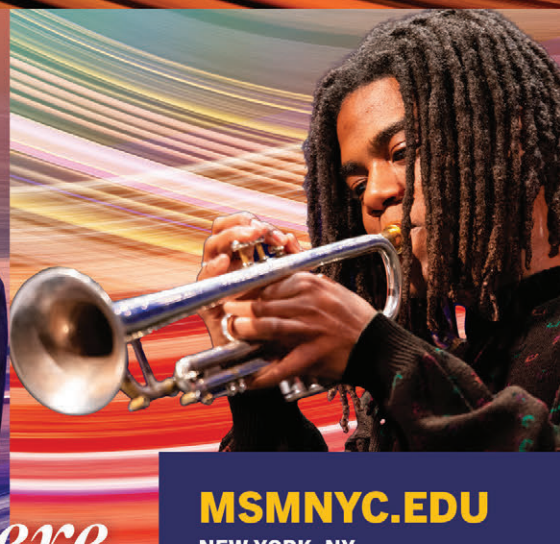
### RIISING STAR ARRANGER

Anna Webber (MM '10)

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"Tito's charisma, along with the rhythmic interaction and melodic interaction — everything was so fine, so exquisite," said percussionist Giovanni Hidalgo.

# Tito Puente

## THE SERIOUS SHOWMAN

By Aaron Cohen Photo by Teri Bloom

When percussionist Giovanni Hidalgo speaks about Tito Puente, he spins out a flood of examples of his mentor's accomplishments.

These include stories highlighting the bandleader's extraordinary technique, big-hearted generosity and ability to write complex arrangements, "like you would eat ice cream." Ultimately, he said playing in Puente's Golden Latin Jazz All Stars during the 1990s was like being invited to join a league of superheroes.

While Puente has yet to join the Marvel Universe, his induction into the DownBeat Hall of Fame by the Veterans Committee is one more illustration of his musical immortality. At the time of his death 25 years ago (at the age of 77) he had recorded more than 120 albums and typically played 200 concerts a year. Popular worldwide for his mastery of such Latin idioms as the mambo and guaguanco, Puente never rested on his exalted status.

Along with the global acclaim, Puente embodied as much complexity as the rhythms he played. An irrepressible showman who joked and mugged onstage up until the end of his life, the bandleader was also a tough taskmaster as well as a serious, and prolific, composer. A Puerto Rican cultural hero, Puente embraced musical influences from all over the

world. While Puente was comfortable in prestigious concert halls, large music festivals and the White House, he sounded equally enthused playing to kids in New York City barrios.

Born Ernesto Anthony Puente in that city in 1923, he grew up in Manhattan's Spanish Harlem. He absorbed classical piano and jazz drumming while also being noticed as a ballroom dancer. As Latin bands thrived in the city, Puente played drums with Machito's Afro-Cubans and Johnny Rodriguez's Stork Club Orchestra while he was a teenager. During Puente's time with Machito, he brought the timbales to the front of the stage where they would remain throughout his life.

United States Navy service during World War II also shaped Puente's path. That education came amid strenuous circumstances: Along with playing alto saxophone, clarinet and bugle, he was a machine gunner on an aircraft carrier. Through the G.I. Bill, he studied composition theory at Juilliard after the war. Another post-war experience also inspired him. Because of a delay in troop movements, Puente spent time across the Pacific studying Asian music. These countries' distinctive

melodic ideas are clear in such songs as "Hong Kong Mambo" from his 1957 album *Dance Mania* and in subtler ways that impacted his music and consequently wound up exerting a wide influence, according to drummer Bobby Sanabria, who worked with Puente in the 1990s. "Tito was one of the first to use voicings in fourths," Sanabria said. "That came from his exposure to Asian music. Tito modernized the way we arrange through his progressive jazz technique."

Upon returning to New York stages in the late 1940s, Puente was a key part of the mambo rage at such clubs as the Palladium Ballroom. His command of Afro-Cuban rhythms, mixed with original ideas and an unstoppable exuberance, put Puente at the forefront among such fierce bandleaders as Machito and Tito Rodriguez. Puente told author Steven Loza in the book *Tito Puente and the Making of Latin Music* that while Dizzy Gillespie's adoration of Latin rhythms are well known, Charlie Parker and Dexter Gordon also jammed with his group at the Palladium.

Discerning listeners would have heard how Puente reflected the swing drummers he admired, particularly Gene Krupa. But Puente also originated a distinctive approach. This included playing cascara rhythm patterns with his right hand and the two-bar clave with his left. He also began recording singles with various singers in 1949 (these were compiled on CD on the exceptional series *Tito Puente: The Complete 78s*). His expansive 1950s albums on RCA featured striking modern arrangements for *Puente Goes Jazz* (1956) and *Night Beat* (1957). One bold session, *Revolving Bandstand* (1960), is an orchestral call-and-response between his ensemble and Buddy Morrow's.

During the 1960s and '70s Puente became known as The King of Salsa, even as he derided that term as musically vague. Audiences especially adored his collaborations with that genre's queen, Celia Cruz. He also enjoyed big crossover success in 1971 when Santana turned his "Oye Como Va" into a rock hit.

Puente's comic timing equaled the seriousness of his music. He even became a cartoon character, appearing on "The Simpsons" in 1995. His set at Florida's Clearwater Jazz Holiday eight months before his passing exemplified Puente as both goofily exaggerated ringmaster and demanding bandleader.

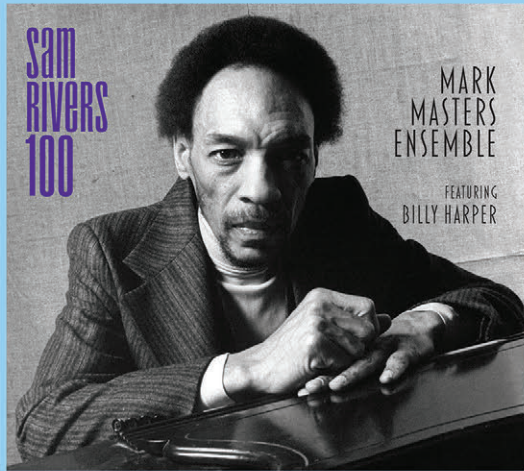
As Hidalgo said, seeing Puente perform up close meant embracing his total persona — and the entire package endures.

"Tito's charisma, along with the rhythmic interaction and melodic interaction — everything was so fine, so exquisite" Hidalgo said. "All of us had a unique style, and when that is put together, it's an example for people around the planet on how to be together and respect us not only as a group, but a family."

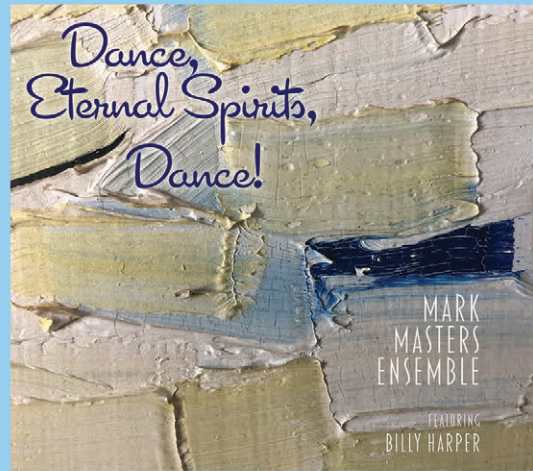
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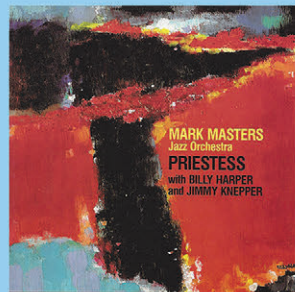
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Acclaimed arranger and band-Leader Mark Masters reimagines music by visionary saxophonists Billy Harper and Sam Rivers on two stunning albums. Both albums feature ingenious new arrangements for different configurations of the Mark Masters Ensemble,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

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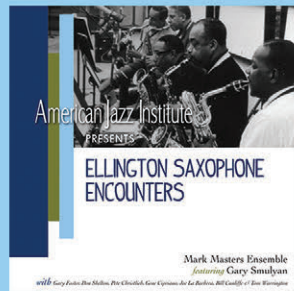
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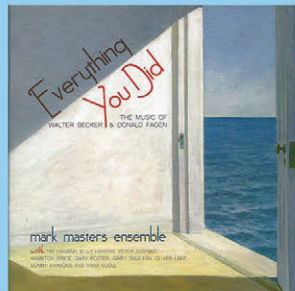
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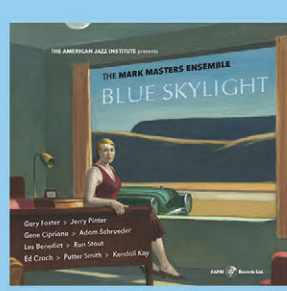
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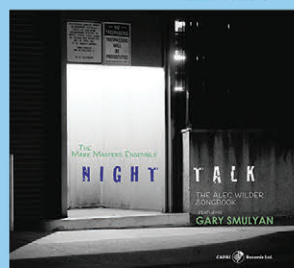
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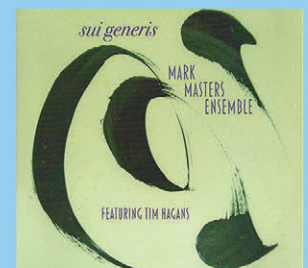
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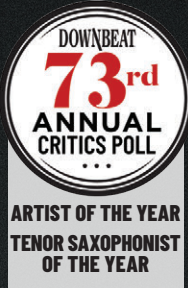


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# *James Brandon Lewis*

## 'THE WORK NEVER ENDS'

*By Ammar Kalia Photo by Julien Vonier*

James Brandon Lewis is no stranger to the DownBeat Critics Poll. In 2023, the Brooklyn-based saxophonist received the Rising Star on tenor saxophone and Best Group honors, celebrating a run of acclaimed releases including 2021's *Jesup Wagon*, which honored the life and work of African American polymath Dr. George Washington Carver, and his 2023 boundary-pushing debut with the cult label Anti-, *Eye Of I*.









The Trio: from left, Chad Taylor, Lewis and Josh Werner.



With The Messthetics: from left, Lewis, Anthony Pirog, Joe Lally and Brendan Canty.

In 2024, he was named Critics Poll Artist of the Year, joining the likes of previous winners Charles Lloyd and Jon Batiste, and capping off a frenetic 12 months that saw him release his tribute to Mahalia Jackson, *For Mahalia, With Love*, with his Red Lily Quintet; a new record with his quartet, *Transfiguration*, playing his improvisatory system of “molecular systematic music”; and a debut collaborative album with post-punk supergroup The Messthetics, *The Messthetics And James Brandon Lewis*.

Lewis’ star has ascended even further to find him named Artist of the Year for the second year running and Tenor Saxophonist of the Year, alongside previous winners such as Stan Getz and John Coltrane. All three of his albums this year placed in the Top 20 for Album of the Year — *Apple Cores* with his trio; *The Messthetics And James Brandon Lewis* and *Transfiguration*, his quartet recording.

“I’m still processing all these accolades, but at heart, I’m just James,” Lewis says from his hotel room while on the road in Pittsburgh. “There’s a vulnerability to putting so much work out there, and I’m humbled that these records have been received so well. I don’t make music to win awards, and I don’t see these awards as a point of arrival. They are simply the beginning of another phase — markers of time in my journey of creativity.”

Lewis might have 16 albums to his name since the release of his 2010 debut *Moments*, but it’s a strange coincidence that sees the most recent milestone in his creative journey taking inspiration from these very pages. On *Apple Cores*, his latest trio outing with long-

time collaborators drummer Chad Taylor and bassist Josh Werner, Lewis pays homage to writer Amiri Baraka’s “Apple Cores” columns that chronicled the avant garde explorations of jazz in *DownBeat* throughout the 1960s.

“Amiri Baraka’s [*Black Music*, which contains the ‘Apple Cores’ columns] was required reading while I was studying at Howard University, so his writing has been with me for a long time,” Lewis explains. “I’ve never been one to label myself free-jazz or avant garde, I just enjoy blurring the line, and Baraka writes really engagingly and with such feeling in ‘Apple Cores’ about people blurring the line between form and abstraction. It felt like the perfect title to encapsulate this record.”

While Baraka’s writing provided the intellectual framework for the album, when it came to improvising with Taylor and Werner in the recording studio, another freewheeling jazz influence came to the fore musically: Don Cherry. Lewis is no stranger to the multi-instrumentalist and formative genre-breaker, recording a version of Cherry’s polyrhythmic 1985 track “Bamako Love” on his 2015 album *Days Of FreeMan*, as well as previously collaborating with Cherry’s bandmembers William Parker and Hamid Drake and being mentored by his Old And New Dreams bandmate Charlie Haden while studying composition at CalArts.

“I spent two days in the studio improvising with Josh and Chad and the resulting music spoke to me as a tribute to Don Cherry’s curiosity,” Lewis says. “I’ve always been a handshake away from meeting Don, and while he could have stayed in one lane, he was always pushing his creativity and curiosity, from

incorporating instruments from around the world into his improvisations to rapping in the ’80s. He said that music should be of mind and of feeling, using our intuition to become what we are playing, and that’s something I have always strived towards, too.”

The resulting 11 tracks of *Apple Cores* employ Lewis’ signature muscular saxophone tone across compositions rooted in an earthy, deep-swinging sense of groove. Tracks like “Five Spots To Caravan” and “Apple Cores #1” see Lewis playing punchy, frenetic lines over Werner’s pulsating bass lines and Taylor’s textural drumming, while “Prince Eugene” floats through a balladic melody played on the mbira — a Zimbabwean thumb piano and an instrument Lewis says “is very Don Cherry.” “Don’t Forget Jayne” channels Ornette Coleman’s buffeting barrage of free saxophone phrasing, and “D.C. Got Pocket” does exactly what its title says, sinking into a fat-pocket funk groove worthy of Don Cherry’s piercing trumpet improvisations.

“The titles are references to these artists as much as the music,” Lewis continues. “‘Five Spots To Caravan’ nods to the Five Spot in New York where Ornette Coleman made his debut alongside Don Cherry in 1959, as well as the Caravan of Dreams performing arts center in Ornette’s hometown in Fort Worth, Texas, while tracks like ‘Remember Brooklyn & Moki’ and ‘Don’t Forget Jayne’ are my effort to draw attention to the spouses of these great musicians, Moki Cherry and Jayne Cortez [wife of Ornette Coleman]. They aren’t just ‘the wives,’ since there is a wealth of artistry in who these men decided to be with, and I like





The Quartet, from left, Lewis, Taylor, Aruán Ortiz and Brad Jones.

to imagine them all hanging out back in the day, sharing ideas and opinions on the music.”

As much as *Apple Cores* is a paean to the past greats of jazz music, it is equally a testament to Lewis’ longstanding relationship with Werner and Taylor and the enduring appeal of

alone. There’s a freestyle sensibility and flow that makes the music happen and while I’m indebted to great saxophone trios like Sonny Rollins’, I equally find my trio playing sending me into funk, hip-hop and the blues, which always feels like a reference to my upbringing

rienced it and in the process of investigating my own process in recent years, it’s helped me understand how important it is to know yourself fully when it comes to making art.”

With his thesis complete and ambitions to publish his research, it might seem that Lewis has come to such an understanding of his own process that there is little left to discover. And yet, in typically restless fashion, his roster of forthcoming projects still reads like a list of references that only an endlessly curious mind could think up.

There is a new quartet record, *Abstraction Is Deliverance*, exploring Lewis’ rhizomatic “molecular systematic music” method through ballads and accompanying text from writer Teju Cole, plans for a new Red Lily Quintet record and another trio album, as well as a possible future project inspired by multi-reedist Eric Dolphy, which is still in its early stages.

“I’m always searching,” Lewis says after taking a pause. “The work never ends.”

And with that pronouncement, it’s time for him to pack up his saxophone and head back out onto the road, as later this evening he is due on stage in Philadelphia to play alongside yet another jazz great, Marshall Allen, as he celebrates his 101st birthday. It’s an apt pairing, as whether he is being garlanded with awards or not, it is difficult to shake the conviction that Lewis will spend the next decades carrying on much as Allen has done for the past 80 years, always looking for the next note and never failing to push forward the legacy of this great improvisatory tradition we call jazz.

DB

*‘I’ve never been one to label myself as free-jazz or avant-garde; I just enjoy blurring the line.’*

the trio format.

“I’ve been playing with Chad for at least a decade and Josh since 2018 — we’re always talking about music, and we have built it up over time, which means it’s always getting better and stronger,” he says. “Chad has worked with masters like Pharoah Sanders and Josh has played with people like Wu Tang Clan and Lee Scratch Perry, so between the three of us there is always a wealth of information to draw on when we’re playing.”

As a trio, Lewis pulls from this wellspring of creative trust as a jumping-off point for new and often unexpected explorations.

“The trio allows you to be more in charge of your melodic line, and I like the challenge of not knowing where it’s going to go next,” he says. “I enjoy not being able to rely on anything or being held up by anyone, since you have to be building the melodic development

in Buffalo, the hometown of Rick James, Ani DiFranco and The Goo Goo Dolls.”

Growing up in Buffalo and first encountering music during the sermons his father, a pastor, would hold, Lewis went on to study clarinet at the age of 9 before progressing to the saxophone and learning melodies through playing Disney songs by ear. It is a musical upbringing that he had been increasingly focusing on over the past three years while he was studying for a Ph.D. at University of the Arts before it closed. Part autoethnography and part musicological study, the doctorate has seen Lewis look back at his creative life as a way of understanding the philosophy behind his music.

“It’s a behind the scenes of what a note is — the lived experience shaping and building your artistic DNA,” he says. “I always say that you can’t play about love if you’ve never expe-





ALBUM OF THE YEAR  
VIBRAPHONIST  
OF THE YEAR







# Patricia Brennan

## EXPLORING THE SUPERUNKOWN

By Jim Macnie Photo by Werner Siebert

**You could pretty much see this one coming. If you were one of Patricia Brennan's Facebook friends, her wall posts around the end of 2024 seemed like a full-blown gratitude festival.**

**T**he bandleader's thank-yous to publications praising *Breaking Stretch* (for either album-of-the-year status or one of the annum's top 10) stacked up with increased velocity, each new citation heaping more love on the vibraphonist's work.

The New York Times, Bandcamp, NPR, the Francis Davis Jazz Critics Poll, Stereogum, Pop Matters, NYC Jazz Record, even Kareem Abdul-Jabbar threw compliments her way. From its Sept. 6 arrival date to the end of December and beyond, the buzz was undeniable. A consensus album.

And why not? Brennan's third disc, a septet affair based around reeds, brass and rhythm, was intrepid and visionary, the subject of several glowing conversations in my neck of the woods. Now the DownBeat Critics Poll makes it the year's top dog, and, yeah, you could pretty much see it coming. It's extra-sweet that our writers have also deemed Brennan Vibraphonist of the Year, a hard-earned distinction in an era when the instrument has several impressive players.

The 40-year-old mallet whiz is fully tickled by

the acclaim, but during a recent video chat quickly yields to the collective prowess of the squad who so effectively rendered her quite elaborate, rather tricky and occasionally daunting pieces.

"The whole team made it what it is," Brennan says. "[The most] satisfying part is knowing that what I wanted the listener to feel and hear actually came through. It's about communication. As a composer, as a performer, the fact that the message got across is awesome."

That team is populated by some of modern jazz's most impressive improvisers. Trumpeter Adam O'Farrill and saxophonists Jon Irabagon and Mark Shim unite with the remarkably insistent rhythm section of drummer Marcus Gilmore, bassist Kim Cass, percussionist Mauricio Herrera and the leader on marimba, vibraphone and electronics. And that message — well, it can be complex at times.

This critic gave the record a full five stars in DownBeat's November issue, and the review applauded the storm of action responsible for the music's character.





The *Breaking Stretch* band: from left, Kim Cass, Jon Irabagon, Marcus Gilmore, Brennan, Mark Shim, Adam O'Farrill and Mauricio Herrera.

Swirling thematic motifs, frenzied sax declarations, time-signature disruptions, Soca allusions, bass reveries, abstract brasstronica, heartrending pastorals ... all seem to be unleashed at once.

*Breaking Stretch* (Pyroclastic) isn't mainstream fare, but the eloquence of its commotion is obvious. A big dash of pleasure comes from the roiling intricacies of its astutely calibrated thrust. "Five Suns" is a futuristic "Salt Peanuts," thick with zig-zagging motifs. "Manufacturers Trust Company Building" is three-and-a-half minutes of jagged outbursts, orchestrated to shift while activating new ways to dazzle the listener.

Many of these pieces start with the rhythmic

structures pointedly scripted by the composer; this child of the conservatory is now an educator as well, and Brennan says she often has a "very mathematical" way of shaping her music, as on the album's "555," which breaks down the time combinations to create a clave web that instantly sucks you in. Shim blows blustery over the loping jaunt, and the other horns circle the track's upper atmosphere like hawks on the hunt. Brennan's instrument is in the foreground, nudging Cass' pulse and the drummers' poly-beats. "It's everyone's job to make the music move," she confides.

This swarm of sounds is something the Mexico-born, Brooklyn-based Brennan was

looking for while writing and recording. At times the group sounds larger than seven instruments, and that too was sketched out. A vitality that any bandleader would love to claim lives within the charts' cross-hatched lines. But, she cautions, density isn't a goal in and of itself; the performance must always be seducing the listener on some level.

"No matter how complex the source is, I still ask myself a question: Does it feel good? I could add all these crazy rhythms, but if it doesn't make any sense, and I'm just doing it for the sake of making it complicated, it misses its purpose."

That outlook is born of a music-drenched upbringing. Brennan was raised in a home full of songs with a percussionist father and a Zep-and-Hendrix-loving mom. Outside, the street musicians of Veracruz were ubiquitous. "Even if you want to get away from them, they follow you. No joke, you'll literally see four guys outside a restaurant carrying a marimba everywhere."

She grew up playing piano and percussion as a child. By 15, she was studying harmony, counterpoint and more advanced compositional mechanics. Balancing street sounds with classical notions is part of her agenda. She says she never particularly saw them as two separate things. When the conversation turns to that stance being a way of disrupting musical stereotypes, the subject of rebellion bubbles up.

"I'm basically cautious and need to do lots of

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pre-planning, but I've always questioned things. It's not that I was disobedient or anything, but I've often thought, 'Why is it [done] this way?' So maybe a rebel spirit comes into it."

Veteran producer David Breskin, who has helmed several titles for Pyroclastic, helped organize many of these notions. He was behind the board for Brennan's second disc, *More Touch*, and established a simpatico bond with the bandleader that bolstered the impact of *Breaking Stretch*. Focusing on precision and punch, Breskin wanted to make "each ingredient be distinct without separating them so much that it feels sterile. I like it when all the instruments are kind of glued together," he says.

Another compelling facet is track flow; *Breaking Stretch* scans as if it were a planned-out suite. Breskin, who is an insightful writer in a variety of realms and has produced artists as diverse as Ronald Shannon Jackson and Mary Halvorson, has a strong grip on ways to make a program engagingly unfold.

"I don't know that much about music [in specific]," he says with a sly grin, "but what I do know — and I think this goes to my background as both a journalist and poet — is how to tell a story. 'How do [these pieces] link together? And how can we end up somewhere different than where we started?' I'm trying to build a fabric."

Mission accomplished, because another key attribute of *Breaking Stretch* is the coherence of its emotional arc. Once it starts, each song seems to be passing the baton to the next; the album refuses to yield until it's had its full say.

"I remember sending [David] two different sequence options and he definitely [weighed in], because he thinks about the same things," says Brennan. "And you mentioned clarity before; on this album he pushed me to explore the limits, but was always reminding us to remember the listener. To have someone corroborating your actions ... makes you even more motivated."

Together with accumulated experience, such support has nudged the vibraphonist into becoming a more seasoned leader, a captain who wants to make sure "everybody's taken care of, and nobody's feeling the stress of any situation."

That jibes with Irabagon's perspective. He was pleased to have a few days of rehearsal and plenty of studio time to record. "It's rare that you get an opportunity to really dig into music like that," he says. "She had, what, 10 or 11 tunes with amazing melody lines and crazy rhythmic things? Every aspect of it was challenging and beautiful at the same time. [We all left] the studio saying, 'Man, this is probably going to be one of the best records I'm ever going to be on.' And now it's one of those rare cases where the album is getting the recognition it deserves."

The saxophonist was also impressed by his boss's improvising skills, deeming her "a great vibraphonist." The DownBeat voters concur, and Brennan, a Bobby Hutcherson fiend who

genuflects to Walt Dickerson and Steve Nelson, remains enthralled with her instrument and its possibilities. "The vibraphone is still new in so many ways," she says. "Its sound quality is so mysterious and so weird at the same time. It's transparent, but it's clean; it's loud, but it's soft."

Brennan augments her approach with electronics. At an intimate gig with O'Farrill at Brooklyn's Lowlands earlier this year, she seemed to be glancing at her foot pedals as much as she was at the bars.

"The [pedals] are just another color in my palette; they expand the instrument's range

beyond what's there acoustically. It's silly to limit any options."

Brennan's experimental streak drives *Of The Near And Far*, her next album due in October. It's a sextet augmented by a string ensemble that claims Stravinsky, Stockhausen and Soundgarden as influences.

Intrigued by astrophotography, Brennan writes that ideas for the new music came from pondering what lies beyond the night sky, and turns the "shapes of the constellations into pitch collections." Who knows? Maybe the superunknown is best divined with mallets. **DB**

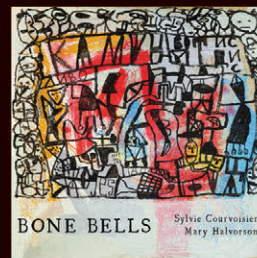
## Pyroclastic Records Celebrates Its Artists with Albums Voted Among the Top 5 for Album of the Year in the 73<sup>rd</sup> DownBeat Critics Poll!



**PATRICIA BRENNAN**  
**BREAKING STRETCH**  
Album of the Year and  
Vibraphonist of the Year



**KRIS DAVIS TRIO**  
**RUN THE GAUNTLET**  
Pianist of the Year



**SYLVIE COURVOISIER  
& MARY HALVORSON**  
**BONE BELLS**  
Guitarist of the Year

**And Congratulations to  
Pyroclastic Artist Ingrid Laubrock  
for being named  
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**Craig Taborn, Nels Cline,  
Marcus Gilmore**

**Of The Near And Far**  
**Patricia Brennan**

# PYROCLASTIC RECORDS





# CRITICS CAPSULES

We asked our participating critics to elaborate on several of this year's honorees. They offered plenty of high praise!



## *Immanuel Wilkins*

Alto Saxophonist of the Year  
Rising Star Artist of the Year

In a somewhat short span since his debut, *Omega*, for Blue Note in 2020, Immanuel Wilkins has made his mark. He's developed a highly individual alto sax sound, built on elements of early mentor Marshall Allen, Paul Desmond, Greg Osby and Kenny Garrett, and evolved an imaginative musical vision and context for it to flourish. This extends from a deepening spiritual awareness, a desire to collaborate with other artistic disciplines through to highlighting civil rights issues, the latter under heavy manners in today's world.

Wilkins also studied art history while at Juilliard and was encouraged by Jason Moran in the music-art continuum while touring with him from 2017. His wish to break down barriers in music and the arts has led to his participation in interdisciplinary events such as The Black Chapel in London and Black Monks in New York.

Wilkins has become a critics' favorite, topping DownBeat's Rising Star Alto Saxophonist category in 2022 followed by Alto Saxophonist in 2023 and Jazz Group of the Year and Alto Saxophonist wins last year. He's also scored high in the Jazzwise Albums of the Year Critics Poll for his three Blue Note releases: *Omega*, *The 7th Hand* and the entwining strands of ancestry and the plight of the Harlem Six on *Blues Blood*. For this deep, intriguing player, composer and thinker, the Rising Star win is richly deserved.

—Jon Newey, editor in chief, Jazzwise magazine

## Ambrose Akinmusire

Trumpeter of the Year

I was 17 when I first saw Ambrose Akinmusire perform at the Pacific Northwest's lauded jazz workshop, Jazz Port Townsend. I was just a kid and Akinmusire had just released his debut record, *Prelude to ... Cora*, but I was immediately drawn in by his finesse and soulful depth.

As a trumpet player, Akinmusire is special. Jazz trumpet is so often about volume, bravado and heat — colors which Akinmusire paints with deftly — but he's also developed the cooler pallet. Akinmusire, who leads his groups collaboratively and understatedly, draws on the instrument's capacity for tender nuance through subtle embouchure shifts, command of breath and unconventional melodic ideas. Likewise, he is among the first artists I ever heard to conceptually highlight the natural connection between jazz lineage and the spirit of hip-hop, an effort and aesthetic that's iterated on by emerging jazz talent today. He can artfully shift between these many colors in response to the moment, displaying undeniable vision and command of his instrument.

Over time, Akinmusire's gifts for collaging texture, timbre, pulse, style and emotion have only sweetened, and the critics have noticed. His latest project, *honey from a winter stone*, draws on chamber strings, electronic effects, rap verses, hip-hop beats and impressive trumpet interpretations. It's one of his very best. It spotlights Akinmusire at the height of his ability as a composer, arranger and musician, propelling jazz ever-forward.

—Alexa Peters



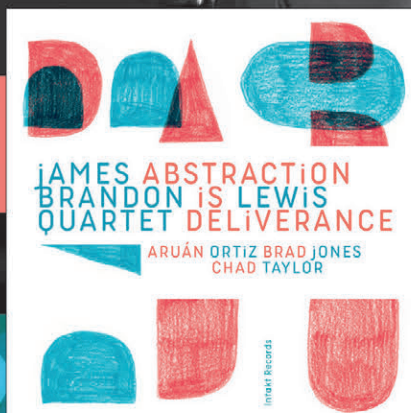


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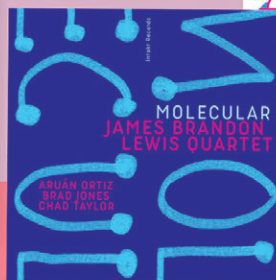
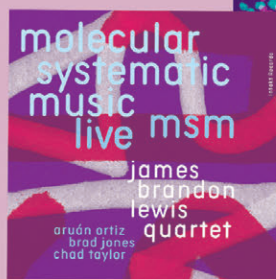
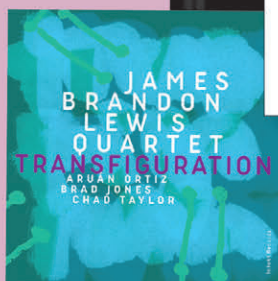
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# James Brandon Lewis

## Tenor Saxophonist of the Year + Artist of the Year 2025



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ANDREW WAGNER

## Meshell Ndegeocello

Beyond Artist of the Year  
Electric Bassist of the Year

Multi-instrumentalist, composer, bandleader and vocalist Meshell Ndegeocello has been a musical force to be reckoned with ever since she dropped her debut album *Plantation Lullabies* in 1993. She sang about the plural state of the world and the personal inventions and dimensions of her identity. Ndegeocello has also recorded the music of Prince, Sade and TLC, but her 2024 release, *No More Water: The Gospel Of James Baldwin*, is her towering tribute to the legendary essayist and novelist who celebrated his centenary last year.

Ndegeocello performed a concert in 2016 dedicated to Baldwin at The Harlem Stage Gatehouse as part of its annual showcase honoring him. She read his seminal book, *The Fire Next Time*, which changed her life and her music. *No More Water* finds Ndegeocello as part of an ensemble that includes younger musicians who grew up listening to her. These talented young Turks include guitarist and co-producer Chris Bruce, vocalist Justin Hicks, saxophonist Josh Johnson, keyboardist Jebin Bruni, drummer-vocalist Kenita Miller-Hicks, keyboardists Jake Sherman and Julius Rodriguez, trumpeter Paul Thompson, spoken word poet Staceyann Chin and Pulitzer Prize-winning author and critic Hilton Als.

Baldwin was a child preacher, which is why the spirit of the Black church permeates *No More Water's* 17 tracks. They range from the mellow dramatic backbeat of "Trouble," the insurgent, spoken-word urgency of "Raise The Roof" and Ndegeocello's guitar-driven "The Price Of The Ticket" to the Global South-grooved "Travel" and the Afro-anthem "Pride I" and "Pride II." Baldwin's writings on race and love have been illuminated by Ndegeocello's evocative musical parallel.

—Eugene Holley Jr.

## Ingrid Laubrock

Rising Star Composer of the Year  
Rising Star Large Ensemble of the Year

*Purposing The Air* is a triumph of modern chamber music, refined, cerebral and emotionally resonant. Though traces of jazz surface in the phrasing, the experience is more akin to attending a contemporary recital at a modern art museum: demanding, intimate and unapologetically artistic. Every performer involved seeks not just technical precision, but also theatrical nuance and expressive depth. It stands, without question, among the most compelling musical releases in recent memory. To fully engage with this record, one must enter Laubrock's world shaped by a lifelong love of literature and language.

Raised in a home where the sound and meaning of words were revered, Laubrock composes with a poet's ear and a philosopher's restraint. Her music invites introspection and resists easy interpretation, resulting in a body of work that feels both timeless and uncompromisingly modern.

She recalls learning Portuguese while performing with Brazilian singer Mônica Vasconcelos, who emphasized the emotional weight of lyrics. That melding of linguistic sensitivity and musical experimentation informs her compositional voice. Many of the pieces were composed in solitude during the 2021 COVID lockdown, often while in residence in the U.S. and Europe or in rare moments of domestic quiet. The poems that inspired the duets were matched to instruments intuitively, less by logic than by sonic intuition. The result is an album of rare coherence, driven by emotion and executed with grace. My vote reflects this artistry, and a desire to spotlight a singular female voice in contemporary music.

—Thierry De Clemensat



JESSICA HALLOCK



MARK SHELDON



## Brian Blade

### Drummer of the Year

American drummer Brian Blade is a true master of his craft, equally adept at creating tight rhythmic pulses or embracing a freer approach — all while never abandoning the melodic and tonal sensitivity that makes him a standout ensemble player. I'm always captivat-

ed by musicians who seem to "speak" through their instruments, and Blade does just that, expressing emotion and setting mood with effortless grace and deep authenticity.

Whether striking skins or cymbals, his refined touch, fluidity and soulfulness consis-

tently surprise and inspire. Rooted in gospel and spiritual jazz, Blade's style carries a profound sense of groove, steering clear of flashy pyrotechnics in favor of mature musicality. His amazing ears and intuitive reactions elevate the music, giving him the ability to shape a piece from within, rather than dominate it.

One of Blade's most admirable qualities is his ability to offer an active rhythmic foundation — constantly engaging with his bandmates in ways that are tasteful, meaningful and inspirational — without overshadowing the soloists. His playing often invites conversation, not competition.

With his Fellowship Band, Blade has earned a well-deserved place in the modern jazz canon, thanks to the uniqueness and quality of his creative compositions. His contributions to projects led by Kenny Garrett, Wayne Shorter, Joshua Redman, John Patitucci and, more recently, Charles Lloyd, have solidified his place as one of the most respected drummers in contemporary jazz.

To me, Brian Blade is a living legend, a musician who never disappoints, regardless of the context he's in.

—Filipe Freitas



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MICHAEL JACKSON

## Isaiah Collier & the Chosen Few

Rising Star Group of the Year

Rising Star Tenor Saxophonist of the Year

Rising Star Flutist of the Year

When I spoke to reedist/composer Isaiah Collier back in March, I asked him why he titled his latest album *The World Is On Fire*. He explained that he wrote most of the material as a student on the West Coast encountering wildfires for the first time. “And then,” he shared, “[the title] went from that literal thing to becoming a metaphorical thing. It became an eternal fire, an emotional fire and then really came back as a physical one. I just think the timing is very befitting.”

After having seen Isaiah Collier & The Chosen Few blow the proverbial roof off of the Brooklyn Bowl during Winter Jazz Fest in New York City, it’s clear that not only are they adept at reading the tea leaves of the moment, they also speak presciently to the future of jazz. And while civil unrest is becoming par for the course in cities across the country, it’s also clear that Collier is sensitive to how that dynamic relates to his music.

There is a vocal contingency of jazz lovers who prefer to divorce political commentary from the music, but Collier, who grew up in Chicago in a scene steeped in the vibrant tradition of spiritual and free-jazz masters like the AACM and Phil Cohran, sees that separation as antithetical to jazz culture.

He notes, “This is a culture that’s created by an oppressed group of people. So, you can’t say you’re into jazz as a social thing if you’re not socially aware of where these constructs come from.”

—Ayana Contreras

## Mary Halvorson

Guitarist of the Year

Mary Halvorson has been honored as Guitarist of the Year several times since 2017, with the bonus of Album of the Year nods for recordings such as the immensity of *Amaryllis & Belladonna*.

From dry, icy tones and sinewy, industrial-strength assault tactics, through to her multi-versed compositions’ poetic stride, it can be said that she is her own free genre: Halvorson-Garde, rather than avant-garde.

Though swooping, emotive solos and baffling guitar lines are things of shock, awe and astounding beauty, Halvorson’s compelling collaborative improvisations are as immeasurable as they are unpredictable. Ask pianist Sylvie Courvoisier, with whom she shares 2025’s *Bone Bells* (which placed 5th in Album of the Year honors), or percussionist Ches Smith, whose new *Clone Row* album has Halvorson sparring with fellow six-stringer Liberty Ellman in the diciest guitar duel since Charlie Ellerbie met Bern Nix on Ornette Coleman’s *Body Meta*.

Halvorson’s just-released *About Ghosts* (see review on page 68) finds Halvorson cascading wildly while pushing her sextet, Amaryllis, into a traffic jam of wriggly reed sounds courtesy of new saxophonists Immanuel Wilkins and Brian Settles. So, 2026’s best Guitarist and best Album awards are covered. As for *Cloudward* — Halvorson’s 2024 album that pushed her, again, to the top of DownBeat’s Critics Poll — the winding yet shockingly winsome work opened even-newer doors to her talents with its spacious planes, unyielding intricacy and oddly alluring, even upbeat, melodicism.

Nothing that she’s recorded before *Cloudward* could be mistaken as cheerful and concordant. Yet, like every challenge she has met with music that marvels, Mary Halvorson refuses to be defined, let alone confined.

—A.D. Amorosi



ELIANA OLIVO





## Adrian Young & Ali Shaheed Muhammad

Rising Star Producers of the Year

"Jazz Is Dead," boldly proclaims the cover art of a series of eclectic analog recordings, now numbering 24, by Los Angeles-based producers Adrian Young and Ali Shaheed Muhammad. But the music inside the sleeves

puts the lie to that audacious assertion. Although the recordings do not fit neatly into any mainstream, straightahead definition of jazz, they are a provocative brew of jazzy styles nonetheless. As evolutionary developments have always

demonstrated, jazz is not only not dead, but very much alive and thriving, even in the hands of musicians who are well into their 70s and 80s.

From the first release in March 2020, a compilation featuring tracks by music icons of the 1960s and 1970s, including Gary Bartz, Roy Ayers, the group Azymuth, Doug Carn, João Donato, Marcus Valle and Brian Jackson, the producers have cleverly and skillfully staked their territory while cultivating new creative ground. Subsequent releases have given further voice to those artists, as well as to singer Jean Carne, bassist Henry Franklin, the band Katalyst, keyboard artist Lonnie Liston Smith and others. The latest editions of Jazz Is Dead feature Brazilian singer Hyldon, 74; Ghanaian guitarist and composer Ebo Taylor, 89; and Brazilian pianist Dom Salvador, 86.

In just five years, the Jazz Is Dead series has become essential listening and collecting for so-called "crate-diggers," music buffs with ears tuned to a mix of jazz, funk, soul, samba and hip-hop by artists who have been largely neglected by the bigger labels in recent years. For that alone, Young and Muhammad deserve our appreciation and praise as Rising Star Producers of the Year. —Tom Ineck



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## Michael Dease

### Trombonist of the Year Rising Star Baritone Saxophonist of the Year

With nearly 20 albums under his belt as a leader, multi-instrumentalist Michael Dease's relentless pursuit of swing has been burgeoning since he arrived on the scene in New York as a member of Juilliard's initial jazz class a quarter century ago. I've seen or heard him play with many of the important big bands of today and as a leader of his own small groups.

In addition to coalescing his influences into his own singular sound on trombone, I have been truly impressed with the generosity of spirit that can be gleaned from the veterans he surrounds himself with, but more importantly with the younger musicians. He has turned into an all-around musician as his growth as a composer and record producer has been on a high trajectory, too.

He also digs a little deeper to find that hidden gem from an iconic historic player of the past. But what really knocks me out is that he is one of the very few current musicians who consistently records the music of his peers. He shocked me, and I think most in the jazz world, two years ago when he put out *Swing Low* playing only baritone saxophone. That's when I came up with the line "Dease is a Beast." Turns out sax was his first instrument.

Having put New York in his rearview mirror, he is now one of the leading musical dons of the influential Central Michigan Jazz Mafia and an international jazz star destined for greatness.

—Mark Ruffin



JESSICA D. LOWLES



DAVID LOBATO

## Susan Alcorn

### Rising Star Beyond Instrument

Pedal steel guitarist Susan Alcorn sadly passed away on Jan. 31 of this year, at age 71. I still voted for her in the DownBeat Critic's Poll, if only to honor her indelible memory. She was already a star in my opinion, always rising, and her stylistic range was "beyond" most things. With experience forged in the hardscrabble honky-tonks around Houston, Texas, where she moved after picking up the instrument in Chicago during the 1970s, Alcorn was a true master of and innovator on her instrument. She was always a musical seeker, and at a certain point country wasn't enough for her. Alcorn was interested in all kinds of music, but as she formed an expanding interest for improvisation her music gravitated toward jazz, which became her primary focus in the final decades of her life, especially after moving to Baltimore in 2007.

Her playing alongside Mary Halvorson, Joe McPhee and Ingrid Laubrock, among others, highlighted her harmonic sophistication and her keen lyric sensibility. She could summon dense chaos when engaging with experimental guitarist Bill Nace, and she also delved into unexpected corners of the musical globe, finding ways to translate the chamber music of Olivier Messiaen and the nuevo tango of Astor Piazzolla to pedal steel, the beauty and resourcefulness of her interpretations transcending any novelty factor. Her rejection of stylistic hierarchies probably made things harder for her career, but her astonishing body of work and a deep sense of humanity had the last word. Susan Alcorn lives. —Peter Margasak

*Jane Ira Bloom*

# SONGS IN SPACE

[OTL 146]

*Jane Ira Bloom*

## SONGS IN SPACE

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KAROLIS KAMINSKAS

Cecile McLorin Salvant



PETER GANNUSHKIN

Kris Davis



COURTESY THE COLTRANE FAMILY

Alice Coltrane

## Hall of Fame

### Anthony Braxton ..... 202

Henry Threadgill.....	171
Bobby Hutcherson.....	159
Paul Bley.....	152
Jack DeJohnette.....	150
Peter Brötzmann.....	135
Oliver Nelson.....	119
Wadada Leo Smith.....	116
Grant Green.....	114
Abdullah Ibrahim.....	111
Kenny Burrell.....	110
Lou Donaldson	
(Passed Nov. 9, 2024).....	110
Bill Frisell.....	102
Dave Holland.....	102
Roscoe Mitchell.....	99
Billy Higgins.....	97
Jaki Byard.....	93
John Zorn.....	93
Roy Ayers.....	81
Kenny Wheeler.....	81
Shirley Horn.....	80
Barry Harris.....	76
Joey DeFrancesco.....	67
Pat Martino.....	66

Billy Cobham.....	65
Zakir Hussain.....	
(Passed Dec. 15, 2024).....	64
Albert "Tootie" Heath.....	
(Passed April 3, 2024).....	63
Melba Liston.....	61
Bob Brookmeyer.....	60
Terence Blanchard.....	57

## VETERANS COMMITTEE VOTING

### Hall of Fame

#### Tito Puente

## Artist of the Year

### James Brandon Lewis ..... 220

Mary Halvorson.....	206
Kris Davis.....	194
Ambrose Akinmusire.....	180
Charles Lloyd.....	177
Kenny Barron.....	137
Vijay Iyer.....	121
Christian McBride.....	106
Bill Frisell.....	102
Samara Joy.....	102
Sullivan Fortner.....	86
Shabaka Hutchings.....	84

Terri Lyne Carrington.....	83
Fred Hersch.....	80
Branford Marsalis.....	76
Brian Blade.....	68
Anat Cohen.....	58
Julian Lage.....	58
Orrin Evans.....	54
Terence Blanchard.....	48
Brad Mehldau.....	47
Steve Lehman.....	43
Kenny Garrett.....	40
Wynton Marsalis.....	37
Bill Charlap.....	36
Béla Fleck.....	35
Jon Batiste.....	33
Billy Childs.....	33
Jacob Collier.....	28
Stefon Harris.....	25

## Album of the Year

### Patricia Brennan, *Breaking Stretch (Pyroclastic)*..... 188

Ambrose Akinmusire, <i>honey from a winter stone</i> (Nonesuch).....	149
Kris Davis Trio, <i>Run The Gauntlet</i> (Pyroclastic).....	141

Tyshawn Sorey, <i>The Susceptible Now</i> (Pi).....	108
Sylvie Courvoisier & Mary Halvorson, <i>Bone Bells</i> (Pyroclastic).....	104
Wadada Leo Smith/Amina Claudine Myers, <i>Central Park's Mosaics Of Reservoir Lake Paths And Gardens</i> (Red Hook).....	102
Immanuel Wilkins, <i>Blues Blood</i> (Blue Note).....	102
Tomeka Reid Quartet, 3+3 (Cuneiform).....	99
Jeff Parker ETA IVtet, <i>The Way Out Of Easy</i> (International Anthem).....	94
David Murray Quartet, <i>Francesca</i> (Intakt).....	91
Nels Cline Consentrisk Quartet, <i>Nels Cline Consentrisk Quartet</i> (Blue Note).....	84
Fred Hersch, <i>Silent Listening</i> (ECM).....	75
James Brandon Lewis Trio, <i>Apple Cores</i> (Anti-).....	73
Branford Marsalis Quartet, <i>Belonging</i> (Blue Note).....	73



The Messthetics And James Brandon Lewis, <i>The Messthetics And James Brandon Lewis</i> (Impulse!).....	65
The Bad Plus, <i>Complex Emotions</i> (Mack Avenue) .....	64
Artemis, <i>Arboresque</i> (Blue Note).....	62
Orrin Evans and the Captain Black Big Band, <i>Walk A Mile In My Shoe</i> (Imani).....	60
James Brandon Lewis Quartet, <i>Transfiguration</i> (Intakt).....	60
Marta Sánchez Trio, <i>Perpetual Void</i> (Intakt) .....	58
Steve Coleman, <i>PolyTropos</i> (Pi).....	57
Emmet Cohen, <i>Vibe Provider</i> (Mack Avenue) .....	56
Sullivan Fortner, <i>Southern Nights</i> (Artwork) .....	54
Isaiah Collier & The Chosen Few, <i>The World Is On Fire</i> (Division 81).....	53
Nduduzo Makhathini, <i>uNomkhubulwane</i> (Blue Note)...	53
Avishai Cohen, <i>Ashes To Gold</i> (ECM).....	51
Lionel Loueke/Dave Holland, <i>United</i> (Edition).....	51
Nicole Mitchell and Ballaké Sissoko, <i>Bamako*Chicago Sound System</i> (FPE).....	51
Dave Douglas, <i>Gifts</i> (Greenleaf Music) .....	50
Melissa Aldana, <i>Echoes Of The Inner Prophet</i> (Blue Note).....	48
Jenny Scheinman, <i>All Species Parade</i> (Royal Potato Family)....	46
Alexander Hawkins/Sofia Jernberg, <i>Musho</i> (Intakt).....	43
Jazzmeia Horn, <i>Messages</i> (Empress Legacy) .....	43
Matt Wilson's Good Trouble, <i>Good Trouble</i> (Palmetto).....	43
Matana Roberts, <i>COIN COIN Chapter Five: in the garden</i> (Constellation) .....	42
Chris Potter, <i>Eagle's Point</i> (Edition) .....	41
Etienne Charles, <i>Creole Orchestra</i> (Culture Shock).....	40
Kamasi Washington, <i>Fearless Movement</i> (Young) .....	40
Tigran Hamasyan, <i>The Bird Of A Thousand Voices</i> (Naïve) .....	39
Jeremy Pelt, <i>Woven</i> (HighNote) .....	38
Renee Rosnes, <i>Crossing Paths</i> (Smoke Sessions) .....	38
Walter Smith III, <i>three of us are from Houston and Reuben is not</i> (Blue Note).....	38
Jamie Baum Septet, <i>What Times Are These</i> (Sunnyside) .....	37
Bill Charlap Trio, <i>And Then Again</i> (Blue Note).....	37
John Hollenbeck & NDR Big Band, <i>Colouring Hockets</i> (Flexatonic).....	37
Fergus McCreadie, <i>Stream</i> (Edition) .....	35
Aaron Parks, <i>Little Big III</i> (Blue Note).....	35
Omar Sosa, <i>Omar Sosa's 88 Well-Tuned Drums</i> (OTA).....	35
Scott Colley/Edward Simon/ Brian Blade, <i>Three Visitors</i> (Groundup) .....	34
Tarbaby, <i>You Think This Is America</i> (Giant Step Arts).....	34

### Historical Album of the Year

#### Alice Coltrane, *The Carnegie Hall Concert* (Impulse!)..... 310

McCoy Tyner & Joe Henderson, <i>Forces Of Nature: Live At Slugs'</i> (Blue Note).....	296
John Coltrane, <i>A Love Supreme: 60th Anniversary Edition</i> (Impulse!).....	250
Miles Davis, <i>Miles In France: 1963 &amp; 1964: The Bootleg Series Vol. 8</i> (Legacy A&R).....	236
Sonny Rollins, <i>A Night At The Village Vanguard: The Complete Masters</i> (Blue Note).....	160
Keith Jarrett, <i>The Old Country: More From The Deer Head Inn</i> (ECM).....	158
Roy Hargrove's Crisol, <i>Grande-Terre</i> (Verve) .....	145
Wayne Shorter, <i>Celebration Volume 1</i> (Blue Note) .....	138
Andrew Hill, <i>A Beautiful Day Revisited</i> (Palmetto) .....	125
Emily Remler, <i>Cookin' At The Queens</i> (Resonance).....	113
Pharoah Sanders, <i>Thembi</i> (Verve).....	109
Cannonball Adderley, <i>Burnin' In Bordeaux: Live In France 1969</i> (Elemental).....	87
Charlie Parker, <i>Bird In Kansas City</i> (Verve).....	81
Sun Ra, <i>Inside The Light World: Sun Ra Meets The OVC</i> (Strut).....	77
Black Arts Group (BAG), <i>For Peace And Liberty: In Paris Dec. 1972</i> (Wewantsounds).....	71
Ron Miles, <i>Old Main Chapel</i> (Blue Note).....	70
Louis Moholo-Moholo, <i>Viva La Black</i> (Cadillac).....	62
King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band, <i>Centennial</i> (Acheophone).....	62
Charles Tolliver & Music Inc., <i>Live At The Captain's Cabin</i> (Reel to Real).....	57
Oscar Peterson, <i>City Lights: The Oscar Peterson Quartet Live In Munich 1994</i> (Mack Avenue/Two Lions).....	55
Crusaders, <i>Freedom Sound</i> (Pacific Jazz/Blue Note).....	53

B.B. King, <i>In France</i> (Deep Digs/Elemental) .....	53
Kurt Rosenwinkel, <i>The Next Step Band</i> (Live At Smalls 1996) (Heartcore).....	52
Duke Ellington, <i>Copenhagen 1958</i> (Storyville).....	51
Various Artists, <i>Classic V-Disc Small Group Jazz Sessions</i> (Mosaic).....	40
Phil Haynes' 4 Horns & What, <i>The Complete American Recordings</i> (Corner Store Jazz) ...	29

### Group of the Year

#### Mary Halvorson: *Amaryllis* .... 193

Kris Davis Trio .....	160
Charles Lloyd Quartet.....	149
Vijay Iyer Trio .....	138
Branford Marsalis Quartet ....	132
Ambrose Akinmusire Quartet .....	110
Tomeka Reid Quartet .....	109
Artemis .....	108
Tyshawn Sorey Trio .....	108
James Brandon Lewis Red Lily Quintet.....	107
Matthew Shipp Trio .....	104
Myra Melford's Fire And Water Quintet .....	97
Ethnic Heritage Ensemble .....	94
The David Murray Quartet .....	82
Emmet Cohen Trio .....	79
Terri Lyne Carrington's New Standards .....	75
Joe Lovano Trio Tapestry.....	73
Thumbscrew .....	71
Henry Threadgill Ensemble.....	71
Julian Lage Trio .....	69
Darius Jones Trio .....	64
Billy Hart Quartet.....	60
Brad Mehldau Trio.....	59
Fred Hersch Trio.....	56
Bill Frisell Trio .....	56
Christian McBride's New Jawn .....	56
Steven Bernstein's Millennial Territory Orchestra ...	55
Miguel Zenón Quartet .....	50
Terence Blanchard & The E-Collective .....	48
The Cookers .....	47
Kurt Elling and Charlie Hunter, SuperBlue .....	47

### Large Ensemble of the Year

#### Maria Schneider Orchestra ... 243

Darcy James Argue's Secret Society .....	220
Sun Ra Arkestra .....	198
Steven Bernstein's Millennial Territory Orchestra .....	135
Exploding Star Orchestra .....	132
Christian McBride Big Band ..	127
Fire! Orchestra.....	107
WDR Big Band Cologne .....	97
Anat Cohen Tentet .....	95
John Beasley's MONK'estra....	92
Satoko Fujii Orchestra .....	91

Miho Hazama's m_Unit.....	84
Arturo O'Farrill and the Latin Jazz Ensemble .....	76
Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra.....	67
Mingus Big Band .....	56
Ryan Truesdell Gil Evans Project.....	55
Amir ElSaffar Rivers of Sound .....	53
Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra.....	52
Anthony Brown's Asian-American Jazz Orchestra .....	51
Orchestre National de Jazz (France) .....	51
Metropole Orkest .....	43
NDR Big Band.....	43
Vanguard Jazz Orchestra.....	41
Count Basie Orchestra .....	37
Ed Palermo Big Band .....	36
ICP Orchestra.....	35
Chicago Jazz Orchestra.....	33
Danish Radio Big Band.....	33
Mike Holober & the Gotham Jazz Orchestra....	33
Frank Carlberg Large Ensemble .....	32

### Trumpeter of the Year

#### Ambrose Akinmusire ..... 438

Wadada Leo Smith .....	250
Peter Evans .....	137
Terence Blanchard .....	131
Ingrid Jensen.....	121
Tom Harrell .....	104
Adam O'Farrill .....	103
Jeremy Pelt .....	103
Charles Tolliver.....	89
Dave Douglas.....	88
Avishai Cohen .....	87
Nate Wooley.....	84
Kirk Knuffke.....	80
Marquis Hill .....	72
Rob Mazurek.....	67
Wynton Marsalis .....	66
Eddie Henderson .....	62
Jonathan Finlayson .....	61
Enrico Rava .....	61
Etienne Charles .....	59
Natsuki Tamura .....	59
Terrell Stafford .....	58
Steven Bernstein.....	57
Randy Brecker .....	56
Theo Croker .....	55
Jason Palmer .....	52
Keyon Harrold .....	52
Nicholas Payton .....	46
Mathias Eick.....	45

### Trombonist of the Year

#### Michael Dease ..... 196

Ryan Keberle.....	144
Steve Turre .....	143
Samuel Blaser .....	136
Steve Davis .....	135
Jacob Garchik.....	121
Steve Swell.....	117
Jeb Bishop .....	111
Robin Eubanks.....	111





Shemekia Copeland



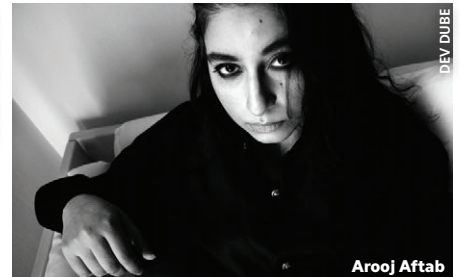
Ron Carter



Nicole Mitchell



Darcy James Argue



Arooj Aftab

Trombone Shorty .....	97
Wycliffe Gordon .....	96
Conrad Herwig .....	91
George Lewis .....	86
Joe Fiedler .....	83
Curtis Fowlkes .....	82
Delfeayo Marsalis .....	68
Nils Wogram .....	65
Mats Ålekint .....	62
Marshall Gilkes .....	60
Craig Harris .....	60
Gianluca Petrella .....	56
Nick Finzer .....	53
Shannon Barnett .....	51
Ku-umba Frank Lacy .....	47
Nils Landgren .....	47
Robinson Khoury .....	37
Alan Ferber .....	35
John Fedchock .....	32
Yves Robert .....	28

### Soprano Saxophonist of the Year

<b>Jane Ira Bloom .....</b>	<b>222</b>
Branford Marsalis .....	189
Dave Liebman .....	184
Ingrid Laubrock .....	173
Ravi Coltrane .....	141
Evan Parker .....	136
Roscoe Mitchell .....	129
Sam Newsome .....	126
Isaiah Collier .....	117
Jane Bunnett .....	94
Émile Parisien .....	92
Joe Lovano .....	85
Jan Garbarek .....	83
Chris Potter .....	83
Kenny Garrett .....	82
Joshua Redman .....	81
Steve Wilson .....	72
Aurora Nealand .....	64
James Carter .....	61

Tia Fuller .....	59
Donny McCaslin .....	59
Wayne Escoffery .....	55
Yuval Cohen .....	45
Greg Osby .....	45
T.K. Blue .....	39
Roxy Coss .....	39
Sharel Cassity .....	35
Ted Nash .....	29
Walter Smith III .....	27
Christine Jensen .....	24

### Alto Saxophonist of the Year

<b>Immanuel Wilkins .....</b>	<b>248</b>
Marshall Allen .....	199
Miguel Zenón .....	154
Lakecia Benjamin .....	136
Anthony Braxton .....	128
Gary Bartz .....	125
Tim Berne .....	122
Darius Jones .....	121
Steve Lehman .....	113
Steve Coleman .....	103
Rudresh Mahanthappa .....	103
Kenny Garrett .....	99
Henry Threadgill .....	88
John Zorn .....	82
Jon Irabagon .....	81
Roscoe Mitchell .....	73
Charles McPherson .....	68
Matana Roberts .....	68
David Binney .....	67
Jim Snidero .....	63
Silke Eberhard .....	61
Caroline Davis .....	60
Paquito D'Rivera .....	59
Chris Potter .....	56
Greg Osby .....	53
Sharel Cassity .....	46
Tia Fuller .....	46
Greg Ward .....	46

Donald Harrison .....	44
Bobby Watson .....	43

### Tenor Saxophonist of the Year

<b>James Brandon Lewis .....</b>	<b>299</b>
Charles Lloyd .....	209
David Murray .....	173
Joe Lovano .....	164
Chris Potter .....	143
Melissa Aldana .....	136
Ingrid Laubrock .....	119
Mark Turner .....	117
Billy Harper .....	98
Branford Marsalis .....	94
Nubya Garcia .....	85
Jon Irabagon .....	82
Joshua Redman .....	76
James Carter .....	73
Noah Preminger .....	73
JD Allen .....	69
Ivo Perelman .....	69
Shabaka Hutchings .....	62
Eric Alexander .....	56
Anna Webber .....	56
Archie Shepp .....	51
Mats Gustafsson .....	50
Ben Wendel .....	49
Walter Smith III .....	47
Houston Person .....	46

### Baritone Saxophonist of the Year

<b>James Carter .....</b>	<b>241</b>
Mats Gustafsson .....	198
Gary Smulyan .....	180
Claire Daly .....	
(Passed Oct. 22, 2024) .....	176
John Surman .....	166
Brian Landrus .....	135
Scott Robinson .....	125

Ken Vandermark .....	125
Tim Berne .....	120
Colin Stetson .....	110
Alex Harding .....	72
Dave Rempis .....	71
Vinny Golia .....	59
Céline Bonacina .....	52
Lauren Sevan .....	51
Patience Higgins .....	49
Josh Sinton .....	44
Grace Kelly .....	42
Roger Lewis .....	31
Dave McMurray .....	31
Stephen "Doc" Kupka .....	29
Rudy Mahall .....	29
Charlie Kohlase .....	28
Frank Basile .....	24

### Clarinetist of the Year

<b>Anat Cohen .....</b>	<b>447</b>
Don Byron .....	171
Paquito D'Rivera .....	169
Ben Goldberg .....	165
Angel Bat Dawid .....	154
Ken Peplowski .....	126
Marty Ehrlich .....	113
Shabaka Hutchings .....	113
Chris Speed .....	91
Louis Slacvis .....	78
Ken Vandermark .....	78
Matana Roberts .....	64
Jeff Lederer .....	62
Aurora Nealand .....	60
Ned Rothenberg .....	60
François Houle .....	55
Eddie Daniels .....	54
David Krakauer .....	53
Gianluigi Trovesi .....	52
Ab Baars .....	50
Michel Portal .....	44
Michael Moore .....	38
James Falzone .....	34



Dr. Michael White .....	32
Ted Nash .....	32

### Flutist of the Year

<b>Nicole Mitchell .....</b>	<b>415</b>
Charles Lloyd .....	199
Shabaka Hutchings.....	196
Jamie Baum .....	194
Elena Pinderhughes .....	154
Hubert Laws.....	116
Anna Webber .....	116
Henry Threadgill.....	115
Jane Bunnett .....	87
James Newton .....	84
Lakecia Benjamin.....	80
Roscoe Mitchell .....	61
Lew Tabackin .....	61
Naïssam Jalal .....	59
Dave Liebman .....	48
Elsa Nilsson.....	48
Marty Ehrlich .....	47
T.K. Blue .....	44
Robert Dick .....	40
Tia Fuller .....	40
Ted Nash .....	38
Douglas Ewart.....	35
James Spaulding .....	33
Jorge Pardo.....	29
Juhani Aaltonen .....	26

### Pianist of the Year

<b>Kris Davis .....</b>	<b>263</b>
Kenny Barron .....	213
Sullivan Fortner .....	168
Vijay Iyer .....	160
Matthew Shipp .....	140
Fred Hersch.....	135
Sylvie Courvoisier .....	134
Brad Mehldau .....	97
Jason Moran .....	92
Marilyn Crispell.....	87
Satoko Fujii .....	87
Gerald Clayton .....	85
Emmet Cohen .....	81
Craig Taborn.....	75
George Cables .....	73
Myra Melford .....	72
Bill Charlap.....	70
Orrin Evans.....	69
Abdullah Ibrahim.....	68
Robert Glasper .....	64
Herbie Hancock .....	63
Chucho Valdés .....	59
Monty Alexander .....	55
Matt Mitchell .....	53
Jon Batiste .....	52
Marta Sánchez .....	52
Tord Gustavsen .....	51
Aaron Parks.....	49
Aaron Diehl.....	48
Eliane Elias .....	38

### Keyboardist of the Year

<b>Herbie Hancock.....</b>	<b>229</b>
Robert Glasper.....	144
Craig Taborn.....	140
Nik Bärtsch.....	134
Kit Downes.....	134
Larry Goldings.....	129
Matt Mitchell .....	111
Leo Genovese .....	103

Matthew Shipp.....	101
Jon Batiste.....	96
Uri Caine .....	95
Hiromi .....	84
James Francies.....	76
Gary Versace.....	75
Brian Charette.....	66
Danilo Pérez .....	62
John Medeski.....	59
Wayne Horvitz.....	57
Marc Cary.....	56
Jamie Saft .....	55
Django Bates.....	53
Geoffrey Keezer .....	38
Jim Baker .....	36
Zaccai Curtis.....	36
Benoit Delbecq .....	35
Jason Lindner .....	35
Patrice Rushen.....	35
Cory Henry.....	31

### Organist of the Year

<b>Larry Goldings .....</b>	<b>322</b>
Amina Claudine Myers.....	231
Kit Downes.....	224
Brian Charette.....	173
John Medeski.....	132
Jamie Saft .....	126
Delvon Lamarr.....	109
Cory Henry.....	99
Wayne Horvitz.....	79
Craig Taborn.....	77
Gary Versace.....	77
Booker T. Jones .....	74
Gary Versace.....	72
Mike LeDonne.....	69
Brian Auger .....	65
Ståle Storløkken.....	62
John Medeski.....	52
Rhoda Scott.....	51
Barbara Dennerlein .....	50
Craig Taborn.....	48
Pat Bianchi.....	46
Jared Gold.....	43

### Guitarist of the Year

<b>Mary Halvorson .....</b>	<b>383</b>
Bill Frisell .....	299
Julian Lage .....	203
Nels Cline .....	172
Pat Metheny .....	132
Jeff Parker .....	130
Susan Alcorn .....	108
(Passed Jan. 31, 2025) .....	108
Russell Malone .....	90
(Passed Aug. 23, 2024).....	90
John Scofield .....	90
John McLaughlin .....	81
Peter Bernstein .....	80
Jakob Bro .....	77
Kurt Rosenwinkel.....	72
Lionel Loueke.....	71
Marc Ribot.....	69
Ben Monder .....	68
Dave Stryker .....	53
Rez Abbasi.....	50
Pasquale Grasso.....	49
Gilad Hekselman.....	48
Fred Frith.....	42
Gordon Grdina .....	41
Charlie Hunter .....	39

Bobby Broom.....	38
Miles Okazaki.....	35
Kevin Eubanks .....	34
Ralph Towner .....	33
Henry Kaiser.....	31
Nir Felder.....	27
Anthony Pirog .....	27

### Bassist of the Year

<b>Ron Carter .....</b>	<b>257</b>
Linda May Han Oh .....	214
Dave Holland.....	205
Christian McBride.....	192
William Parker .....	125
John Patitucci .....	93
Luke Stewart.....	92
esperanza spalding.....	84
Larry Grenadier .....	83
Thomas Morgan.....	76
Arild Andersen.....	72
Stanley Clarke.....	70
Joshua Abrams .....	69
Cecil McBee.....	67
Dezron Douglas.....	65
Michael Formanek .....	64
John Clayton.....	59
Ingebrigt Håker Flaten .....	58
Joe Fonda .....	52
Ben Allison .....	51
Stephan Crump.....	49
Scott Colley.....	45
Mark Dresser.....	44
Robert Hurst.....	43
Buster Williams .....	41
Avishai Cohen .....	40
Peter Washington.....	38
Matt Brewer.....	37
Eric Revis .....	36
Brandon Lopez .....	33

### Electric Bassist of the Year

<b>Meshell Ndegeocello .....</b>	<b>212</b>
Steve Swallow.....	187
John Patitucci .....	150
Stanley Clarke.....	142
Marcus Miller.....	139
Linda May Han Oh .....	127
Melvin Gibbs .....	114
Jamaaladeen Tacuma.....	110
Shahzad Ismaily.....	96
Christian McBride .....	94
Thundercat.....	93
esperanza spalding.....	84
Trevor Dunn .....	82
Richard Bona .....	73
Tim Lefebvre .....	69
Tarus Mateen.....	69
Larry Grenadier .....	67
Ingebrigt Håker Flaten .....	63
Derrick Hodge.....	62
James Genus .....	60
Tony Levin .....	59
Pino Palladino .....	56
Avishai Cohen .....	54
Brian Bromberg.....	47
Victor Wooten.....	47
Matthew Garrison .....	42
Junius Paul .....	36
Moppa Elliot.....	29
Mimi Jones.....	25
Felix Pastorius.....	24

### Violinist of the Year

<b>Regina Carter .....</b>	<b>355</b>
Jenny Scheinman .....	277
Mark Feldman .....	198
Mat Maneri .....	162
Jason Kao Hwang.....	156
Sara Caswell.....	147
Jean-Luc Ponty.....	136
Miguel Atwood-Ferguson .....	128
Zach Brock.....	80
Theo Ceccaldi .....	69
Eyvind Kang .....	51
Sam Bardfeld .....	46
Carla Kihlstedt.....	45
Sarah Bernstein .....	40
Michal Urbaniak .....	39
Mads Tolling .....	37
Mazz Swift.....	36
Mark O'Connor .....	32
Christian Howes.....	29
Phil Wachsmann .....	28

### Drummer of the Year

<b>Brian Blade .....</b>	<b>208</b>
Tyshawn Sorey.....	148
Terri Lyne Carrington.....	132
Jack DeJohnette.....	118
Roy Haynes .....	116
(Passed Nov. 12, 2024).....	116
Johnathan Blake .....	92
Andrew Cyrille .....	91
Billy Hart .....	89
Hamid Drake .....	76
Gerald Cleaver .....	68
Albert "Tootie" Heath .....	61
(Passed April 3, 2024).....	61
Nasheet Waits .....	53
Ches Smith.....	52
Tomas Fujiwara .....	51
Cindy Blackman Santana .....	51
Billy Cobham .....	50
Makaya McCraven.....	49
Steve Gadd .....	42
Chad Taylor .....	42
Matt Wilson .....	41
Joey Baron .....	39
Jeff "Tain" Watts.....	36
Rudy Royston .....	35
Jim Black.....	34
Joe Farnsworth .....	34
Paal Nilsson-Love .....	33
Bill Stewart .....	32
Han Bennink.....	26
Moses Boyd .....	24
Allison Miller .....	20

### Percussionist of the Year

<b>Zakir Hussain .....</b>	<b>254</b>
(Passed Dec. 15, 2024).....	254
Kahil El'Zabar .....	206
Hamid Drake .....	196
Cyro Baptista .....	123
Alex Acuña .....	100
Adam Rudolph.....	99
Susie Ibarra .....	96
Ches Smith.....	96
Pedrito Martinez.....	92
Trilok Gurtu.....	83
Han Bennink.....	81
Mino Cinelu .....	76
Marilyn Mazur.....	70





Jacob Collier



James Carter



Anna Webber



Larry Goldings

Airto Moreira.....	70
Poncho Sanchez.....	66
Dafnis Prieto.....	63
Sheila E.....	61
Bobby Sanabria.....	57
Jovia Armstrong.....	51
Chad Taylor.....	45

### Vibraphonist of the Year

<b>Patricia Brennan.....</b>	<b>426</b>
Joel Ross.....	362
Warren Wolf.....	203
Stefon Harris.....	202
Mulatu Astatke.....	125
Jason Adasiewicz.....	122
Joe Locke.....	109
Steve Nelson.....	102
Sasha Berliner.....	97
Ches Smith.....	70
Simon Moullier.....	69
Tomas Fujiwara.....	64
Kenny Wollesen.....	60
Chris Dingman.....	58
Jon Marsalis.....	55
Joe Chambers.....	54
Christopher Dell.....	38
Taiko Saito.....	35
Warren Smith.....	35
Behn Gillece.....	33

### Beyond Instrumentalist of the Year

<b>Tomeka Reid (cello).....</b>	<b>310</b>
Brandee Younger (harp).....	166
Béla Fleck (banjo).....	152
Anouar Brahem (oud).....	143
Theon Cross (tuba).....	111
Edmar Castaneda (Colombian harp).....	100
David Murray (bass clarinet)....	92
Richard Galliano (accordion)....	88

Jon Irabagon (sopranino saxophone) .....	77
Ikue Mori (laptop).....	77
Gordon Grdina (oud).....	76
Greg Leisz (pedal steel guitar).....	72
Grégoire Maret (harmonica).....	70
Erik Friedlander (cello).....	69
James Carter (bass saxophone).....	67
Gary Versace (accordion).....	61
Peggy Lee (cello).....	54
Toumani Diabaté (kora) (Passed July 19, 2024).....	52
Scott Robinson (bass saxophone).....	49
Chris Thile (mandolin).....	48
Rabih Abou-Khalil (oud).....	47
Brandon Seabrook (banjo).....	47
Jon Batiste (melodica/harmonaboard).....	46
Todd Marcus (bass clarinet).....	42
Colin Stetson (bass saxophone).....	39

### Female Vocalist of the Year

<b>Cécile McLorin Salvant.....</b>	<b>393</b>
Samara Joy.....	222
Jazzmeia Horn.....	149
Fay Victor.....	120
Dee Dee Bridgewater.....	100
Sheila Jordan.....	83
Dianne Reeves.....	78
Sara Serpa.....	74
Lizz Wright.....	74
Catherine Russell.....	71
Cyrille Aimée.....	69
Cassandra Wilson.....	66
Kate McGarry.....	63
esperanza spalding.....	62
Norma Winstone.....	53
Luciana Souza.....	52

Tierney Sutton.....	44
Youn Sun Na.....	43
Veronica Swift.....	43
Diana Krall.....	42
Gretchen Parlato.....	38
Flora Purim.....	38
Patricia Barber.....	37
Madeleine Peyroux.....	37
Roberta Gambarini.....	36

### Male Vocalist of the Year

<b>Kurt Elling.....</b>	<b>419</b>
Andy Bey (Passed April 26, 2025).....	257
Theo Bleckmann.....	246
Gregory Porter.....	242
José James.....	150
Bobby McFerrin.....	97
Dwight Trible.....	76
James Blood Ulmer.....	75
Sachal Vasandani.....	64
Bilal.....	63
Jacob Collier.....	55
Giacomo Gates.....	54
Johnny O'Neal.....	51
Benny Benack III.....	42
John Boutté.....	42
Phil Minton.....	41
John Pizzarelli.....	39
João Bosco.....	38
Harry Connick Jr.....	32
Allan Harris.....	28

### Composer of the Year

<b>Maria Schneider.....</b>	<b>180</b>
Ambrose Akinmusire.....	165
Mary Halvorson.....	144
Kris Davis.....	139
Anthony Braxton.....	133
Henry Threadgill.....	123
Darcy James Argue.....	107

Terence Blanchard.....	102
Tyshawn Sorey.....	102
Wadada Leo Smith.....	90
Immanuel Wilkins.....	84
John Zorn.....	79
Billy Childs.....	76
Bill Frisell.....	73
Satoko Fujii.....	71
Vijay Iyer.....	64
Pat Metheny.....	61
James Brandon Lewis.....	58
Christian McBride.....	56
Tim Berne.....	54
Nik Bärtsch.....	47
Fred Hersch.....	47
Dave Holland.....	47
Kamasi Washington.....	44
Arturo O'Farrill.....	43
Anna Webber.....	43

### Arranger of the Year

<b>Darcy James Argue.....</b>	<b>220</b>
Steven Bernstein.....	114
Terri Lyne Carrington.....	112
Tyshawn Sorey.....	103
John Beasley.....	100
Miho Hazama.....	92
Satoko Fujii.....	83
John Hollenbeck.....	76
John Clayton.....	72
Sullivan Fortner.....	70
Arturo O'Farrill.....	69
Ryan Truesdell.....	64
Myra Melford.....	59
Christian McBride.....	57
Vince Mendoza.....	57
Billy Childs.....	56
Miguel Zenón.....	54
William Parker.....	51
Lakecia Benjamin.....	49
Alan Broadbent.....	46
Robert Glasper.....	45



Kamasi Washington	45
Michael Leonhart	44
Wynton Marsalis	43
Joshua Abrams	38

## Record Label of the Year

<b>Blue Note</b>	<b>282</b>
Pyroclastic	218
ECM	201
Pi	178
Resonance	126
International Anthem	105
Intakt	103
Smoke Sessions	86
Edition	79
Sunnyside	78
Mack Avenue	76
Cellar Live Music Group	70
Nonesuch	58
Clean Feed	54
ACT	53
Impulse!	53
Origin	49
Mosaic	48
AUM Fidelity	43
Jazz Is Dead	43
Tzadik	43
Verve	43
Posi-Tone	37
Relative Pitch	37
We Jazz	35
ArtistShare	33
577	29
Astral Spirits	28
Cuneiform	28
Out of Your Head	27

## Producer of the Year

<b>Michael Cuscuna</b>	
<b>(Passed April 20, 2024)</b>	<b>274</b>
Manfred Eicher	267
Zev Feldman	244
Kris Davis/David Breskin	186
Don Was	177
Terri Lyne Carrington	113
John Zorn	103
Makaya McCraven	86
Ambrose Akinmusire	84
Tyshawn Sorey	82
Dave Douglas	73
Larry Klein	72
Bill Laswell	72
Flying Lotus	63
Christian McBride	62
Cory Weeds	58
Miguel Zenón	45
Matt Pierson	40
John Beasley	39
Marc Free	39
Charlie Hunter	39
Robert Glasper	35
Jeremy Pelt	33
Dave Holland	32
Brian Bacchus	30

## Blues Artist of the Year

<b>Buddy Guy</b>	<b>179</b>
James Blood Ulmer	148
Tedeschi Trucks Band	136
Shemekia Copeland	128
Taj Mahal	119

Gary Clark Jr.	111
Christone "Kingfish" Ingram	94
Eric Bibb	67
Robert Cray	62
John Mayall	58
Keb' Mo'	57
Cedric Burnside	52
Samantha Fish	51
Corey Harris	42
Fantastic Negrito	39
Billy Branch	37
Charlie Musselwhite	37
Joe Bonamassa	35
Otis Taylor	34
Eric Gales	33

## Blues Album of the Year

<b>Shemekia Copeland, <i>Blame It On Eve (Alligator)</i></b>	<b>155</b>
Cedric Burnside, <i>Hill Country Love (Provogue)</i>	106
John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, <i>The Power Of The Blues Pt. II (MIG-Music)</i>	101
Eric Bibb, <i>In The Real World (Stony Plain)</i>	87
Staple Jr. Singers, <i>Searching (Luaka Bop)</i>	74
Collins Cray & Copeland, <i>Showdown! (Alligator)</i>	73
Eric Bibb, <i>Live At The Scala Theatre (Repute/Stony Plain)</i>	67
Joe Bonamassa, <i>Live At The Hollywood Bowl (J&amp;R Adventures)</i>	61
Guy Davis, <i>The Legend Of Sugarbelly (M.C.)</i>	48
Bobby Rush & Kenny Wayne Shepherd, <i>Young Fashioned Ways (Deep Rush)</i>	46
Abdalla Oumbadougou, <i>Amghar—The Godfather Of Tuareg Music Vol. 1 (Petaluma)</i>	42
Duke Robillard, <i>Roll With Me (Stony Plain)</i>	42
Candi Staton, <i>Back To My Roots (Beracah)</i>	39
Popa Chubby, <i>I Love Freddie King (Gulf Coast)</i>	33
The Fabulous Thunderbirds, <i>Struck Down (Stony Plain)</i>	30
Muireann Bradley, <i>I Kept These Old Blues (Tompkins Square)</i>	27
Early James, <i>Medium Raw (Easy Eye Sound)</i>	26
Tab Benoit, <i>I Hear Thunder (Whiskey Bayou)</i>	23
Chris Cain, <i>Good Intentions Gone Bad (Alligator)</i>	22
Tommy Castro & the Painkillers, <i>Closer To The Bone (Alligator)</i>	22
Jerron Paxton, <i>Things Done Changed (Smithsonian Folkways)</i>	22
Rev. Peyton's Big Damn Band, <i>Honeysuckle (Family Owned)</i>	22

## Beyond Artist of the Year

<b>Arooj Aftab</b>	<b>135</b>
Meshell Ndegeocello	126
Rhiannon Giddens	111
Kendrick Lamar	98
Milton Nascimento	97
and esperanza spalding	91
The Messthetics	91
Yo La Tengo	91
Jon Batiste	80
Ceramic Dog	69
Bob Dylan	64
Neil Young	60
Jacob Collier	58
Béla Fleck	58
Wilco	55
Hermeto Pascoal	51
Tedeschi Trucks Band	51
Edmar Castañeda	50
André 3000	49
Roxana Amed	47
Angela Kidjo	44
The Roots	44
Bettye LaVette	41
Lucinda Williams	40
Butcher Brown	38
Ruben Blades	37
Billie Eilish	37

## Beyond Album of the Year

<b>MeShell Ndegeocello, <i>No More Water: The Gospel Of James Baldwin (Blue Note)</i></b>	<b>218</b>
Kronos Quartet, <i>Outer Spaceways Incorporated: Kronos Quartet &amp; Friends Meet Sun Ra (Red Hot)</i>	169
Arooj Aftab, <i>Night Reign (Verve)</i>	147
Milton Nascimento and esperanza spalding, <i>Milton + esperanza (Concord)</i>	146
Brad Mehldau, <i>After Bach (Nonesuch)</i>	94
Shabaka, <i>Perceive Its Beauty, Acknowledge Its Grace (Impulse!)</i>	80
Thumbscrew, <i>Wingbeats (Cuneiform)</i>	79
Jon Batiste, <i>Beethoven Blues (Batiste Piano Series Vol. 1) (Verve/Interscope)</i>	77
Kendrick Lamar, <i>GNX (PGLang/Interscope)</i>	70
Jason Isbell, <i>Foxes In The Snow (Southeastern)</i>	59
Luciana Souza, <i>Twenty-Four Short Musical Episodes (with first lines from poems by Emily Dickinson) (Sunnyside)</i>	59
Allison Krauss & Union Station, <i>Arcadia (Down the Road)</i>	58
Richard Thompson, <i>Ship To Shore (New West)</i>	56
Brittany Howard, <i>What Now (Island)</i>	54
Billie Eilish, <i>Hit Me Hard And Soft (Darkroom/Interscope)</i>	46
T Bone Burnett, <i>The Other Side (Verve)</i>	45

Willie Nelson, <i>Last Leaf On The Tree (Legacy)</i>	42
Jack White, <i>No Name (Third Man)</i>	41
Lana Del Rey, <i>Henry Come On (Interscope)</i>	36
Neil Young and Crazy Horse, <i>Fuckin' Up (The Other Shoe/ Reprise)</i>	36
Mdou Moctar, <i>Eternal For Justice (Matador)</i>	34
Tyler the Creator, <i>Chromakopia (Columbia)</i>	34
Andrew Bird/Alan Hampton/ Ted Poor, <i>Sunday Morning Put On (Loma Vista)</i>	31
Annie & The Caldwells, <i>Can't Lose My Soul (Luaka Bop)</i>	30
Mark Knopfler, <i>One Deep River (Blue Note)</i>	27
Nick Lowe, <i>Indoor Safari (Yep Roc)</i>	27
Ani DiFranco, <i>Unprecedented Sh!t (Righteous Babe)</i>	26
Charli XCX, <i>Brat (Atlantic)</i>	26
Lake Street Dive, <i>Good Together (Fantasy)</i>	24
Taylor Swift, <i>The Tortured Poets Department (Republic)</i>	23

## ★ ★ Rising Star ★ ★

### Rising Star Artist of the Year

<b>Immanuel Wilkins</b>	<b>304</b>
Lakecia Benjamin	199
Isaiah Collier	170
Brandee Younger	147
Joel Ross	142
Adam O'Farrill	133
Nubya Garcia	128
Luke Stewart	128
Emmet Cohen	117
Jazzmeia Horn	100
Peter Evans	81
Aaron Diehl	77
Miho Hazama	75
Angel Bat Dawid	66
Kevin Sun	65
Tigran Hamasyan	61
Etienne Charles	56
Christian Sands	55
Pasquale Grasso	53
Micah Thomas	45
Shuteen Erdenebaatar	45
Theo Croker	43
Simon Moullier	43
Theon Cross	41
Julietta Eugenio	38

### Rising Star Group of the Year

<b>Isaiah Collier and The Chosen Few</b>	<b>247</b>
Sullivan Fortner Trio	196
Irreversible Entanglements	183
Joel Ross Quartet	159
Luke Stewart Silt Trio	119
Jazzmeia Horn	
And Her Noble Force	115





ELI SETHNA

Kandace Springs



MARCELLA CYTRYNOWICZ

Sam Gendel



FELICIA R BASS

Ulysses Owens Jr.



MICHAEL JUNG

Ava Mendoza



ALEX BEX

Béla Fleck, Edmar Catañeda,	
Antonio Sanchez Trio .....	102
Nduduzo Makhathini Trio .....	96
Black Art Jazz Collective .....	95
Aaron Diehl Trio .....	83
Lina Allemano Four .....	74
Ezra Collective .....	71
Butcher Brown .....	70
Christian Sands Trio .....	63
BADBADNOTGOOD .....	52
Damon Locks Black	
Monument Ensemble .....	51
Joey Alexander Trio .....	49
Yussef Dayes Experience .....	44
Connie Han Trio .....	42
Delvon Lamarr Organ Trio .....	42
Binker and Moses .....	38
Simon Moullier Trio .....	38
Christian Lillinger/Christopher	
Dell/Jonas Westergaard Trio ....	37
Ben Williams Band .....	32
Doxas Brothers .....	27

### Rising Star Large Ensemble of the Year

<b>Ingrid Laubrock</b>	
<b>Orchestra .....</b>	<b>261</b>
Jihye Lee Orchestra .....	166
Allison Miller with the One O'Clock	
Lab Band .....	153
Natural Information Society	
Community Ensemble .....	135
Silke Eberhard	
Potsa Lotsa XL .....	127
Idris Ackamoor's Ankhestra ...	124
Remy Le Boeuf	
Assembly of Shadows .....	124
Paul Nilsson-Love	
Large Ensemble .....	119
Ghost Train Orchestra .....	110
Trondheim Jazz Orchestra .....	77
Webber/Morris Big Band .....	74

Manuel Valera	
New Cuban Express Big Band ...	66
Dan Pugach Big Band .....	53
John Yao's	
17-Piece Instrument .....	51
Steven Feifke Big Band .....	45
Josephine Davies	
Enso Ensemble .....	42
Michael Leonhart Orchestra ....	40
Julian Joseph Big Band .....	40
Jazzrausch Bigband .....	37
Budapest Jazz Orchestra .....	33
The Royal Krunk Jazz Orkestra ...	31
People's Liberation Big Band ...	29
Anita Brown Jazz Orchestra ....	28
Cecilia Coleman Big Band .....	27
Winnipeg Jazz Orchestra .....	24

### Rising Star Trumpeter of the Year

<b>Yazz Ahmed .....</b>	<b>222</b>
Wallace Roney Jr. ....	183
Brandon Woody .....	167
Emma-Jean Thackray .....	137
Laura Jurd .....	130
Takuya Kuroda .....	125
Alex Dörner .....	121
Riley Mulherkar .....	113
Rachel Therrien .....	112
Benny Benack III .....	109
Dan Rosenboom .....	84
Giveton Gelin .....	66
Kenny Warren .....	55
Julien Knowles .....	52
Chad McCullough .....	52
Mederic Collignon .....	48
David Adewumi .....	47
Luca Aquino .....	45
Audrey Powne .....	45
John Raymond .....	42
Summer Camargo .....	40
Chloe Rowlands .....	37

Hermon Mehari .....	35
Jawwaad Taylor .....	33
Anthony Hervey .....	29

### Rising Star Trombonist of the Year

<b>Natalie Cressman .....</b>	<b>210</b>
Kalia Vandever .....	135
Melissa Gardiner .....	90
Nanami Haruta .....	84
Corey King .....	78
Audrey Ochoa .....	67
Rosie Turton .....	48
Andy Clausen .....	57
Aubrey Logan .....	45
Henrik Munkeby Nørstebø .....	50
Altin Sencalar .....	53
Filippo Vignato .....	49
Corey Wilcox .....	49
Gina Benalcázar-López .....	47
Rita Payés .....	46
Darius Christian Jones .....	37
Reggie Chapman .....	33
Nick Grinder .....	33
Emily "Freddie" Fredrickson ....	32
Sam Blakeslee .....	30
Joshua Holcomb .....	30
Anoushka Nanguy .....	28
Mariel Bildsten .....	26
Nick Depinna .....	25
Evan Dexter .....	25
Haruka Kikuchi .....	25

### Rising Star Soprano Saxophonist of the Year

<b>Sam Gendel .....</b>	<b>156</b>
Alexa Tarantino .....	152
Tineke Postma .....	140
Emma Rawicz .....	120
Tobias Meinhart .....	103
Trish Clowes .....	87

Jason Robinson .....	75
Tomoki Sanders .....	67
Morgan Guerin .....	63
David Leon .....	60
Hailey Niswanger .....	56
Emilio Modeste .....	54
Dan Blake .....	52
Alfredo Colón .....	50
Alex LoRe .....	48
Nick Adema .....	42
Kira Linn .....	40
Nicola Caminiti .....	37
Marius Sjøteland Neset .....	33
Jeremy Powell .....	32
Ben Solomon .....	29
Yuma Uesaka .....	29
Brent Birkhead .....	25
Danny Janklow .....	25
Steven Lugerner .....	23

### Rising Star Alto Saxophonist of the Year

<b>Sarah Hanahan .....</b>	<b>148</b>
Remy Le Boeuf .....	141
Émile Parisien .....	131
Silke Eberhard .....	122
Josh Johnson .....	122
Logan Richardson .....	103
Tineke Postma .....	96
Angelika Niescier .....	94
Aurora Nealand .....	93
Godwin Louis .....	87
Jessica Lurie .....	86
Jasmine Myra .....	72
Nicole Johäntngen .....	71
Braxton Cook .....	67
Owen Broder .....	66
Patrick Bartley .....	63
Nick Mazzarella .....	63
Alfredo Colón .....	61
Rachel Cohen .....	47
Danny Janklow .....	42



Hailey Niswanger .....	40
David Leon .....	39
Luise Volkmann .....	38
Francesco Cafiso .....	35
Erena Terakubo .....	28

### Rising Star Tenor Saxophonist of the Year

<b>Isaiah Collier .....</b>	<b>333</b>
Zoh Amba .....	139
Kevin Sun .....	129
Julietta Eugenio .....	101
Abraham Burton .....	96
Emma Rawicz .....	92
Camille Thurman .....	92
Stacy Dillard .....	89
Roxy Coss .....	84
Maria Grand .....	84
Binker Golding .....	75
Xhosha Cole .....	71
Alexa Tarantino .....	70
Trish Clowes .....	58
Linda Sikhakhane .....	45
Troy Roberts .....	41
Chelsea Carmichael .....	38
Emilio Modeste .....	38
Marius Sjøteland Neset .....	38
Dan Blake .....	37
Morgan Guerin .....	31
Matt Carmichael .....	30
Neta Raanan .....	30
Tivon Pennicott .....	29
Cecilie Strange .....	25

### Rising Star Baritone Saxophonist of the Year

<b>Michael Dease .....</b>	<b>299</b>
Alexa Tarantino .....	179
Linda Fredriksson .....	174
Jonah Parzen-Johnson .....	118
Jason Marshall .....	116
Charles Evans .....	93
Lo "LUCY" Wood .....	75
Andrew Hadro .....	46
Josh Lee .....	40
Henry Solomon .....	39
Tim Sullivan .....	39
Jason Sharp .....	35
Tony Lustig .....	32
Courtney Wright .....	32
Paul Nedzella .....	30
Larry Bustamante .....	27
Jasper Dutz .....	24
Josh Lee .....	22
BJ Jansen .....	21
Hunter Pullen .....	20

### Rising Star Clarinetist of the Year

<b>Chet Doxas .....</b>	<b>185</b>
Chris Byars .....	149
Sam Sadigursky .....	119
Yuma Uesaka .....	107
Josh Johnson .....	100
Joachim Badenhorst .....	99
Jeremiah Cymerman .....	91
Lucas Pino .....	79
Doreen Ketchens .....	73
Giacomo Smith .....	68
Mike McGinnis .....	62

Luigi Grasso .....	57
Marius Sjøteland Neset .....	56
Nico Gori .....	51
Tim Laughlin .....	43
Chloe Feoranzo .....	39
Daniel Cohen .....	38
Sheldon Brown .....	31
Jason Scott .....	30
Connor Stewart .....	26

### Rising Star Flutist of the Year

<b>Isaiah Collier .....</b>	<b>194</b>
Nubya Garcia .....	169
Noah Preminger .....	160
Anne Drummond .....	135
André 3000 .....	114
Naissam Jalal .....	108
Alexa Tarantino .....	93
Laura Cocks .....	79
Zoh Amba .....	75
Xhosha Cole .....	73
Grace Kelly .....	59
Magic Malik .....	51
Josh Johnson .....	43
Itai Kriss .....	43
Braxton Cook .....	40
Tamar Osborn .....	36
Itai Kriss .....	35
Alfredo Colón .....	33
Mthunzi Mvubu .....	28
De'Sean Jones .....	20

### Rising Star Pianist of the Year

<b>Marta Sánchez .....</b>	<b>182</b>
Nduduzo Makhathini .....	170
Alexander Hawkins .....	132
Tigran Hamasyan .....	120
Micah Thomas .....	112
Christian Sands .....	99
James Francies .....	90
Kaja Drakler .....	86
Lawrence Fields .....	71
Connie Han .....	68
Isaiah J. Thompson .....	63
Amaro Freitas .....	58
Rachel Eckroth .....	57
Tania Giannouli .....	54
Fergus McCreadie .....	53
Philip Golub .....	50
Kris Bowers .....	47
Gwylim Symcock .....	42
Paul Cornish .....	41
Alfa Mist .....	41

### Rising Star Keyboardist of the Year

<b>Jacob Collier .....</b>	<b>171</b>
Florian Weber .....	117
Joe Armon-Jones .....	107
Brian Marsella .....	97
Lawrence Fields .....	96
Matthew Whitaker .....	89
Elias Stemeseder .....	79
Cameron Graves .....	78
Phillip Gollub .....	76
Amaro Freitas .....	70
Elliot Galvin .....	70
DOMi .....	68

Fergus McCreadie .....	60
Alfa Mist .....	59
Marco Benevento .....	57
Frank Woeste .....	52
Matthew Bourne .....	50
Morgan Guerin .....	48
Mamiko Watanabe .....	45
Kamaal Williams .....	43

### Rising Star Organist of the Year

<b>Alexander Hawkins .....</b>	<b>238</b>
Rachel Eckroth .....	178
Matthew Whitaker .....	162
Akiko Tsuruga .....	133
Will Blades .....	99
Bobby Sparks .....	88
Ben Paterson .....	84
Morgan Guerin .....	67
Gerard Gibbs .....	55
Atsuko Hashimoto .....	54
Joe Bagg .....	53
Raphael Wressnig .....	46
Jeff Babko .....	40
Charlie Wood .....	39
Erik Deutsch .....	37
Radam Schwartz .....	32
Dan Fogel .....	26
Kyle Koehler .....	25
Chris Hazelton .....	24
Ron Oswanski .....	20

### Rising Star Guitarist of the Year

<b>Ava Mendoza .....</b>	<b>195</b>
Brandon Seabrook .....	151
Wendy Eisenberg .....	145
Yotam Silberstein .....	125
Hedvig Mollestad .....	114
Camila Meza .....	101
Gordon Grdina .....	98
Gregg Belisle-Chi .....	86
Cory Wong .....	81
Graham Dechter .....	71
Emma-Jean Thackray .....	68
Charles Altura .....	65
Matt Gold .....	64
Max Light .....	55
Rotem Sivan .....	55
Ant Law .....	54
Dan Wilson .....	45
Charlie Ballantine .....	42
Jesse Van Ruller .....	33
Eric Hofbauer .....	32

### Rising Star Bassist of the Year

<b>Brandon Lopez .....</b>	<b>168</b>
Nick Dunston .....	147
Petter Eldh .....	126
David Wong .....	102
Hans Glawischnig .....	100
Rashaan Carter .....	98
Junius Paul .....	88
Harish Raghavan .....	87
Lisa Mezzacappa .....	70
Endea Owens .....	64
Yasushi Nakamura .....	56
Daniel Casimir .....	50
Mali Obomsawin .....	48

Gabriele Evangelista .....	47
Brandi Disterheft .....	46
Noah Garabedian .....	45
Marion Hayden .....	44
Amina Scott .....	44
Russell Hall .....	40
Tyrone Allen .....	37

### Rising Star Electric Bassist of the Year

<b>Jorge Roeder .....</b>	<b>151</b>
Brandon Lopez .....	145
Skulli Sverrisson .....	140
MonoNeon .....	93
Michael Olatuja .....	89
Farida Amadou .....	85
Hadrien Feraud .....	80
Mali Obomsawin .....	79
Jason Roebke .....	71
Joe Lally .....	61
Daniel Casimir .....	58
Kinga Glyk .....	51
Conor Chaplin .....	47
Anders Christensen .....	45
Dieter Ilg .....	44
Ciara Moser .....	42
Carlitos Del Puerto .....	40
Matt Lux .....	38
Kaveh Rastegar .....	34
Marika Galea .....	29

### Rising Star Violinist of the Year

<b>Jessica Pavone .....</b>	<b>215</b>
Gabby Fluke-Mogul .....	109
Adam Baldych .....	103
Scott Tixier .....	101
Macie Stewart .....	82
Jason Anick .....	59
Jesse Zubot .....	58
Johanna Burnheart .....	49
Maureen Choi .....	41
Sana Nagana .....	37
Mateusz Smoczynski .....	37
Majid Khaliq .....	36
Ben Powell .....	36
Aline Homzy .....	33
Joanna Mattrey .....	33
Joe Deninzon .....	31
Ola Kvernberg .....	31
Anais Drago .....	30
Nora Germain .....	30
Lisi Wright .....	30

### Rising Star Drummer of the Year

<b>Ulysses Owens Jr. ....</b>	<b>164</b>
Justin Faulkner .....	128
Savannah Harris .....	127
Jonathan Barber .....	100
Moses Boyd .....	99
Christian Lillinger .....	96
Kassa Overall .....	85
Chris Corsano .....	79
Justin Brown .....	74
Sun Mi-Hong .....	72
Leslie Mok .....	70
Mark Whitfield Jr. ....	70
Otis Brown III .....	67
Devin Gray .....	67





ANOUSH ABRAR



LISA LOPEZ



LAUREN DESBERG

Alexander Hawkins

Marta Sanchez

Michael Mayo

McClenty Hunter Jr.	67
Jeremiah Collier	52
Joe Dyson	50
Jeremy Dutton	47
Sarathy Korwar	45
Seb Rochford	44

### Rising Star Percussionist of the Year

<b>JoVia Armstrong</b>	<b>149</b>
Keita Ogawa	123
Rajna Swaminathan	110
Weedie Braimah	102
Kweku Sumbry	88
Luisito Quintero	85
Mauricio Herrera	83
Sarathy Korwar	82
Carolyn Koebel	57
Eli Fountain	53
Gumbi Ortiz	51
Tomoki Sanders	49
James Maddren	47
Amaury Acosta	35
Armando Marçal	34
Garth Powell	34
Al Murray	27
Negah Santos	21
Chris Joris	20
Robert Vizcaino Jr.	20

### Rising Star Vibraphonist of the Year

<b>Sasha Berliner</b>	<b>372</b>
Chien Chien Lu	195
Yuhan Su	107
Jim Hart	98
Kjell Nordeson	85
Corey Mwamba	81
Mike Dillon	71
Thaddeus Tukes	61
Jalen Baker	58
Sae Hashimoto	54
Lolly Allen	53
Christian Tamburr	50
Peter Schlamb	44
Tom Beckham	35
Wayne Williams	30
Lewis Wright	30
Smith Dobson	24
Tyler Blanton	22

Alfredo Naranjo	22
Hristo Yotsov	22

### Rising Star Beyond Instrumentalist of the Year

<b>Susan Alcorn (pedal steel guitar)</b>	<b>(passed Jan. 31, 2025) 362</b>
Shabaka (shakuhachi)	144
Val Jeanty (turntables/sound sculpture)	142
Jason Stein (bass clarinet)	99
Vincent Peirani (accordion)	94
Ben Wendel (bassoon)	93
Aurora Nealand (accordion)	80
Alina Bzhezzhinska (harp)	71
Ballaké Sissoko (kora)	70
DoYeon Kim (gayageum)	66
Helen Gillet (cello)	65
Fred Lonberg-Holm (cello)	61
Maxine Roach (viola)	60
David Virelles (celeste)	57
Alexa Tarantino (alto flute)	56
Okkyung Lee (cello)	48
Ben Rosenbaum (accordion)	48
Amanda Whiting (harp)	44
Arkady Shilkloper (French horn)	39
Katherine Young (bassoon)	34

### Rising Star Female Vocalist of the Year

<b>Kandace Springs</b>	<b>113</b>
Lady Blackbird	92
Amirtha Kidambi	92
Kat Edmonson	91
Champion Fulton	88
Elina Duni	87
Nicole Zuraitis	80
Gabrielle Cavassa	79
Zara McFarlane	75
Melanie Charles	74
Emma-Jean Thackray	73
Buika	68
Christie Dashiell	67
Vanisha Gould	66
Alyssa Allgood	63
Hilary Gardner	58
Bria Skonberg	58
Jo Lawry	54
Camille Bertault	45

Daymé Arocena	43
Laufey	42
Michelle Lordi	41
April Varner	41
Sarah Elizabeth Charles	40
Carmen Souza	39
Camille Thurman	39

### Rising Star Male Vocalist of the Year

<b>Michael Mayo</b>	<b>231</b>
Samora Pinderhughes	115
Fred Moten	105
Bilal	90
Doug Wamble	90
Tyreek McDole	89
Milton Suggs	88
Dean Bowman	74
Peter Cincotti	71
Ola Onabule	67
Billy Valentine	61
Braxton Cook	55
JD Walter	54
Jeremy Davenport	51
Jeff Denson	41
Alan Hampton	38
John Proulx	36
Paul Marinaro	35
Vincent Gardner	34
Jamie Davis	24

### Rising Star Composer of the Year

<b>Ingrid Laubrock</b>	<b>194</b>
Melissa Aldana	165
Anna Webber	135
Etienne Charles	102
Joel Ross	98
Makaya McCraven	89
Miho Hazama	86
Marta Sanchez	76
Angel Bat Dawid	75
Yazz Ahmed	73
Amina Figarova	66
Ches Smith	62
Eve Risser	56
Jihye Lee	55
Marquis Hill	53
Pascal Le Boeuf	49
Walter Smith III	49

Jonathan Finlayson	45
Remy Le Boeuf	45
Tia Fuller	39

### Rising Star Arranger of the Year

<b>Anna Webber</b>	<b>202</b>
Allison Miller	168
Makaya McCraven	162
Jihye Lee	155
Adam O'Farrill	134
Jacob Collier	131
Amina Figarova	110
Noah Preminger	107
Ulysses Owens Jr.	98
Jonathan Finlayson	94
Michael League	94
Obed Calvaire	85
Ben Wendel	84
Miles Okazaki	80
Christian Sands	69
Michael Leonhart	47
Carlos Henriquez	40
Steven Feifke	34
Chris Crenshaw	29
Lauren Elizabeth Baba	20

### Rising Star Producer of the Year

<b>Adrian Younge &amp; Ali Shaheed Muhammad</b>	<b>112</b>
Kassa Overall	92
John Corbett	90
Ryan Truesdell	89
Michael League	88
JD Allen	81
Myra Melford	77
Jimmy Katz	74
Fabian Almazan	70
Emma-Jean Thackray	70
Ben Allison	68
Moses Boyd	66
Ryan Keberle	66
Marta Sanchez	66
Liberty Ellman	62
Dezron Douglas	62
Taylor Ho Bynum	62
Ulysses Owens Jr.	60
Pedro Costa	52
Spike Wilner	50



**CONGRATULATIONS TO THE NEW SCHOOL  
FACULTY & ALUMNI ON 132 RECOGNITIONS  
ACROSS 51 CATEGORIES IN THE 2025  
DOWNBEAT CRITICS POLL!**



Jaki Byard, Mary Halvorson, Fred Hersch, Anat Cohen, Julian Lage, Brad Mehldau, Patricia Brennan, Sylvie Courvoisier, Immanuel Wilkins, Artemis, Dave Douglas, Melissa Aldana, Jazzmeia Horn, Matt Wilson, Chris Potter, Roy Hargrove, Julian Lage Trio, Brad Mehldau Trio, Fred Hersch Trio, Anat Cohen Tentet, Arturo O’Farrill and the Latin Jazz Ensemble, Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, Jacob Garchik, John Fedchock, Jane Ira Bloom, Caroline Davis, Brian Landrus, Jeff Lederer, Ned Rothenberg, Elsa Nilsson, Marty Ehrlich, George Cables, Uri Caine, Larry Goldings, Peter Bernstein, Rez Abbasi, Gilad Hekselman, Nir Felder, Buster Williams, Avishai Cohen, Sara Caswell, Andrew Cyrille, Adam Rudolph, Bobby Sanabria, Tomas Fujiwara, Chris Dingman, Cécile McLorin Salvant, Fay Victor, Sara Serpa, José James, Arturo O’Farrill, Robert Glasper, Thumbscrew, Lakecia Benjamin, Brandee Younger, Luke Stewart, Peter Evans, Joel Ross Quartet, Luke Stewart Silt Trio, Jazzmeia Horn And Her Noble Force, Allison Miller with the One O’Clock Lab Band, Riley Mulherkar, Chloe Rowlands, Andy Clausen, Morgan Guerin, Jasper Dutz, James Francies, Brian Marsella, Wendy Eisenberg, Yotam Silberstein, Camila Meza, Nick Dunston, Jeremy Dutton, Kweku Sumbry, Sasha Berliner, Sarah Elizabeth Charles, Bilal, Ingrid Laubrock, Joel Ross, Allison Miller, Ben Allison, Spike Wilner





# THE CRITICS

Below are the **251 critics** who voted in DownBeat's 73rd Annual International Critics Poll. It's a record number! According to the rules, critics distributed up to 10 points among up to three choices in each category, with no more than 5 points going to any single artist or group. They voted for both Established Talent and Rising Stars.

**A.D. Amorosi:** Variety, JazzTimes, Flood, Wax Poetics

**Aaron Cohen:** DB, Chicago Reader

**Adam Shatz:** New York Review of Books, London Review of Books, New York Times Magazine

**Alain Drouot:** DB, Citizen Jazz

**Alan Scherstuhl:** New York Times

**Alberto Bazzurro:** Musica Jazz

**Alex Dutilh:** Open Jazz, France Musique

**Alex Rodríguez:** Mirolo

**Alexa M. Peters:** DB, KNKX Public Radio, The Seattle Times, Rolling Stone, Earshot Jazz Magazine.

**Allen Morrison:** DB, JazzTimes, The Guardian

**Ammar Kalia:** The Guardian, Observer, DB, Jazzwise

**Andrew Read:** Jazz In Europe Magazine

**Andrey Henkin:** The New York Times, Stereophile, JazzWise, QwestTV, WeJazz, The Brooklyn Rail, Point of Departure, Squid's Ear

**Andy Beta:** NPR, Pitchfork, We Jazz, Texas Monthly

**Andy Cowan:** MOJO

**Andy Hamilton:** The Wire, Jazz Journal

**Andy Hermann:** DB, Wondery

**Angelo Leonardi:** All About Jazz Italia

**Anthony Dean-Harris:** DB, Portland's KMHD

**Ayana M. Contreras:** DB, KUVO Jazz, New York Times

**Bill Beuttler:** Boston Globe

**Bill Brownlee:** Plastic Sax

**Bill Meyer:** DB, The Wire, Chicago Reader, We Jazz, New York Jazz Record, Magnet, Dusted

**Bill Milkowski:** DB, Absolute Sound, Guitar Player, Jazzthing (Germany)

**Brad Rose:** Foxy Digitalis, The Pickup

**Brenda Sisane:** Kaya 959

**Bret Saunders:** Denver Post

**Brian Kiwanuka:** PostGenre

**C. Andrew Hovan:** DB, All About Jazz

**Charles Waring:** MOJO, uDiscover, Record Collector

**Chip Stern:** Positive Feedback OnLine

**Chris Heim:** KMWU, Global Village

**Chris J. Bahnsen:** DB

**Chris Monsen:** Musikkmagasinet, Jazznytt, Substack

**Chris Walker:** LA Jazz Scene, JazzTimes, California Tour & Travel

**Chris Wright:** Giant Steps—RTRM 92.1

**Christof Thurnherr:** Jazz'n'More

**Chrys Roney:** Hot House

**Coen de Jonge:** JazzBulletin NJA, Jazzism, JazzFlits

**Constantin Sieg:** Jazz-Zeit @ Radio Unerhört Marburg

**Corrado Antonini:** Rete Due, rsi.ch; Doppiozero.com

**Dan Bilawsky:** All About Jazz, JazzTimes

**Dan McClenaghan:** All About Jazz

**Dan Ouellette:** DB, Quest TV, Stereophile,

**Sag Harbor Express**

**Daniel A. Brown:** The New York City Jazz Record

**Daniel Spicer:** Jazzwise, The Wire, WeJazz, The Quietus, Songlines

**Dave Sumner:** Bandcamp Daily, Bird is the Worm

**David Fricke:** MOJO, JazzTimes, Sirius XM Radio

**David Graham:** The Atlantic

**David Hajdu:** The Nation

**David Koperhant:** TSFJazz/JazzNews

**David Kunian:** Offbeat, DB, Oxford American, Beat Street

**David Lührssen:** Shepherd Express

**Denise Sullivan:** San Francisco Chronicle

**Derk Richardson:** The Absolute Sound

**Dick Hovenga:** writteninmusic.com and jazzism.nl

**Doug Collette:** All About Jazz, Glide Magazine

**Dr. Brian Morton:** Tablet, others

**Dustin Garlitz:** JazzTalent.com, Sage Encyclopedia of Music and Culture

**Ed Enright:** DB

**Edward Blanco:** Allaboutjazz.com; WDNA, 88.9FM

**Elzy Kolb:** Freelance

**Emily Bick:** The Wire

**Enrico Romero:** Controradio Firenze

**Enzo Capua:** Musica Jazz

**Eric Harabadian:** Music Connection, Big City Rhythm & Blues, Media News Group, geoffwilburmusic.com, Goldmine, DB, aoidemagazine.com

**Eric Snider:** Jazziz, Creative Loafing

**Eugene Holley Jr.:** DB, Hot House, Publishers Weekly

**Filip Roshauw:** Jazznytt

**Filipe Freitas:** JazzTrail

**Frank Alkyer:** DB

**Frank John Hadley:** DB

**Frédéric Charbaut:** Festival Jazz à Saint Germain des Prés Paris

**Gary Fukushima:** DB

**Gene Seymour:** BookForum, The Nation

**Geoffrey Himes:** Paste, Chamber Music, Hard Rain & Pink Cadillacs

**George Grella:** Star-Review, Bandcamp, Brooklyn Rail, KillYrIdols

**George Kanzler:** Hot House, The New York City Jazz Record

**George Varga:** San Diego Union-Tribune & Tribune News Service

**George W. Harris:** jazzweekly.com

**Giuseppe Piacentino:** Musica Jazz

**Glenn Astarita:** AllAboutJazz.com

**Greg Bryant:** SiriusXM, NPR

**Greg Turner:** The Absolute Sound

**Héctor Martín González:** Canción a Quemarropa, Radio Canaria

**Henry Carrigan:** Living Blues, Folk Alley, No Depression, Publishers Weekly, DB

**Herb Boyd:** Amsterdam News and Black World Media Network

**Hobart Taylor:** All About Jazz

**Howard Mandel:** DB, The Wire, HowardMandel.substack.com

**Howard Reich:** DB, Gramophone

**Hrayr Attarian:** Jazziz and All About Jazz

**J.D. Considine:** DB

**James Hale:** DB, SoundStageXperience.com

**James Hussein Catchpole:** Tokyo Jazz Site, Songlines, Japan Times

**Jan Kobrzynowski:** JAZZTHETIK Magazine (Print)

**Jason Bivins:** Dusted, Point of Departure

**Jean Szlamowicz:** Spirit of Jazz; DB

**Jeff Cebulski:** chicagojazz.com, The New York City Jazz Record

**Jeff Krow:** Audiophile Audition

**Jeff Mccord:** kutx.org

**Jeff Wilson:** The Absolute Sound (Music Editor)

**Jeffrey Siegel:** Podcaster, Straight No Chaser

**Jennifer Odell:** Gambit Weekly (nola.com)

**Jerome Gordon:** WPRB Blog

**Jerome Wilson:** All About Jazz

**Jessica Nicholas:** The Age

**Jez Nelson:** One Jazz / Jazz FM UK

**Jim Macnie:** DB

**John Chacona:** AllAboutJazz.com, PostGenre

**John Ephland:** DB, AAJ

**John Gilbreath:** KEXP, Jazz Theater; KBCS, Caravan

**John McDonough:** DB, Mosaic Records

**John Moore:** Jazziz

**John Mulvey:** MOJO

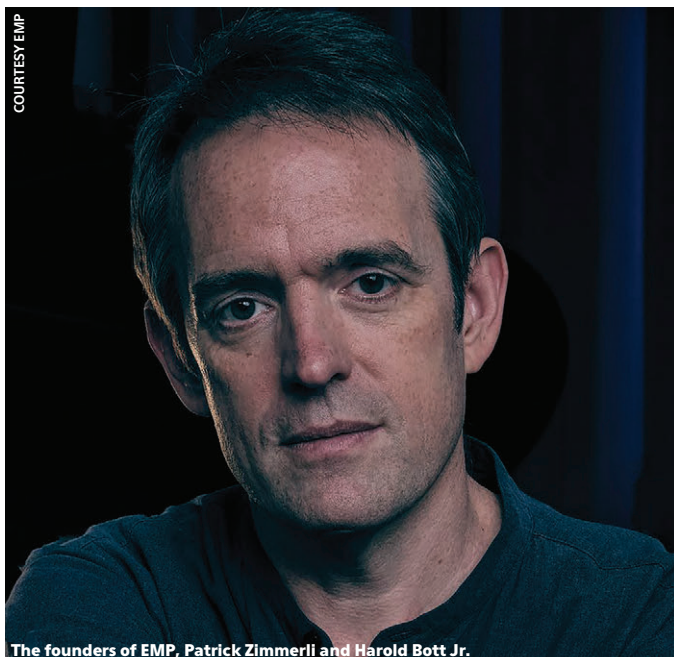


**John Murph:** DB, Washington Lawyer  
**John Shand:** The Sydney Morning Herald, Harper's Bazaar, Dingo, Limelight, Writing in the Dark  
**John Szwed:** Gagosian Quarterly  
**Jon Bream:** Minnesota Star Tribune  
**Jon Garelick:** Boston Globe, The Arts Fuse, Jazziz, DB  
**Jon Newey:** Jazzwise (Editor in Chief)  
**Josef Woodard:** DB, All About Jazz, Jazziz, Santa Barbara Independent  
**Joshua Myers:** DB, CapitalBop  
**Kazune Hayata:** Jazz Life  
**Kazunori Harada:** Jazin Magazine  
**Ken Dryden:** The New York City Jazz Record, Hot House  
**Ken Micallef:** Stereophile, DB, Analog Planet  
**Ken Shimamoto:** stasdauber.blogspot.com  
**Ken Waxman:** Jazzword.com, New York City Jazz Record, The Whole Note, MusicWorks, SquidsEar  
**Ken Weiss:** Cadence  
**Kerilie McDowall:** Inspired 55+ magazine, All About Jazz, past DB writer (2016–2020), currently: In the Zen (blog)  
**Kevin Lowenthal:** The Boston Globe  
**Kevin Whitlock:** Jazzwise  
**Köchl Reinhard:** Jazzthing, Jazzthetik, ZEITonline, Augsburg Allgemeine  
**Kurt Gottschalk:** The Wire, The New York City Jazz Record, DB  
**Lacaze Emmanuelle:** France Musique  
**Larry Birnbaum:** Stereophile  
**Larry Hollis:** Cadence  
**Larry Kelp:** The Absolute Sound  
**Laurence Donohue-Greene:** The New York City Jazz Record  
**Lawrence Peryer:** The Tonearm, KNKX, That Canadian Magazine, All About Jazz  
**Lee Rice Epstein:** Free Jazz Blog, But Does It Swing?  
**Leo Sidran:** All About Jazz, WBGO, Third Story Podcast  
**Ludovico Granvassu:** All About Jazz, Radio Free Brooklyn  
**Ludwig vanTrikt:** cadencemagazine.com  
**Luis Cubells:** 99.9 Valencia Radio  
**Makeda Krish:** Folded Wing for BBC Radio 3's 'Round Midnight  
**Mal Stanley:** ABC Jazz-Australian Broadcasting Corporation  
**Marcela Breton:** freelance  
**Marek Romanski:** Jazz Forum, Audio-Video  
**Mark Corroto:** AllAboutJazz.com  
**Mark Lomanno:** JazzTimes, Rhythm of Study  
**Mark R. Bacon:** JazzRio, LEO  
**Mark Ruffin:** Sirius XM Satellite Radio  
**Mark Stryker:** JazzTimes, DB, NPR, Author: "Jazz from Detroit"  
**Martin Laurentius:** Jazz thing  
**Martin Longley:** DB, Jazzwise, Songlines, All About Jazz, We Jazz, Qwest TV, The New York City Jazz Record, The Brooklyn Rail  
**Matt Collar:** Allmusic.com  
**Matthias Wegner:** Deutschlandfunk Kultur

(nationwide public radio)  
**Mel Minter:** Musically Speaking, Albuquerque The Magazine  
**Michael Barris:** DB  
**Michael Elves:** UMFM 101.5  
**Michael Jackson:** DB, Jazzwise, Chicago Sun-Times, Chicago Reader  
**Michael Ullman:** Fanfare, Arts Fuse  
**Michael J. West:** DB, Washington Post, Washington City Paper  
**Mike Flynn:** Jazzwise Magazine  
**Mike Greenblatt:** Goldmine, theaquarian.com, thejerseysound.com.  
**Mike Jeffers:** Chicago Jazz Magazine  
**Mike Jurkovic:** All About Jazz  
**Mirian Arbalejo:** Ditirambop, the Jazz Omnibus  
**Mitra I. Arthur:** NPR Music  
**Morgan Enos:** JazzTimes, UK Jazz News, Tracking Angle  
**Nina Terruzzi:** Radio 3—Radio Popolare  
**Otakar Svoboda:** Czech Radio Vltava  
**Paul Acquaro:** freejazzblog.org, Jazzpodium  
**Paul Cavalcante:** WBGO, WFUV, WNYC  
**Paul de Barros:** DB, Earshot  
**Paul Medrano:** bestofjazz.org  
**Pawel Brodowski:** Jazz Forum  
**Peter Howland McElhinney:** Style Weekly, Richmond Magazine  
**Peter Hum:** The Ottawa Citizen  
**Peter Margasak:** DB, the Wire, Bandcamp Daily, We Jazz, Chamber Music  
**Philip Booth:** Jazziz, Relix, JazzTimes, Culture Pop  
**Philip Freeman:** DB, Stereogum, The Wire, Burning Ambulance  
**Phillip Lutz:** DB  
**Pommaret Nicolas:** France Musique / Radio France  
**R.J. DeLuke:** Albany Times Union, All About Jazz  
**Rainer Bratfisch:** Jazz Podium, rockradio.de  
**Ralph A. Miriello:** notesonjazz.blogspot.com  
**Richard Brody:** The New Yorker  
**Richard Gehr:** Relix  
**Richard Kamins:** Step Tempest (Richard. Kamins@Substack.com)  
**Rick Anderson:** CD Hotlist: New Releases for Libraries; Shfl  
**Rob Saffer:** WGXC 90.7FM  
**Rob Hoff:** WQLN, WETF, JazzErie  
**Rob Shepherd:** PostGenre  
**Robert Baird:** Stereophile, Qobuz  
**Rolf Thomas:** Jazz thing, FAZ  
**Ron Netsky:** City Magazine, Rochester N.Y.  
**Ronald Patrick Hart Jr.:** Rock & Roll Globe, Billboard, Spin, AV Club, Village Voice  
**Ronald Schepper:** textura.org  
**Ross Boissoneau:** Something Else! Reviews, Local Spins  
**Roz Milner:** Dusted/Freelance  
**Rudolf Amstutz:** Jazz 'n' More  
**Rui Miguel Abreu:** expresso.pt, rimasebatidas.pt, We Jazz magazine  
**S. Victor Aaron:** somethingelsereviews.com  
**Sascha Feinstein:** Brilliant Corners, Jazziz

**Scott Gutterman:** The Brooklyn Rail  
**Scott Yanow:** DB, The New York City Jazz Record, LA Jazz Scene, Jazziz, Syncopated Times  
**Sean J. O'Connell:** Square, Cube, Prism  
**Sean Westergaard:** All Music Guide  
**Sebastian Scotney:** UK Jazz News, Jazzthetik, The Arts Desk  
**Selwyn Harris:** Jazzwise Magazine  
**sergio piccirilli:** elintruso.com  
**Shannon J. Effinger:** freelance  
**Sharonne Cohen:** DB, JazzTimes, OkayPlayer, Line of Best Fit, Everything Jazz  
**Shaun Brady:** Philadelphia Inquirer, Bandcamp Daily, Jazziz  
**Spencer Grady:** Songlines, Jazzwise, Metal Hammer, Invisible Oranges  
**Steve Feeney:** ArtsFuse.org  
**Steve Smith:** Night After Night  
**Stewart Smith:** The Wire, We Jazz, Bandcamp Daily, The Quietist, The Guardian  
**Stuart Broomer:** Musicworks/New York City Jazz Record/ Point of Departure  
**Stuart Derdeyn:** Vancouver Sun/Province/Postmedia  
**Stuart Kremsky:** Mr. Stu's Record Room  
**Suzanne Lorge:** DB, The New York City Jazz Record  
**Takao Fujioka:** Way Out West  
**Ted Gioia:** The Honest Broker  
**Terry Perkins:** DB  
**Thierry De Clemensat:** Paris-Move  
**Thierry Giard:** CultureJazz.fr  
**Thomas B Henry:** The (Toledo) Blade  
**Thomas Conrad:** Stereophile, JazzTimes, The New York City Jazz Record, All About Jazz  
**Thomas Curbillon:** Club Jazz à Fip (Fip Radio)  
**Thomas Mau:** WDR; ARD; DLF  
**Thomas Rees:** BBC Radio 3 'Round Midnight, Jazzwise, The Wire  
**Thomas Staudter:** The (Croton) Gazette, DB, New York City Jazz Record, The Recorder  
**Tilman Urbach:** Stereo  
**Tim Larsen:** jazzviews.net  
**Tina Edwards:** DB, Composer, Listen Zine  
**Todd Manning:** Burning Ambulance, Rock and Roll Globe  
**Tom Hull:** tomhull.com  
**Tom Ineck:** Lincoln Journal Star, KZUM Community Radio  
**Tony Hillier:** Rhythms magazine  
**Tor Hammerø:** Nettavisen and the Tor de Jazz-blog  
**Troy Collins:** Point of Departure  
**Vincent Bessieres:** La Terrasse; Jazz Magazine  
**Virgil MIHAIU:** DB, Steaua—Jazz Context, JAM (Jazz Montenegro)  
**Will Layman:** PopMatters.com  
**Willard Jenkins:** DB, JazzTimes, the Independent Ear (openskyjazz.com)  
**Wolf Kampmann:** Jazzthing, Jazzthetik, other media  
**Yahve M. de la Cavada:** El País newspaper, Scherzo magazine  
**Yoshi Kato:** DB, San Francisco Classical Voice, San Francisco Chronicle





The founders of EMP, Patrick Zimmerli and Harold Bott Jr.



# PATRICK ZIMMERLI, HAROLD BOTT JR. LAUNCH EMP RECORDS

They were college pals at Columbia University in the mid- to late-'80s and later became roommates after graduating in 1990.

Now saxophonist-composer Patrick Zimmerli and electronic music maven Harold Bott Jr. have joined forces, nearly 40 years later, to form Emergence Music Productions (EMP) Records. The inaugural release on their recently launched label is *Songs Of Innocence*, a trio outing of original material showcasing Zimmerli on soprano saxophone alongside long-time collaborators Kevin Hays on piano and Satoshi Takeishi on drums and percussion.

"Harold and I have known each other for quite a long time," said Zimmerli, who splits his time between homes in New York and Paris. "And we've done projects together on and off ever since college where we're playing, mostly. In fact, we played together in Joe Henderson's practice band that was put together by Don Sickler, who was directing the Columbia Jazz Band at the time. This was back when Joe was doing his big band recordings for Verve near the end of his career. But as I got more into composing and Harry was getting into an electronics phase, we did a bunch of concerts with string quartet, jazz quartet and electronics. And he also did a lot of work with me for a 2002 project of mine called *Emergence* (a nine-piece ensemble in-

cluding string quartet), which was kind of the acorn from which EMP is coming out of."

Zimmerli, who won DownBeat's "Best Young Soloist" award as a high schooler at Hall High School, the West Hartford, Connecticut, school that has a notable history of producing talented jazz musicians such as Brad Mehldau, Joel Frahm, Noah Preminger and Pete McGuinness, also won the Thelonious Monk Composers Competition in 1993 (for his piece "The Paw"). He has made 14 albums to date, beginning with 1997's *Explosion* for Vancouver-based Songlines Records. That impressive debut, recorded in 1995 with guitarist Ben Monder and the Takeishi brothers (Satoshi on drums/percussion and Stomu on electric bass), was followed by a series of releases on Songlines, including 2016's *Shores Against Silence* (recorded in 1992 with pianist Kevin Hays, bassist Larry Grenadier and drummer Tom Rainey).

In addition *Songs Of Innocence*, Zimmerli is planning to follow up with a companion piece, *Songs Of Experience*, which finds him playing tenor saxophone exclusively. "The soprano has a sunny, optimistic color that brings solace, as opposed to the darker, more

dramatic color of the tenor sax," he explained. (Both sessions were actually recorded in 2019 for Elan Mehler's vinyl-only Newvelle label and are being released on CD for the first time on EMP).

In 2024, Zimmerli was awarded a Copland Fund grant to support yet another project, *Messages*, which has him playing soprano sax in a saxophone quartet featuring Chris Potter on tenor, Steve Wilson on alto and Ron Blake on baritone saxophone with a rhythm section of pianist Ed Simon, bassist Scott Colley and drummer E.J. Strickland. Their Feb. 10 performance at Dizzy's Club at Jazz at Lincoln Center (with Roman Filiu subbing for Wilson on alto saxophone) was documented in a YouTube clip.

Recordings of that ambitious sax quartet project, along with Zimmerli's opera, *Lucia Joyce* (a musical drama in four acts about James Joyce's daughter, a promising dancer in late-'20s Paris who was romantically linked with Samuel Beckett), are expected to be released on EMP in the near future.

Meanwhile, Zimmerli and Bott, who had a weekly show on Columbia University radio station WKCR back in the late '80s, have con-



tinued to explore new musical terrain together on the bandstand in recent performances at Firehouse 12 in New Haven, Connecticut, The Falcon in Marlboro, New York and The Blue Gallery in New York City (Bott generates electronic sounds he created with his laptop, much in the same way that Patrick Gleeson did with analog synthesizers for Herbie Hancock on *Crossings* and *Sextant*). Zimmerli also did a vocal presentation in June at the Irish embassy in Paris, showcasing vocal segments from *Lucia Joyce* with a crew of singers.

Ultimately, the EMP production company is about fermenting ideas and bringing them to fruition. And teaming Zimmerli and Bott seemed like a perfect match. "I was thinking about various partners I could work with," said Zimmerli. "Harry's a producer in the classical field; I think one of the records that he produced got like 8 million spins on Spotify. This is the kind of thing I want to bring to my music, and so I thought it would be ideal to team up with him. Harry's a monster musician in so many ways, and we can kind of put our whole take on musical reality out there that is kind of unique to what we do.

"And the goal is to widen it and have it be not just my music but a bunch of other like-minded people that are sort of in our circle," Zimmerli added. "It'd be cool to have Pete

Bernstein, for instance, playing with the EMP House Band (Zimmerli on saxophones, Chris Tordini on bass, David Cook on piano, Bott on electronics) and a brass quintet, but keep that part of our sound as well. We have a really broad range of things that we can do with a core of musicians so that we're developing our sound, even as we're being super broad esthetically. Plus, Harry's got a lot of connections with Indian music, which would be really interesting to do something with. He's had a collaboration with Krishna Bhatt, an amazing sitar player. And it would be amazing to do stuff like that on the label, just to broaden things out. That's the idea of EMP."

Zimmerli added, "Harry and I are quite prolific. I'm always writing and Harry has a back catalog of a lot of electronic stuff that he's done. I also tend to write a lot of little songs while I'm composing bigger works. Like when I was writing my opera, *Lucia Joyce*, little things would occur to me on the side that I'd write down and want to develop and produce later. I've got a lot of music that has never seen the light of day, a lot of the stuff I did with Harold. We did a whole record of stuff that never got released. And we hope to be putting out some of those things in the future."

Meanwhile, the two musical compadres al-

ready have another joint project in the works. As Bott explained, "We have a nascent podcast that we're nurturing at this point and producing, to kind of put forward some thoughts about all sorts of music and a wide range of aesthetics. We started with Gregorian chant on our first episode, then we did an episode on Grant Green, another episode on Bach and one on Nat 'King' Cole. Plus, I want to get into a discussion of Webern and Varèse. So we're kind of hop-skip-jumping around."

Added Zimmerli, "We have a great affinity in terms of the kinds of music that we like and the kinds of things that we like to think about, the kinds of ideas that we'd like to trade back and forth. And I think the idea for the podcast is to have a take on things, discussing it while not necessarily revering it, maybe sometimes criticizing even somebody like Bach. It's good to do that with these people because that makes them feel more alive. And I think we've shared a certain, not irreverence, but more like we want to question and get to the bottom of what's good and what's bad about everyone, no matter how revered they are. And that kind of opens up an interesting discussion, I think, and makes things more lively. So that's the kind of thing we really get into on our podcast."

Stay tuned.

—Bill Milkowski



# MORE AMOR

A Tribute to Wes Montgomery



Photo Credit: Spencer Cole Porter

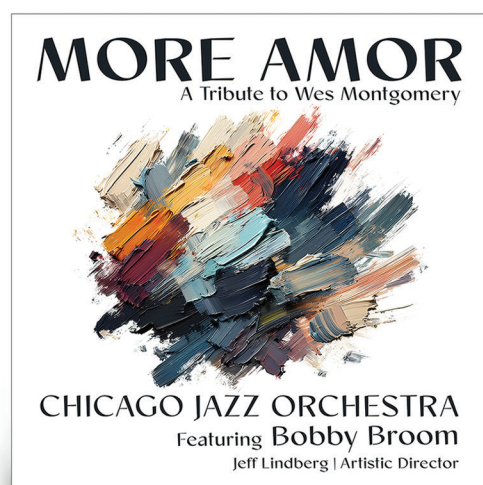


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The Julian Shore Trio: from left, Marin Nevin, Shore and Allen Menard.

## JULIAN SHORE: ENGAGING ABSTRACTION

A learned scholar from Berlin emigrated to the U.S. to teach economics and mathematics at Harvard and MIT. When America joined the war effort, he was recruited by his adopted country, and found himself in Nazi Germany, spying for the Americans.

There, he met a beautiful woman. "Meet me in Berlin," he told her, and she did, still carrying the papers he had slipped into her jacket to get them past a military checkpoint. She had been deceived and used, but they fell in love anyway. They were the grandparents of Julian Shore, who would not exist but for that covert dalliance.

Shore is almost certain he picked up the term *sub rosa* from his professor-turned-secret-agent grandfather. Often used when talking about clandestine operations, it literally means "beneath the rose," exploiting the most furtive of flowers in ancient mythology.

There is a romance to secrecy. The unknown is mysterious, evocative, dangerous. Shore's mentor, Wayne Shorter, seemed to relish in obfuscations, remarking once to Shore in Panama that Zorro committed crimes but saved a village, and that Dr. Frankenstein was also a creator. Riddles can be a code; their deciphering might lead one to a greater realization of the truth. Jazz has its codes, and a mystique anthropomorphized by griffins and unicorns — Shorter, Miles, Trane, Bird, Monk,

et al. Their stories often surpass the schooling.

Shore decided on calling his latest piano trio album *Sub Rosa* (Chill Tone) after reading an interview with the late filmmaker David Lynch articulating his aversion to talking about his movies. He explains: "That felt like a good way to get at the abstraction of just trying to communicate in a way that [is] keeping our secrets a little bit ... trying to communicate in a way that's not verbal, not everything being out in the open." He pays homage to his mentor, Shorter (who passed away during the planning for this album), penning several originals very much in the style of the enigmatic saxophonist and composer, and including a snippet of Shore with bassist Martin Nevin and drummer Allan Mednard in mid-flight on a rendition of Shorter's own piece, "Pegasus."

"I've always been scared of piano trio," Shore admits. "Obviously the lineage is so deep. ... I wanted to face my fears, and the only way out is through." He tunnels forward courageously, taking risks in music like his grandfather did in his episodes of espio-

nage. "I think risk taking, for me, is the thing that helps me be myself," he affirms. "Maybe, you know, that's coming from Wayne. ... My [piano] teacher, Hal Crook, was really into risk taking, almost saying, like, what's the point unless you're doing that? That's my vehicle. That's my place."

Risk is an everyday facet in Shore's household. His partner, pianist Carmen Staaf, is at high risk for COVID, so for them the pandemic remains a clear and present danger. "She's one of the lucky, lucky few that still really have to worry about it," he says, sardonically. "And so, we have often felt a little left behind, like we haven't been able to relax since this whole thing started." He wrote "Must Keep Going" as a representation of their mindset. "There's been this kind of partnership where we're just like, we've got to keep going. ... We just have to push through and no matter how much chaos that brings emotionally and otherwise, you just got to keep going." The piece is a disorienting, angular series of modulating triplet figures, spinning in infinity, to quote Paul Simon.



Circles are the muse de fixation for artist Tayo Heuser, Shore's mother. Her sprawling canvasses are wrought with wreaths of color, concentric rings overlapping in three or more dimensions, transporting in from another realm. Her artistic statement reads: "My aspiration has always been to merge line and color in such a way that does not end in representational imagery but rather opens the door for the poetics of the imagination. My abstractions hover between the need to meticulously render geometric shapes and intuitively express my feelings." One can appreciate how Julian Shore has absorbed those concepts. They are evident in his music.

It was his mother who signed him up for jazz camp as a teenager. He didn't enjoy it at first, but Shore remembers, "She talked me down and got me to do it. Some other parents might have been like, 'Yeah, forget it, let's go.'" He understands why she wanted him to stick with it, even though she knew very little about jazz. "She was very comfortable with jazz, being an abstract artist," he says. "And that to me, that's kind of the power of this abstraction stuff in the first place. We're not even in the same medium, [but] she was able to totally get the power of it and encourage me in that space."

One of Heuser's recent paintings intrigued her son: Amidst her trademark ringlets and other geometric shapes are a pair of antelope, portrayed only from the head up, horns locked, punctiliously drawn à la Joseph Wolf's taxonomical illustrations. "It was the layer of having this beautiful and naturalistic element just so vividly, carefully represented against all this abstraction. I loved that," Shore remembers. The non-abstraction became the mystery — why did she decide to render something so literal, after a lifetime of not doing precisely that? He then realized he had found the cover of his new album.

The pieces all deal with the concept of abstraction. The title of the Beach Boys song "Don't Talk (Put Your Head On My Shoulders)" speaks for itself. "It Was A Dream" references the phenomenon of "derealization" — suddenly being unsure if this is reality or otherwise (it's happened to Shore, to his partner and to one in five people). "Blue In Blueprint," where Ellington uses some clever harmonic misdirection to disguise the blues. "All The Things You Are," the standard of standards deconstructed to only its essence. "Mission," written for Shorter, the incarnation of implication. "When [Wayne] died, he said he was looking forward to getting a new body and continuing the mission," says Shore. "I thought that was an incredible kind of parting statement. ... The mission is the thing."

The mission is now for Shore to continue — if he chooses to accept it.

—Gary Fukushima

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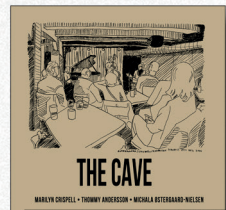
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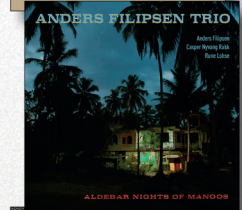
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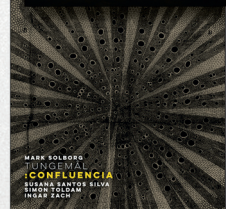
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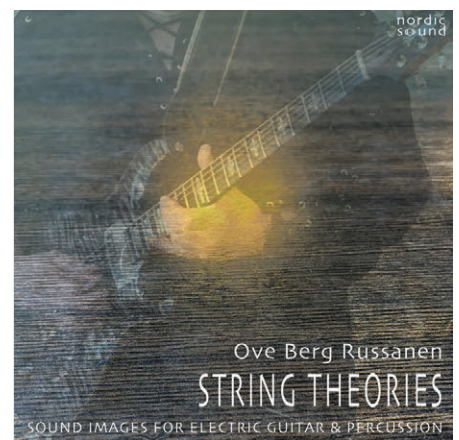
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SILVIA DI NATALE



"I would like this music to be music of connections, so people can recognize themselves in the music," says Ludovica Burtone of her new recording, *Migration Tales*.

## LUDOVICA BURTONE CELEBRATES RESILIENCE OF IMMIGRANT WOMEN

Ludovica Burtone recorded her latest album, *Migration Tales* (Endectomorph Music), in late 2023, well before Donald Trump was elected U.S. president.

"It was sort of a political statement even before all this happened," Burtone said from Brooklyn, where she moved after studying jazz at Boston's Berklee College of Music. "Because discrimination based on someone's immigration status also happens in Europe. But this time it's even more relevant because I'm an immigrant myself, and I'm here on a visa."

A classically trained violinist who played in several regional Italian orchestras, Burtone "always had a dream of living abroad" and studied in Spain for a while. But it was only after receiving a scholarship to attend the 2011 Banff Festival in Jazz and Creative Music, where artistic director Dave Douglas tapped her to play in ensembles with Myra Medford and many others, that she reset her musical compass and enrolled as a scholarship student at Berklee to study jazz composition.

The follow-up to her debut as a leader, *Sparks* (Outside In Music), *Migration Tales* celebrates the resilience of immigrant women. It features a multinational ensemble — Milena Casado (Spain) on flugelhorn, Julieta Eugenio (Argentina) on tenor saxophone, Marta Sánchez (Spain) on piano, Tyrone Allen II (USA) on bass and Jongkuk Kim (South Korea) on drums — and translates their multilingual collaboration into the universal language of music.

Highlighting her migration theme, Burtone discussed her own arrival in the U.S., dealing with the betrayal of a loved one, the hurdles she faces passing through immigration during the Trump regime, and her ongoing evolution as a jazz violinist, composer and vocalist.

The following conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

**Cree McCree:** *How did your own migration tale unfold?*

**Ludovica Burtone:** I left Italy with one suitcase of black clothes, so I couldn't mismatch. [laughs] I didn't think I would be able to stay very long because Boston is really expensive, but when Berklee understood what I could do, I started working a lot inside the university. I already had friends in New York who said when you finish, move down here. I was scared of moving to New York, and it was scary at first, but I'm surrounded by a community of musicians and artists and friends, so it feels like home now.

**McCree:** *The whole album is a tribute to immigrant women, and I'm sure it's no coincidence that several of the players are women as well. Have you been playing with them for a while?*

**Burtone:** Yes. Marta Sánchez also played piano on my first album, she's been part of my

projects since the beginning, and I met Julietta and Milena not long after that album came out. I'm really grateful to have this band. They put their heart into my music, and it was really, really beautiful to work with all of them.

**McCree:** *How did you come to be signed to the Endectomorph Music label?*

**Burtone:** I have known [label founder] Kevin Sun for a while now. I had already reached out to different labels and everyone was either not replying or just saying, "We have too many things lined up already." Then [publicist] Matt Merewitz said, "Why don't you talk to Kevin? He has this great label." And I was like, duh, of course! He's an incredible musician, super smart and very dedicated. So it's a small label, but he's doing so much, and I was grateful to work with them.

**McCree:** *Let's backtrack to your beginnings. What artists most influenced you to transmute your classical training into jazz?*

**Burtone:** My first love was Ella Fitzgerald. As a kid, my first vinyl of jazz was Ella singing. I discovered Regina Carter when my dad took me to New York when I was a teenager, and she definitely inspired me as a violinist. From many years of orchestra, I was also attracted by big band ensembles like Maria Schneider's and Kenny Wheeler's, and I feel like there's a synthesis between them and my love of French composers like Debussy and Ravel.

**McCree:** *Is your family still in Italy, and do you go back to visit them often?*

**Burtone:** I actually just got back, and it's strange, there was no line at all at JFK. I've never been in an immigration line that short, but the immigration officer Googled me.

**McCree:** *Really?! How did you know that?*

**Burtone:** He told me. He was like, "Are you famous?" And I'm like, "What? I'm a professional musician." Then he said, "Let me check your YouTube." As soon as he put my name in, he could see I was a musician. But he wanted to see numbers. He was like, how many followers do you have on Instagram? I guess if you have more, you are really worthy of the visa that they give you. My Instagram is basically my visa application. [laughs]

**McCree:** *I'm going to include this information in the article, because I think it's important for people who may be having problems of their own to know. Is there anything in particular you would like the listener to take away from *Migration Tales*?*






**Burtone:** I would like this music to be music of connections, so people can recognize themselves in the music. We may be very different, but we have a lot of common ground. And I hope it inspires them to chat with people who are different from them, and maybe become more welcoming of those people. **DB**



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# Reviews

Masterpiece ★★★★★ Excellent ★★★★ Good ★★★ Fair ★★ Poor ★

JEN ROSENSTEIN



Joshua Redman commands the dialog between jazz's past and future with equanimity.



## Joshua Redman *Words Fall Short*

BLUE NOTE

★★★★½

With a crisp new working quartet, Redman offers much satisfaction. His sound is lean, with a dry, unsentimental precision. He can leap from ascetic tranquility to muscular fluency on command, often within the same piece. He makes “She Knows” a case study in bipolar balladeering. “Message To Unsend” has a cautious stoicism, as if to emphasize its simplicity. Pianist Paul Cornish loosens the austerity and Redman tees off on his last figure, flies into the clouds, then lands serenely where it started. “Borrowed Eyes” is a more midnight lament, paced carefully around Philip Norris’ bass interlude.

Former Artimis tenor Melissa Aldana joins Redman on “So It Goes.” The solos are less interesting than their convergences. They dive into each other’s jet streams like a couple of Top Guns. Skylar Tang guests on “Icarus,” which mimics codelike patterns before becoming a two-horn dialog. The eight originals are mostly passing predicates on which to hang the fine playing.

They also become an inhibiting barrier. When listeners must take time to tame and internalize too many new songs, the overproduction creates a passive indifference characterized by Nicolas Slonimsky as “non-acceptance of the unfamiliar.” Performance and composition sleep apart. They rarely rendezvous in one person, which is why history offers us so few Ellingtons or Monks. Yet, one would hardly know it from those per-

ilious words that bestride this and so many current CDs: “All compositions by ...”

If Redman’s songs don’t live in our heads, his sound does. His debut in 1992 was a smart mix of freshness and familiarity that amplified his roar among the decade’s young lions. His consistent confidence and craft have made him an anchor of the modern mainstream, where he commands the dialog between jazz’s past and future with equanimity. Perhaps that entitles him to the rank of compositeur amateur.

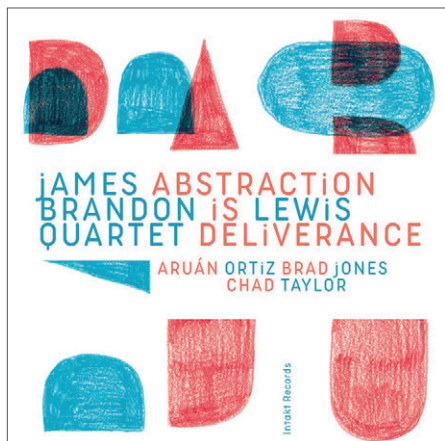
—John McDonough

**Words Fall Short:** A Message To Unsend; So It Goes; Words Fall Short; Borrowed Eyes; Icarus; Over The Jelly-Green Sea; She Knows; Era’s End. (43:41)

**Personnel:** Joshua Redman, tenor and soprano saxophone; Paul Cornish, piano; Philip Norris, bass; Nazir Ebo, drums; Skylar Tang, trumpet (5); Melissa Aldana, tenor saxophone (2); Gabrielle Cavassa, vocal (8).

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





## James Brandon Lewis Quartet *Abstraction Is Deliverance*

INTAKT

★★★★★

Moody, contemplative and gorgeously expressive, *Abstraction Is Deliverance* is the work of a quartet that deserves its place in the front rank of contemporary creative music.

With the exception of the title piece — the album's most aggressive performance, featuring high-level interplay and an extremely powerful saxophone component — this is a dark-hued work that's both eloquent and emotive. Displaying roots that extend from modalism

to melodicism that echoes the impressionism of Debussy and Ravel, the band's fifth outing stakes its place among the best recordings of this decade.

The opening "Ware" illuminates the lineage from Newk and Trane to the titular David S. Ware with a fervid rhythmic underpinning and Lewis' meditative lead, while "Remember Rosalind" layers a winsome melody over Chad Taylor's slowly churning accompaniment.

The oft-recorded "Left Alone" drifts on Taylor's reiterative foundation and Brad Jones' resonant toms, providing fertile ground for Lewis' rich exposition of the Billie Holiday/Mal Waldron melody.

Above all, this is a band that appreciates texture. "Multicellular Beings" and "Per 7" are both prime examples of how these four can shift their traditional roles to build performances that seem so purpose-built that listeners may mistake them for through-composed work.

Over the course of its five recordings, Lewis' quartet has grown into the one of the most eloquent improvising groups in recent history. They appear to be transforming their 41-year-old Swiss boutique label the way John Coltrane did for Impulse! in the '60s.

—James Hale

**Abstraction Is Deliverance:** Ware; Per 7; Even The Sparrow; Remember Rosalind; Abstraction Is Deliverance; Multicellular Beings; Mr. Crick; Left Alone; Polaris. (60:18)

**Personnel:** James Brandon Lewis, tenor saxophone; Aruán Ortiz, piano; Brad Jones, bass; Chad Taylor, drums.

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

## Brandee Younger *Gadabout Season*

IMPULSE

★★★½

Few have done as much in recent years to showcase the versatile abilities of the harp as Brandee Younger. Her latest record, *Gadabout Season*, focuses on original writing, producing 10 tracks of new material accompanied by Rashaan Carter on bass and Alan Mednard on drums.

Recording with Alice Coltrane's harp (Younger became its custodian in 2024), tracks like "End Means" channel Coltrane's signature spiritual work, plucking languorously across the strings while featured flautist Shabaka trips through melodic lines that interweave with Mednard's textural drumming, and "Reflection Eternal" gestures towards Coltrane's ambient compositions. Other influences include Dorothy Ashby's use of harp as a vocal top-line on "New Pinnacle," picking out earworming motifs amid Carter's loping bass rhythm.

*Gadabout Season* is a testament to Younger's own developing style. "Breaking Point," for instance, builds sharp interjections of harp melody over Mednard and Carter's driving groove, sitting somewhere between swing and funk breakbeats, while "BBL" showcases Younger's dextrous fingerpicking style, veering effortless-



ly from muscular phrases to gentle R&B melodies, and "Discernment" soars through horn fanfares and swelling string textures to play like an enveloping orchestral suite. These are fascinating insights into Younger's voice on the harp, laying the groundwork for future records that could see Younger taking more time to explore each facet of her sound and its potential depth.

—Ammar Kalia

**Gadabout Season:** Reckoning; End Means; Gadabout Season; Breaking Point; Reflection Eternal; New Pinnacle; Surrender; BBL; Unswept Corners; Discernment. (42:38)

**Personnel:** Brandee Younger, harp; Rashaan Carter, bass; Alan Mednard, drums; Shabaka, flute (2); Courtney Bryan, piano (7); Josh Johnson, saxophone (10).

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



## Mary Halvorson *About Ghosts*

NONESUCH

★★★★

Listening to *About Ghosts* is like falling into Lewis Carroll's looking glass. Mary Halvorson's Amaryllis sextet conjures such vibrant, picturesque riffs, capricious melodic excursions, and suspenseful rhythmic undertows that the album feels equivalent to an exhilarating pop-up book.

A foreboding sense of adventure opens the album with "Full Of Neon" as the rhythm section map out a prowling momentum with Patrica Brennan's alarming vibraphone accompaniment crawling alongside a writhing melody, articulated by a four-person horn section. Trombonist Jacob Garchik breaks free to unravel a probing improvisation, followed by a howling tenor saxophone improvisation from Brian Settles. Inside, Halvorson accentuates the spooky electric vibe with harmonies that sound like melting barbwire.

The album follows that sensibility as swirling melodies pirouette atop drummer Tomas Fujiwara and bassist Dunston's often prancing rhythms. Halvorson's distinctive guitar soloing takes center stage on the rambunctious "Carved From" and the bewitchingly slow "Eventidal" on which her spidery guitar lines stretch across Fujiwara's shadowy brushstrokes, Dunston's eerie arco bass and elegiac horn melodies concocted by Garchik and trumpeter Adam O'Farrill.

Each member gets their share of the spotlight through the funhouse of phantasmagorical mirrors, whether it's the racing "Absinthian" or the gorgeous title track. In the end, though, it's Halvorson the composer that shines the brightest.

With hints of Henry Threadgill's Very Very Circus and early-'90s Bobby Previte, *About Ghosts* is a marvelous document for Halvorson's compositional acumen and conceptual ingenuity.

—John Murph

**About Ghosts:** Full Of Neon; Carved From; Eventidal; Absinthian; About Ghosts; Amaryllis; Polyhedral; Endmost. (44:08)

**Personnel:** Mary Halvorson, guitar, pocket piano; Adam O'Farrill, trumpet; Jacob Garchik, trombone; Patricia Brennan, vibraphone; Nick Dunston, bass; Tomas Fujiwara, drums; Immanuel Wilkins, alto saxophone (1, 2, 4, 5); Brian Settles, tenor saxophone (1, 2, 5, 8).

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



# The Hot Box

Critics	John McDonough	James Hale	Ammar Kalia	John Murph
<b>Joshua Redman</b> <i>Words Fall Short</i>	★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★
<b>James Brandon Lewis Quartet</b> <i>Abstraction Is Deliverance</i>	★★★½	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
<b>Brandee Younger</b> <i>Gadabout Season</i>	★★	★★★	★★★★½	★★★★½
<b>Mary Halvorson</b> <i>About Ghosts</i>	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★

## Critics' Comments

### Joshua Redman, *Words Fall Short*

I love the sound of bands coalescing. This newly minted quartet shows real promise to be a great one, especially on the fiery showdown between Redman and Melissa Aldana.

—James Hale

Redman's second album for Blue Note sees him linking up with a new, younger quartet of backing musicians to produce eight compositions of typically dense, hard-swinging tunes. Tenor sax duet "So It Goes" with Melissa Aldana is a true joy. The two instrumentalists interweave without exploding into a competition of who can play loudest — showcasing the inherent tenderness of masters at work.

—Ammar Kalia

Themes of surviving the pandemic five years ago seep into the music with hints of longing and detachment being significant touchstones. The admirable inspiration behind the music, however, outweighs its fleeting memorability.

—John Murph

### James Brandon Lewis Quartet, *Abstraction Is Deliverance*

Lewis delivers his abstractions with an erudite restraint and formality. Many early and mid-Coltrane modalities, some infused with restless passion but more with a relaxed, evenhanded caution, allowing the listener to project any transcendence.

—John McDonough

Lewis' "molecular systematic music" Quartet can threaten to smother creativity with its involved thematics but on their latest record they sink into a slower register, playing through beautiful ballads and downtempo, fractal melodies with a signature deftness of touch. A complex album that is a joy to encounter.

—Ammar Kalia

Lewis' strongest statement on wax yet. He and his quartet power the music with passion, purpose and propulsion.

—John Murph

### Brandee Younger, *Gadabout Season*

Space is *not* the place to party. At best, restful in its unremitting tranquility. Younger needs a contrasting foil.

—John McDonough

From the spectral beauty of the solo prologue to the funky pointillism of "BBL," Younger continues to reimagine the role of the harp in contemporary music.

—James Hale

Soul, serenity and suspense coalesce splendidly in Younger's diaphanous compositions.

—John Murph

### Mary Halvorson, *About Ghosts*

Particularly smart chamber writing provides a friendly, often feathery context of pastels in which soloists and ensemble interact as equals. An "experiment" that works.

—John McDonough

As Halvorson notes, each piece has a pre-determined intent, but with much room for interpretation. The resulting stew is dense, meaty and occasionally highly spiced.

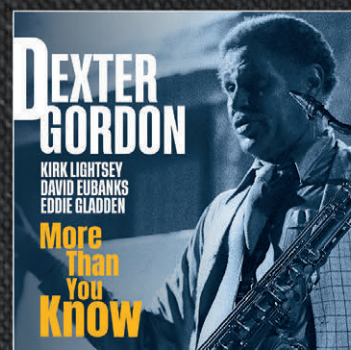
—James Hale

The addition of dual saxophones is a welcome sound, giving Halvorson's often challenging and changeable compositions a raucous sense of rounded and emotive self-expression.

—Ammar Kalia

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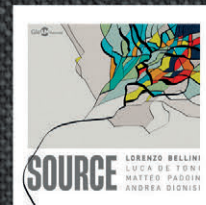
GleAM Records is proud to present **More Than You Know**, the new album by the great master of tenor saxophone **Dexter Gordon** with his quartet recorded live in Genova (Italy) in 1981, available on CD and digital download/streaming from November 7th, 2025.



The Italian bassist **Stefano Rielli** presents his first album along with **Gabriele Mirabassi** (clarinet), **Emanuele Coluccia** (tenor saxophone), **Vince Abbracciante** (hammond organ) and **Marco Girardo** (drums).

"With *So Far* Stefano Rielli takes the floor as a leader for the first time, entering the scene on tiptoe and offering us a taste of his improvisational skills, his bass lines and his point of view as an arranger."

Spencer Travis



The Italian pianist & composer **Lorenzo Bellini** presents his quartet along with **Luca De Toni** (guitar), **Matteo Padoin** (upright bass) and **Andrea Dionisi** (drums).

"This is an incredibly fresh sounding album, full of surprises, virtuosity and beauty — as a group they shift between colours effortlessly and the fluidity of the solos brings everything together."

Alex Hitchcock



Best New Italian Talent 2020 in the annual Top Jazz of Musica Jazz magazine and second place as 'Italian Musician of the Year 2023', the Italian bassist **Ferdinando Romano** presents his new album along with Finnish accordionist **Veli Kujala**, Estonian pianist **Kirke Karja** and **Ermanno Baron** on drums. His music blends jazz, contemporary music, experimental, drum n bass, and rock.



The Israeli guitarist & composer **Ron Magril** presents his second album along with **Yonatan Riklis** (hammond organ) and **Ofri Nehemya** (drums).

"Inspired is an excellent example of refined, dense and undoubtedly modern jazz. The interplay runs parallel to the groove and the swing, while copious, is both solid and full of subtleties. We will certainly hear about Ron Magril again."

Ernesto D'Angelo



The Italian bassist **Giuseppe Venezia**, just part of Emmet Cohen Italian trio, presents a post-bop session along with **Fabrizio Bosso** (trumpet), **Attilio Troiano** (tenor saxophone & flute), **Bruno Montrone** (piano) and **Pasquale Fiore** (drums).

"This recording is a true honest performance of modern jazz with high level of sophistication and melody."

Gerald Cannon



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info@gleam-records.com





## Theon Cross *Affirmations: Live At The Blue Note New York* NEW SOIL

★★★★½

While pioneers Ray Draper and Howard Johnson may have put the tuba on the jazz map in the 1950s, '60s and '70s, on *Affirmations*, newcomer Theon Cross raises the bar, both conceptually and dexterously.

A rising star on London's thriving jazz scene and core member of the group Sons of Kemet, Cross blends rollicking energy, innovative use of electronics and an uncanny com-

mand of his cumbersome brass instrument on his third outing as a leader. Energized tunes like "Play To Win," the rousing Afrobeat number "Candace Of Meroe" and the 14-minute title track set the tone while Trane/Pharoah-inspired tenor player Isaiah Collier, a powerhouse figure on Chicago's vibrant scene, elevates the proceedings with his relentless flow of energy and ideas from track to track.

London-based guitarist Nikos Ziarkas brings a rock edge with his spacey sonic textures and heavily effected six-string onslaughts ("We Go Again," "Radiation"). He is also showcased on the unaccompanied "Transcending," a tour-de-force of looping with infinite sustain and virtuosic two-hand-tapping. The leader showcases his rare facility and multiphonics chops on three unaccompanied interludes: "Transition," "Leap Of Faith" "Here And Now." And Chicagoan James Russell Sims grounds everything with slamming authority on the kit. Audacious music full of fire and a spirit of experimentation.

—Bill Milkowski

**Affirmations:** Live At The Blue Note New York: Greetings; We Go Again; Transition; Play To Win; Leap Of Faith; Wings; Transcending; Affirmations; Here And Now; Radiation; Candace Of Meroe; Confidence In Your Ability. (77:24)

**Personnel:** Theon Cross, tuba; Isaiah Collier, saxophone; Nikos Ziarkas, guitar; James Russell Sims, drums.

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

## Marty Ehrlich Trio *Exaltation This Time* SUNNYSIDE

★★★★

Veteran reedist Marty Ehrlich formed Trio Exaltation about a decade ago, eager to focus on expansive improvisation after working on a big band project where he didn't even pick up his horn. He enlisted bassist John Hébert and drummer Nasheet Waits, the rhythm section he worked with in pianist Andrew Hill's sextet in the early 2000s; their connection has only grown stronger. After a seven-year pause, *This Time* is only the trio's second album, but they haven't lost a step. In high school, Ehrlich was influenced by musicians from the Black Artists Group in St. Louis, and this trio offers a clear homage to BAG figures like Julius Hemphill and Oliver Lake, as well as others Ehrlich encountered on New York's '70s loft jazz scene. ("Twelve For Black Arthur" is an homage to the overlooked alto saxophonist Arthur Blythe.)

The album features compact Ehrlich originals and a pair of Hill tunes, including the ravishing "Dusk," which this trio has now interpreted on both of its albums, reinforcing how the emphasis is on interpretation more than composition. Ehrlich has always balanced ven-



eration for tradition with exploration, but this trio continues to push toward the latter while still swinging fiercely. Its reading of Hill's melancholy ballad "Image Of Time" is achingly beautiful, full of space and dripping with tenderness. Ehrlich sounds more fiery and agile than ever, and hearing him ride the off-kilter dissections of the rhythm section on the funky "Variations On A Vamp" is irresistible.

—Peter Margasak

**This Time:** Sometimes, This Time; Dusk; Image of Time; Twelve For Black Arthur; Variations On A Vamp; Conversations I; As It Is; This Space, This Time; Conversations II. (54:51)

**Personnel:** Marty Ehrlich, alto saxophone, tenor saxophone (8); John Hébert, bass; Nasheet Waits, drums.

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



## Dan Weiss Quartet *Unclassified Affections* PI

★★★★

The selection of personnel can be a compositional act. While that's the case with the musicians that drummer/leader Dan Weiss has chosen to be in his new quartet, that doesn't mean he has simply picked people he wants to hear and then turned them loose. Rather, each musician he has tapped presents a challenge to his compositional resources, and together they offer a breadth of opportunity. His pieces tend not to repeat but move with quiet confidence through a sequence of linked moods and varied attacks.

Guitarist Miles Okazaki has been playing with Weiss for nearly 30 years. They know each other's ideas about rhythm, melody, genre and the merits of complexity inside and out. Neither of the other players is a complete stranger to Weiss, having played with him in other people's combos. They bring contrasting potentialities that, when combined, yield depth and unpredictability. Listen to how vibraphonist Patricia Brennan's introductory statements on the title track and "Perfection's Loneliness" guide the music towards lucid, unsentimental lyricism.

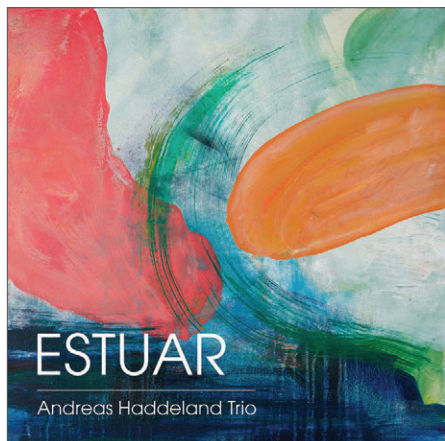
Peter Evans, on the other hand, can be an agent for unapologetic virtuosity. Witness his fearsomely precise articulation at speed on "Holotype," and the way that Okazaki and Brennan hold formation with him as he leads the quartet through hairpin maneuvers. But their differences make the music's cohesion feel especially satisfying. When Evans and Brennan join and part, like dancers stepping in and out each other's embrace while negotiating to the subtly evolving platform provided the guitar and drums, the effect is exquisite. —Bill Meyer

**Unclassified:** Unclassified Affections; Holotype; Perfection's Loneliness; Mansions Of Madness; Consol'd Without Consolations; Existence Ticket; Plusgood; Dead Wail Revelry. (54:26)

**Personnel:** Dan Weiss, drums; Peter Evans, trumpet; Patricia Brennan, vibraphone; Miles Okazaki, guitar.

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





## Andreas Haddeland Trio *Estuar*

TARE

★★★★½

Guitarist Andreas Haddeland, bassist Lars Tormod Jensen and drummer Ulrik Ibsen Thorsrud navigate complex melodies and time changes on an album named for estuaries, those places where fresh and saltwater meet.

"Cumulus," the most majestic tune, alludes to those plump clouds that always seem to hover so closely. "Ysme" is named after a Norwegian term for fog. Each of the five tracks has its own personality in a record-

ing that spans genres, from the rock-inflected "Skrøne" to the classical mass of "Cumulus" and the funky interplay of "Trirøding."

Haddeland is a subtle leader whose guitar blends the sounds of Dire Straits' Mark Knopfler and jazz's John Scofield. Like them, he is a master of sustained, ringing single notes. The noise his trio makes on its third album, whether in the abstract "Trirøding" or "Cumulus," a showcase for Tormod Jensen's bowed bass, is sweeping and powerful.

At first, some of Haddeland's restless work may seem formless; "Skrøne" certainly ends abruptly, and the opening and closing tracks emerge, somewhat creakily, from silence, a quality this trio ordinarily uses effectively. But considered as a whole, all the pieces of this album fit.

The group's versatility is as much a draw as Haddeland's tense, sensuous lines. Bass, plucked so hard it becomes percussive, launches "Ysme," the finale of this addictive album. Haddeland's guitar is particularly piercing and rangy here. The music soars and captivates as these three explore caverns of innovative, resonant sonics, luring us along.

—Carlo Wolff

**Estuar:** Trirøding; Skrøne; Cumulus; Estuar; Ysme. (31:45)

**Personnel:** Andreas Haddeland, guitar; Lars Tormod Jensen, bass; Ulrik Ibsen Thorsrud, drums.

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

## Rez Abbasi Acoustic Quintet *Sound Remains*

WHIRLWIND

★★★★½

This is guitarist Rez Abbasi's third album with his acoustic group, and what used to be a quartet has expanded to a quintet with the addition of percussionist Hasan Bakr. That's not all; he's also playing steel strings throughout. As a result of these two changes, the music has a little more rhythmic energy and bite than in the past. The melodies have knots and barbs and take you on a journey.

Abbasi and vibraphonist Bill Ware work in unison, then in harmony. Bassist Stephan Crump is a subtle, reassuring presence deep within the music, and drummer Eric McPherson keeps everything on track, as Bakr adds somewhat splashy adornments, dropping in a wide variety of sounds. Abbasi is never content to play mere "jazz guitar"; "Spin Dream" has the aggression of flamenco (or Al Di Meola), and the scrape of the steel strings often adds one more percussive element to the music. There's a version of John Coltrane's "Lonnie's Lament" late in the disc that begins so patiently it's like you're dreaming it, the melody and Abbasi's solo played with deep, bent notes that nod to Indian music. "Folk's Song," a simple



guitar-vibes duet, is almost an interlude at just a little over two minutes, but it's a perfect breather between more challenging compositions. Even when everything's superficially gentle — there's a version of Keith Jarrett's "Questar" with a '70s lounge-act feel — the players bring enough energy and focus to their performances that the music remains compelling rather than merely breezy.

—Phil Freeman

**Sound Remains:** Presence; You Are; Questar; Folk's Song; Spin Dream; Lonnie's Lament; Meet The Moment; Purity. (55:30)

**Personnel:** Rez Abbasi, acoustic guitars; Bill Ware, vibraphone; Stephan Crump, bass; Eric McPherson, drums; Hasan Bakr, percussion.

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

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## JOHNNY RAWLS NEW ALBUM



DOWNBEAT

★★★★★



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# Miscellany and Tangentiae

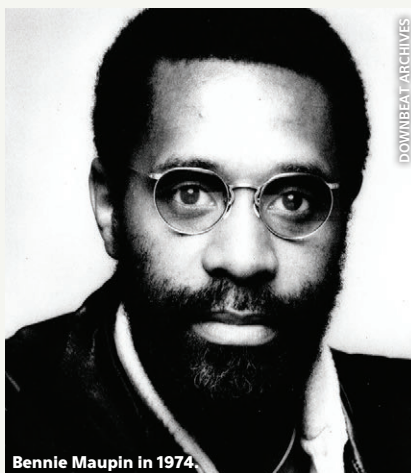
"No high concept here, just a list of goodies," my editor observed when assigning these four historical LPs, recorded between 1959 and 1980, comprising two lodestar sessions of the 1970s and two first-ever releases. Still, there is a connective thread: Each performer intersected with Miles Davis, three directly, one indirectly.

**Chick Corea** was seven months past his plugged-in tenure with Davis in April 1971, when he responded to ECM president Manfred Eicher's suggestion that he, Keith Jarrett and Paul Bley record in the solo acoustic piano format with the 22 improvised vignettes that appear on *Piano Improvisations, Vol. 1* (ECM; ★★★★★½ 42:50) and (released in 1972, though not here). The albums mark an inflection point in Corea's corpus, straddling both the radical experimentalism of the cop trio with Dave Holland and Barry Altschul documented on A.R.C. (augmented with Anthony Braxton in Circle), and the populist, melody-driven songs Corea would introduce in early 1972 with Return to Forever, the path-breaking fusion group, after he abruptly split from his partners in the former. A spirit of transparency and erudition permeates the flow, as does Corea's extreme fluency and focused intention. Corea devotees who haven't heard these half-century-ago probes into the future should rectify that gap.

**Bennie Maupin**, who played bass clarinet on 11 of Davis' plugged-in, cusp-of-the-'70s albums, made the sui generis *Jewel In The Lotus* (ECM; ★★★★★½ 44:21) in 1974, with Mwandishi bandmates Herbie Hancock (in a rare acoustic piano Headhunters-era sighting), bassist Buster Williams and drummer Billy Hart, along with Freddie Waits on drums and marimba, Charles Sullivan on trumpet and Bill Summers on percussion. It's a cohesive, ritualistic, ensemble-oriented suite, telling the story with folk dialects sourced from West Africa, Asia and vernacular Afro-America. Strong solos by Hancock and Maupin emerge from the flow but don't dominate it; Hart and Waits (who has an extended marimba passage) operate synchronously throughout in conjunction with Summers' percussive coloring, while Williams triangulates all members with characteristic authority.

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

**Irving Sidney "Duke" Jordan** (1922–2006), composer of tuneful hard-bop standards like "Jordu" and "No Problem," played with Davis — who went out of his way to disparage Jordan several times in his autobiography, but also claimed that he wrote "Donna Lee" for Jordan's first daughter — in Charlie Parker's working quintet in 1947 and 1948. After various trials and travails, Jordan moved to Denmark in 1978, five years after



Bennie Maupin in 1974.

he'd made the first of his 30-plus albums for Steeplechase. Their latest Jordan release is the posthumous *Sketching For Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (Steeplechase; ★★ 56:24), whose title refers to the recently discovered solo recording of motifs — 21 tracks in all — that Jordan presented to director Roger Vadim in 1959 for various scenes in the titular, considerably controversial French film (whose female star, Jeanne Moreau, had a fling with Davis in 1957 while he was in Paris making the soundtrack for *Elevator to the Gallows*). Jordan would play the fleshed-out compositions on two subsequent solo piano albums; only completists will find much to interest them in these embryonic antecedents.

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

Fans of alto saxophonist **Art Pepper** (1925–'82) will welcome *An Afternoon In Norway: The Konigsberg Concert* (Elemental; ★★★★★ 97:45), the latest of dozens of posthumously issued concert recordings by Pepper in late career. Recorded in 1980 with his working quartet (Milcho Leviev, piano; Tony Dumas, bass; Carl Burnett, drums), we hear Pepper — who famously recorded an album with Red Garland, Paul Chambers and Philly Joe Jones from Davis' first quintet in 1956 (*Art Pepper Meets The Rhythm Section*) — in full, over-the-top voice on a couple of blueses, the Coltrane-esque "The Trip," the lachrymose ballad "Patricia" and the boppish "Straight Life" (for which he titled his no-holds-barred autobiography). It's far from the best document of Pepper before an audience: For one thing, as mentioned in the characteristically thorough booklet notes that accompany any Zev Feldman production, Leviev and Pepper are at odds, and the entire set has an asynchronous quality. Any Pepper album with George Cables on piano is a better representation of his gifts.

Ordering info: [elemental-music.com](http://elemental-music.com)

DOWNBEAT ARCHIVES



## Dave Bass Trio Nuevo, Vol 2

DAVE BASS MUSIC

★★★★½

Filling your palette with an overabundance of hues might render a clumsy outcome if you don't watch your step.

Fret not: On the second album by his Trio Nuevo project, Dave Bass knows where every footfall should land.

The pianist's big tent is home to a scad of pieces from distinct backgrounds (hard-bop, Brazilian, classical, pop, Monk, a blend of Cuban/Spanish motifs), and the ease with which he binds them for this lively jaunt is as important to the music's character as his cohort's collective panache.

Bass waxes eclectic but soundly retains a grip on his through-line. Just as robust as its 2024 predecessor, the newly released *Vol 2* reveals its authority by making seemingly disparate pieces flaunt their common denominator: an unmistakable effervescence.

Bud and Bach share space just as cozily as Egberto Gismonti and Ricky Nelson. The leader's measured attack amplifies the oomph of bassist Tyler Miles and drummer Steve Helfand, and while the approach is pointedly mainstream, the trio's sharp dynamics provide a key element, balancing a wisp of obviousness that wafts through the program.

San Francisco septuagenarian Bass also has a yen for Latin accents. "Melquíades" gives the titular Márquez character a sensual groove, and Gismonti's "Frevo" prances with a subtle flamboyance. Braided through the moody existentialism of "Questions" and the reflective bounce of "Heart Above My Head," it casts *Vol 2* as a clever enterprise, indeed.

—Jim Macnie

**Trio Nuevo, Vol 2:** Legrand/Lester Left Town; Heart Above My Head; Frevo; Melquíades; Latin Journey; Questions; Trinkle Tinkle; Fools Rush In; Dance Of The Infidels; Journey With Bach; Lennie's Pennies. (61:00)

**Personnel:** Dave Bass, piano; Tyler Miles, bass; Steve Helfand, drums.

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



## Danny Grissett *Travelogue*

SAVANT

★★★★

"The Long Way Home" is the opening track on Danny Grissett's *Travelogue* album, and a meandering pace exudes from the trio as if they are in no hurry to reach a destination. Some of the scenes evoked by Grissett's imaginative piano expositions are like flipping the pages in a collection of photos: Here's a brilliant, sunlit beach, and then a heavily forested region on a tropical island. If the legendary poet Langston Hughes had been a pianist, he might have possessed Grissett's touch on the keyboard and he certainly came to mind on "Wonder Wander," almost approximating the title of the writer's second autobiography.

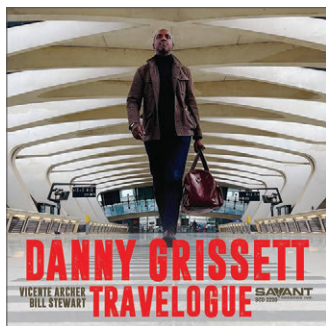
Grissett and his sidemen, bassist Vicente Archer and drummer Bill Stewart, seem less inclined to be reflective on "The After Hours," and they are particularly as one on Benny Golson's "Whisper Not." It was especially nice to hear the rhythmic pickup on the reprise of the tune's bridge, akin to Jon Hendricks' version of Leonard Feather's lyrics.

"Interlude Inbound" is Grissett's obvious search within and "Interlude Outbound" the opposite. In both cases there's a compelling invitation for the listener to relax, take a deep breath and follow his deeply felt interpretation of the scintillating tonal zones awaiting his impressive fingers. —Herb Boyd

**Travelogue:** The Long Way Home; Wonder Wander; Interlude Inbound; The People In The City; Picture In Picture; Whisper Not; Interlude Outbound; The After Hours; Here's That Rainy Day; Spin Cycle. (47:33)

**Personnel:** Danny Grissett, piano; Vicente Archer, bass; Bill Stewart, drums.

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



## Alon Farber Hagiga *Dreams I Dream*

ORIGIN

★★★★

It's not all that unusual to sustain a jazz group for 20 or more years; longevity and legacy are practically hallmarks of the genre's history. Still, that doesn't mean it's easy to do. However, bandleader and Hagiga founding member Alon Farber has remained up to the challenge, and with *Dreams I Dream*, the composer and saxophonist has put together a record worthy of celebration, the Hebrew meaning behind his ensemble's name.

The dream-based theme of the album makes for an approachable but very stimulating entry point to Farber's work. "Cookies" starts with a bouncing and busy solo saxophone line. The music eases into a slower, full-band swinging melody but things don't settle into too much of a groove before Farber's solo acrobatics resume. "Minor Trap" adds to this mood with Katia Toobool dancing up and down the piano midway through, providing quirky contrast against the steady rhythms of Yonatan Rosen's cymbal taps. "Theme For Einat" brings Farber's dream to a peaceful place, grounded by Hakimi's strolling bass plucks and the gentle, continuous sweep of Rosen's brushes, before "Minorism" lets the light back in and everyone shines before the good dream ends all too abruptly but just right. —Kira Grunenber

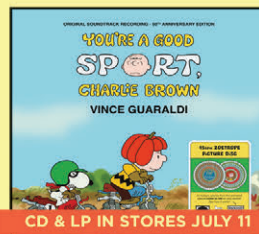
**Dreams I Dream:** Cookies; Minor Trap; 20 Years; Mingus Dream; The Bartok Blues; An Old Friend; Theme For Einat; Minorism. (43:22)

**Personnel:** Alon Farber, soprano, alto, tenor saxophones; Katia Toobool, piano; Assaf Hakimi, bass; Yonatan Rosen, drums.

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



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## Ben LaMar Gay *Yowzers*

INTERNATIONAL ANTHEM

★★★★½

The remarkably distinctive and individualist style of Ben LaMar Gay places this Chicagoan multi-tasker at the forefront of adventurous jazz (and ritually folkloric electronica). It's his voice and phrasing, his use of worming synths and his actual songwriting that propel Gay's artistry, but his tightly contained cornet curlicues are also impressive. A stable band continues to make unstable music, with sensitive drums, deep tuba and root-sy guitar aiding in this quest, as well as added bass

clarinet and three-part vocal chorus.

The title cut carries a gospel undertow, but with sneaky synth spirals in the background. "The Glorification Of Small Victories" features a free-Eastern drum-tumble, flutey electronics, small-metal showers and a vocal invocation, sounding somewhat native American, keeping phrases hollered and extended. There's even an injection of crispy cornet and restless guitar. "For Breezy" is a succinct remembrance for Jamie Branch, with some tender bass clarinet surges. The comparatively epic "I Am (Bells)" climaxes with one of Gay's most compulsive vocal out-cries, and the sympathetically lengthy "Cumulus" acts like a mini-suite for straighter jazz lovers, guitar and muted cornet conversing over uncrowded palette. But by two minutes in, it's already wisping into electro-bleeps and bassy bleeps, voices joining in at three minutes, then climaxing with repeating horn, synths and clutter-drum spasms. No one is making music like this, but many would probably desire such a state of assured abstraction.

—Martin Longley

**Yowzers:** Yowzers; The Glorification Of Small Victories; There, Inside The Morning Glory; Roller Skates; For Breezy; I Am (Bells); Promontory; John, John Henry; Damn You Cute; Cumulus; Touch; Leave Some For You.

**Personnel:** Ben LaMar Gay, cornet, voice, synth, bells, diddley bow, percussion, programming, manipulation; Will Faber, guitar, ngoni, bells, voice; Matthew Davis, tuba, piano, bells, voice; Tommaso Moretti, drums, percussion, voice; Rob Frye, bass clarinet, flute; Ayanna Woods, Tramaine Parker, Ugochi Nwaogwugwu, voices.

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

## Vladimir Kostadinovic *Iris*

CRISS-CROSS

★★★★★

For his third outing as leader, the Austrian drummer Vladimir Kostadinovic put together an all-star group. Commenting on their dynamic in the album's notes, he mentions that there can be a bit of pressure when coming from the Austrian context, where players at this capacity are perhaps only around a few dates out of the month. Yet it worked here, because, as he put it: "They grab you, and you are safe." The resulting *Iris* is a delightful record. Kostadinovic is joined by vibraphonist Joe Locke, who contributes the lush tune, "Is There A Heart In The House?" midway through the program. The other band members include tenor saxophonists Chris Potter and Ben Wendel, trumpeter Alex Sipiagin, pianist Geoffrey Keezer and bassist Matt Brewer.

Of the album's seven tunes, five are originals, along with the Locke composition and Sonny Rollins's "Airegin" to close out the record. Of these five tracks, the title track, named for Kostadinovic's daughter, and "Echoes Of Eternity" stand out. With the latter, we get closer to the thesis of the record: measured solemnity. The soft life, however, is not all that it is on



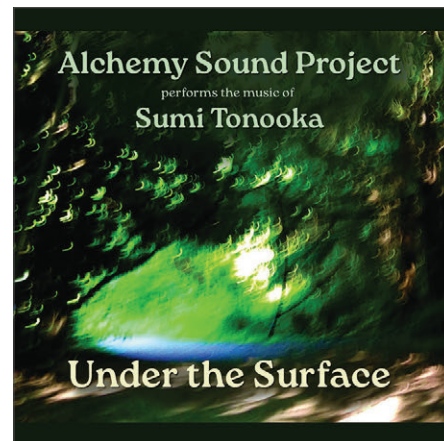
offer. Other tunes reflect the inventiveness and exploratory approaches that have made each of the band members master improvisers in their own right. Both "The World Keeps Ending And The World Keeps Going On" and "Airegin" emerge from that dimension. But the band finds its home in its emotional territory, showing what we might learn and feel from that space.

—Joshua Myers

**Iris:** Iris; The World Keeps Ending And The World Keeps Going On; Unborn Child; Is There A Heart In This House?; Echoes In Eternity; Collectors Of Emotions; Airegin. (53:16)

**Personnel:** Vladimir Kostadinovic, drums; Chris Potter, tenor saxophone (1, 2); Ben Wendel, tenor saxophone; Alex Sipiagin, trumpet; Geoffrey Keezer, piano; Joe Locke, vibraphone; Matt Brewer, bass.

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



## Alchemy Sound Project Performs the Music of Sumi Tonooka *Under The Surface*

ARTISTS RECORDING COLLECTIVE

★★★★★

Sumi Tonooka is a 50-year jazz veteran, her best-known recordings probably in trio and quartets with bassist Rufus Reid, or her 2012 solo record *Now*. Around that same time she invited tenor saxophonist Lindsay, trumpeter Boshnack and reeds/winds player Washington — contacts from the late, lamented Jazz Composers Orchestra Initiative — to form a mutually supportive composers-performers collective. *Under The Surface* the sextet devotes itself explicitly to Tonooka's singular music, realizing it to a "T" and requiring she be considered an artist of expansive vision.

Regarding Monk, Mary Lou Williams and Stanley Cowell as influences, Tonooka is a thoughtful, inquisitive, expressive pianist. Those qualities imbue the seven tracks of her suite, which she says concerns connections, roots and community. The music flows from start to close and is undergirded throughout by the propulsion of drummer Jonathan Blake and bassist Gregg August with the pianist-composer at their apex. The three horns spill forth colorful themes, often unusually voiced, and stretch out individually, freely. Yet all stay together.

The ensemble's pace is nuanced, sometimes languid but able to turn suddenly forceful. Melodically, there's humor like Ventoso's wah-wah 'bone on "Savour," affecting solo statements growing upon arranged backdrops into climax as on "Interval Haiku," gentle lyricism and Tonooka's presence framing the activity. She's subtle, but the confluence of composition and improvisation is complete.

—Howard Mandel

**Under The Surface:** Points Of Departure; Saviour; Interval Haiku; Tear Bright; Mother Tongue; For Stanley; Under The Surface. (59:05)

**Personnel:** Sumi Tonooka, piano; Gregg August, bass; Johnathan Blake, drums; Erica Lindsay, tenor saxophone; Samantha Boshnack, trumpet; Michael Ventoso, trombone; Salim Washington, tenor saxophone, bass clarinet, flute.

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



## Itai Kriss *Daybreak* JOJO

★★★★½

Flutist and composer Itai Kriss arrived on the scene more than 20 years ago along with a tidal wave of exceptional musicians from Israel, and since then, he's worked at developing a unique blend of jazz, Middle Eastern and Afro Latin styles. He presents them with a stellar group featuring pianist Adam Birnbaum, bassist Luke Selleck and Anthony Pinciotti (in one of his final sessions on drums) in a song cycle that lightly traces the moods of a day.

The title track leads with a piece that rouses gently in a manner that is reminiscent of James Newton's cover of Duke Ellington's "Fleurette Africaine." The urgency of the morning routine and rush hour take center stage on the hard bopping "Drivin'." The band's languid take on the standard "East Of The Sun" brings to mind the confidence rebuild that often occurs over lunch. The bluesy "Uphill" allows the band to stretch out and showcases some of the best solos on the recording. The recording concludes with an air of triumph "In The Light," featuring guest guitarist Yotam Silberstein.

Kriss has said that he wants to make his instrument a more central part of the jazz lexicon. That's a tall order, but *Daybreak* is an excellent building block toward his goal.

—Martin Johnson

**Daybreak:** Daybreak; Drivin'; Beleza; East Of The Sun; O Jardim; Upfront; Uphill; Delicacy; No Smoking; Sunday Lemonade; Cosinha; In The Light. (66:00)

**Personnel:** Itai Kriss, flute; Adam Birnbaum, piano; Luke Sellick, bass; Anthony Pinciotti, drums; Benny Benack III, trumpet (2, 10); Yotam Silberstein, guitar (3, 5, 12).

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



## Adegoke Steve Colson/Iqua Colson *Glow: Music For Trio* ... Add Voice

SILVER SPHINX

★★★★

This power couple sends out more love than any billionaire-philanthropist ever managed. Married since 1975, Steve and Iqua (her name's an honorific for "singer") were early and influential members of the AACM. Steve started out as a typical multi-instrumentalist of the day but now concentrates on a piano style subtly imbued with classical correctness and sense of form. There's nothing chaotic about any of the pieces on *Glow*, yet they still convey a strong sense of what I prefer to call openness rather than freedom.

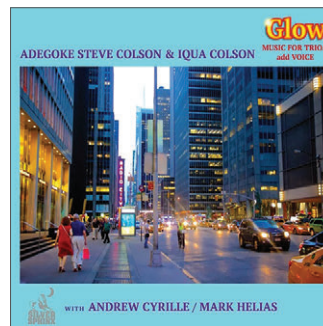
The Colsons still espouse an art of engagement. Cyrille is a timeless master, who works in time or aside from it as the song dictates. Iqua's own compositional talent and passion is evident on "Atrocities" and listening to the couple now, you have the feeling that they haven't changed but the world has gotten a littleunkinder. I still hanker after the glorious collective sound of the old Colson Unity Troupe on *Black Saint*, but it's 45 years past now, and the Colsons are still here, still vital and still making music for the heart and head. Nostalgia is part of it, sure, but only as a reminder that old dreams and warnings have to be kept alive.

—Brian Morton

**Glow:** Getting Comfortable; Clouds On A Sunny Day; Truly; Midnight Samba; Atrocities; For Freddie; Glow. (52:04)

**Personnel:** Adegoke Steve Colson, piano; Iqua Colson, voice; Mark Helias, bass; Andrew Cyrille, drums, percussion.

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



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## Braxton's Epic Journey

Working diligently in his own expressive margin zone, the impossible-to-categorize **Anthony Braxton's** sweeping *Trillium* Opera Complex — birthed in the '80s — has reached a new apex with the release of a powerful live and studio recording of his epic, four-hour *Trillium X* (PMP; ★★★★★, 453:37). Although this is the sixth opera in his ongoing cycle, the precise and persuasive realization of *Trillium X* by the Prague Music Performance Orchestra (PMP), conducted by longtime Braxton ally Roland Dahinden, marks a triumphant moment.

In time for Braxton's 80th birthday, a special eight-CD box includes both the 2023 world premiere in Prague and a studio recording made in Darmstadt, Germany. The document is the finest manifestation yet of Braxton's operatic adventure, a decade after he finished writing the opera in 2014.

Scale matters here. Braxton follows the example of his vast canvas-making heroes Richard Wagner, of the four-opera *Ring Cycle* fame, and Stockhausen, whose bigger-is-better *Licht* opera series clocked in at 29 hours. For audiences, committing to the full experience of *X* can be transformative. With the right mind frame, the listener's sum experience of Braxton's epic becomes a time- and mind-expanding hypnotic realm, writ large.

Musically, *X* operates in a postmodern language in between tonality and atonality, in a style loosely inspired by serialist Alban Berg, whose operas *Wozzeck* and *Lulu* were part of Braxton's obsession with opera around age 40. In *X*, the uniformly impressive and committed singers often deliver their serpentine texts in a kind of singspiel speech-song format. The general ambience of intellectual and cerebral intensity is periodically punctuated by comic relief dollops of common or bizarre speech: "if this is a sheep, I'm George Washington," "wassup, babel?" and "in the future, everyone will love the bagpipe industry ... I'm open to radiance, but first things first."

Insider winks also appear, as with the well-placed phrase "X marks the spot," "all things considered, I think the director did a great job" and "what we have here is a case of idiomatic certainty." Braxton's underrated sense of humor is intact and slyly deployed throughout *X*.

As a narrative structure, *X* follows a twisting and decidedly non-linear path, with witty asides folded into an elaborate libretto. The "storyline" shapeshifts from a pirate ship at sea, led by captain Helen (expertly sung by Eva Esterkova), to a clash with robot malefactors subverting the financial complex (foreshadowing AI cyber misdeeds?). Act III conveys a triple wedding between bank robbers, and IV slips sideways from the White House warmaking forces to an orgy site. Various



Anthony Braxton conducts a rehearsal.

meltdowns ensue along the way.

In some ways, the opera's scheme of blending surreal sci-fi textures, free associative flow, metaphysical language and surprise pop-cultural punchlines evokes such parallels as Robert Heinlein's classic proto-AI-referential novel *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* and Robert Ashley's wildly experimental and language-playful operas *Perfect Lives* and *Now Eleanor's Idea*. But Braxton's signature imprint, as music maker and renegade thinker, is never far from the surface.

Jazz, as such, sneaks in from the wings, with a brief saxophonic improv burst early in Act II, the insertion of pianist Hildegard KleeB performing an extant Braxton composition and, in the "Three Sisters" third act, a sudden appearance of a fleeting, slightly tipsy big band segment. This last recalls the deconstructed big-band adventurism of Braxton's Creative Orchestra Music project dating back to the 1970s. In another cross-reference, a woozy variation on the "Wedding March" from *Lohengrin*, closing Act III, tips a tipsy hat to Wagner.

*X's* sprawling sensory landscape reaches an oddly graceful endpoint, as an atonal wash of sound eases into a brooding cyclical theme for low strings, passed to a solo clarinet fading into the cosmic sunset. The 21-note theme loops back to the opera's introduction, akin to the last-to-first sentence framing James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*.

*X* is a dream-logical world unto itself, a place to get lost in for a handful of hours, like Wagner, but strictly according to Braxton-ian rules of order and exploration. **DB**

Ordering info: [pmpmusic5.bandcamp.com](http://pmpmusic5.bandcamp.com)



## Masha Campagne *Alegre Menina*

IMPETUS

★★★★½

For Masha Campagne's fourth album, the vocalist and composer set out to tell "the story of [her] life." The songs include two of her own compositions, "Samba Carioca" and "So Mad, So Young," as well as meaningful cuts in homage to artists that shaped not only her own sensibilities, but 20th century popular Brazilian music more broadly. For instance, she included "Cobra Criada" in tribute to singer-songwriter and guitarist João Bosco, as well as to Elis Regina, "whose electrifying performance at the 1979 Montreux Jazz Festival is etched" in Campagne's mind. Beyond simple homage, however, Campagne also plays with living legend guitarist Lula Galvão on a lushly rendered version of the Caetano Veloso-penned classic "Coração Vagabundo."

Campagne found Brazilian music in her native Russia, and at the turn of the 21st century came to the United States. Perhaps it's by no coincidence that she feels so connected to Brazilian bossa nova and MPB, deceptively breezy modes born during times of political upheaval.

That's not to say that this music doesn't swing. Campagne's own "So Mad, So Young" is a pleasing slice of Brazilian fusion, while her rendition of Guinga's "Di Menor" showcases Campagne's penchant for meteoric scat singing. The set ends on a decidedly wistful note with "Estrada do Sol," capturing a taste of sweet saudade, or nostalgic longing. *Alegre Menina* is an apt tribute to the music that made Campagne, but may leave listeners longing for some of the inventiveness and punch of its predecessors.

—Ayana Contreras

**Alegre Menina:** Bahia Com H; Samba Carioca; Coração Vagabundo; Baião De Lacan; Cobra Criada; Alegre Menina; So Mad, So Young; Di Menor; Estrada Do Sol. (35:31)

**Personnel:** Masha Campagne, vocals, percussion; Ricardo Peixoto, acoustic guitar, electric guitar, 12-string guitar (1,2,5-7); Scott Thompson, electric bass (1,2,5-7); Rafael Barata, drums (1-3,5-7); Frank Martin, piano (1,2,6,7,9); Brian Rice, percussion (1,2,4-6,8); Natalie Cressman, trombone (2); Erik Jakabson, trumpet (2); Zack Pitt-Smith, tenor saxophone (2); Julio Lemos, 7-string guitar (3,8); Lula Galvão, acoustic guitar (3); Guto Wirtti, acoustic bass (3); Mary Fettig, flutes (6); Gary Meek, flute (4,8), soprano saxophone (4).

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





## Something Blue In The Beginning

POSI-TONE

★★★★

*In The Beginning* marks the third album by the hard-driving sextet Something Blue, a revolving ensemble of label personnel that in this case also showcases tunes recorded by early Posi-Tone artists. It's a solid, mostly Latin-tinged outing of intense blowing over thoughtfully arranged originals for a three-horn front line and a cohesive rhythm section deftly helmed by drummer Rudy Royston. Trombonist Altin Sencalar boldly stands

out, as does pianist Phil Farris' dreamy and mysterious "Sea Of Sand," the riveting final cut.

The late Los Angeles guitarist known by the single name Edwing wrote four of the tunes. "Trapdoor" pounds out of the gate with a quick triplet undercurrent and a yearning melody, offering Sencalar the first of many opportunities to show off his Willie Colon-worthy tone and blatty sense of humor. The medium-tempo, bossa-adjacent "Dream For Donte" features attractive call-and-response; "Portrait Of Harlem" struts slow-dance blues triplets, with a nice opening by bassist Boris Kozlov.

Pianist Art Hirahara sparkles and dances on fellow Posi-Tone pianist Ehud Asherie's "Lockout" and two lovely ballads offer a change of pace: Joe Gaeta's "This One's For You" and John Nau's pleasantly floating waltz "Undercurrent."

Farris also contributes "Sun Sound," an uptempo modal riff that unfortunately encourages tenor saxophonist Diego Rivera to unleash a river of pentatonic arpeggios, a practice-room habit that underlines the album's weakness: apart from Sencalar, few of the solos rise to the excellence of its overall concept.

—Paul de Barros

**In The Beginning:** Trapdoor; Undercurrent; Dream For Donte; Sun Sound; This One's For You; Like Miles; Portrait Of Harlem; Lockout; Sea Of Sand. (57:06)

**Personnel:** Diego Rivera, Willie Morris (2,4), tenor saxophone; Langston Hughes II, alto saxophone; Altin Sencalar, trombone; Art Hirahara, piano; Boris Kozlov, bass; Rudy Royston, drums.

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

## Andy Biskin/Mike McGinnis/Peter Hess/Sam Sadigursky Reed Basket

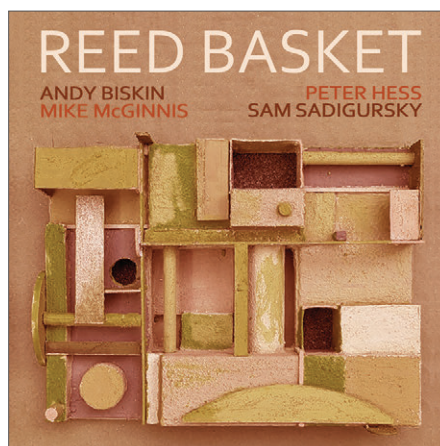
ANDORFIN

★★★★

There was a time, back in the late 1940s, when it looked as if the clarinet was on its way to extinction in modern jazz. Fortunately as time passed, the clarinet has regained its footing, fitting into a variety of settings and being mastered by adventurous players from later generations.

Andy Biskin's *Reed Basket* may at first remind some of Clarinet Summit, the 1983-'87 unit featuring Alvin Batiste, John Carter, Jimmy Hamilton and (on bass clarinet) David Murray. *Reed Basket* comes in as a much more melodic and mainstream unit; however, the styles that the clarinetists explore will keep one guessing. Biskin's arrangements keep the music tight and focused with brief solos.

The seven Biskin originals include the whimsical "Easy Chair"; "So Forth," which has four bass clarinets interacting with each other; and "New Fangle," a scalar piece that with a touch more humor would be reminiscent of Raymond Scott. The other six numbers include an intriguing reworking of "Camelot," a brief but joyful version of a Schubert melody, a tip of



the hat of sorts to Pee Wee Russell ("Wailing DA Blues"), although it is not quite eccentric enough, and a rollicking "Walk On The Wild Side." A highpoint is a tribute to clarinetist Johnny Dodds' version of "Wolverine Blues" with the Jelly Roll Morton Trio including three choruses of Dodds' solo. *Reed Basket* displays the still-unlimited potential of the clarinet. —Scott Yanow

**Reed Basket:** Easy Chair; Camelot; Yasmina; Moment Musicaux #3; New Fangle; Wailin' D.A. Blues; Old Self; Blue Silver; So Forth; Walk On The Wild Side; If Time Allows; Wolverine Blues; Minotaur. (60:07)

**Personnel:** Andy Biskin, clarinet; bass clarinet; Peter Hess, clarinet, E-flat clarinet, alto clarinet, bass clarinet, contra-alto clarinet; Mike McGinnis, clarinet, alto clarinet, bass clarinet; Sam Sadigursky, clarinet, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet.

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



## Gary Brunton SPACECRAFT

JUSTE UNE TRACE

★★★★½

On "Lunar Meditation," the opening track to Gary Brunton's *SPACECRAFT*, the bassist re-imagines the universe through his own spiritual jazz lens. The soft introduction of the bass and gentle serenade of the flute leading up to a fierce tenor saxophone solo sets the tone for the atmospheric record.

Structured as a two-part voyage — *Outward Bound* and *Return To Earth* — *SPACECRAFT* is Brunton's interpretation of how the world functions. *SPACECRAFT* also stands for "craft," meaning highly specialized work and instrumental mastery, acquired through constant dedication, passion and daily practice.

Along with his longtime partner, drummer Simon Goubert, Brunton joins forces with three newcomers — French saxophonists Emma Rawicz and Léa Ciechelski and guitarist Benjamin Garson — to round out the album's futuristic sound. As an intergenerational band with multiple ethnic identities, each musician is given the space to improvise and decipher a myriad of sounds over 11 tracks.

"Take The Rocket" features a Hungarian minor scale and North Indian tihai, a rhythmic and musical device in Indian classical music. Goubert's fast-paced drumming opens the track followed by solid alto and tenor saxophone solos from Rawicz and Ciechelski, which augments the tune's complex rhythmic structure. Although Brunton experiments with more compound melodies throughout the recording, he manages to leave room for swing and funk-friendly tunes such as "Sneaklifter" and "So Chavvy." Here the band's energy is decidedly more playful.

—Veronica Johnson

**SPACECRAFT:** Lunar Meditation; Sneaklifter; So Chavvy; Three Cliffs Bay; A Sign From Within; Take The Rocket; Lost In The Black Fort; Nightcap For Dot; Rising Damp; Houston Can You Hear Me?; Song For Jez. (60:44)

**Personnel:** Gary Brunton, bass; Emma Rawicz, tenor saxophone; Léa Ciechelski, alto saxophone, flute; Benjamin Garson, guitar; Simon Goubert, drums.

Ordering info: [juste-une-trace.com](http://juste-une-trace.com)



# Calligram's Multitudes

For going on two years, Calligram Records has shown how artist-owned companies can encourage both community and individual experimentation. With this solid new batch of albums, saxophonist Geof Bradfield and trumpeter Chad McCullough continue to release exciting works from musicians who, like themselves, are sharp composers and (mostly) share ties to the fertile Chicago scene.

On *Arc And Edge* (Calligram; ★★★ 58:11) trumpeter James Davis' *Beveled* combines his experiences in chamber music and jazz through a joyous amalgam of inspired original pieces and unique arrangements. The lineup for this sextet features two flugelhorn (Davis and McCullough) alongside a pair of bass clarinetists (Bradfield and Michael Salter). The singular instrumental textures and rich compositions echo the group 8 Bold Souls, whose leader, Edward Wilkerson, has previously worked with Davis. And like that ensemble, Davis has made his assemblage sound bigger than it is through a shifting array of juxtapositions, such as playing with conventional harmonies on the brief but forceful "Pulsar." These movements build to the ecstatic on "Search For Itness." Davis also presents the framework for building constantly surprising turnarounds, especially in "Long Road Home." Set against the ensemble's weighty leads, bassist Daniel Thatcher and drummer Juan Pastor's sparse duet sounds all the more striking on "Unending Path."

Tenor saxophonist Jarod Bufe's *Brighter Days* (Calligram; ★★★★★ 50:51) extends the success of his quartet's 2018 debut, *New Spaces*. Since then, he wrote a number of compositions that he said reflect attempts to convey optimism during the harshness of the COVID-19 pandemic. His strong performance shows that some crucial things have not changed. As with his previous album, Bufe's robust tone blends lyricism and punch as he sounds ebullient on the ballads "Goodnight, My Brooklyn Prince" and "Goodbye, Marlene." Bufe also stacks his repeated riffs to ascend into a sense of brightness on the appropriately titled "Fighting For Hope." The group's growing mutual telepathy sounds particularly resonant on "Midnight" with guitarist Tim Stine's fierce response to Bufe. Stine also accentuates Bufe's lines as he glides from the background and foreground before taking quick turns leading back into Bufe's warm response. Behind the scenes, empathetic saxophonist Nick Mazzarrella serves as producer and shows how to bring out the best sound in everyone.

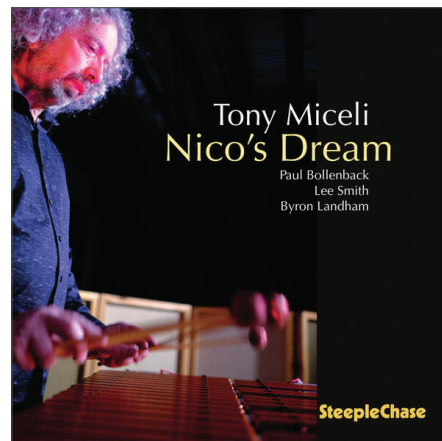
Scottish drummer Alyn Cosker takes a different direction from his Calligram label mates on the electronics-based *Onta* (Calligram; ★★★½ 37:20). A diverse team of



instrumentalists — including fiddler Jenna Reid-Sandilands and chromatic whistler Paul Towndrow — also drop in for guest visits. Cosker's writing and Tom Gibbs' Fender Rhodes lines give this album's version of fusion a seemingly ethereal vibe, initially. But Cosker knows how to shake things up, while also emphasizing thoughtful melody. Playing piano and adding vocals to "And You," Cosker's navigates a labyrinthine direction. On "Lullapalew" Towndrow's flutes begin to create an almost ambient effect before Cosker and bassist James Lindsay turn things around. Clear connections to his national roots come up a few times on *Onta*, particularly when Karen Matheson sings the Scottish Gaelic "Làrach do Thacaidean." In any language, her voice combined with Cosker's hand percussion and guitarist Davie Dunsmuir's attack simply rocks out.

Now a resident of Seoul, vibraphonist Chris Varga made the most out of a return visit to Chicago to record *Breathe* (Calligram; ★★★½; 57:37). His tone is deeply resonant as a sense of weight enhances his lyricism. Leading a quartet — with Bradfield guesting on tenor for four tracks — Varga's ostensibly subdued use of musical space gives way to startling changes, including the vibraphone/saxophone bobbing and weaving on "Darrantula." The sudden rhythmic shifts on "Lid" emphasize drummer Neil Hemphill and bassist Clark Sommers' fluidity along with Varga's sharp use of accents. Varga also creates ideal spaces for guitarist Dave Miller to fill on "Passing Remarks." Like Cosker, Varga also draws inspiration from traditions an ocean away as his lyrical "Gentle Vicissitudes" is his take on a Korean folk song that goes back centuries. **DB**

Ordering info: [calligramrecords.bandcamp.com](https://calligramrecords.bandcamp.com)



## Tony Miceli *Nico's Dream* STEEPLECHASE

★★★

Does jazz have a competence problem?

Sometimes it seems that the music suffers not from a lack of competence, but an overabundance. *Nico's Dream*, by the vibraphonist Tony Miceli, is a case in point.

Miceli is clearly a master of his instrument, effortlessly moving between fluid, single-note solos and intricate chordal comping, and his bandmates are equally accomplished. Between them, they deliver these 10 tunes with breezy, solidly swinging ease.

It's extremely competent musicianship, but hardly compelling.

If a five-star effort could be represented with a fire emoji, this one would only merit a smiley face: not bad, not great, merely pleasant. The album starts off strong with "Winther Blues" (presumably named for Steeplechase chief Nils Winther), which sets a spritely unison line over the clockwork tick of snare and hi-hat. But once the solos start, the quartet abandons the rhythmic novelty of the head for pro-forma swing, which seems a squandered opportunity.

"Green Dolphin's Treat" is a punning contrafact with an angularly boppish head, but the blowing is so by-the-book they may as well have paid Bronislau Kaper his royalties. And while it was nice to hear guitarist Paul Bollenback pull out a slide for his solo on the 5/4 title track, it would have been nicer still had he used it to play something even vaguely daring.

None of those are fatal flaws, of course. *Nico's Dream* is eminently listenable — and almost as easily forgettable. —J.D. Considine

**Nico's Dream:** Winther Blues; Nico's Dream; Have A Sense Of Humor; Breathe Deep; Sanbarific; Vince Guaraldi; Green Dolphin's Treat; End Of A Beautiful Friendship; YAS; What's That. (66:47)

**Personnel:** Tony Miceli, vibraphone; Paul Bollenback, guitar; Lee Smith, bass; Byron Landham, drums.

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





## Tessa Souter *Shadows And Silence: The Erik Satie Project*

NOANARA  
★★★★

## Kurt Rosenwinkel & Jean-Paul Brodbeck *The Brahms Project*

HEARTCORE  
★★★★

The tradition of mixing jazz with classical music has tended to take two forms: the one that became known as Third Stream music in the 1950s, and the more direct approach, which is not to assimilate or borrow elements of classical music into an altogether new form but to focus primarily on received material, usually from one composer, usually of some vintage. The latter type is demonstrated on these two recent recordings, both of which take strikingly different, interpretative approaches and both of which offer strikingly different results.

On Kurt Rosenwinkel and Jean-Paul Brodbeck's *The Brahms Project*, the noteworthy guitarist and pianist (respectively) dig mightily into the music of composer Johannes Brahms across 10 pieces — pieces that for someone unfamiliar with the composer would likely come away hearing a fairly conventional jazz recording, the music filled with much improvisation but also resonant to the melodies of

Brahms. There's an assuredness to each selection, all named according to the titles Brahms himself gave. That may be your only clue, apart from the album's signature, that this isn't your typical jazz release (whatever that may suggest).

The selections range from just under four minutes ("Symphony No. 4-III Allegro giocoso") to well over eight ("Symphony No. 3-III Poco allegretto"), each number involving highly arranged treatments with Rosenwinkel and Brodbeck's careful guidance and interactions very determinative, guiding bassist Lukas Traxel and drummer Jorge Rossy's every move, or so it seems. Reminiscent, in parts, to Claude Bolling's overtures to the mixing of genres, *The Brahms Project* expresses a fanciful delight in a never-ending romance between two musical worlds.

The same could be said for *Shadows And Silence: The Erik Satie Project*, vocalist Tessa Souter's idiosyncratic approaches to the music of Erik Satie. Because we're now talking about a singer, the introduction of lyrics becomes a key ingredient, given that Satie's music was primarily, if not exclusively, instrumental. Satie, more so than Brahms, has been a periodic source of inspiration for jazz musicians. Souter's voice works naturally within this milieu, her butterscotch timbres gliding smoothly from track to track. Her crew here includes the highly sympathetic drummer Billy Drummond, along with bassist Yasushi Nakamura, trumpeter Nadje Noordhuis, sopranoist Steve Wilson and pianist Luis Perdomo.

While you can trace the lines of perhaps Satie's most famous composition ("Gnossienne No.1"), "A Song For You," the relaxed interpretation this group gives makes you forget it's a "cover." This is just one example of what Souter explains of "the mysterious, amorphous fluidity of Satie's melodies, [which] invited the lyrics." The words she sings are her own throughout (excepting "Never Broken" with lyrics from Cassandra Wilson that Souter returns to by way of Wayne Shorter's "E.S.P.," and the final selection). A favorite Ron Carter composition originally played by the bassist as "Doom" and subsequently by him with Miles Davis as "Mood" fits perfectly as a kind of end-around Satie, given its simple, eloquent repetitive lines, the tune played true to its origins.

—John Ephland

**Shadows And Silence:** The Erik Satie Project: A Song For You (Gnossienne No. 1); Mood (Musica Universalis); Holding On To Beauty (Gnossienne No. 3); Peace (Gnossienne No. 2); Avec le Temps; D'Ou Venons-Nous (Gymnopedie No. 3); I Kiss Your Heart/Vexations; Never Broken (ESP); Rayga's Song (Gymnopedie No. 1); If You Go Away/Ne Me Quitte Pas.

**Personnel:** Tessa Souter, vocals; Luis Perdomo, piano, percussion (1); Yasushi Nakamura, bass; Billy Drummond, drums, cymbals; Nadje Noordhuis, trumpet, flugelhorn (2, 8); Steve Wilson, soprano saxophone (2, 6, 9); Pascal Borderies, spoken word (7).

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

**The Brahms Project:** Hungarian Dance No. 1; Intermezzo, Op. 117, No. 2; Intermezzo, Op. 118, No. 2; Rhapsody, Op. 79, No. 1; Wiegenslied; Intermezzo, Op. 116, No. 6; Symphony No. 3—III. Poco allegretto; Hungarian Dance No. 5; Ballade, Op. 10, No. 4; Symphony No. 4—III. Allegro giocoso.

**Personnel:** Kurt Rosenwinkel, guitar; Jean-Paul Brodbeck, piano; Lukas Traxel, acoustic bass; Jorge Rossy, drums.

**Ordering info:** [heartcore-records.com](http://heartcore-records.com)

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JIM O'KEEFE

Your band needs and wants your guidance in order to achieve the whole, according to vocalist and bandleader Karrin Allyson.

## Translating Musical Experience Into Best Bandleading Practices

I come from the vantage point of being an instrumentalist first. My educational background is in classical piano — my mom was my first teacher (she was a beautiful classical pianist), and I got a Bachelor of Music degree in Piano Performance at the University of Nebraska Omaha. But I also have a considerable amount of experience being “just” the singer within a group. This has informed my long-term development as a vocalist-bandleader in significant ways.

I learned bandleading skills on the bandstand. I needed to lead to let my players know what I wanted. And, of course, I’ve always depended on their talents to help me lead.

I put out my first recording, 1993’s *I Didn’t Know About You*, on my own while living in Kansas City. I truly did not know what a record label was then. I just wanted to record with this wonderful group of KC players I

had brought together and to have something to offer to listeners and sell on the bandstand at my gigs. A fan bought it and sent it to the radio station KJAZZ in San Francisco, where the morning-shift DJ happened to be Stan Dunn, the West Coast radio promoter for Concord Records. He got a lot of calls from listeners about the album, so he played it for Carl Jefferson, founder of Concord. “Jeff” and I spoke on the phone, and I ended up going out to L.A. to meet him. Things progressed very nicely from there, and I ended up getting signed to Concord and releasing more than a dozen of my own recordings on the label.

Who knew? My point here is: Move forward, do your best, and by all means have some fun with the music. Don’t wait! Hire the best musicians you can find and afford. Hanging out is also important — spending time with “the cats,” being on the scene, living that life.

There’s no replacement for that kind of personal interaction when one is learning how to be a good leader. To that end, I recommend that all vocalists work on getting some keyboard or guitar skills. You don’t have to perform on it, but all singers need to know basic skills in order to communicate and, frankly, pay respect to this music and the players.

### Deliberate Approach

As a bandleader, you are your own conductor, dancing with the pulse and groove within. It’s important to acknowledge that we all have a different approach to time and rhythm, two of the most essential aspects of all music.

What do you want to say with your musical offering? Do you only want to emulate your heroes? Of course, most of us start that way. Or, would you like to make things more personal? Your musical choices, many of them hard-won, matter — so how do you express that to your players?

How one physically moves (or doesn’t move) during a performance can make a big difference. I always tell my students I’m not asking them to be Alvin Ailey on stage, but they should communicate their ideas clearly and deliberately.

I don’t know why eye contact can be so hard for some people. Your band needs and wants your loving guidance in order to achieve the whole. Your eyes express a lot of information and emotion, so don’t shy away from using them as a vehicle for communication.

Understandably, instrumentalists feel frustrated when singers basically treat the band like a karaoke machine. While it’s important to be deliberate as a bandleader, have the presence of mind to put yourself in your bandmembers’ shoes and try to be sensitive to their needs, and feelings, as well.

### Making Choices

Choosing the right players for you — and your music — matters, too. It takes some trial-and-error to make that happen.

I admire so very many musicians, but not all are suited to what I do. It makes things more challenging when one wants to play a real variety — not only jazz standards, but venturing out into other languages, styles, pop, your own originals, etc. When you have a choice, choose material that suits you best. Then hire the best players who will support your repertoire and thrive in the stylistic contexts you prefer.

As a bandleader, you also have choices to make within the set/show itself regarding when and how things happen. Being truly in



the music can help dictate that. What would you like to hear next? A saxophone solo? Something featuring piano, drums or bass? None of the above? Jazz is wonderful in so many ways because it's a democracy — usually with a leader, not a dictator — where we can all have our say and truly communicate with one another.

Listening is key. Sometimes it feels like a lost art, with all the distractions we have around us. And being a good listener is essential when it comes to leading a band, just as it is within a conversation, or attending a lecture, or enjoying a concert by your favorite artist. Your ears and soul should be exhausted after a set, yet energized, too. It's a physical act to actually listen and respond to what's happening. Just because you are “done” with your part, do not tune out, otherwise you will miss out.

### Letting Go

Learning to let things go and lay back is often liberating. Your fellow bandmembers can help with that. Ultimately, it can help you and your group achieve balance: the one intangible thing that we're all looking for.

When I first started to sing “jazz,” I felt intimidated by jazz players, and the idiom itself. I thought, “Why would anyone want to hear what I've written when they can hear Duke Ellington, the Gershwins, Thelonious Monk, Cole Porter, Oscar Brown Jr., Blossom Dearie, Peggy Lee, and all the great artists before me?”

But I finally let that go and put out my CD of original music. My dad (who was a Lutheran Pastor, and a thespian earlier in his life) always said, “Write your own songs!” But he was my dad — did I listen? Not till later. Remember, your audience wants to know you, so try to “let go” and allow that to happen.

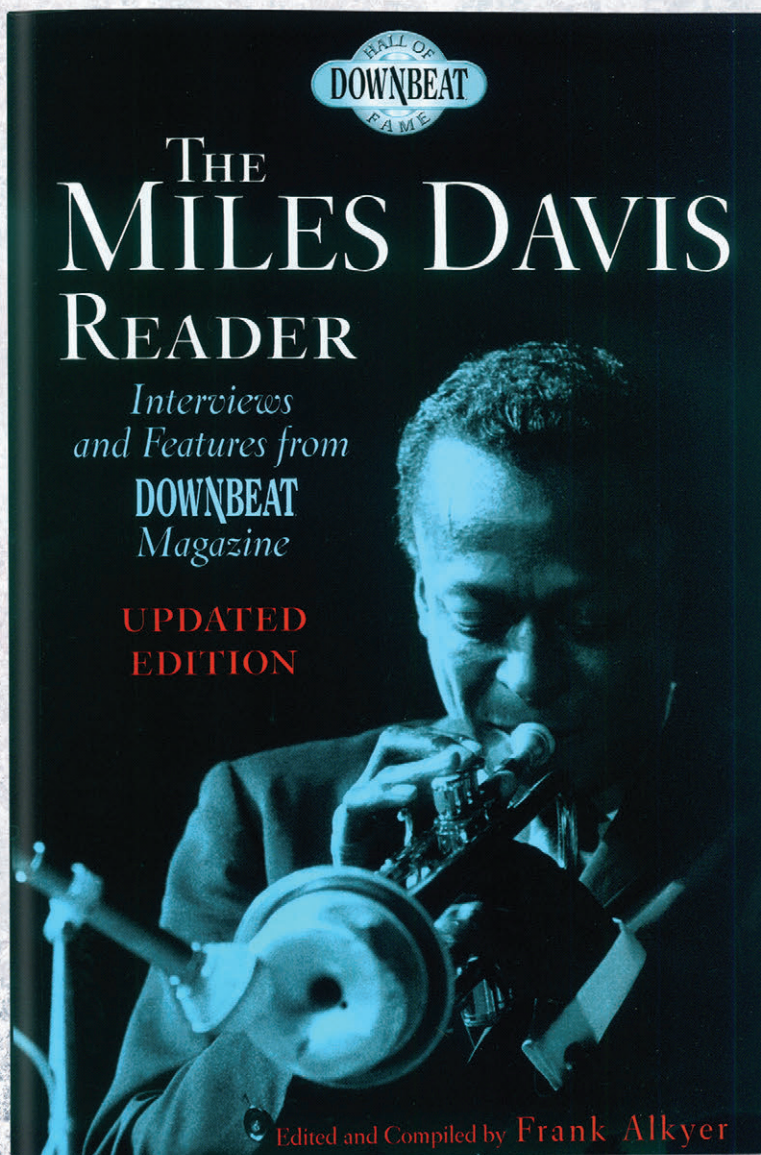
I love the company of musicians. They are the liveliest, smartest, funniest, most encouraging people I've ever met, and that is a life-line in this business. Their collective sense of humor and worldly wisdom helps me get through each day. If I had not ended up doing this for a living, I know just the study and love of music would immeasurably enhance my life anyway.

We are all “Just Passin' Through” (song plug intended). It's a journey, for sure, and a very worthwhile one. Thank you for listening! **DB**

Karrin Allyson, one of jazz's most popular and wide-ranging vocalists, has delved into bebop, blues, pop and Great American Songbook standards, as well as her own original compositions. Her recent release as a leader, 2024's *A Kiss For Brazil* (Origin Records), features Bahian singer-guitarist Rosa Passos, along with drummer Rafael Barata, bassist Harvey S, guitarist Yotam Silberstein and keyboardist Vitor Gonçalves. Allyson was the star of the 2019 concept recording *Shoulder To Shoulder: Centennial Tribute To Women's Suffrage*, a collection of songs of the Suffragist Era (plus two originals). Visit Allyson online at [karrin.com](http://karrin.com).

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Lewis' solo incorporates a lot of fourths, starting from his first lick.

# James Brandon Lewis' Tenor Solo on 'Remember Brooklyn & Moki'

**T**he newest album from saxophonist James Brandon Lewis, *Apple Cores* (Anti-), is a gem. The interaction between the trio members is deep, and there is a strength of the lines for each instrument that sometimes makes it difficult to

tell what is composed and what is improvised (and what falls somewhere in between). I've chosen Lewis' composition "Remember Brooklyn & Moki," partly because it has a clearer distinction between melody and solo, but also because it's such a sweet groove. The

transcription is presented at concert pitch, but octave transposed, as tenor saxophone usually is.

A word about the chords: The song seems to be based on quartal voicings, so even though I've named them based on our ter-



tiary system, that doesn't really give an accurate idea of the harmonies. If you take the notes included in the chords I've given, but put them in order of ascending fourths, you might get a better sense of what sounds we're dealing with.

And you'll notice how Lewis embraces these sounds. There are quite a lot of fourths, starting right from his first lick. This "fourths with a step" approach creates a sound most of us first encountered with saxophonist Eddie Harris' classic "Freedom Jazz Dance." The final phrase starting at the end of bar 23 is another example. But Lewis isn't restricting himself to just fourths and seconds. There are the occasional thirds, though these appear to me to occur as a consequence of the seconds and fourths, specifically from the underlying harmonies.

For instance, the F# to A in bar 3. Lewis lands on that high A through much of the first six measures. So, throwing in the step from E to F#, and a corresponding third from E to G in measure 5, is something he doesn't want to disrupt that high point. Also, he appears to be exploring (or developing, if you prefer) this motif. An advantage of emphasizing a couple of intervals is that it makes motivic development almost inevitable.

Observe the following four bars (measures 6–9). The previously mentioned F# and G, as second and minor third, are not dissonant against the stacked-fourths E chord. But here Lewis is adding in Bb, the tritone — highly dissonant, especially on a quartal voicing. But placing the G natural and A around it as he does makes it sound bluesy. In fact, the incorporation of the G into the previous motif sort of sets up the blues quality. Since the chord is neither major nor minor, blues can work against it.

Likewise, the major or minor sixth could both fit or not fit on this, and though Lewis does favor the major sixth, the minor sixth shows up as well. All of these pitches become part of Lewis' motifs. Notice that the C# is always either preceded or followed (or both) by an A natural. This creates a consistency that makes that potentially "outside" note sound more at home — just like he did inserting the Bb into a blues lick.

Another one is the chromatic half-step between the D and E. We hear this in bars 10–12 and 14, but these are the only measures where this appears. Lewis brings in this idea halfway through his improvisation, uses it for a handful of bars and then abandons it. This is an intriguing way of developing a solo. Since in the final three measures the Bbs, C#s, Cs and Gs are also dropped, there is an oxymoronic aspect to this solo. A similar thing happens with the inclusion of F naturals, which first happens in bar 13

and continues through measure 15. Not only does Lewis present this new sound and then abandon it, but coincidentally it overlaps the chromatic D#/Eb.

And notice when the chord "changes" at measure 17. The new chord is still fourths, but built on B natural, and all the way up to G (so now the G is more of a chord tone). There is significant overlap between the chords, and it's mainly the change in bass line that makes it sound like a chord change. This means that one could use the same melodic ideas over this new section, and Lewis does. The Bbs may sound a little darker and the C#s a bit brighter, but the sounds still fit. And this means Lewis can continue exploring (developing) his motifs even though the "chord" has changed. It's a clever way of giving us variety and consistency simultaneously.

Another way of viewing this solo is that Lewis has chosen a select group of pitches to explore. He starts with E, A and D, then adds F#, and then G. This seems to be leading our ears toward an E minor scale (though his use of intervals obscures that), but then we get Bb

and C# quickly after that. This becomes the main group of notes, with B natural, C natural and the chromatic D#/Eb making rare appearances. This main group of notes — E, F#, G, A, Bb, C#, D — don't make a standard scale (it is a mode of the D harmonic major scale). When he gets to the end, he's reduced it back to E, A and D, returning us to where it began (again, oxymoronic).

An essential aspect of Lewis' improvisation is his tone: sharp and growly. He's not trying to be sweet, and this groove doesn't need sweetness. Also, bar 19 is a great example of "false fingerings," where Lewis is playing the same E natural but giving it a different timbre. This technique has shown up more subtly in other places, but it demonstrates how important the sound of the note is to him — at least as important as what note and what part of the chord/scale it represents.

DB

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



## JodyJazz DV JC 'Jody Custom' Alto Sax Mouthpiece

### *Design Modifications Boost Fatness, Sweetness, Darkness & Warmth*

The JodyJazz DV series of saxophone mouthpiece upended expectations when it was introduced in 2005. With a name inspired by the book *The Da Vinci Code* and featuring design elements incorporating the Golden Mean proportions found in nature, the line offered free-blowing power and projection without sacrificing a fat-sounding mid-range and bottom end: a problem saxophonists had frequently encountered when playing metal mouthpieces that appealed to their desire for increased thrust and more tonal presence when wailing in the higher registers. The DV proved to be a welcome exception to the unwritten rule that metal mouthpieces were overly shrill.

Since the DV's debut, JodyJazz founder and saxophonist Jody Espina has made a series of modifications to his personal version of the mouthpiece to make it better suit the range of acoustic and amplified musical environments he encounters on his gigs. Now he's making those customizations available in a regular production model: the JodyJazz DV JC, which stands for "Jody Custom."

"As we occasionally made changes to my personal DV, it was getting better and better," said Espina. And when he began to consider new designs for a limited edition mouthpiece to honor the company's 25th anniversary this year, Espina started tweaking his personal DV even more. "We came upon a version that I just freaked

out over. I loved it so much that I decided it was too good and would be too universally embraced to make it a limited edition only. So, we're launching it to be a regularly offered model in our DV lineup."

In terms of sound capabilities, the DV JC falls somewhere between the company's DV and the DV NY mouthpieces, according to Espina. In play-testing, it responded with a little extra warmth and slightly more rounded tone compared with the original DV alto model, likely the result of subtle changes made to the baffle. It retains the long facing of the original DV and responded most reliably when I used a medium-hard or hard reed. When I put on a medium reed, I found the DV JC Alto to be extremely flexible, opening the door to another realm of soulful and expressive playing where pitch bends, thick vibrato and dramatic dynamic shifts are more paramount.

"There is a characteristic about this mouthpiece that makes it feel even less like a metal piece than the others," Espina said. "Big, fat and warm with enough power to do all the variety of jobs I do, but sweet and dark enough to play beautiful ballads."

Made from gold-plated virgin bell brass and featuring a "Jody Custom" engraving, the DV JC Alto comes in size 6, 7 and 8 tip openings. A tenor version is due sometime this year. —Ed Enright



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

## Odisei Music Travel Sax 2

### *Pocket-Size MIDI-Capable Electronic Instrument for Practice Anytime, Anywhere*

Odisei Music's Travel Sax 2, an updated version of the company's original model released about five years ago, is a viable addition to the electronic saxophone options currently on the market. Designed primarily for quiet or silent practice virtually any place in the known universe, it has the real fingering of a saxophone with responsive key-spring mechanisms, a built-in speaker and a headphone jack. It's also ultra-portable; in fact, it's so small and lightweight that you can carry it around in a case that's not much larger than your standard Dopp kit.

Additionally, Travel Sax 2 is MIDI-enabled and functions well as a controller that connects to your DAW via USB-C. It includes more than 50 onboard sounds, including saxophone samples (soprano, alto, tenor, baritone), keyboards (pianos, electric pianos, organs, accordion), brass instruments, strings, basses, guitars, harmonica, ensemble patches and special effects. And it has an app for your phone that connects via Bluetooth and provides control over parameters like transposition, reverb effects, breath sensitivity, MIDI velocity, custom fingerings (including altissimo), output levels, input levels (for playing along with tracks) and recording.

Made of injection-molded ABS, Travel Sax 2 comes with modular-type adapters that make it possible to "play" it — or activate the sound, to be more accurate — using your own soprano, alto, tenor or bari mouthpiece. For a more realistic saxophone-playing feel, a slightly bent "neck" can be added to the setup, as well as a straight

extension neckpiece that effectively elongates the instrument. True beginners, or anyone who's not prepared to use a saxophone-type mouthpiece, also have the option of using the simple blow-hole intake that comes included.

Travel Sax 2 is an attractive option for beginning students, or anyone who wants to learn how to play saxophone starting from scratch. A learning app called Odisei Play does a fine job of teaching fingerings and rhythms using visual representations, and provides instruction in reading notation by starting with hybrid music sheets that eventually transition into standard treble-clef-type layouts. The app monitors you as you play along and gives immediate, helpful feedback indicating when you nail it, when you "fluff" it and when you're getting close.

I had the most fun using the Travel Sax 2 as a MIDI controller connected to Logic software running on my laptop, with my familiar Brilhart bari mouthpiece acting as the air-intake mechanism. One time I even brought it onstage, where for a while I was a flute, then a muted trumpet and a harmonica before switching over to some otherworldly, edgy synth leads — relying on regular old saxophone fingerings to get me through my solos, well within the safety and security of my comfort zone. —Ed Enright

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The LP Black Box II Cajon offers an enhanced playing experience while sticking to its eco-friendly ethos and affordability. It now boasts a Meranti soundboard for punchy, bright tones. Its two internal snares add crispness to the characteristic buzz, and an integrated bass port boosts projection during live performances.

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

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Kurzweil Music Systems teamed up with Artesia Pro on the KaP1, a digital stage piano featuring a minimalist design, a streamlined control panel and a mid-century modern look. Fueled by the 2GB KORE 2.0 Sound Library, the KaP1 includes samples from Kurzweil's pro products — showcasing the 9-foot German grand piano samples found in the company's flagship K2700 workstation and SP7 Grand.

More info: [artesia-pro.com](http://artesia-pro.com)

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Beneath its vintage-inspired exterior, the Wanda microphone from Ear Trumpet Labs delivers clarity and detail. The mic's sweet spot extends up to 12 inches away, giving artists freedom of movement while maintaining the ability to capture tonal nuances. A medium-large diaphragm condenser capsule, high-SPL-handling circuitry design and integrated multilayer pop filter ensure professional-grade performance.

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

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

## 6. Bridging the Gap

The Rath R300 from Rath Trombones is the latest model in the company's Rath 00 series, which includes the R100, R400 and R900. It has a medium size bore (.525-inch) and is designed to bridge the gap between student-level instruments and Rath's modular, hand-drafted custom trombones.

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





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aammusic.com	crisscrossjazz.com	<b>Network</b> ..... 60
<b>Andreas Haddeland</b> ..... 65	<b>Dave Bass Music</b> ..... 79	jazzednet.org
andreashaddeland.no	davebass.com	<b>JodyJazz</b> ..... 92
<b>Blue Note Records</b> ..... 5	<b>DC Jazz Festival</b> ..... 12	jodyjazz.com
bluenote.com	dcjazzfest.org	<b>Karla Harris</b> ..... 65
<b>Calligram Records</b> ..... 14	<b>DownBeat</b> ..... 81, 85, 87	karlaharris.com
calligramrecords.com	downbeat.com	<b>Latin Percussion</b> ..... 19
<b>Cannonball Music</b> ..... 9	<b>Dünya</b> ..... 17	lpmusic.com
cannonballmusic.com	sanlikol.com	<b>Loose Groove</b>
<b>Capri Records</b> ..... 31	<b>Ed Palermo</b> ..... 65	<b>Records</b> ..... 75
caprirecords.com	palermobigband.com	loosegrooverecords.com
<b>Catfood Records</b> ..... 71	<b>Freedom Art Quartet</b> ..... 63	<b>Manhattan School</b>
catfoodrecords.com	faqmusic.com	<b>of Music</b> ..... 29
<b>Chicago Jazz Orchestra</b>	<b>GleAM Records</b> ..... 69	msmnyc.edu
<b>Association</b> ..... 61	gleam-records.com	<b>Masha Campagne</b>
cjomusic.org	<b>Guitars Over Guns</b> ..... 47	<b>Music</b> ..... 63
<b>Chill Tone Records</b> ..... 79	guitarsoverguns.org	mashacampagnemusic.com
chilltone.com	<b>ILK Music</b> ..... 63	<b>MVD Entertainment</b> ..... 73
<b>Clearwater Jazz</b>	ilkmusic.com	mvdshop.com
<b>Holiday</b> ..... 4	<b>Intakt Records</b> ..... 41	<b>The New School</b> ..... 57
clearwaterjazz.com	intaktrec.ch	newschool.edu/jazz



**Nonesuch Records** ..... 11  
nonesuch.com  
**Nordic Sound** ..... 63  
nordicsound.no  
**Outline Records** ..... 46  
janeirabloom.com  
**P. Mauriat**.....91  
pmauriatmusic.com  
**Pittsburgh Jazz Festival**.... 45  
pittsburghjazzfest.org  
**Pyroclastic Records**..... 39  
pyroclasticrecords.com  
**Rovner MC LLC** .....10  
rovnerproducts.com

**ScienSonic Laboratories**  
**Records**.....10  
sciensonic.net  
**Shifting Paradigm**  
**Records**..... 65  
shiftingparadigmrecords.com  
**Signature Cruise**  
**Experiences**..... 46  
scecruises.com  
**Soulville Sound**  
**Recordings**..... 65  
soulvillesoundrecordings.com  
**Summit Records**.....23  
summitrecords.com

**Susan Hinkson Music**..... 65  
susanhinksonmusic.com  
**TurnTable Tickets** ..... 21  
turntabletickets.com  
**Vandoren**..... 3, 15  
dansr.com  
**Wesleyan University** .....27  
wesleyan.edu/music  
**XO Brass**..... 2  
xobrass.com  
**Yamaha** ..... 7  
usa.yamaha.com  
**Yardbird Suite** ..... 38  
yardbirdsuite.com



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# Buster Williams

**B**uster Williams, who at the age of 83 has been on the scene for 65 years, had never done a Blindfold Test. The first for the legendary, Camden, New Jersey-born bassist was hosted by the jazz studies program at New York University. More than 30 students attended, as did a few faculty members, including drummer Lenny White. At the close of the session, he saluted the young musicians on their career choice. “People in your family that love you, like your grandmother and your mother, will ask you, ‘What are you going to do if it doesn’t work out? What’s your back door?’ My father told me, ‘There ain’t no back door!’ There’s only one door, and when you’re in, you’re in. When I chose music, I was trapped. What a great entrapment. So, congratulations to all of you. You could have chosen to work for the federal government.”

## Oscar Pettiford

“Tricetism” (*Oscar Pettiford*, Bethlehem, 1954) Pettiford, bass; Julius Watkins, French horn; Charlie Rouse, tenor saxophone; Duke Jordan, piano; Ron Jefferson, drums.

Oscar Pettiford. It’s his tune. One day my father, who was a bass player and my teacher, played for me a record by Oscar Pettiford playing “Stardust.” The thing that captured me was I could hear the squeak as his hand moved up and down the neck coupled with the beautiful notes that he was playing, and that just drew me in.

## esperanza spalding

“The Peacocks” (*Unjo*, Ayva Music, 2006) Spalding, bass; Aruán Ortiz, piano; Francisco Mela, drums.

That’s a beautiful arrangement on that song. I associate it with Jimmy Rowles — “The Peacocks,” yeah. We recorded that with Stan Getz, Elvin Jones and Jimmy. Jimmy called me “Ster.” It was too much for him to say “Buster.” [laughs] I loved this version. [afterwards] Oh, esperanza. That was her singing. She’s a great talent. I love her stuff. We were playing in Blues Alley, and I hadn’t met her yet, but as I’m getting ready to walk up on the bandstand she ran up to me and had this big smile and said, “Buster!” I said, “esperanza!” I knew who she was.

## Ray Brown Trio

“Things Ain’t What They Used To Be” (*At the Bern Jazz Festival*, YouTube video, 2002) Brown, bass; Larry Fuller, piano; Karriem Riggins, drums.

Is that Ray Brown? When I first heard him what was so outstanding was his sound. A lot of times it has to do with the way you’re recorded. But with Ray, it was always clear to me that his sound was his sound. His sound and his choice of notes, that really drew me in, and the fact that I never heard a throwaway note when it came to Ray. He played as though every note mattered. When a band doesn’t sound amazing, it’s usually because the bass player sucks. Ain’t nothing worse than a sucking bass player. My objective is to do this so well that the band sounds amazing. I take that very seriously.

## Stanley Clarke

“Bass Folk Song” (*Children Of Forever*, Polydor, 1972) Clarke, electric bass, vocals; Arthur Webb, flute; Chick Corea, electric piano, clavinet; Pat Martino, 12-string guitar; Lenny White, drums.

It’s that drowning sound [imitates sound of electric bass played through a wah-wah pedal]. Was that Stanley Clarke? Were you on that, Lenny? Lenny, Stanley. *Children Of Forever*. I was playing electric and acoustic at that time with Herbie — the Herbie Hancock Sextet, later it was called Mwandishi. Anyway, Stanley came on the scene, and he was playing his ass off. I really didn’t want Herbie to hear Stanley because as far as I was



“What I got from Percy was the dignity of playing the bass,” Williams said of Percy Heath.

concerned, I was the man. “Herbie, you don’t need to hear nobody else.” Stanley and I became friends, and recently we became a little closer than we were before. I cherish that.

## Red Norvo/Tal Farlow/Charles Mingus

“Godchild” (*The Red Norvo Trio With Tal Farlow And Charles Mingus*, Savoy, 1952) Norvo, vibraphone; Farlow, guitar; Mingus, bass.

I liked it as far as each person’s proficiency. They gelled very well. It’s interesting — a drummer-less and piano-less trio. I could hear and feel anxiety moments going through the bass player. [afterwards] Oh, I thought that was Mingus. Mingus was too mean to get nervous. I remember me and Kenny Barron were doing a duo at Bradley’s, and in walks Charlie Mingus with some lady beside him. He’s coming straight towards me because that’s the way you gotta go, and he walks to the back. Then in a few minutes I heard someone say, loudly: “That’s right! That’s what I’m talking about!” That was him complimenting me. He wanted the world to hear that compliment. Later he came around and motioned to me to sit down at his table, and we talked. That was my Mingus encounter.

## Percy Heath

“Django” (*A Love Song*, Daddy Jazz, 2003) Heath, bass; Jeb Patton, piano; Albert Heath, drums.

Percy Heath? What I got from Percy was the dignity of playing the bass. The simple approach that he had. He never played anything that was unnecessary, and everything that he played was necessary. Percy and I became very good friends. We were on a jazz cruise once and there was this room where we would keep all of our basses and when the Heath Brothers played, I’d go to the room and take Percy’s bass out of the case and carry it for him to where they were going to play.

## Billy Drummond

“The Bat” (*Dubai*, Criss Cross Jazz, 1995) Drummond, drums; Peter Washington, bass; Chris Potter, Walt Weiskopf, tenor saxophones.

I liked it. The performance. The song. Who was it? [afterwards] Billy Drummond used to be in my band. I always have the drummer on my left side. But Billy, when he plays he always looks to his left, and I’m always to his right. Peter is an excellent bass player. Peter used to always ask me questions about Paul Chambers. Like I knew answers. He loves Paul as I did. I can hear things from Peter that are akin to Paul, but his approach is distinctly different, which is great. Also, Peter puts his middle finger over his first finger. There was a guy in Philly that used to do that, Spanky DeBrest, one of the original Jazz Messengers. Spanky had that beat. We always called him The Hump because of that.

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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