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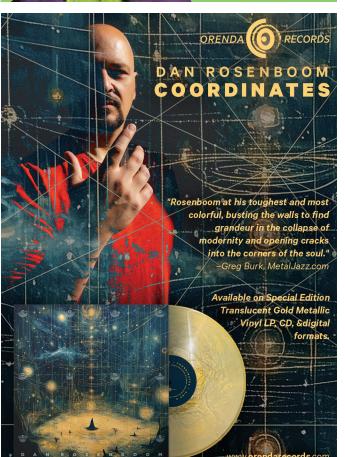
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SEPTEMBER 2025

VOLUME 92 / NUMBER 9

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ON THE COVER

22 Kurt Elling

A Restless Soul Heads to Broadway

BY PHILLIP LUTZ

At 57, vocalist Kurt Elling's soul seems as restless as ever, compelling him to ruminate about future endeavors even as he immerses himself in present ones like a tour of Weather Report's music with an all-star cast. And one upcoming project in particular — his Broadway debut in the musical *Hadestown* this fall — has lodged itself front and center.

FEATURES

- 28 Brandee Younger Finds Room to Wander BY STEPHANIE JONES
- 32 Joe Farnsworth
 Plays 'The Big Room'
 BY ALLEN MORRISON
- 36 Isaiah J. Thompson's Road to Glory
 BY GARY FUKUSHIMA
- 40 The Slyly Ambiguous Music of ... The Wood Brothers BY BILL MILKOWSKI

DEPARTMENTS

- 8 First Take
- 10 Chords & Discords
- 13 The Beat
- 45 Reviews
- **66 Blindfold Test**Faye Carol



Cover photo by Elliot Mandel



46 Linda May Han Oh



49 Ryan Keberle & Collectiv do Brasil



50 Fred Hersch



53 Jimmy Greene

RECORDING WOODSHED

- 56 Master Class Jazz & Hip-Hop; Us3's Creative Dialogue Returns to the Studio BY GEOFF WILKINSON AND MIKE GORMAN
- 58 Pro Session
 Tips on Recording a Big Band
 BY DAN SIEGEL
- 60 Transcription Rachel Therrien Trumpet Solo BY JIMI DURSO
- 62 Toolshed M-Audio M-Track Duo HD Producer Pack BY KEITH BAUMANN
- 63 GearBox

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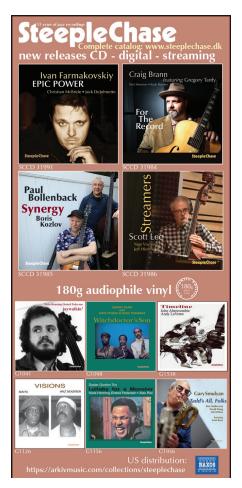


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First Take > RY FRANK ALKYER

Chuck Mangione, Rest in Peace

THIS COLUMN WAS ORIGINALLY SLATED to outline this edition's theme of road stories. But, as with all road stories, you've got to be prepared for a quick pivot. And, with a heavy heart, that's exactly what we'll do right here.

At press time, we learned that Chuck Mangione, one of the most popular trumpeters in jazz history, passed away at home in Rochester, New York. He was 84.

Mangione's 1978 hit album (and titletrack single), Feels So Good, delivered record-setting sales and ascended to heights of popularity seldom reached by a jazz musician — leading many to claim, in retrospect, that the trumpet and flugelhorn master helped usher in the smooth jazz craze of the ensuing decade. "Feels So Good" hit No. 4 on the Billboard Hot 100 and topped the magazine's adult contemporary chart.

Mangione was no overnight sensation. He made his way up the ladder of jazz stardom in a most old-fashioned way: school, sideman, educator, leader. His work on the jazz scene dates back to the early 1960s.

While still a conservatory student, he began putting out records with his brother, Gap, a pianist, as the Jazz Brothers. With the release of their 1960 album, The Jazz Brothers (Riverside), Mangione set sail on a career of rarified success.

He caught the wider eye of jazz fans as a member of Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers, taking over a trumpet chair that had been previously held by the likes of Lee Morgan, Freddie Hubbard, Clifford Brown and others. Later, Wynton Marsalis held that chair.

"I went with Art for two years and recorded two albums with him," Mangione told DownBeat in the Nov. 25, 1971, issue. "At that time we had Frank Mitchell on tenor and Reggie Johnson on bass. John Hicks had just left so Keith Jarrett was on piano. Then Mike Nock was on for a while and then Chick Corea came on the band. What a school that was! I went to school with piano players. But then after two years I couldn't handle it anymore ... work two weeks, off a week, work a weekend, be off the week. ..."

All this when Mangione was fresh out of college, after studying at the Eastman School of Music. The Jazz Brothers produced three albums on Riverside, then disbanded.

Mangione moved to New York on what he called "a stupid ego thing," basically to prove himself. And he did. Kai Winding gave him his first gig. He met and worked with Maynard Ferguson and many other high-calibre leaders.



Before striking jazz gold in the late 1970s, Mangione served as a performer and educator, teaching at Eastman, where he served as director of the school's jazz ensembles, and other prominent institutions.

In the late 1960s, he was a member of the band National Gallery. In 1970, he released Friends & Love ... A Chuck Mangione Concert (Mercury), a live album that raised his profile dramatically. But nothing would compare to the success of Feels So Good. The album landed Mangione on the March 23, 1978, cover of DownBeat. It was a hit beyond his wildest dreams.

"I'm always flabbergasted when I see a sellout house that seats 700 people," Mangione told DownBeat in that issue. "Tonight both shows are sold out in advance. ... I feel good about it. I don't know how it's all happening, but I think it's a combination of things we've been doing for a long time."

Mangione's immense popularity was built on his first Grammy Award, for "Bellavia," in 1977, which won for Best Instrumental Composition. That directly led to Feels So Good and 1979's Fun And Games, huge hits that reached far beyond the realm of jazz. He went on to enjoy a career that spanned 30 albums, 14 Grammy nominations and two Grammy Awards.

In the end, it's yet another compelling road narrative: the story of an artist's incredible journey. Chuck Mangione accomplished something few in jazz ever have or ever will through artistry, hard work and, yes, a bit of magic dust sprinkled in for luck. Rest easy, Mr. Mangione. Your music still feels so good. DB







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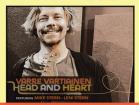
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Chords & Discords

We Have a Winner!

After reading your Critics Poll issue, I would gander that at least 50% of the world's information on jazz music will be found in the pages of DownBeat magazine, probably more. The opinion of 251 critics in 62 categories and 23 reviews as a bonus, all contained in one issue, wins you Best Jazz Magazine in any poll.

LAURY KATZ OAK CREEK, WI

Editor's Note: Thank you, Laury. Actually 33 reviews (counting the columns), but we really appreciate the shout-out!

Hall of Fame Shut Out

I've had a DownBeat subscription seemingly forever and have no plans to change, but I'm tired of being disappointed two times a year with the release of both the Readers Poll and the Critics Poll, and true to form, the August 2025 Critics Poll did not "disappoint." Yes, once again, three of the greatest and most important jazz musicians of all time — Bobby Hutcherson, Kenny Burrell and Billy Higgins — were apparently deemed "not good enough" for the Hall. But at least we got Tito in!

If you were going to play the old Mount Rushmore game for jazz vibes players, the obvious choices would be Lionel Hampton, Milt Jackson and Bobby Hutcherson, with the fourth spot reserved for a player yet to be named — and, no, it's not Red Norvo (who actually is in the Hall of Fame). On second thought, the fourth spot would probably be Gary Burton. (Sorry, Gary.) But talk to any vibes player who's come along in the last 40 years and they will tell you Bobby is the guy, the one player that influenced them the most and was the primary reason for them picking up the instrument — as influential as Jimi was to guitar players or Jaco was to the electric bass.

Kenny Burrell has always been the sound of jazz guitar for me and his exclusion is equally perplexing. I don't know, maybe not enough ECM records, or "too mainstream." And swing doesn't count anymore, right? Whenever I'm in the mood for jazz guitar he's the first person I think of and, as the late, great Russell Malone once famously said, "[Kenny Burrell] can lay you out with one note."

Maybe it's just your typical jazz-snob (I-know-better-than-you-do) bias, but for me, Billy Higgins is the greatest jazz drummer ever — the greatest swing, touch, feel, fire, whatever you want to call it.

GORDON WEBB SANTA CLARA, CALIFORNIA

Editor's Note: Beautiful, Gordon. From your



note to the critics' and readers' ballots. Cheers!

'O' No!

Hi! This is Sana Nagano, violinist.
Thank you for including me in the DownBeat poll this year as well as last year. What an honor.
However, I noticed that my name has been misspelled as Sana Na-

gana in the list both years. It is actually Nagano. Could you please fix this, or forward this email to the right person who could fix this?

SANA NAGANO VIA EMAIL

Editor's Note: Sana, we are so sorry. With over 1,400 artist listings on our ballots, we always manage to mangle a name or two. We'll fix it!

Don't Forget David Murray!

While I'm thrilled to see the election of Anthony Braxton to the Hall of Fame, I'm dismayed to see zero support for David Murray.

Murray is the greatest tenor saxophonist of his time. He's a member of two seminal groups: the World Saxophone Quartet and his own octet, besides making literally dozens of great albums with his quartets, big band and other groups. Please, readers, listen up. Start with the WSQ's Revue and the Octet's Ming and Home. Then go to his organ record with Don Pullen — Shakill's Warrior. Then go to the quartets and keep going. Come Readers Poll time, give this giant the respect he deserves.

CHUCK BROMLEY

Editor's Note: That's some persuasive campaigning, Chuck. Hope it works!

Corrections & Clarifications

In the August issue...

- Theon Cross' great new recording, which received 4.5 stars in DownBeat, was released on New Soil x Division 81.
- Violinist Emma Rawicz is British, not French.
- We misspelled Ben Rosenblum's name in the Critics Poll listings. A keyboard player, Ben plays some accordion and made the list for Rising Star Beyond Insrumentalist.
- In the review of Alchemy Sound Project, we misspelled Sumi Tonooka's name in the text, as well as Johnathan Blake's, which has become a running embarassment at this magazine!

DOWNBEAT REGRETS THE ERRORS.

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

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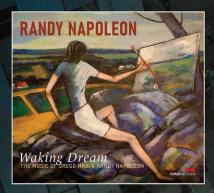




MIKE POPE

The Parts You Keep

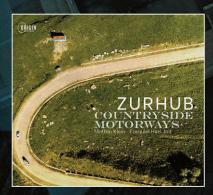
Geoffrey Keezer / Nate Smith / Randy Brecker Roxy Coss / Amaury Cabral / Ann Pope



RANDY NAPOLEON

Waking Dream

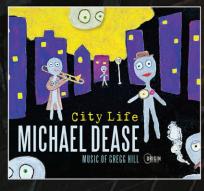
Luke Sittard / Chris Minami / Jocelyn Gould Ben Turner / Rick Roe / Rodney Whitaker Quincy Davis & more...



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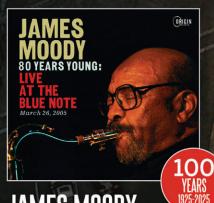




MICHAEL DEASE

City Life: Music of Gregg Hill

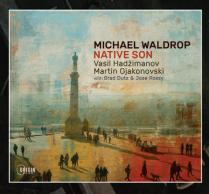
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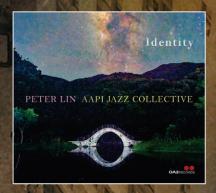
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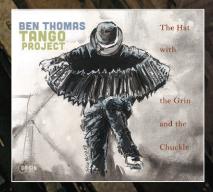
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Amina Claudine Myers Revisits Her Formative Years

t 83 years young, pianist, organist, something to do with vocal music and creating vocalist, composer and NEA Jazz Master Amina Claudine Myers is just as active and creatively spirited as she was in her 20s and 30s. To start, she is currently working on a symphony about the life of Harriet Tubman, which she hopes to finish by next spring. She is plotting the release of chorus music she composed for the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians' 60th anniversary in the fall. She is also working with her gospel quartet, Generation Four, to honor musicians of the 1950s such as Clara Ward and Ward Singers and The Staple Singers.

"I want to express music about people that have made a difference in African American culture, our deep people that have done positive things. And Harriet Tubman is one of the main ones; her life is so interesting, so I wanted to express that through the music. There is always music, period," said Myers via telephone from her home in Midtown, New York, where she's lived since 1976.

At this stage in her life, Myers may be enjoying the fruits of her accomplishments, but she is also far from done adding to her legacy.

In June, she released her 12th solo record, Solace Of The Mind (Red Hook), a vivid collection of revisited compositions from her forma-

Myers is known for using piano and voice to execute her music, as she enjoys the freedom of solo piano over performing with a band. On Solace Of The Mind, for example, she goes back to her roots by imposing a more meditative approach to songs such as "African Blues," "Steal Away" and "Song For Mother E," which appeared on her 1980 Leo Records album recorded with a quartet. The first version had a fuller, richer texture, whereas the solo piano rendition on Solace Of The Mind is more personal reflection.

Myers said that most of the songs began as improvised compositions and were gradually extended over time. Red Hook Records founder Sun Chung, who produced this record and worked with her on her prior release, pushed Myers to strip all her previous and new music to its deepest core.

"The process was about embracing what Amina played and capturing the music's essence, which was achieved by providing an honest and supportive ear, and coming up with complementary suggestions," said Chung. "During the pre-production phase, we selected the compositions. Then, in the studio, it became clear that one of the main focuses would be the melodic components of the songs, rather than extended improvisations."

Myers recorded about five or six takes of each of the compositions, after which she entrusted Chung to select the best moments of each take to then shape into a final version.

"Working with masters such as Amina is a different process than working with younger musicians," Chung said. "Their language is already formed so it is less about developing the music itself or the preparation of it, but rather capturing the master's energies in their purest form.

"It was a pleasure and an honor to work with her on Solace Of The Mind. It was very much a collaborative experience, as there were many musical discussions that took place."

The levels of calmness and complexity in Myers' playing are unparalleled, bringing to mind her 60-plus years of performing and navigating jazz, blues and gospel, which is at the core of all her art.

Myers grew up in Blackwell, Arkansas, and was raised by her great aunt and uncle. She began taking piano lessons at the age of 6. A year later, her family moved to Dallas, where she continued lessons and was introduced to gospel music. In 1957, the family returned to Arkansas, where Myers formed a gospel group that toured locally. In college, she learned how to play the blues, became student director for the choir and taught herself to play the organ. After graduation, Myers moved to Chicago, where she taught music at an elementary school for six years. It was in Chicago that Myers was introduced to jazz.

"I met a girl from Detroit who came up to me and said, 'I got a gig for you at this nightclub and it pays \$5 an hour.' I said I can't perform at no club," Myers recalled. "But I had some nerve back then, and that's how I started playing jazz solo piano, copying Nina Simone, the easy songs like "I Loves You Porgy." I made friends composer Phil Cohran, organized free music education programs for inner-city youth and were instrumental in helping develop Chicago's avant-garde scene.

"Who I am today is because of my experiences with the AACM. When I moved to New York, Lester Bowie asked me to go to Europe

Liberation Music Orchestra and saxophonists Gene Ammons, Sonny Stitt, Von Freeman, Anthony Braxton and Rahsaan Roland Kirk.

Her 2024 recording, *Central Park's Mosaics Of Reservoir, Lakes, Paths And Gardens*, with trumpeter Wadada Leo Smith, marked their first collaboration since the duo's early days in the AACM. They are planning to release a second record together next year.

Outside of her work as a jazz musician, Myers is also known for her theatrical endeavors, composing music and acting in off-Broadway productions. She has debuted larger orchestral pieces, including *Interiors* and *When The Berries Fell.* In 2010, the Chicago Jazz Institute commissioned her to compose and direct a composition for a 17-piece jazz orchestra in honor of pianist-arranger Mary Lou Williams' 100th birthday.

For an octogenarian, Myers revels in keeping her plate full and has no plans to change. There are upcoming concerts in Brazil later this year. She quickly pointed out that she has more music to share with the world and getting it out is what she currently has her sights on.

"I'll never retire. That's not even a thought in my head because music is ongoing. I always want to grow in knowledge and to express the things that I've learned, the feelings and situations that have shaped me and to express that through music."

—Veronica Johnson

'I'll never retire. That's not even a thought in my head because music is ongoing.'

with the Black piano players from Memphis and learned how to play jazz from them. I never went out to try to get work thinking of myself as a musician. It was always people who put me in these positions."

Myers moved to Chicago at a time when Black jazz musicians were concerned that rock music was overshadowing jazz. She joined the AACM, formed in 1965 to support, nurture and record original music by jazz musicians. The founders, pianists Muhal Richard Abrams and Jodie Christian, drummer Steve McCall and

with his group, and that started introducing people to my music, so I was able to get more work," she said. "I will always be a member of the AACM and am grateful for my experiences with them."

The organization also fueled her writing output. She started composing for voice and instruments. Of her 12 solo albums, all incorporate compositions that blend blues, gospel and jazz. As her musical stock and popularity grew, she worked and recorded with icons like saxophonist Archie Shepp, bassist Charlie Haden's



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Jaleel Shaw Paints with Vital Purpose

Invisible Man used the notion of invisibility to explore the issues and philosophies of Black Americans in the years following the Second World War. That the word invisible remains a powerful metaphor for the Black experience in this country a half century later is reflected by the frequency with which Jaleel Shaw has returned to it in his recent work.

Shaw's new album, his first full band effort in more than a dozen years, is titled Painter Of The Invisible, and it features his composition "The Invisible Man." That follows "On Being Invisible," a piece from his 2021 solo sax-and-electronics outing Echoes. The newer track pays tribute in part to Ellison, Shaw acknowledges, and makes a pair with "Baldwin's Blues": a more overt homage to another Black writer, activist and intellectual, James Baldwin.

But there is a far more autobiographical meaning at the root of the term's recurrence, the Philadelphia-born saxophonist explained over the phone from his home in Fort Lee, New Jersey. "It's really about me and how I feel sometimes just walking down the street, or when I go into a store and no one helps me, or go into a club where I'm the only Black person."

As Shaw continued to unpack the intersecting meanings behind the title of his new album, its complexities came to light. He borrowed

RALPH ELLISON'S COMPELLING 1952 NOVEL Painter Of The Invisible from the Paris-based artist Daniela Yohannes, who uses the sobriquet on Instagram. Shaw feels a certain kinship with visual artists, approaching his music with the color-rich palette of a painter.

"We can hear sound and we can feel it," he said, "but it's invisible. In the same way, a lot of our history is invisible. People don't truly understand or know about the contributions of Black artists, Black composers, Black inventors. I think that goes to the root cause of racism and discrimination: people not truly understanding a people, not truly seeing them for who they are."

At a time when that history is being aggressively erased from some school curricula, Shaw came to realize that it wasn't in the classroom that he'd learned those lessons in the first place. Instead, it was through stories told by the elders of his community, family members, musical mentors and peers included. The notion of invisibility on the new album is also a commemoration of the loss that the saxophonist has suffered in those communities in recent years and the intangible influence that the departed continue to exert on his life and work.

The music on Shaw's last album as a leader, 2013's Soundtrack Of Things To Come, was composed prior to the death of his father in 2011. The album's prescient title reflects the way that the music nonetheless seemed to capture his loss

along with other personal struggles at the time. Shaw has continued to lose a number of close friends and family members in the intervening years, which vividly colors the resolute, deeply felt music on Painter Of The Invisible.

"Distant Images" pays tribute to Shaw's two grandmothers, tenderly twining the sounds of the composer's alto and Lage Lund's guitar. "Gina's Ascent," which adds Sasha Berliner's soulful vibes to the band, was penned for a cousin. "Tamir," propelled by Joe Dyson's agitated drums, celebrates the life of 12-year-old Tamir Rice, cut short by a police shooting.

Two other pieces offer farewells to figures mourned throughout the jazz community: saxophonist Casey Benjamin and Revive Music Group founder Meghan Stabile. Shaw recalled receiving a letter about a young woman looking for advice about entering the New York City jazz scene. "She had these aspirations and ideas," he said. "Meghan took New York by storm. It just seems like yesterday. Sometimes you don't fully understand how extreme someone's situation is. She was so young and had so much going for her, but she had something else going on that she couldn't handle and that we don't see."

Benjamin, who Shaw refers to as "my alto brother," is the subject of the album's closing track, a duet between Shaw and Berliner. The wistful send-off poses another meaning behind the invisibility theme: those whose gifts remain mysteriously hidden from the public eye. "Casey was a genius, so why wasn't he more visible?" Shaw mused. "Why wasn't he signed to a major label? He's one of those amazing people that I wish more people could have known."

Though he passed away after the music on Painter Of The Invisible was written and recorded, the spirit of Roy Haynes can't help but hang over Shaw's music. The saxophonist spent 14 years in the legendary drummer's band, absorbing enough lessons for a lifetime.

"I always felt Roy was going to live forever," Shaw said. "So many opportunities came from playing with Roy. Through him I got to work with Chick Corea, Ron Carter, Pat Metheny and so many others. Being on the bandstand with Roy, Christian McBride and Roy Hargrove, you understand how the generations come together under this master who transcends time."

Not every tune on Painter Of The Invisible is so tinged with eulogy. The imagistic "Good Morning" leads off the album, its dawn hues giving way to the tautly focused "Contemplation," balanced on Ben Street's urgent bass line. "Beantown" looks back on Shaw's years at Berklee College of Music, graced by Lawrence Field dancing with gleeful abandon on piano. The emotions and storytelling on these pieces is just as strong as the rest of the material: a vibrant, moving collection of music that promises to remain indelible rather than fade away.

-Shaun Brady



Paul Cornish: a Debut Well Worth the Wait

BLUE NOTE RECORDS HAS BEEN ON A TEAR since late 2024, releasing new work by Immanuel Wilkins, Out Of/Into (formerly known as The Blue Note Quintet), Gerald Clayton, Joshua Redman, The Openness Trio (consisting of guitarist/producer Nate Mercereau, saxophonist Josh Johnson and percussionist Carlos Niño), a debut album by trumpeter Brandon Woody and, in short, making the case that it's not just a catalog label by asserting its relevance in contemporary jazz.

And now the label is presenting the debut album of another young lion, the delightful Paul Cornish (who also happens to play in Joshua Redman's combo).

Cornish is no stranger to being surrounded and nurtured by a strong lineage. In 2014, he graduated from the High School for Performing and Visual Arts in Houston, a school that counts fellow pianist/composers Robert Glasper and Jason Moran as notable alumni. Remarkably, Glasper recently stated, "Continuing the legendary lineage of Houston pianists while still carving out your own lane is not an easy feat. There is no history without the now. Paul is the now ... and I'm Not Exaggerating!!!" The later exclamation is a play on Cornish's debut album title: You're Exaggerating.

Cornish chatted via Zoom on a bucolic June day. The Los Angeles-based pianist/composer wore horn-rimmed glasses and two of his locks were adorned with cowrie shells.

When asked about his relationship with jazz, he shared, "I care specifically about this music that has poured so much into me. I feel like I'm where I am because of what this music has meant to me." So what does he say about being categorized as a jazz musician though

his discography is chock full of collaborations with non-jazz artists including r&b singer Snoh Aalegra and rockers HAIM?

"I do feel the need to say, 'I am a jazz musician,' but I've been in these other fields of music, and I do find them all related."

You're Exaggerating is absolutely a jazz recording with something for new fans and seasoned jazz lovers alike. The album glows with youth and vigor, featuring Cornish leading a lithe trio with distinctive bassist Joshua Crumbly and drummer Jonathan Pinson. Idiosyncratic guitarist Jeff Parker sits in on a notable track called "Palindrome."

"The youngest composition on the record was from 2019," Cornish divulged. "I'd been trying to get Joshua and Jonathan in the studio for a while, but they're both incredibly busy ... and rightfully so. I've been working on it for a while, but it was [recorded in] three days [during December 2023]."

An apt introduction to the world of Paul Cornish is his composition "DB Song." As he clarifies, "It seems like a very simple and catchy song, but there's a lot happening within the framework. I think that explains the dynamic of what's happening in my brain, but also the way the trio plays together."

Cornish lists Thelonious Monk, Jason Moran, Geri Allen and Ahmad Jamal as inspirations. He considers Glasper in particular to be a key influence: "He just created a window ... a lane to see myself in the music."

After high school, Cornish attended the Herbie Hancock Institute of Jazz at UCLA, where he completed his master's degree. And today, *You're Exaggerating* reflects the artist's still-flowering philosophy.

"The process of getting older," Cornish says, "you realize not everything that you see and hear is true, even if it appears to be. [The album title represents] an invitation for people to take a second look and see if there's a certain thing that we're overlooking ... or we're too prideful to acknowledge ... that maybe changes reality."

But he also offers a lighthearted twist to the title's definition. "It's equally as valid to be interpreted as, 'Oh, this is just not serious.' I tend to be an overthinker, but I love joking about that. Some of my favorite artists like Louis Cole or Thundercat [create a] high level of art, but they don't take themselves too seriously."

Cornish took every opportunity to make each aspect of *You're Exaggerating* a form of intentional communication, right down to the cover art, a silhouette of Cornish backlit in moody blue. "I'm not the type of person to take selfies or wear bright colors and say, 'Hey, I'm here.' I think there's the tendency of new breaking artists, especially in jazz, to be flashy," he said. "I don't see how that lasts."

Another key to understanding Cornish's point of view is factoring in the influence of his devout upbringing. "We were Seventh Day Adventists," he said. "I'm pretty sure the Saturday after I was born, I was in church. That's definitely something that's very important to me and guides me now."

According to Cornish, Los Angeles, which he's called home for about a decade, possesses "some quirkiness to it and some groundedness to it. I found a really cool community out here. There's this DIY grassroots spirit in this scene that's been really cool."

That's not to say he isn't still paying attention to the creative scene in his native Houston, from Solange's Eldorado Ballroom programming to ongoing residencies happening at Rick Lowe's Project Row Houses. "I really care about Houston and the scene that's there. It has been such a great export of talent that people appreciate globally, but I don't think that's necessarily been fostered in the same way within the city. There is a bridge there of seeing someone like Solange embrace more experimental projects. That all enriches the community in a lot of ways."

There's the sense that all of his multifaceted influences and experiences have resulted in a new artist with uncommon depth.

"I'm doing this debut, I'm 28, which isn't old, but I feel like it's old in the sense of a breaking new artist," Cornish said. "I think there's this unspoken pressure that I feel, or I felt, and also my peers have felt. If we don't get recognized young, then maybe we've missed the boat. I think everyone just feels this pressure to do whatever they need to do to be seen."

Ultimately, Cornish offered, "The more people are actually OK with who they actually are, the more we can actually see each other."

-Ayana Contreras



The Ferbers Improvise on Bach

confluence turns out to be a fatefully apt and multilayered concept and title for the new album released by the Ferbers on Scarlet Tree Records. For starters, said Ferbers are twin brothers Alan and Mark, the trombone-and-drum siblings who have been jazz scene mainstays for years, and Alan's cellist wife Jody Redhage Ferber. Stylistically speaking, the confluence factor concerns a creatively devised and vibrant crosstalk between jazz and classical chamber music traditions — specifically, the Baroque grand master J.S. Bach.

Many a jazz-meets-classical hybrid has been attempted over the years, and not all have worked out in the translation. Mark *Confluence* as a success story in progress with family bonding, braving new musical challenges and COVID-lockdown woodshedding all in the mix.

As the classically trained Jody noted, "This collaborative album was very long in the making. As twins who started playing their instruments as pre-teens, Alan and Mark have been collaborating most of their lives, and Alan and I first began playing Telemann and Mozart duets together 20 years ago, as neighbors in Brooklyn."

The collaboration became more serious, and official when Jody and Mark played on Alan's 2010 album *Chamber Songs* and Alan joined Jody on her 2013 Rose & The Nightingale album *Spirit Of The Garden*. A bonafide working duo solidified after they played together at the 2017 Salzburg Jazz Festival.

By now married with a son, the pair got to work. "After our toddler's bedtime," Jody said, "we workshopped stacks of potential tunes, pulling not only from our originals, but also tunes from various projects of different genres on which we had been side musicians — discovering and developing tunes that held poten-

tial to be musically compelling for this oddball instrumentation."

J.S. Bach's 300th birthday was a catalyst driving them toward the master's oeuvre — especially the landmark Cello Suites. Bach, Jody said, "pushed the collaboration in a new direction, when we were tasked with reimagining Bach's Cello Suite No. 3 in C Major for duo, in which we teased apart this seminal work, infused improvisatory elements and reworked the baroque dance movements with playfully crooked asymmetrical dance meters from Eastern Europe and lively cross-rhythms from the Afro-Cuban tradition."

Alan pointed out that "since Jody comes largely from a classical background, and I come from a jazz background, we are always looking for common ground if we want to play together. For us, Bach's music served as a good starting point as the music lends itself well to both ensemble playing and improvisation. Beyond that, we looked for repertoire that shared these qualities — well-written melody and countermelody that encourages interplay between two linear instruments.

"Bach's music is the gold standard of musical composition so it makes perfect sense that it is so stylistically malleable," Alan continued. "It just seems to work in any frame. Bach was known to be a virtuosic improviser himself, so I would imagine that for those lucky enough to have heard him live, it would, at times, have been hard to discern the difference between what was previously composed and what was being composed on the spot."

The influence of blending Bach with contemporary music by Swiss cellist Thomas Demenga, a formative hero of Jody's, fed into the couple's conceptualization process. "In a way," Alan remarked, "Confluence is our exploration of a similar format in a chamber

jazz style." The Ferbers also join a sizable roster of famed jazz artists who have been drawn to Bach's work, including Dave Brubeck, Keith Jarrett, Lee Konitz and Brad Mehldau. As Alan commented, "So many artists have explored this rich terrain in projects combining Bach roots and modern improvisation."

An auspicious suite of this new body of jazz-classical material premiered at Carnegie's Weill Recital Hall, but just on the brink of the 2020 pandemic lockdown. "With the pandemic extending long past what was originally expected," Jody said, "the silver lining that we could play chamber music together at home as a family was the impetus for further tinkering with the Bach, leading us to also include Alan's twin, Mark, on drums. We liked the result so much that we decided to record the Bach, along with a set of complementary pieces."

The long-honed brotherly empathy of the twins is a bold feature of this trio. Alan notes that Mark "plays with a dynamic sensitivity that always supports and never overwhelms the other instruments. The addition of Mark certainly accentuates the dance elements of the movements and allows for more freedom of expression by Jody and me."

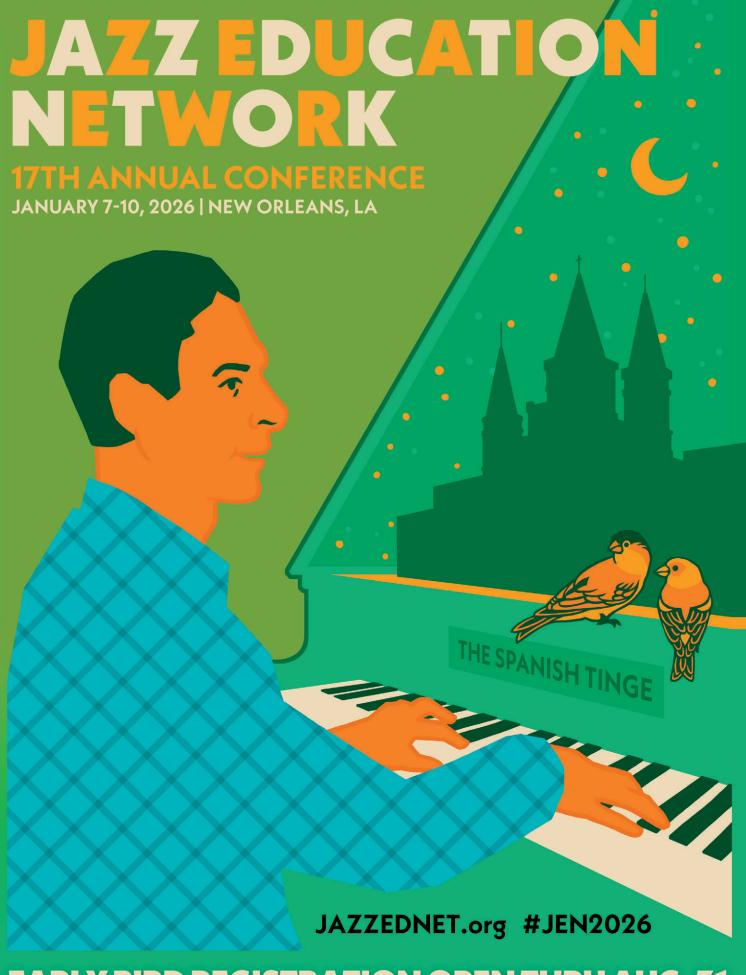
Interwoven into the Bach-oriented fabric of the album are arrangements of tunes by McCoy Tyner, Bill Evans and Kenny Wheeler with cameo extra-trio contributions by pianist Adam Maness, saxophonist Chris Cheek and guitarist Matt Sewell. All the musicians were sharing St. Louis as a homebase at the time of the recording.

Confluence is being released on the Scarlet Tree label, run by Jody. She explained that the label's aim is "to support the evolution of chamber music and jazz improvisation, and the goal going forward is to be a home for compelling projects which braid together artists coming from these backgrounds, pushing more 'orchestral' instruments into jazz contexts, and more classical musicians into improvisation.

"In a way, it's also drawing a circle back 300, 400 years to when improvisation was an integral part of classical music. The overarching goal is to center the musicians in a creative space of personal expression requiring the mindfulness of staying in the moment and reacting like an improviser — rather than being glued to a compositional plan from the page. When musicians are open, magic can really happen, and I love seeing the elan of musicians when they step outside their comfort zone and collaborate with people from outside of their stylistic silo."

The Ferbers continue to evolve the project, and the innate challenge remains. "We have to be musical Olympians to have our chops in shape to perform this music," Jody said. "We've created a project that forces us to stay sharp in our performance and chamber skills, and is also a blast to perform live."

—Josef Woodard



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Getting to Know Gregg Hill

AT A RECENT PERFORMANCE AT THE DIRTY

Dog Jazz Cafe in the Detroit suburb of Grosse Pointe, Michigan, bassist Rodney Whitaker celebrated the release of his new album, *Mosaic* (Origin). During a set that included the tunes "Sloe Gin Fizz" and "Unknown Ballad," listeners stayed glued to each note he played. Even the bartender was transfixed.

Unbeknown to the audience, the music was written by a Lansing-based composer named Gregg Hill. Jazz musicians including Whitaker, guitarist Randy Napoleon and trombonist Michael Dease have recorded Hill's music, with "The Music of Gregg Hill" in all their album titles. So, the question must be asked: Who is Gregg Hill, and why have musicians clamored to record his music?

"I'm self-taught, an autodidact as they call it, but the passion hasn't diminished. This is a 60-year-old thing, and it's still going strong," Hill said about his love for jazz.

To put Hill's music into a conventional shell is impossible. Sometimes you hear a little Billy Strayhorn and John Coltrane, but always with a modern twist. His compositions allow for interpretation and in his melodies are elements of surprise and freedom. He's not writing to impress anybody. He's just writing to write.

Hill, 79, is a slender, white-haired gentleman who never fashioned himself a professional musician. His journey as a sought-after jazz composer came later in life. He grew up in Midland, Michigan, and his love for music was nurtured by his parents, big band fans who would travel anywhere Duke Ellington performed.

Hill played saxophone and wanted to attend the Berklee School of Music back in the day, but his parents refused to send him. So, he attended Michigan State University, dropped out and moved to New York. There, he soaked up the 1960s jazz scene at clubs such as Slugs Saloon, where Sun Ra, Yusef Lateef and Archie Shepp held court.

Between 1968 and 1973, Hill bounced around a bit, with short stints in Detroit, California and Denver. He eventually returned to his hometown of Lansing and started a family. He was a professional truck driver for 25 years and worked for his son's technology firm.

After settling down, Hill felt the urge to write. He composed 60 tunes over a 20-year period. In 2013, he decided to transcribe and record them, then put out a sample book. That's when he connected with Whitaker, who heard his tunes and wanted to record the material. The two had been friends for years from living in Lansing.

"I was floored when Rodney said he wanted to record my tunes," recalled Hill. "I didn't expect that from him because he is definitely higher up on the music scene, and I was just sort of an unknown composer."

Their first collaboration was 2019's *Common Ground*. Since then, they have recorded four albums together, the latest being *Mosaic*. Released in February, the record is Whitaker's favorite to date. "I think the selection of tunes was incredible, and this is the third project that I've done with this particular band, so I think people know Gregg's writing style and his

music more than when we did the first one," the bassist said.

Much of the magic stems from the solid collaborative relationship Hill has established with musicians. "I just give them the compositions, and I give them the freedom to arrange as they please and hire the musicians as they please," Hill said. "It's like they're providing a second layer of creativity to what I'm doing."

Napoleon has a similar bond with Hill, collaborating with him twice. Their 2024 release, *The Door Is Open* (Origin), was named one of the best albums of the year by DownBeat and topped the Roots Music Report charts. Long before teaming up, they were good friends who met on a jazz cruise some 15 years ago. Napoleon didn't know Hill was a composer until much later. Their upcoming album, *Waking Dream*, features five guitars and rhythm section.

"Each progressive project has been more expansive and adventurous," Napoleon said. "And sometimes it's hard to know where Gregg's music ends and where mine starts, because he is so deeply collaborative and open to anything you want to do."

According to Napoleon and Dease, common denominators that make Hill's compositions distinct are his complex melodies and harmonies, as well as his unconventional writing. Those differences drew Dease to Hill's music while recording Whitaker's 2021 album OUTROSPECTION. After hearing Napoleon and Whitaker's records of Hill's music, he decided to join them. Hill was the first composer that Dease worked with outside of recording standards and his own music.

"That was a big moment for me," said Dease. "Because it really felt like connecting with someone else's musical mind but still trying to keep my own identity. In a way, it kind of refines your identity and challenges it to stay relevant."

Dease has released three recordings of Hill's music. *City Life*, the most recent, features bassist Linda May Han Oh and drummer Jeff "Tain" Watts.

In 2019, Hill started his own label, Cold Plunge Records. He has published five songbooks with more than 170 compositions (160 songs have been performed or recorded so far), and his sixth songbook is pending.

Hill is also a jazz philanthropist. He formed the nonprofit organization Jazz Alliance of Michigan with his wife, Lois, and has been a main sponsor of the East Lansing Jazz Festival for years. He also helps support musicians in the Lansing community and holds weekly jam sessions in the area.

"Playing is not my calling. Composing is my calling," he said. "Do you work on your weak points, or do you work on your strong points? In my case, I unanimously show strong points in composing, so I'm going to stick with that."

—Veronica Johnson

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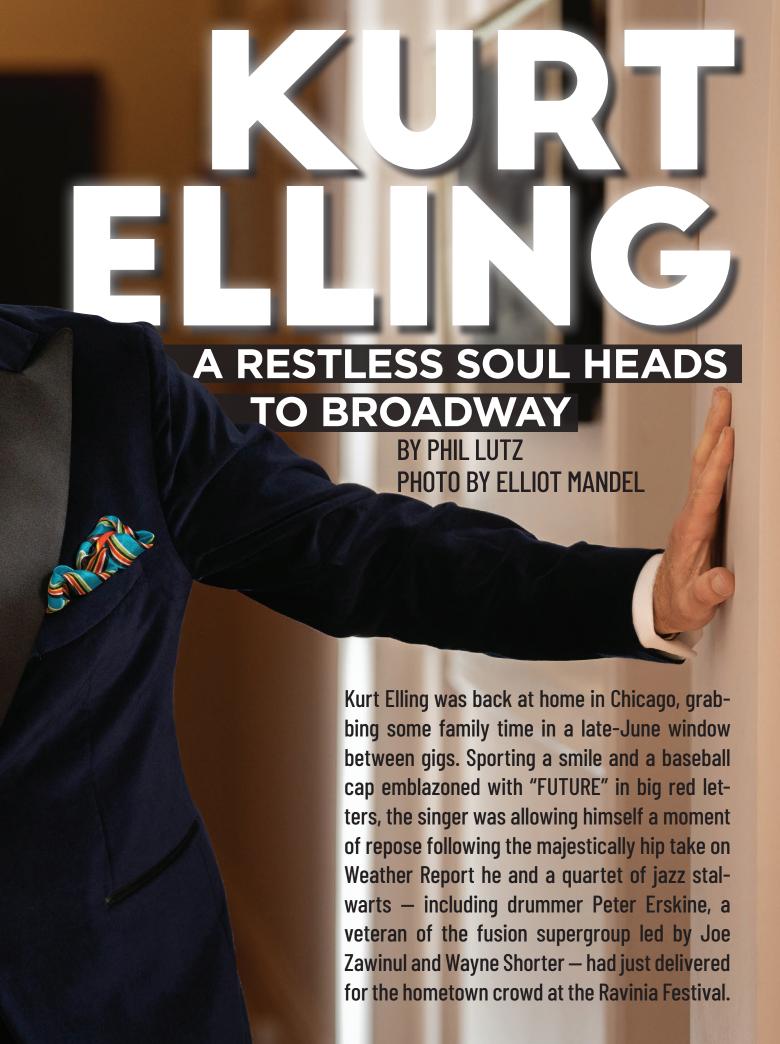
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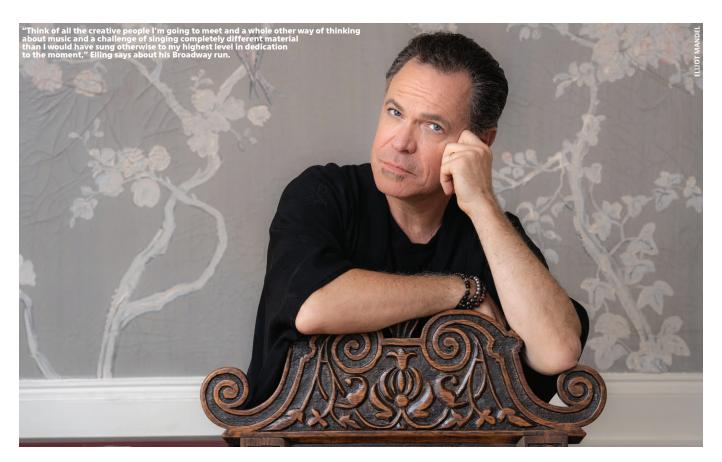
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TURNTABLE"







f Ravinia found Elling literally on the road — albeit a traffic-clogged one — he would in a few days be in the air, departing O'Hare Airport for a series of July dates in Europe at which Weather Report would again be the subject at hand, this time in concert with the Yellowjackets. Already, some of the material had been adapted for his Wildflowers duo and the

WDR Big Band. With all the repurposing, the Weather Report project was becoming a major element in his oeuvre and a key source of satisfaction.

Yet, at 57 years old, Elling's soul was as restless as ever, compelling him to ruminate about future endeavors even as he immersed himself in present ones. And one upcoming project in particular — his Broadway debut

in the musical *Hadestown* — had lodged itself in his consciousness. So, despite Weather Report's emerging status in Elling's world, he couldn't quite say that the European run would command his presence in every sense of the word.

"Physically, yes," he said, adjusting his cap. "But I've got to put this *Hadestown* show in my head. I've got to come in hot on that. I don't want to waste anybody's time not being overprepared."

Starting in August, when he would be rehearsing, and stretching from Sept. 2 through Jan. 25, when he would be onstage at the Walter Kerr Theatre, Elling would be taking over the central role of Hermes, the narrator around whom this phantasmagorical retelling of the Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice revolves. Though the music is rooted in a kind of raw New Orleans folk sound with jazz influences, he would be the first of the 10 or more people who have played the role in New York to come from the jazz world.

"He will be a pioneer," said David Lai, the show's Emmy- and Grammy-winning music coordinator.

Lai said he first grasped the depth of Elling's talents while producing a 2014 PBS holiday special and the accompanying album on which soprano Renée Fleming was the star and Elling a guest artist. This past January, Lai, bowled over by an Elling set with the Ulysses Owens Big Band at



Birdland, approached the singer about appearing in Hadestown. He told Elling that he would probably be cast as Hades, the villain of the piece, but his club act pointed more toward Hermes, the mentor and master storyteller.

"'That's what you do,' I said to Kurt. 'When you do your Birdland show, you're telling a story, either speaking it or singing it. I feel like in some ways that might be the better role.' And that's what he was cast as, Hermes."

For Elling, taking the role meant rescheduling jazz dates and being away from his wife and children. But for a self-described "pimple-faced, 12-year-old choir nerd from Rockford, Illinois," the chance to expand the scope of his artistry in a highly collaborative, intensely competitive new arena was, he said, too good to pass up. "Think of all the creative people I'm going to meet and a whole other way of thinking about music and a challenge of singing completely different material than I would have sung otherwise to my highest level in dedication to the moment."

Elling said he understood skepticism about a Broadway novice stepping into such a coveted role. "I'm kind of an interloper," he said. "There are people who, for them, Hermes is the No. 1 dream in life, and I'm going to saunter in and do six months of it. Do I deserve this opportunity? Yes, as a musical professional, sure. Do other people also deserve it? Absolutely. But I am going to honor that moment and take it seriously."

Elling's biggest New York stage role to date was as the protagonist in a self-written radio drama, The Big Blind, a "jazz musical" mounted for two nights in 2019 at Jazz at Lincoln Center. A hit on its own terms, it nonetheless was relatively thin as experience for Broadway.

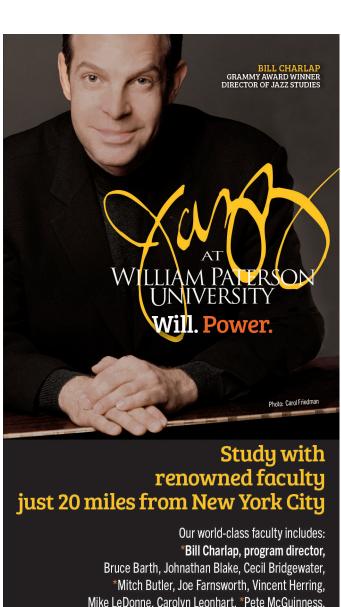
But Lai was undeterred, focusing on Elling's potential for bringing new meaning to the show's score. "As great a singer as Kurt is he's got that incredible range; when he sings down low it sounds like a baritone with great round richness, but he can also sing really high the thing that struck me is his perspective on things. I like to hear him take a song I might know really well but interpret it in a way I haven't heard before. Even though he hasn't done Broadway, necessarily, I think that would translate well to the right role."

In auditions and work sessions, Elling's ability to render the music and advance the narrative without giving short shrift to either recommended him for this largely sung-through musical. "What music director wouldn't be excited to have Kurt Elling in his cast?" Lai said. "You don't normally get that kind of musician in any Broadway show. You have great actors, and sometimes when they sing, a lot of the great acting chops get channeled in a way that you don't see it because they're just focused on singing. I don't think Kurt ever has to think about his voice. The singing and the speaking, I think, are the same to him."

In taking over the role, Elling fills some big shoes. New York theater legend André De Shields, who originated the role on Broadway in flamboyant style, won a Tony award for it — one of eight the show has won in its five-year run. Lillias Thomas and Stephanie Mills demonstrated that the role was not gender specific.

Like them, Lai said, Elling should enjoy "a lot of latitude" in interpretation. "Obviously, you have to sing the notes and sing the words and there's some basic staging, but they will adapt it very much to the strengths of the person." Beyond his ability to affect a certain swagger in a sharkskin suit, Elling's jazz roots should facilitate interaction with the onstage players, a seven-piece band with strings, brass and a rhythm section integrated into the action. "He's such a good musician, he'll hear the orchestration and that will inspire in him colors to play with that it might not with some others."

Add to that his ability to inhabit a song and draw people in. "He doesn't sing at you," Lai said. "It's not as if he's not projecting, but he makes you listen to what he's saying. He doesn't let the melod-



Mike LeDonne, Carolyn Leonhart, *Pete McGuinness, Marcus McLaurine, Chico Mendoza, John Mosca, Steve Myerson, Steve Nelson, Ed Neumeister, *Tim Newman, Jeremy Pelt, Rich Perry, Gary Smulyan, Dave Stryker, David Wong *Full-time faculty

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ic line dictate the line reading. The line reading is from the line, from the words. It just happens to be set to music. He's not singing along; he's in it."

Elling's way with a word — sung, spoken or written — reflects a sensibility that harkens back to the days of dark coffee houses, according to Erskine. The drummer, who

first worked with Elling on a 2001 album consisting largely of standards, *Flirting With Twilight*, vividly recalled a Disney Hall gig that involved the reading of beat poetry. "That's when I got a true appreciation of what a hipster Kurt Elling could be," Erskine said.

That sensibility runs through Elling's Weather Report material. Dubbing Elling a "genius," Erskine, who played with Weather Report from 1978 to 1982 and last performed with Elling on that June date at Ravinia, said the singer's lyrics turned out to be "much hipper and more profound than I would have imagined."

Erskine said he was "quite moved" by the singer's "in-between-song preaching" — so much so that after their gigs, he would repair to his hotel room to meditate. Elling brings a seminarian's zeal to his work — he studied for the priesthood — but he is so conscious of keeping the audience entertained that he naturally avoids crossing the line from preaching to preachy. "He's very deft."

Erskine, whose theater experience includes writing for or performing on stages from the Pasadena Playhouse to the Royal Opera House, said Elling's vocalese was relevant to his Broadway venture: "When Kurt



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would talk about this stuff, he used two words that are very near and dear to my heart: specificity and intention. These are really theatrical terms of art. They are a big part of his awareness and mentality."

Though Elling can appear acutely self-aware in clubs, concert halls or, for that matter, interviews — making light of his innate theatricality, he at one point laughingly remarked on his tendency to "goof around and make faces and noises" — he is, according to longtime friend and manager Bryan Farina, "more subdued" when traveling, channeling his creative energy into writing.

That process can yield deeply theatrical moments. Erskine cited Elling's take on Zawinul's "Current Affairs," a ballad on which Elling, finding "there was nothing in the title that suggested anything usable," turned to the specific — addressing, with great intent, a poignant paean to innocence directly to his daughter:

You were just a child/You were just a tiny soul — a little bit/ How were you to know the truth — the whole of it?

One treatment of the song, a masterful exercise in lyrical restraint executed solely with pianist Joey Calderazzo, was released last November on *Wildflowers Vol. 2*. An

expansion of the material, by turns mystical and ecstatic, will appear in February 2026 on *In The Golden Palace*, with saxophonist Bob Mintzer arranging the material and conducting the WDR Big Band.

Calderazzo and Mintzer are veterans of Elling's takes on Weather Report in multiple formats, including combos — the pianist most recently at Ravinia in June and the saxophonist with the Yellowjackets in July. But whatever the format, both attest to Elling's adherence to the jazz ethos of interpretive freedom, Calderazzo citing the "leeway" and Mintzer the "latitude" they were given.

By all accounts, Elling has been a creature of jazz. His scatting is singular, as is his standing as a 21-time winner of Male Vocalist of the Year in the DownBeat Critics Poll. All of which raises the question: Does his foray on Broadway represent a momentary diversion or a new direction?

Lai, who has produced jazz for Sony Masterworks and hires the *Hadestown* musicians, noted that while Elling had the capacity to do most anything, "I hope we don't take him away from jazz audiences. I hope this is a fun detour for him. But there aren't too many vocalists in our jazz world right now at his level who are so magnetic

— and not just singing the American songbook but doing new stuff, encouraging new arrangements of things. He's still very much an innovator."

For his part, Elling said that he was content being "multifarious." He elaborated: "Being a jazz singer, you can go so many different directions. There are so many influences just within that family, so many resources just there upon which to draw, and avenues to explore. If there's more that comes of this, then I will investigate that."

Broadway, he added, "is just another extension of really good music that deserves great treatment, that will require its own self-discipline and its own technical specificity. And I hope that it will enlarge my capacity and my ability to bring the message of the day to people."

Should he decide to convey his message more broadly through theater, further development of *The Big Blind* might be a place to start. But for the moment, less ambitious activities await. Ever the restless soul, he will, the day after his Broadway run ends, be back on the road — or, more literally, in the air — headed to Fort Lauderdale, where he will set sail on a jazz cruise.

"I've got to keep moving," he said.

DR



Brandee Younger FINDS ROOM C TO WANDER

BY STEPHANIE JONES PHOTOS BY ERIN PATRICE O'BRIEN

When she's on the road, Brandee Younger enters a hybrid state of action and contemplation. Free of daily distractions — of organizing her workspace, of shopping for groceries, of turning over laundry in the basement of her East Harlem apartment — she communes with her focus, and frequently her music.

around them, she and her fellow artists evolve her repertoire, finding new pathways through the same songs and different directions to take the music.

Like many working artists, the Grammynominated harpist, composer and 2025 Doris Duke Artist Award honoree finds herself scheduling a record date, in part, so she can book her the newest phase of her artistry.

ight after night, as new cities settle next tour. These days, that's part of the practice. It's routine, and it's prescriptive. "A lot of places don't want to book you unless you have an album," she said. But in 2024, a series of events scrambled that structure, leading to the creation and June 2025 release of Gadabout Season, Younger's seventh album as a leader, third for Impulse! Records and first for



Once upon a tour date at SFJAZZ, Younger overheard a conversation between her manager, Tinku Bhattacharyya, and her trio-mate and album producer, bassist Rashaan Carter.

"[They were] basically making a whole life plan for me over there," she said. "They were like, 'She needs to write some music because we have to do an album." Later, the pair approached Younger to ask what she needed to get started. "I just need a little space," she said. "Like, physically to leave home because when you're home, you just have all these distractions."

In May 2024, Younger arrived at her cousin's home in Athens, New York, where she set

the music and decide, "This is great ... Oh, I don't like this.' Plenty of room to argue about it," said Younger. "We did start to play some of the music on the road. And it would start to evolve." Over many months, the artists, often at Carter's behest, would return to the East Harlem studio for another session or to rerecord a song they'd already crossed off as complete. "[Rashaan] likes to sit, listen, assess and revisit a lot," said Younger. "I'm not used to working this way. I almost died. It was horrible, but I'm so thankful now."

Gadabout Season references a word-of-theday email she received last year featuring a whimsical term for a pleasure-seeking wanreleased her first album of originals in 2021. But where albums of her recent past, notably *Brand New Life* (Impulse!, 2023), mimic a live set, *Gadabout Season* plays like an audio diary. "It's about resilience in hard times, period," she said. "Joy doesn't just find you ... it takes work, and it takes intention. ... We're going to do this one thing to bring us some joy and then continue on with what we're dealing with."

To communicate the energy of that intention, the groove-centric artist leans into melody in a way she hasn't in the past. "Melody has always been my thing, and it's always been a struggle," she said, "I've always written strong melodies, but I wrote them for horns because harp can't sustain a melody. So if I want something to be held, I'm going to put it on a saxophone or a flute."

Gadabout Season breaks that pattern, centering harp as the melody bearer. Playful and syncopated on certain tracks, indulgent on others, the character of Younger's melodies helps translate her songs from personal accounts to shared narratives. She desired a "bouncy, quirky vibe" when she fleshed out the title track, and initially heard strings on "New Pinnacle" before Carter convinced her to keep the melody line on the harp. "That song leans on the happy side of things — of reaching this new point that you didn't even know existed," said Younger. As she and Carter layer the sound, Mednard's brushwork buoys the song's momentum. "I wanted it to build up."

Younger, who has collaborated with Makaya McCraven, Ravi Coltrane, the late Pharoah Sanders, Lauryn Hill, Beyoncé, Stevie Wonder, the Roots, Common, John Legend and other icons, convenes a roster of equally melodic guest artists on *Gadabout Season*, including Shabaka, who plays on the title track and "End Means"; Niia, who sings on "Unswept Corners"; Josh Johnson, who plays on "Discernment"; and Courtney Bryan, who plays in such intimate communion with Younger on "Surrender" that, at times, the boundaries between piano and harp nearly fall away.

"That's one of the things that makes [Courtney] so special," said Younger, who routinely resists playing with pianists. "She complemented what I was doing." The melody itself informed Younger's textural decisions for the song: "I wanted it to be dry ... I wanted the melody to be the main ingredient of that, and the feeling — I didn't want anything to get in the way. You'll notice I didn't even roll the chords. I played them like bling, not blllinnnggg. No romanticism here."

On "BBL," Younger approaches melody differently, giving herself "permission to run my mouth nonstop." Conceived as a full-blown argument with little room to catch breath, that song in particular underwent a transforma-

'This sounds really good. I think we could do this at home.'

up a modest workspace in the cottage behind his house. Her expectations well managed, she set a goal of completing two songs and began to write. Alone with her instrument, she sketched out her anguish and confusion as well as her moments of joy and resolve. She allowed herself to feel whatever she needed to feel and to express those emotional arcs in her music. "I left with almost everything," she said. "I didn't expect that, but I guess I had a lot to say."

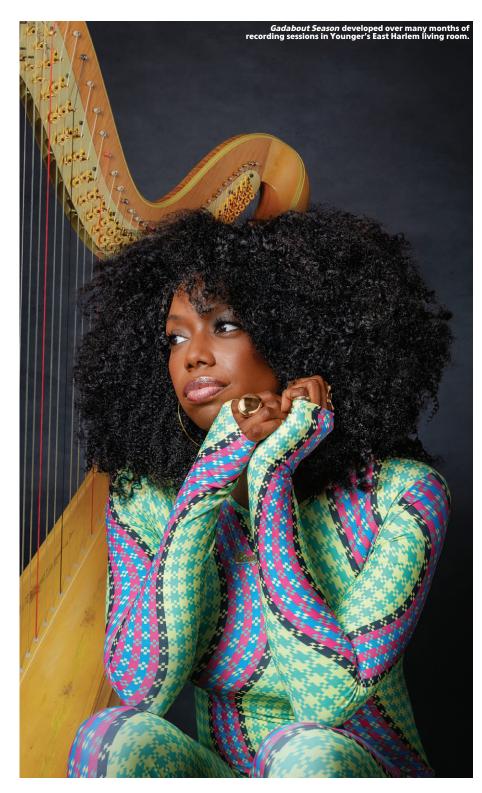
And that might have signaled the start-toend of a familiar story: Artist writes music, band records album, manager books tour. But like its namesake, *Gadabout Season* needed a little room to wander. Carter and her other working trio mate, drummer Allan Mednard, joined Younger in Athens to play through the music and hash out ideas in the cottage's living room, with no way to isolate the instruments.

To their own surprise, at the end of the second or third session they agreed to record the album in Younger's New York apartment. "We're like, 'This sounds really good. I think we could do this at home,'" said Younger. And what that decision ultimately gave them was "the gift of time."

Suddenly the songs had room to breathe and expand. The artists had time to consider sounds and concepts. "We could listen to derer. When the word hit her inbox for the second time in a matter of months, she said, "This is a sign." Younger and her trio mates soon applied *gadabout*'s connotations to the tour grind, claiming the word as their road mantra. And before long, the expression "gadabout season" became an invitation to make time when seemingly none exists.

"[Touring is] really hard," said Younger. "After the concert, we pack everything up, get back to the hotel, 4 or 5 a.m. lobby call, get on a train or plane or however we're traveling to the next place, get in, rush to the venue, sound check, hope we can take a quick shower, maybe have a bite to eat, play the concert and repeat, repeat, repeat. It's hard. So while we're out there on the road, we kept having these moments where we're like, 'Do we take this moment to nap or do we have this great food in this country?' You don't want to pass up these opportunities."

The force behind any successful gadabout season is intention. And on this release, that force extends beyond schedules and itineraries and engages loss and grieving. The year leading up to her Athens seclusion hadn't been easy for Younger. The album translates some very personal reflections into 10 compositions — all but three written solo by Younger, who



tion on the road. During a train ride through the Swiss countryside, Carter was struck by an Alice Coltrane record — her harp, he remembers, sounding closer to a kalimba. "I took the headphones off and and asked Brandee about Alice's connection to these instruments," he said. "And we started to talk about how to approximate that kind of sound." That conversation would lead to an entirely new arrangement for "BBL" pieced together over time,

which the trio rerecorded for the album using Younger's extended technique to create a xylo effect for the first half of the song — still centering that energetic melody.

Conversely, Younger initially felt dissatisfied with their recording for "Breaking Point," which she intended to have deliver a claustrophobic feeling of anxiety. She pressed Carter to play a staccato bass line she'd written, but he held fast to a Herbie Hancock reference

he'd had in mind. Begrudgingly, she acquiesced. But over time, she found the tour helped break her attachment to a particular sound so she could really observe what was happening with the song, which includes a hyper-responsive interactivity among all three artists. "Somehow it achieved the vibe," she said. "[Being on the road] gave me the time and the space to really sit with it in a way that I would never ever be able to at home."

Another hallmark of Gadabout Season — one that can't help but affect Younger's treatment of melody throughout the album — is the presence of Alice Coltrane's harp. In 2024, Younger became custodian of the legacy instrument, newly restored by Chicago-based manufacturer Lyon & Healy, and this release is her first experience playing her own music on it.

"I got to get up every morning and play the instrument, just warm up on it, practice on it ... spend enough hours on it until I could find my voice on it," she said. "It's one thing to be playing her music on it, which I've had the opportunity to do a few times. But moving beyond playing her music, playing my own music, really starting to get the feeling of this being an extension of me and not me just playing on somebody else's harp — it almost felt like something was handed over to me, like a permission. It's hard to explain, but it felt like I was given the OK. Like, 'Now's the time."

That freedom resonates on "Reflection Eternal," Younger's brief solo gesture which serves as a pivot point for the album and an earnest reminder for the listener.

"It's introspective," she said. "The obvious example is, you've had a crazy day, not in a bad way, but a busy day. Maybe you were being a gadabout. And then you get on the subway home and it's quiet, and you're just sort of reflecting on everything that happened. So it's not a bad thing and it's not a good thing. It's literally just that — you're reflecting."

Continually adding record dates for *Gadabout Season* allowed the trio to establish routines and rituals. At the end of each apartment session, for example, they would open up and improvise; from those moments of intention emerged compositional seeds for "Reckoning," "Discernment" and "End Means." While these individual sessions were integral to creating and recording the music, the album as a whole materialized through time and space — which is all Younger really asked for in the first place.

"When you're removed from your home and you have nothing but your concerts, the plane ride, the train rides, the car rides, that's when you can really sit there and focus," she said. "It's not like being in your home where you have all these distractions. You could devote 150 percent of your focus to one thing. And in this case it was the music."



Joe Farnsworth Plays **ITHE BIG ROOM** ROOM**

BY ALLEN MORRISON PHOTOS BY OSMEL PORTUONDO AZCUY

When he was 12 years old, the hard-swinging veteran drummer Joe Farnsworth had a fateful encounter with his idol, Max Roach, the bebop pioneer.

rior to that, Farnsworth had already been playing drums and attending jam sessions in and around his hometown of South Hadley, Massachusetts, thanks to his four older brothers, musicians all. As a budding young drummer, he had been emulating Buddy Rich and Sonny Payne of the Count Basie Orchestra. He used to play along with the Count's "April In Paris."

"Then my older brother John had me learn Charlie Parker's version of 'Slow Boat To China' and 'Chi Chi,' with the great Max Roach on drums," Farnsworth said during a pair of recent interviews. "When I started hearing Max, that was like the big change in my life ... (to) that style of music and drumming.

"Around that time, my brother John drove me to UMass-Amherst to see Roach give a master class. We came into the room, and there was a guy playing piano. It was just the three of us. I'm like, 'Damn, is that Max Roach?' Because I had never seen his face, and he was playing piano. Then he stopped playing and says, 'What are you guys here for?'

"I said, 'I'm here because I want to play like Max

Roach.' He didn't answer; he just kept playing. About 10 minutes later, he asked, 'Do you know who Billy Strayhorn is?' I said no. He kept playing music — beautiful music — on the piano. He finally stops and says, 'If you don't know Billy Strayhorn, you don't know anything about the drums.'

"I was 12, and I didn't really know what he meant by that. But I know now. He meant that ... you first and foremost are a musician, and you need to learn about music ... and open your mind and ears to all the possibilities. ... Then you're able to play music instead of just playing drums."

Farnsworth's jazz education continued with private lessons with the legendary drum teachers Alan Dawson and Art Taylor, and at William Paterson College. "But," he says, "the school I wanted to go to was the school of Cedar Walton and George Coleman."

So, he headed to New York City.

When you see Farnsworth on a gig, he is always dressed to the nines. It's his way of paying hom-



age to the jazz masters. "I've been doing it ever since I started making gigs in 1986. Art Blakey did it. McCoy. Miles. Charlie Parker. That was the thing to do. My first big gig was with Benny Golson. He always wore a suit. I did, too. Milt Jackson, George Coleman, Cedar Walton. I wanted to be like that."

Coming out of the hard-bop tradition, Farnsworth, 57, has played with a formidable list of jazz masters, including Tyner, Walton, Golson, Coleman, Horace Silver and Harold Mabern. He toured with Diana Krall and spent 16 years with Pharoah Sanders. He is a charter member of the supergroup One for All with his former Paterson classmate Eric Alexander. In recent years he has helped nurture — and is sought out by — a younger generation of musicians, including pianist Emmet Cohen, in whose trio he plays, and the sensational young tenor player Sarah Hanahan.

Both Cohen and Hanahan are featured on his latest album, *The Big Room* (Smoke Sessions), his 8th as a leader. Rounding out the A-list of players is Joel Ross, vibraphone; Jeremy Pelt, trumpet; and Yasushi Nakamura, bass.

Farnsworth's drumming is characterized by crispness; rhythmic clarity; melodicism; a sensitive, musicianly use of dynamics; and a bulletproof sense of swing. His impeccable technique has given him the freedom to celebrate a tradition that includes drummers from Roach to Roy Haynes, Billy Higgins and Tony Williams, while enjoying the ability to go well beyond that tradition.

The younger players admire his discipline, an almost monastic dedication to the art form, which comes out in many ways: the way he presents himself — no matter what the gig may be, Farnsworth always sports a suit, tie and pocket square; and the way he takes care of his body and spirit. "It's the standard that he holds

for himself," said Cohen, describing his friend and colleague. "Dressing. Running every day. Going to church no matter what the language or what country he's in. Staying centered. I've never seen him falter. He's been an enormous blessing in my life."

South Hadley, Massachusetts, population 17,000, in the western part of the state, was never exactly the jazz capital of the world. Yet being the son of a high school band director, and with four older brothers who all played, Farnsworth's life was filled with jazz.

"Listening to music was the biggest thing in my life," he said. "It was important to me. Still is. I used to love having listening parties with my brothers. We had thousands of records.

"My oldest brother, David — he was the original drummer. He had a nice set of Ludwigs. He'd go off to school and say, 'Don't touch my drums.' So, I'd look out the window until I couldn't see him anymore, and I'd plop on the drums."

The budding musician would go from room to room in the house in South Hadley, listening to his brothers' favorites. With David, he would listen to the Temptations and O'Jays, but also the Buddy Rich and Basie bands. "The next room over was James. He was a saxophone player and was into Sonny Stitt and Sonny Rollins. ... John was a trombone player, so he liked Chicago, but he was also into Charlie Parker, J.J. Johnson and Clark Terry. So, I'd go into that room and listen to that. I like to joke that it was like having my own mini 52nd Street."

hat is "the big room," the concept behind Farnsworth's new album? It seems to have more than one meaning, describing a place where constraints on expression disappear, but also an approach to time. Farnsworth has said, "Jackie McLean talked about being at such a height of greatness that you're able to go into the big room, where there's no furniture and no paintings on the walls. You're able to arrange the room any way that you want, but only a few people ever get there — greats like John Coltrane or Ornette Coleman. It's like what Roy Haynes said about playing with Coltrane — it's freedom with discipline."

The sense of "freedom with discipline" is palpable on the record. It was tracked in a single day during a recording session on the stage of Smoke, the Upper West Side nightclub that spawned the label. The eight songs cover a wide spectrum, from post-bop burners like Hanahan's opener "Continuance" and Cohen's "You Already Know" to altered blues (Pelt's "All Said And Done"), pensive ballads (Joel Ross' "What Am I Waiting For?") and the triumphant boogaloo (Farnsworth's "Prime Time") that closes the album.

For Farnsworth, the music is never about ego or chops. It's about being the best person you can be, on and off the stage.

"I remember meeting Billy Higgins and asking him why he smiled so much. 'Smiling Billy Higgins,' people called him. He told me he made changes so he could become happy, joyous and free. He changed his lifestyle, stopped doing certain things. Became Muslim, started listening to God. Freed himself from toxic relationships. Set healthy boundaries. Certain people he had to let go of.

"I was determined to be like that, but I didn't know how. About 13 years ago, I decided to do the same thing — change my life. Being a father of three, I stopped hanging out after the gig, stopped drinking. I decided to become Catholic — I wasn't anything before that. I started listening to a higher power.

"Listen to learn, and learn to listen' that was what Art Taylor taught me. I wanted to be happy, joyous and free ... to be a better father, a better drummer and be of service to younger people."

Farnsworth once toured with Benny Golson. Two legendary players, trombonist Curtis Fuller and trumpeter Art Farmer, joined the band for its final dates. "One night when Art played 'I Remember Clifford,' I noticed that Curtis started to cry. Little did I know that Art was dying of cancer at the time.

"Being on the road with these guys showed me the level of fellowship, commitment, love and respect that they had for each other. I learned just how big their hearts were. What I learned was that they were giants of men. The instruments (they mastered) were just by-products.

"Art gave me a pocket square to put in my jacket. He said, 'Hey, man, you need to look good if you want to hang around me. Don't embarrass me.' To this day I wear it."



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ISAIAH J. THOMPSON'S

BY GARY FUKUSHIMA PHOTOS BY EVELYN FREJA

Pianist Isaiah J. Thompson is on the road, answering a video call from his hotel room in Victoria, a quaint city on Vancouver Island in the western Canadian province of British Columbia.

e is there for the TD Victoria International JazzFest, playing later that evening with the New Jazz Underground, a band with his former Juilliard colleagues Sebastian Rios (bass), TJ Reddick (drums) and Noah Halpern (trumpet). But at this moment Thompson is reminiscing about another, rather eventful journey he did while on tour with his own group. "We did Cincinnati at Café Vivace, we did Indianapolis at the Jazz Kitchen, Blue LLama in Ann Arbor. We did Space in Evanston near Chicago, and we did Blues Alley in D.C.," he recalls.

"Now, between those things," he continues, "there was incredible rain. We were afraid for some of the flights. What else happened? The power went out at one of the hotels. We had to go [straight] to the sound check, and I'm supposed to run back to another hotel that we were able to get. We got a flat tire — that we had to figure out. And then I think we almost missed something else." Thompson proclaims, "I believe there's another force at work that does not want the message of this recording to be getting out — this is spiritual warfare."

The recording Thompson refers to is his latest album,

The Book Of Isaiah: Modern Jazz Ministry (Mack Avenue), a proclamation of his faith in God and the message of the gospel embedded in generations of African Americans who have struggled to find freedom and justice. Thompson has paired these ideals with musical motifs that resonate throughout the album. Of those themes, he states: "They're talking about what is the African American experience through the lens of faith, but also, just what is faith for anyone?" For Thompson to answer that question, he needed to embark on his own proverbial road trip to Damascus, to be blinded by the light so that he could see.

Isaiah Justin Thompson grew up in West Orange, New Jersey. He's always included his middle initial in everything he signed, from grade school to the present day. He went to a small Black Baptist church, but unlike many musicians who grew up in the church, Thompson didn't play there nor was his musicianship developed through gospel music. He instead learned to play jazz in nearby Montclair at Jazz House Kids (run by Melissa Walker and her husband, bassist Christian McBride), and then at New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) Jazz for Teens in Newark. It was in those formative pro-



grams that he met and befriended saxophonist Julian Lee, prominently featured on this latest recording. Thompson continued his jazz education at Juilliard, and he has since sojourned down the path to success, being featured in 2022 on NPR's *Jazz Night in America*, winning the jazz division in the 2023 American Piano Awards and working with notable artists like McBride, Wynton Marsalis and John Pizzarelli, among others.

But along the way, Thompson developed tendonitis in both arms, for a time rendering

him a pianist who was unable to play the piano. "What is a jazz musician without the ability to play?" he asks. "This is something that we've seen ... people putting their identity in something that's not strong enough to uphold them. I believe God kind of intervened in that way, [saying], this is the only way you're gonna listen."

Thompson surmised at the time he was putting his faith solely in his own talent, which was why it was taken away from him. He questioned who he really was, what he was truly meant to do. He started by delving into the origins of his

name, reading the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament of the Bible. "You see people walking away from the Lord, and the Lord using certain ways to get them back," he quips. "Now, these weren't always ways that they liked." The parallels to his own predicament were too explicit to ignore. Isaiah the prophet himself was initially reluctant to be a servant of God, deeming himself unworthy, but as chronicled in the book, he ultimately was cleansed by God and felt sanctified to do the work he was asked to do.

Isaiah the pianist experienced a similar transformation and commission. "Coming back to the Lord in that way has changed everything for me," he says. "It changes the way that I play, because I am more interested in getting to the root of what I'm trying to play and trying to accomplish." His hands have recovered, but they may never fully heal. "I think it's important that each person has a little kryptonite because I think it humbles them," he ruminates.

Thompson's own *Book Of Isaiah* is a portrayal of his faith through his unique identity as a jazz musician, as opposed to more of a traditional gospel approach. "As someone who has so much respect for people that grew up in [the gospel] tradition and really understand how to play that, I would never put myself in that category," he professes. Instead, he turned to other models in the jazz idiom,





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namely Duke Ellington's music in the form of his three Sacred Concert programs from 1965 to 1973; and Wynton Marsalis, who in 2008 wrote a mass celebrating the 200th anniversary of the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem. Thompson has had the privilege of performing both works. "Duke Ellington and Wynton Marsalis in particular, they are two people that I found [who] used theological concepts paired with musical and compositional concepts that you could see be repeated in different ways, in a sort of suite format," he explains.

Thompson cites additional sources of inspiration. "Mary Lou Williams, her creativity to the gospel is unbelievable, just even hearing her 'Lord's Prayer'; I would have never thought to do that," he says. "I think she lets a lot of musicians feel like they're allowed to experience their individuality through their creativity and an understanding of faith. Charles Mingus, someone that pairs his faith in his activism. ... Hearing how he can talk about faith, but he can also talk about protests, and things that are wrong, and seeking justice and denouncing oppression. Also, accepting the folk sounds and sounds of gospel music in his jazz playing I think was also super influential."

The Book Of Isaiah is energetic, celebratory, sometimes fierce like Thompson's piece "In The Temple (Spiritual Warfare)," other times intro-

spective and prayerful as in his Ellingtonian soliloquy "A Prayer." The godly themes often literally have a voice, with lyrics sung brightly and eloquently by Vuyo Sotashe, with Thompsons' wife, Kaitlin Obien-Thompson, contributing to background vocals on a track. There is also some deep, thunderous chanting à la John Coltrane's "A Love Supreme," complemented by Lee's channeling of some of Coltrane's own saxophone-specific spiritual language. Bassist Marty Jaffe and drummer Miguel Russell complement Thompson's pianistic and expressive range, maintaining a hard-swinging fire throughout. Thompson received further musical and spiritual assistance from drummer and percussionist Herlin Riley, who was a big factor in Thompson's discovery of faith, and pianist Cyrus Chestnut, who produced the album.

Thompson believes a clear message of God's love and deliverance is ever important in our current times of strife and division. He wrote most of these pieces in 2020 at the apex of the Black Lives Matter movement, which coincided with his exploration of God. "Those things were happening at the same time," he remembers, "becoming more aware of what was going on in our country and the issues that our country was dealing with, the unveiling of some of the ugly truths that have still been there, but also seeing, coming to an understanding of

what faith is doing in my life."

He wants people to know where he's coming from, both as an artist and a follower of God. "I try to be the same person on stage that I am always. ... It's like why I said I've written my name the same way I've always had since the sixth grade." He elaborates: "And that's why we can play what I would consider actual jazz, through the lens of faith that doesn't have to be gospel music. I think the overall message is that your walk will not look the same as someone else's. This is the way that mine looks; and this is how it looks for right now, but who's to say whether it'll look different later? But I do feel that the Lord has called me to use this music to talk about him."

And Thompson believes music can be a tool for a faith-based deliverance to those who have been shackled by the sins of the world. "If I can help just a few people — jazz musicians and non-jazz musicians — to not put their identity in their playing, then we're closer to putting our identity in something that could actually change the lives of people, and maybe changing those lives could affect other lives. Then, maybe we'd be making strides in the right direction."

It's a direction Thompson has walked toward since his divinely inspired course correction on the road to discovering himself and his purpose in this life.



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The Slyly Ambiguous TTHE WAR AMBIGUOUS



Music of.... BROTHERS DV DILL MILL FOR DV LAUDA DADIANA

BY BILL MILKOWSKI PHOTOS BY LAURA PARTAIN Through nine studio recordings since 2006, along with two live albums, The Wood Brothers - guitarist Oliver and bassist Chris — have established the kind of indelible chemistry that only comes from being siblings.



hink the Louvin Brothers, Everly Brothers, Vaughan Brothers, even the Brecker Brothers. The bond that comes from that blood connection is undeniable, often translating to extra-musical results. And yet, these brothers spent a great part of their respective careers avoiding it.

'When we left home we went different ways," said Oliver, four years the elder Wood Brother at age 60. "Chris went to school in Boston (New England Conservatory), then left for New York and eventually started Medeski Martin & Wood. Meanwhile, I moved to Atlanta and started a band called King Johnson with my friend Chris Long. We worked with our bands over the years and sort of grew apart. But we also kind of grew up during that time and maybe established our individual personalities both psychologically and musically. When we finally decided to put The Wood Brothers together, I was pushing 40 and had already been out on the road with my own band for a solid 15 years."

Chris recalled what rekindled their close familial bond. "King Johnson and Medeski Martin & Wood did a double bill in Winston-Salem way back in the early 2000s, and Oliver sat in with MMW. And it was uncanny chemistry with him, just like the same chemistry I

felt with John Medeski and Billy Martin, who were my road brothers. But to have my actual brother on stage, there was something so familiar about his approach to the music that I felt it immediately. So that was the spark that made us realize we both had the same job, we both had gotten decent at it and we should try to do something together. But we didn't know what it was going to be."

Chris believes that in delaying the formation of The Wood Brothers, they avoided the pitfalls of many sibling bands. "I think there's a benefit to starting the band after you've each grown up a little bit," he said. "Like all those young brother bands who have this amazing success early on, they inevitably blow up and fall apart."

Added Oliver, "Many of those family bands that have been playing together since they were teenagers never got a chance to create their own space. So they're always struggling with their own identities because they're sort of married to each other in these family bands. So I really appreciate the way that we did it. Rather than a meteoric rise to the top, with all the consequences of the fast lane, we had a slow rise to middle."

"And it went from being like an inside self-deprecating joke in the band to almost a philosophy," said Chris. "Because this is a sustainable way to have a music career and just keep having fun, keep being creative, not getting overwhelmed by the pressures of the extreme fame that everyone kind of desires but don't really know what they're asking for."

That Wood Brothers anthem, "Slow Rise (to the middle)," is one of many insightful commentaries they lay out on Puff Of Smoke, their ninth studio recording, following 2021's Heart Is The Hero. With Oliver fronting on lead vocals and guitar and Chris alternating between upright bass and his prized Höfner electric bass, they are augmented by a third member in the versatile multi-instrumentalist Jano Rix, who came aboard for the siblings' fourth studio recording, 2013's The Muse. While playing drums and keyboards (often simultaneously), Rix alternates on second guitar and contributes strong harmony vocals while also playing something he's dubbed "the shuitar." (Pronounced shit-ar.)

"It's basically a crappy acoustic guitar that he uses as a percussion instrument," explained Chris. "It's sort of like the antithesis of Future Man (with the Flecktones) playing a Synth Axe. So we call Jano Primitive Man because he's beating on this shitty guitar, but he makes it sound amazing."

Added Oliver, "He wears it around his neck and hits it on the low part of the neck to get a low percussive sound. And he has strings on there that he hits to make a hi-hat sound. Then his wedding ring knocks the side of the guitar for a snare effect. So it's almost like a mini beatbox drum kit. And Chris' upright bass with that shuitar is a really cool sound."

"Jano's shuitar allows us to be very unplugged and acoustic-sounding when we want to be," said Chris. "But then he can get on the drum kit and we can be like a slamming rock band. And he's also an incredible piano and organ player. So he's an amazingly talented, hardworking dude, and he's just getting better all the time."

Rix's distorted Fender Rhodes electric piano brings an alt-rock grunge feel to "The Trick," the band's first single. Elsewhere on *Puff Of Smoke*, they deliver thoughtful, topical messages on tunes like "Witness" and "Money Song," the latter an ode to "highly intelligent billionaires who are building bunkers and think they can create an existence separate from the interconnectedness of life," as Chris put it.

Oliver's idea for "Pray God Listens," which blends elements of Cuban groove and buoyant calypso, sprang from a sign he observed on the street that read: Pray, God Listens. By removing the comma, he had a song title that was both cynical and hopeful at the same time. "I'm a big fan of ambiguity in songs, which Dylan and John Prine seem to be the standard for," he said. "I like the ambiguity in this particular song and the fact that a comma changes everything. With the comma it reads: 'Pray, because God is listening.' Without the comma, it reads: 'You better hope that God is listening.' Probably a lot of us are skeptical of God or the way people present God, but are also hopeful about it. Like, 'I hope it's true, because we need it.' So it's a bit skeptical, but hopeful, too."

The infectious title track is a statement about letting things roll off your back in good time. "It's a little bit like, 'If you have a lousy day today, it's gone in a second and you've got tomorrow again," said Oliver. "Or you can also look at it like, 'Make the most of it because it's going to fly by."

Both Wood brothers believe that the key to the songwriting process is simply getting out of the way. "The idea is to not try to feel like you're in control of writing the song but that you're sort of following the song and seeing what happens," said Oliver.

"It's like, we don't want to stranglehold the creative process by trying to steer it too aggressively into any one direction," added Chris. "You have to just constantly have an open mind and pay attention. A lot of times, you start a song and you kind of don't even know

what it's about until you have some hindsight on it. You just go through the process and sometimes you put it aside for weeks so that you can look at it later with fresh eyes and ears. But having a good writing partner like Oliver helps so much in speeding up that process."

The idea of a composer or songwriter being a vessel for the muse to flow through rings true with the bass-playing Wood brother. "With a really great artist, it's not actually coming from them, it's coming from their environment," he said. "They're just open to reflecting what's happening around them, and they just have the ability to intuitively recognize what's good. It's the beautiful mystery of the creative process, and we're just constantly trying to surrender to it. We just have to pay attention and admit, 'We're not in control here.' And try to not take our intellectual ideas too seriously.

"Meanwhile, the muse either visits you or it doesn't, and it's not up to you," he continued. "So you really can't take credit whether your work is good or bad. Naturally, we want to take credit for things. We want to get the reward. You want to get the Grammy because you did it. But I think the truth of the creative act is that you're not doing it, you're just stepping out of the way and letting something happen that's already there."

In a June 1985 DownBeat cover story this writer did on Robert Fripp, the guitarist and King Crimson founder called it "getting a visit from the Good Fairy." Said Chris, "All artists are fascinated with that state. And there's different names for it — the flow state, being in the zone. Whatever you call it, I do think it's a gift that we're not in control of. And if you really study what it means to be in that state, then you actually can learn how to get there much easier and also be very aware of all the things that prevent it from happening."

As for what to call the music of The Wood Brothers heard on *PuffOfSmoke*—Progressive Americana? Folk-Gospel-Blues? Countrified Talking Heads? Don't ask these brothers. "I feel like our subconscious goal is to not be categorizable, to not commit to any one genre," said Oliver. "Because even the genres themselves are just marketing tools. You know the old adage: 'How do you sell something if you can't say what it is?' So that probably contributes to our slow rise to the middle.

"But there's also a freedom in that," he added. "Like, you can say anything you want, you can write anything you want to write, you can combine any musical ingredients you want. But I'm not sure what kind of music to call it if someone asked me."

How about Bob Dylan meets John Prine, The Band and Medeski, Martin & Wood at Derek Trucks' farm in Jacksonville, Florida?



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Ben WilliamsBetween Church & State SAFE SPACE

***1/2

Ben Williams is a long way from being just the cat who won the 2009 Thelonious Monk International Jazz Competition. These days the esteemed bassist is weighing in on family heritage and cultural politics, widening his artistic conception by embracing the breadth of the musical diaspora that has shaped him thus far.

Between Church & State furthers the accomplishments of 2020's I Am A Man, a getup/stand-up study of racial injustice. The new album boasts Williams' increasingly prevalent songwriting skills, teeming with voices that bump the music's significance by making it more timely, worldly and fluent.

Richly produced, it's a program blending future soul, gospel fervor, Princian pop, poignant strings and sophisticated jazztronica rendered by a scad of L.A. associates. Like the stylistic melanges of the '90s Soulquarian joints, it's ambitious message music that distills a prismatic array of sounds into a focused narrative.

You could also call this project a historical memoir of sorts. An activist mom and minister granddad help inspire these tunes, and from "Black Is Beautiful" to "Safe Space" to Marvin Gaye's "Inner City Blues," the rewards of family unity and participation in the civic and spiritual realms are poetically referenced.

Don't think this Pat Metheny alum has forsaken the joys of jazz interplay, though. The engaging nu-groove of "Consciousness," "Amina" and "Hood Robin" parallels the work of fellow travelers Makaya McCraven and Kassa Overall, reminding that investigations into the psychologies of pride and identity still have room for cool bass maneuvers now and then.

—Jim Macnie

Between Church & State: Safe Space; Keep On; Black Is Beautiful; You Are (Supernational); Inner City Blues; Blue; Ballet (For The Elephant In The Room); Consciousness; Double Consciousness; Anima; Hood Robin. (53:59)

Personnel: Ben Williams, basses, vocals, guitar, drum programming (1); Brandon Coleman, keyboards; Chief Adjuah (6), Keyon Harrold (11), trumpet; Musinah (1), Wes Felton (2), Kendra Foster (2), Pam Yasutake (2), Sy Smith (3), Georgia Anne Muldrow (4), vocals; Dwight Trible, spoken word (3); Bennie Barnes, speaker (1), flute (7); Justin Brown, Jonathan Pinson (5), drums; Kamasi Washington, tenor saxophone (2, 3); Hailey Niswager, tenor saxophone (1, 5, 10) soprano saxophone (9), flute (7, 11), bass darinet; Sasha Berliner, vibraphone; Andrew Renfroe, guitar, Paris Strother, synth; Jasmin Charles, violin, percussion (1); Kahlil Cummings, percussion (2–5, 11); Stephanie Yu, violin (2–4, 7, 11); Corinne Sobolewski, viola (2–4, 7, 11); Mia Barcia Colombo, cello (2–4, 7, 11).

Ordering info: benwilliamsofficial.bandcamp.con



Linda May Han Oh Strange Heavens BIOPHILIA

Because it lacks either piano or guitar, it's tempting to think of this as a chordless trio. But that does a disservice to bassist Linda May Han Oh, who not only regularly drops double- and even triple-stops throughout, but even manages contrapuntal accompaniment at points. Indeed, there's an almost pianistic quality to her playing on Melba Liston's "Just Waiting"; she doesn't merely ground the harmony but fleshes out its relation to the melody.

That's hardly the album's only flash of virtuosity. From the pinging harmonics in the ostinato that opens "Portal" to the masterful arco work that frames the melody of "Folk Song," Oh is in spectacular form throughout. But it's a testament to the calibre of this band that not only is Oh's prowess easily matched by the others, the playing enhances, rather than overshadows, the writing.

It doesn't hurt that all three are as much composers as they are players, and the improvisation seems more like an extension of the writing than impromptu tangents. Ambrose Akinmusire, who played on Oh's 2008 debut, Entry, is particularly adept at amplifying compositional ideas, bringing low-key charm to the casually catchy "Noise Machinery" and spinning deft variations on the rhythmic structure of "Living Proof." Tyshawn Sorey, meanwhile, stands as the trio's special sauce. His slyly virtuosic drumming doesn't so much propel the band as eliminate friction, ensuring the creative momentum is maximized from the capering polyrhythms of "Paperbirds" to the hard-swinging drive of "The Sweetest Water." A power trio in every sense of the term. —J.D. Considine

la; The Sweetest Water; Noise Machinery; Home; Paperbirds; Folk Song; Work Song; Skin; Just Waiting. (48:08)

trumpet; Tyshawn Sorey, drums.



Nate Mercereau/Josh **Johnson/Carlos Niño Openness Trio**

BLUE NOTE

***1/2

A sacred connection to nature pulses through Openness Trio, the debut album by guitarist and producer Nate Mercereau, saxophonist Josh Johnson and percussionist Carlos Niño. The trio draws inspiration from the terroir of its recording locations, a variety of intimate settings across Los Angeles and Ventura County. "Hawk Dreams" soars over the hills of Ojai, with Johnson's sinewy sax and Mercereau's insistent guitar reverberating through Niño's mystical rhythms. The atmospheric track is a warm-up to the fervent exploration and spiritual expansiveness of the rest of the record.

The pulsing current of Niño's geophonic soundscapes brings each spacious, free-flowing track into sharp focus. In the cerebral "... Anything Is Possible," his gentle aquatic sounds give way to Johnson's bluesy introspective musings and mentholated notes. His meditative shells and shakers create an airy yet grounding foundation on "Chimes In The Garden." Johnson's ethereal, measured notes on flute stand out against a lively backdrop of ambient percussion sounds and Mercereau's oscillating electronic layers.

The three musicians are each genre-bending visionaries in their own right. Their combined list of collaborators range from jazz contemporaries like Meshell Ndegeocello, Kamasi Washington and Shabaka Hutchings to soul and pop stars like Leon Bridges and Miley Cyrus. On this record, they mine those experiences to create rich sound tapestries that transcend spiritual, ambient jazz.

—Ivana Ng

Strange Heavens: Portal; Strange Heavens; Living Proof; Acapel-

Personnel: Linda May Han Oh, bass; Ambrose Akinmusire,

Ordering info: biophiliarecords.com

Matthew Shipp The Cosmic Piano **CANTALOUPE**

Pianist Matthew Shipp's work has always had a kind of prickliness that appeals to a very particular kind of listener. His cerebral approach is an acquired taste, which makes his solo exploration on The Cosmic Piano a journey that many may not want to join. The paths through which Shipp travels are excitingly different but still can seem imperceptibly similar to fledgling sojourner and grizzled adventurer alike.

This isn't to say Shipp's playing isn't impeccable and pointed, as always. His searching always discovers something worth finding, yet there's replete frustration for those who don't quite have a taste for all this rooting around, especially in Shipp's very comfortable form of solo playing. His sense of angularity makes for technically well-crafted geometry, but it rarely makes for the conventionally mellifluous. Altogether, it's the kind of playing that is Capital-I Important, but reeks of the "eat your vegetables" self-seriousness that for most just isn't fun to listen to.

This does not deny how accomplished The Cosmic Piano is. These 12 songs are distinct statements that feel of one mind and shared motifs. While it isn't a centerpiece, per sé, "Blues



Orgasm" is the most beat-centric song. There is angularity here, but not chaos. This playing is not disjointed or sclerotic. Shipp plays with clear intention; the problem is determining for whom this music is intended. If you don't already know, you're not getting much. But if this is what you're hankering for, you're getting a hearty helping and Shipp never disappoints (you specifically). —Anthony Dean-Harris

The Cosmic Piano: The Cosmic Piano: Cosmic Junk Jazz DNA: Orbit Light; Piano's DNA Upgrade; The Other Dimensional Tone; Blues Orgasm; Radio Signals From Jazz Keys; Suburban Outer-space; Face To Face; Subconscious Piano; The Future Is In The Past; A Cosmic Thank You. (56:10)

Personnel: Matthew Shipp, piano.

Ordering info: matthewshipp.bandcamp.com

Openness Trio: Hawk Dreams; ... Anything Is Possible; Openness; Chimes In The Garden; Elsewhere. (37:58)

Personnel: Nate Mercereau, electric guitar, guitar synthesizer, MIDI guitar, live sampling; Josh Johnson, alto saxophone, flute, sampler, effects; Carlos Niño, cymbals, shells, bells, shakers, aerophones, gongs, plants, breathing, toms,

Ordering info: bluenote.com

The S

Critics	Jim Macnie	J.D. Considine	Anthony Dean-Harris	ivana Ng
Ben Williams Between Church & State	***1/2	***½	***	***
Linda May Han Oh Strange Heavens	***	****½	****½	***
Matthew Shipp Cosmic Piano	****	***	***	***½
Nate Mercereau/Josh John- son/Carlos Niño	***	★ ½	***	***1/2

Critics' Comments

Ben Williams, Between Church & State

Williams perfectly captures the mix of ambition, uplift and consciousness that animated the jazzy end of '70s progressive soul, from Norman Connors to Marvin Gaye. Even better, he understands that it was the hooks, not the solos, that mattered most. —J.D. Considine

With the exception of an arrangement of Marvin Gaye's "Inner City Blues" that's so divergent, it would benefit from being an entirely different song altogether, this Black is Beautiful album is a practically perfect, multifaceted jam in almost every other way.

—Anthony Dean-Harris

A richly textured, multidimensional exploration of William's lineage of social activism and spirituality, featuring a stacked list of guest stars. It's an expansive work of astral jazz infused with gospel, hip-hop and R&B influences. $-lvana\ Ng$

Linda May Han Oh, Strange Heavens

Man, melodies will save everything in their path. From the bassist's own ditties to the Melba Liston nod, consonance and tunefulness carry the day. Aiding in this victorious program is pith — every track steps lively and minds the closing doors.

—Jim Macnie

Stripped down to a chordless trio, Oh's playing and composition find an even more visceral core. Akinmusire and Sorey are more than mere munitions; they're like dealing with the subtly explosive nature of the heavier noble gases.

—Anthony Dean-Harris

The effortless synchronicity between Oh and Sorey is the highlight of this record. They conjure up tight grooves and magnetic rhythms that elevate Akinmusire's muscular yet nimble trumpet.

—Ivana Ng

Matthew Shipp, Cosmic Piano

Poise remains the pianist's strongest ally, helping articulate his densest gambits and supplying links to wayward rhythm fragments. Here that brokers an eloquence that speaks for itself, uniting clipped melodies and brightening dour moments.

—Jim Macnie

Were these performances fully notated, Shipp could call them études. Then again, knowing that they're improvised makes it easier to excuse the stretches of sameness. Still, there's enough gold here to hope for more in this vein.

—J.D. Considine

Shipp is in rare form in this collection of solo piano pieces, moving deftly between bold, forceful improvisation and introspective meditations. $-lvana\ Ng$

Nate Mercereau/Josh Johnson/Carlos Niño, Openness Trio

Quite possibly the most consistently fetching three-person abstract soundscape since the arrival of Horvitz/Morris/Previte's *Nine Below Zero* in '86. — *Jim Macnie*

Proof, I guess, that competent musicians can make an album just as vacuous as André 3000's New Blue Sun.

—J.D. Considine

Johnson's saxophone provides necessary texture and shape to Mercereau & Niño's ambient soundscaping. *Openness Trio* is the right balance of formlessness and structure.

—Anthony Dean-Harris

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Split Decision







Zoh Amba Sun SMALLTOWN SUPERSOUND ***

Sun is saxophonist Zoh Amba's sixth album as a leader; she has also recorded almost as many times in duo or ensemble contexts. Most of her earlier releases featured legends decades her senior, but here she's playing with three musicians closer to her own age. Lex Korten's sweeping but old-school piano technique recalls Dave Burrell; Miguel Marcel Russel's drumming has the thundering top-heaviness of Milford Graves; Caroline Morton is a powerful,

William Parker-esque bassist. Amba is not the leader during their collective performances; she is one member of a group — honest, attuned to the others and always listening.

Sun is a varied record, assembled like a collage. The opener, "Gathering," places a wavering, Albert Ayler-esque saxophone melody before a rippling sunrise of piano, bowed bass and cymbal washes. Amba's playing baritone here, not her usual tenor, but she's mostly in the instrument's upper register, minimizing the timbral differences. "Interbeing" is a heavy, Charles Gayle-esque blowout; her repetitive phrases accumulate intensity as Russel's kit rattles like it's about to explode.

On "Seaside," meanwhile, the group transitions smoothly from Pharoah Sanders-esque rapture to light, free swing. Three other tracks, "Ma," "At Noon" and the closing "In Heart," account for a third of the album's running time. They're home-recorded solo pieces: left-handed piano and right-handed sax, intimate and tender. And "Champa Flower," on which Amba switches to guitar, sounds like one of the acoustic numbers that used to dot Led Zeppelin albums. This earnest, occasionally primitive album offers much to absorb and consider.

Sun: Gathering; Interbeing; Ma; Forevermore; Seaside; Champa Flower; At Noon; Like The Sun; In Heart. (43:10)

Personnel: Zoh Amba, baritone saxophone, acoustic guitar; Lex Korten, piano, synth; Caroline Morton, bass; Miguel Marcel Russel

Ordering info: zohamba.bandcamp.com

Dave Pietro Satori

INDEPENDENT RELEASE

Every one of the Dave Pietro-composed tunes here generates a momentum to proceed, ofttimes laced with affecting solos to enhance the perpetual, seemingly inevitable flow. My ears are drawn to the tune "Yes I Can't," for example, where that propulsion of Pietro and Michael Rodriguez's bright unison horn lines is suspended by the surprise sonic presence of Johnathan Blake's peppy, staccato-driven drum solo.

Satori: "the effortless, spontaneous and sudden dawning of a realization." That's Zen Buddhism as defined by "philosophical entertainer" Alan Watts. To the extent that Pietro's Satori somehow aligns with those notions heard on such philosophically titled tracks as "Satori," "Suchness" and "Renascence" — the listener may need to take an imaginative leap to hear the spiritual connections in this allinstrumental offering. The music does sound like an effortless outpouring of musical expression from track to track; however, the arrangements do keep a rein on what we hear, the material expertly directed even as it unfurls. The meditative "Suchness" is an eloquent expression of tenderness, Johannes Weidenmueller's plaintive bass solo followed by an equally solemn piano slice from Gary Versace. There is much "suchness" here, however one might define it.

The 7/4 samba feel of "Renascence" does point to a rebirth of sorts, its light, effervescent vibe suggesting a spritely late-night dance, with more firecracking sounds from Blake. A somber mood returns with the ending piece, "The Two Silences," reminding us that Satori's strengths may lie with quieter, more reflective offerings, perhaps more —John Ephland

akin to a transcendence.

Satori: Satori: Yes I Can't: Numbers To Leave Numbers Tomorrow's Tears; Suchness; Renascence; The Human Abstract; Amelioration Dedication; The Two Silences. (59:56) Personnel: Dave Pietro, alto saxophone: Michael Rodriguez, trumpet, flugelhorn; Gary Versace, piano, Fender Rhodes, Hammond B-3 organ; Johannes Weidenmueller, acoustic and electric bass; Johnathan Blake, drums; Rogerio Boccato, percussion (1, 2, 6).

Ordering info: davepietro.com

Lafayette Gilchrist & New Volcanoes Move With Love

MORPHIUS

★★★½

Lafayette Gilchrist returns to the electric with Move With Love, his first album in seven years with his New Volcanoes nonet. The Baltimorebased keyboardist has always offered music that is danceable and often complex, without being pretentious and showy. Recorded live at Baltimore's Club Car, the record nevertheless evidences the cohesion of a studio record. In the moments where one is riding the wave of improvisation, the group always reminds us and each other to center the groove: the mainstay of the New Volcanoes, and frankly all of Gilchrist's formations.

But the coming together of a new group of musicians makes this New Volcanoes record distinct. Among them are the trumpeter Leo Maxey, trombonist Christian Hizon, tenor saxophonist Shaquim Muldrow and Bashi Rose on percussion. Highlighting the effort are the brother-and-sister saxophone duo Ebban and Efraim Dorsey. The horns are never not on fire. But their presence does not mitigate the other elements of the group, which features a rhythm section that takes the pocket seriously. To support them, Gilchrist composed tunes that stand out for their



forward movement, what they anticipate. Where one begins is nothing like where we end up. This is crystallized on the tune "Bamboozled," which is introduced slowly. Yet eight minutes later Gilchrist's keys have completely transported us elsewhere. Perhaps it is appropriate then that he has recently taken over the keyboard chair for the Sun Ra Arkestra. -Joshua Myers

Move With Love: Cut Through The Chase; Move With Love; Bamboozled; Baby Steps; BASTA; Cross Pollination Aggregation.

Personnel: Lafayette Gilchrist, keyboard; Carl Filipiak, guitar; Leo Maxey, trumpet; Christian Hizon, trombone; Anthony "Blue" Jenkins, bass guitar; Shaquim Muldrow, Efraim Dorsey (3–6), tenor saxophone; Ebban Dorsey, alto saxophone (3–6); Kevin Pinder, drums; Bashi Rose, percussion.

Ordering info: morphius.bandcamp.com



Inés Velasco A Flash Of Cobalt Blue BESPOKE JAZZ

As a student at Berklee College of Music, Inés Velasco first encountered "Descripción de un brillo azul cobalto" by Mexican poet Jorge Esquinca during his poetry reading in her hometown of Guadalajara, Mexico. Moved by Esquinca's poignant intertwining of moments and memories of his father's death and the life of French poet Gérard de Nerval, Velasco spent nearly a decade and multiple efforts shaping the six sweeping tracks that became *A Flash Of Cobalt Blue*.

Directing a 17-piece Brooklyn ensemble,

Ryan Keberle & Collectiv do Brasil Choro das Aguas

GROOVE MONKEY

In the liner notes to *Choro das Aguas*, Ryan Keberle places Ivan Lins among such immortal composers as Gershwin, Ellington, Lennon & McCartney, Stevie Wonder and Dolly Parton. This is stellar company — embellished with the inclusion of Antonio Carlos Jobim.

On "Rei do Carnaval," the first track on the album, Lins invokes Jobim, and the two Brazilian composers are in good trombone and piano hands as Keberle and Felipe Silveira merge their splendid musicality. Notes spill out of the piano as though they are dancing across the keyboard. And Keberle's trombone, at every instance a delightful vocal quality exudes. There's a festive rhythmic intensity with nearly every tune, sometimes with Felipe Brisola's bass taking the lead as he does on "Essa Mare" before surrendering the narrative to Keberle and Silveira.

"Tens-Long Life" combines Lins' genius with pianist and composer Lyle Mays, and Keberle gifts it with long expressive lines, and it's amazing the way he melodically sustains notes. Two of the 10 tracks belong to Keberle, and "Quintessence" has a Lins effect, particularly the harmonic colors.

Velasco wove Esquinca's vivid, reflective verses into expansive, cinematic soundscapes; in each piece, the storytelling roles played by the wind instruments are remarkable. Only one track, "This Is The Way Down," includes vocals: the velvety, haunting wordless vocals of Catey Esler, at times riding along with swelling horns' melody simultaneously, at times breaking free to dialogue with the piano. The meticulous arrangements carry dramatic weight and provide the narrative arc of stories of memory and loss. "Vauxhall," which reflects upon a childhood travel to the sea in a cobalt blue vehicle, highlights horns ambling along with gentle joy, swaying with tender funky vibes. On all tracks, the Spanish language's own rhythms and timbre become musical catalysts: Music and verse entwine in a luminous and liminal space.

On *A Flash Of Cobalt Blue*, Latin American artistry is revealed not through its rhythmic danceability. Rather, here is another side of Latine musicality: literary, spiritual and steeped in stillness.

—Catalina Maria Johnson

A Flash Of Cobalt Blue: A Flash Of Cobalt Blue; Todo Está Por Decir; The Heron Crosses; This Is The Way Down; In The Tropical Night; Vauxhall; Cae Ia Nieve. (36:04)

Personnel: Inés Velasco, composer, director, M. Alex Ramírez, Gideon Forbes, alto saxophone, flute; John Lowery, Nathan See, tenor saxophone, clarinet; Kenny Pexton, baritone saxophone, bass clarinet; Sam Hoyt, Bobby Spellman, Dave Smith, Joey Kendrick, trumpet, flugelhom; Nick Grinder, Sam Blakesless, Greg DeAngelis, trombone; Julie Dombroski-Jones, bass trombone; Andrew Boureau, piano; Jacob Aviner, guitar, fx; Eduardo Belo, bass; Jongkuk Kim, drums; Jorge Esquica, spoken word; Catey Esler, vocals (3).

Ordering info: inesvelasco.bandcamp.com



Only occasionally does drummer Paulinho Vicente allow the samba pulse to slip away, though it never loses any of the storytelling drama that suffuses the album. The quartet melds gloriously on "Lua Cirandeira" and they capture the spirit of a Lins recording, and gradually a community sing and dance congeals. Lins is 80 years old now, but this tribute is sure to take him smiling back to the "cry of the waters."

—Herb Boyd

Choro das Aguas: Rei do Carnaval; Noites Sertanejas; Quintessence; Choro das Aguas; Saindo de Mim; Essa Mare; Sai de Baixo; Ten-Long Life; Lua Cirandeira; Simple Sermon. (51:37)

Personnel: Ryan Kebele, trombone, vocals; Felipe Silveira, piano, vocals; Felipe Brisola, bass, vocals; Paulinho Vincente, drums, vocals

Ordering info: ryankeberle.com



Jasper Høiby Fellow Creatures: We Must Fight

***1/2

Phronesis, currently on hiatus, was/is part of a wave of 21st-century piano trios with reinvention on their collective minds. On the latest album under founding bassist Jasper Høiby's aegis as a leader, the reinvention impulse takes on a new spin, as he reconsiders old material from the trio and creates a "Phronesis revisited" conceptual package.

A central step in the process is one of textural and ensemble addition, folding in such standard jazz textures as saxophone and flute and as exotic as oud to the musical mix. Another key factor in the renewal process was to have an "outside" ear and voice, the bold saxist-composer Alex Hitchcock, bring his own fresh ideas to the arranging — and re-arranging — stage. Phronesis oeuvre, we thought we knew thee.

In a brisk 37 minutes, the eight-song set comes alive with twists in tow, while staying within the parameters of the Phronesis signature, recognizable "unplugged fusion" feel, as heard on the energetic whiplashing opener, "Lipwash." Odd time signatures, slithering unison lines and earnest emotionality feed into the musical machinery. That said, time and sense of space and gesture open up on "Before The Storm, "After The Storm" and the flexi-feel structure of "Blues Inspiration." Saied Silbak's limber oud improvisation introduces the title cut, a kind of adrenaline-juiced variation on a gospel theme.

The album is blessed with expert playing and taut ensemble weave, and at least one residual hallmark of the piano trio origins remains: Xavi Torres' piano solos tend to steal the improvisational spotlight.

—Josef Woodard

Fellow Creatures: We Must Fight: Lipwash; Before The Storm; Blue Inspiration; After The Storm: One For Us; We Must Fight; Stillness; French. (37:43)

Personnel: Jasper Høiby, bass; Alex Hitchcock, saxophone; Keija Ringa Karahona, flute; Saied Silbak, oud; Xavi Torres, piano; Luca

Ordering info: editionrecords.com

Brazil, Europe and Beyond

Although Rouse had already shown a particular affinity for Brazilian music on his 1962 Blue Note outing, Bossa Nova Bacchanal, this lively production goes deeper into an authentic samba-bossa vibe, courtesy of Brazilians Dom Salvador and Amaury Tristão, principal composers on Cinnamon Flower and key players in Rouse's 11-piece ensemble. Salvador's "Backwoods Echo (Sertão)" opens the album with a burst of Brazilian-tinged funk-fusion energy, with drummer Bernard Purdie and electric bassist Wilbur Bascomb fueling the percolating groove for Rouse's mellow tenor solo, followed in turn by Claudio Roditi's brash high-note trumpet solo. Tristão's "Disenchantment (Desencontro)," a poignant number reminiscent of gentle Jobim offerings like "Desafinado" and "Meditation," showcase Rouse at his most tender. The closing bonus track is Salvador's buoyant Carnaval-inspired ditty "Meeting House."

Ordering info: resonancerecords.org

Another recently resurrected session is Roland Kirk's Domino: Live At Radio Bremen Studios 1963 (Moosicus; ★★★ 43:09). Accompanied by Swiss pianist George Gruntz, French bassist Guy Pedersen and Swiss drummer Daniel Humair, multi-instrumentalist Kirk delivers dynamic performances on a set of three standards, one original and singular interpretations of tunes by Charles Mingus, Horace Silver, Charlie Parker and Benny Golson. Highlights from this live TV performance from November 1963 (broadcast in the spring of 1964 and now available on CD + bonus DVD) include Kirk alternating from flute to stritch on the swinging waltz-time title track, his earthy tenor playing on the funky "Sister Sadie" and his seductive sax work on the ballad "Tenderly." Kirk's most audacious moments come via his simultaneous multiple horn playing on his uptempo burner "Three In One. Without The Oil" and his raucous interpretation of "Better Git It In Your Soul," a tune he played in Mingus' band. His straightforward reading of the standard "There Will Never Be Another You" brings his considerable manzello chops to the fore. Gruntz distinguishes himself as a firstrate soloist and swinging accompanist, while the rhythm tandem of Pederson and Humair drives home these tunes with energy and interactive flair

Ordering info: moosicus.com

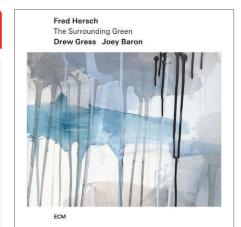


Cal Tjader, perhaps the most influential Latin bandleader of non-Latin descent, delves into decidedly commercial territory on Amazonas (Craft; ★★★ 38:44). Produced by Airto Moreira and arranged by keyboardist George Duke (playing some cringe-worthy synths under the pseudonym Dawilli Gonga), this 1976 Fantasy release is Tjader's capitulation to the funk-fusion that reigned supreme at the time. Despite the dated trappings, there are noteworthy performances by a host of authentic Brazilians, including flutist Hermeto Pascoal, keyboardist Egberto Gismonti, bassist Luiz Alves, drummer Robertinho Silva, pianist Aloisio Milanez and trombonist Raul de Souza, who delivers a superb solo on Sergio Mendes' "Noa Noa." As for Tjader, whether on vibraphone or marimba, he's buried beneath a deluge of glossy overproduction. In the end, Amazonas sounds more like an extension of Duke's Liberated Fantasies (also released in 1976) than a showcase for Tjader.

Ordering info: craftrecordings.com

A previously unknown recording, Cecil Taylor/Tony Oxley's Flashing Spirits (Burning Ambulance; *** 43:32) documents the inventive duo in a September 1988 performance at the Outside In Festival in Crawley, U.K. This early encounter between pianist and drummer, who would continue to perform together until Taylor's final public appearance at the Whitney Museum in April 2016, is marked by their uncanny conversational flow and shifting dynamics. The 38-minute title track runs the gamut from shimmering introspection to turbulent outbursts of kinetic energy on their respective instruments. Two brief encores further showcase the remarkably intuitive connection between the whirlwind piano master and Oxley, who may have been Taylor's most responsive and tuned-in drumming partner in his later decades.

Ordering info: burningambulance.com



Fred Hersch The Surrounding Green

Hersch's third for ECM reunites the pianist with longtime compatriots Drew Gress (bass) and Joey Baron (drums). But perhaps another trio from Hersch's past was present in his mind. It was with Baron and bassist Charlie Haden on Hersch's astounding *Sarabande* (1987) that the ascendant young pianist first forayed into avant-garde territory, a nod to Haden's former bandleaders Ornette Coleman and Keith Jarrett. Echoes of that adventurous album resonate through the decades into this one.

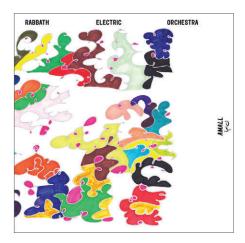
After all this time, Hersch sounds most like himself, making these tributes exquisitely personal. As he did with Haden, Hersch honors Coleman, this time with an agile rumination over "Law Years." Haden penned "First Song" for his wife, Ruth Cameron Haden, and the trio invokes it as a nocturne in memoriam for both Charlie, who left us in 2014, and Ruth, who followed seven years later.

Like Haden, Hersch has the uncanny ability to play free as if there were chord changes, and changes as if there were none. Gress and Baron are of similar spirit, offering stability yet suppleness, allowing Hersch to traverse the peripheries of harmony, time and space. This is exemplary on the title track as well as on Hersch's "Plainsong," studies in lavish, Epicurean rubato, whispers inexorably unfurling to their deepest apogees. In contrast, the Gershwins' "Embraceable You" is an abstracted toggle between two keys. This offering by Hersch, Gress and Baron is engaging, ardent and otherwise splendid; it's conceivable Manfred Eicher has found the great piano trio to anchor his catalogue for the foreseeable future. —Gary Fukushima

The Surrounding Green: Plainsong; Law Years; The Surrounding Green; Palhaço; Embraceable You; First Song; Anticipation. (41:29)

Personnel: Fred Hersch, piano; Drew Gress, bass; Joey Baron, drums.

Ordering info: ecmrecords.com



Rabbath Electric Orchestra

Amall **HEAVENLY SWEETNESS**

***1/2

Amall is world music based on the travels of bass master François Rabbath and his keyboard master son, Sylvain. Its nine tracks, all written by the Rabbaths, are adventures in atmosphere and feel. Virtuosity is a given here: François, 94, is known for championing his bass's rarely heard high register, and this group plays both regular and unusual instruments, like the Cristal Baschet, a creation of glass rods that conjures the theremin.

While François's unique bass sound is the orchestra's signature, it is only one of the elements that distinguishes this sophisticated and cosmopolitan recording. How special this big, swinging band is becomes clear immediately on "Sevillana," with Laurent de Wilde's skittery piano and Victor Wooten's trademark popping bass. It's a great opener.

The album regains its drive with "Samares," a pulsating track with fresh sonics from flutist Olivier Hutin, bass clarinetist Raphaël Imbert and percussionist Minino Garay.

Sylvain's Rhodes beds the plaintive "Espoir," a somewhat tentative tune featuring the Cristal Baschet. "Atoun," which follows, is more dynamic and "oriental" as it speaks to François' Syrian heritage.

Other highlights as Amall winds down: Mathieu Chedid's stinging guitar solo over delirious strings on "Camomile"; François's depth on "Samir," juxtaposed with Hutin's happy flute; and Sylvain's darting synth on "Creation," the delightful closer. —Carlo Wolff

Amall: Sevillana; 66 Grand Street; Samares; Espoir; Atoun; Twin City; Camomile; Samir; Creation. (43:59)

Personnel: Francois Rabbath, Poto Austin, Guillermo Benavides. G.P. Cremonini, Hans Sturm, bass; Sylvain Rabbath, piano, Rhodes, synth: Xavier Bizouard, tenor saxophone: Julien Boye, drums/Cristal Baschet; Mathieu Chedid, guitar; Laurent de Wilde, piano; Pendit Dinesh, Julien Favier, Minino Garay, percussion; Aurelien Fradagrada, Keziah Jones, guitar; Olivier Hutin, flute; Raphael Imbert, bass clarinet: Lucie Leker, Benoit Pineau, violin; Olivier Marin, viola; Raphael Moraly, cello: Valentin Pellet, trumpet; Lynn Adib, vocals

Ordering info: rabbathelectricorchestra.bandcamp.com





Joe Armon-Jones All The Quiet (Part I)

***1/2

All The Quiet (Part II) AQUARII

"Futuristic jazz" goes back to the 1960s when bandleaders such as George Russell and Sun Ra incorporated science-fiction themes and avant-garde instrumentation into their music. Today's musicians are still pushing jazz to unlimited heights, including London-based producer, composer and keyboardist Joe Armon-Jones. His latest experimentation is All The Quiet, a two-part concept album full of groove-oriented sonic forces complete with dub, soul, electronic and hip-hop influences.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Armon-Jones, searching for creative distractions, started exploring the sound world of dub by taking that process and applying it to jazz, funk and all the other genres he was into. He used his free time to teach himself how to use a mixing desk, an electronic device that was also used by Jamaican sound engineer King Tubby, who influenced the development of dub music in the 1960s. The result was this double album; Part I debuted in March and Part II in June. All The Quiet is his first solo project since 2019's Turn To Clear View and showcases his evolution as an artist, blending multiple genres to create cohesive ear candy for audiences to experience.

The records' thematic scope revolves around a dystopian narrative set in the year 3999 where music has lost its creativity, and artists such as Armon-Jones are battling to keep the soul of music alive in an age of indifference and hostility to the creative spirit. This album is, in a sense, Armon-Jones' way of stressing the importance of music and the need for more appreciation of the art form.

From the opening track, "Lifetones," the album sets a tone of rich, groove-laden compositions. Armon-Jones' keyboard work is both intricate and expressive, weaving through complex rhythms and harmonies. Tracks like "Forgiveness" and "Nothing Noble" highlight his ability to fuse jazz improvisation with dub and funk elements. The Afro-punk-inspired "Kingfisher" features dub poet Asheber, echoing celebratory sounds about community whereas "Eye Swear" has more of a hip-hop-infused vibe.

While Part I builds up sonic anticipation with thick, heavy grooves, Part II delves deeper into the space-driven narrative, with an even darker tonal shift.

Armon-Jones continues his mastery on keyboards on tracks including "War Transmission" and "Paladin Of Sound & Circumstance," drawing comparisons to fusion pianists Herbie Hancock and Chick Corea. "Journey South" features the soothing tenor saxophone sounds of British musician Nubya Garcia. Both records feature appearances from Ezra Collective, a British jazz quintet of which Armon-Jones is a member. Armon-Jones also features British vocal collaborators like Greentea Peng, Wu-Lu, Yazmin Lacey and Hak Baker, each bringing a chill, neo-soul vibe to the records they are featured on.

Through their sophisticated compositions, thematic depth and collaborative spirit, both records solidify Armon-Jones' position at the forefront of jazz fusion. -Veronica Johnson

All The Quiet, Pt. I: Lifetones; Forgiveness; Kingfisher, Nothing Noble; Eye Swear; Danger Everywhere; The Citadel; Snakes; Show Me; Hurry Up & Wait. (57:28)

Personnel: Joe Armon-Jones, keyboards, percussion; Mutale Chashi (1–9), Luke Wynter (10), bass; Natcyet Waklii (1–4, 7, 8), Jaega Gordon (5, 6, 9), Morgan Simpson (10), drums; Nubya Garcia, James Mollison, tenor saxophone (1–4, 7, 8); Ife Ogunjobi, trumpet; Oscar Jerome, guitar (1, 8); Kwake Bass, percussion (9); Yazmin Lacey (2), Asheber (3), Goya Gumbani (5), vocals.

All The Quiet, Pt. II: Acknowledgement Is Key; Lavender; Westmoreland: PSR Orchestra: Paladin Of Sound & Circumstance: Another Place; War Transmission; 505 Standby; Journey South; One Way Traffic, (55:55)

Personnel: Joe Armon-Jones, keyboards, percussion; Mutale Chashi, bass; Natcyet Wakili (1–3, 5, 7–10), Jaega Gordon (6), drums; Fani Zahar, flute (1); Nubya Garcia, James Mollison, tenor saxophone (2, 3, 7–9); ife Ogunjobi (2, 3, 6–8), trumpet; Oscar Jerome, guitar (6); Kwake Bass, percussion (3, 7); Hak Baker (1), Asheber (3), Greentea Peng (6), Wu-Lu (6), Yazmin Lacey (10),

Ordering info: joearmon-jones.bandcamp.com

Keep on Walkin' on, All Stars

The Alexis P. Suter Band: Just Stay High (Nola Blue; ★★★ 55:01) Suter's gospel-trained contralto does just fine at center stage of her seventh album. In her 60s, Brooklynite covers the full range of expressiveness as she audits above-average original blues and blues-rock tunes, along with updating pop classics by the Kinks, Leon Russell and Gloria Jones. On "Be On Your Way," a rudimental break-up blues penned by her longtime guitarist Jimmy Bennett, she stomps her authority, unsettling the listener like a brick through a pane of glass. Another Bennett winner, the dirge "God Gave Me The Blues," evokes the high farce of R&B wild man Screamin' Jay Hawkins searching for salvation. Throughout, Suter elevates triteness to

Ordering info: nolabluerecords.com

Lisa Mann's Northwestern All-Stars Featuring Terrie Odabi: The Great Women In Blues (Jay Ray; ★★★1/2 64:01) Patrons of a Swiss club were treated to an exciting performance by Portland's Mann and Oakland's Odabi in 2023. With vocals tapping into emotional realms beyond the reach of most of their peers, they project credibility as devoted interpreters of famous songs in the repertoires of Big Mama Thornton, Etta James, Koko Taylor and other "Great Blues Women." Everyone in their ad-hoc yet disciplined band of Portlanders — drummer Jimi Bott, organist Louis Pain, guitarists Jason Thomas and Ben Rice — merits praise.

Ordering info: lisamannmusic.com

Doug Macleod: Between Somewhere And Goodbye (Reference; ★★★★ 47:11) On his latest triumph, storyteller Macleod appears inspired to learn that his deep-seated empathy for blues actually increases late in life. With a low-decibel rhythm section and cooing backup singers, he sings with complete honesty and brings a less-is-more approach to his guitar playing. Warmth, commingled at times with a Mississippi John Hurt-like sweetness, soaks Macleod's music naturally. He's a sure hand at getting his songs to reverberate with a piercing wit and sensitivity to lyrics on life's journey.

Ordering info: referencerecordings.com

D.K. Harrell: Talkin' Heavy (Alligator; *** 48:03) D'Kieran Harrell has a striking vitality and contemporaneity on his second outing. The 27-year-old's singing is assured and straightforward, while his precise, imaginative guitar sorties build on his analyses of Albert Collins and Albert, Freddie and, especially, B.B. King. Having weathered hard times in his life, the Louisiana native makes believable connections of feeling to sturdy originals (some of an unlikely stylistic nature, like disco-blues "PTLD") and refreshing hybrids of blues, soul, R&B, gospel. Thank trombonist Mike Rinta for the sparkling horn arrangements.

Ordering info: alligator.com



Joe Bonamassa: Breakthrough (J&R Adventures; *** 44:45) The premier blues-rock populist has long demonstrated his remarkable technical facility on his guitars. For his 17th studio album, he seems more concerned about songs than ever before and evidences an affinity for writing with Tom Hambridge and other notables. Self-realization and -reflection often surface in the tuneful songs. Don't worry, Bonamassa fans, he doesn't scrimp on his burn-up-the frets displays.

Ordering info: jbonamassa.com

All Things Swamp: Dressed (Little Village; ★★★1/2 33:19) Closing 2,000-plus miles distance, Kid Andersen's recording studio in San Jose seems like it's located in the French Quarter for this fun-and-funky mostly instrumental album from music director-tubist Luke Kirley, session guitar ace Dean Parks and several more Californians. Providing all the flair and technique prerequisite to a New Orleans R&B sensibility, the group works up its own conjurations of soulful songs borrowed from, among others, Louis Armstrong, Big Sam's Funky Nation and the Cannonball Adderley Quintet. Ordering info: littlevillagefoundation.org

North Mississippi Allstars: Still Shakin' (New West; ★★★½ 48:07) Many years and recordings down the road, the Dickinson brothers continue to creatively evolve their modern version of Mississippi hill country blues. This time they replicate the vibe of their first record, Shake Hands With Shorty (2000), assisted by new Allstars guitarists Ray Ray Holloman (Eminem) and Joey Williams (Blind Boys of Alabama), plus guests. Cody and Luther's vocals are nothing special, lacking inventive inflection, and it's Williams who has the strongest vocal presence. Luther shines on guitar throughout the album, extracting lyricism from fair or good originals and songs by exemplars such as Furry Lewis, Fred Mc-Dowell and R. L. Burnside.

Ordering info: newwestrecords.com



Tropos Switches ENDECTOMORPH

On Switches, the New York collective Tropos opts for an approach that feels akin to an orchestra with no conductor. Such is a daunting prospect that requires open-mindedness, patience, trust, chemistry and a shared pool of humility. Even knowing who introduced the musical catalyst of any given track — whether violinist Ledah Finck, clarinetist Yuma Uesaka, pianist Phillip Golub or percussionist Aaron Edgcomb — there's a fludity and unity between the pieces that renders identifying who wrote what largely moot.

For example, Finck composed "The Best Donuts In Pennsylvania" and Golub wrote the subsequent track "Mother In Lieu." Yet, motifs throughout both evoke similar narrative qualities that transform the music into sonic stand-ins for the expressions of a character or the energy of a setting. This sense of association and projection gives Switches a whimsical appeal. Its tumultuousness turns into an inviting adventure rather than a musical potpourri begging to be deciphered. Intriguing sounds and interactions between the instruments keep each "story" moving, becoming something that can't be put down. The string harmonics and bell tones in the quieter moments of "husk" give a cleansing reprieve. Declarative and repeated rhythms combined with rapid descending chromatic phrases infuse "Witchess" with a drop of mischief. The minimalist style of "Headline's" small notes, dinging bells, clacking sticks and rapid melodic flourishes usher in the bustle of an active newsroom. Switches is an experiential record that embodies Tropos' duality of fastidious work and cheerful camaraderie, which makes the music a remarkably balanced, enjoyable listen. —Kira Grunenberg

Switches: Witchess; The Best Donuts In Pennsylvania; Mother In Lieu: Lukán: Switches: Between The Times: Aerator Debris: Husk:

Personnel: Ledah Finck, violin; Yuma Uesaka, clarinet, bass clarinet: Phillip Golub, piano: Aaron Edgcomb, drums, percussion

Ordering info: endectomorph.com

Tim Jago Time Shift **BESPOKE JAZZ**

"Time Shift" is not just an apt name for the opening track of guitarist Tim Jago's first album under his own name; it's also apt for the album as a whole. This combo deftly tethers between not just tempos, but sensibilities from moment to moment. On



the aforementioned title cut, Martin Bejerano adds a fleshy dash of 1970s style fusion keys, while Jago's licks lace in Middle Eastern flavors, and Mark Small's saxophone, when locked in with Dion Kerr's bass, grounds the affair.

Meanwhile, "Calypso'ish" opens with David Chiverton's calypso-tinged drums, and it absolutely flowers with excitement: a spiritual offspring of classic Bob James recordings like "Take Me To Mardi Gras." "Soil To Sky" is another standout track. The song opens with a multilayered percussive recording of Jago's voice and rolls back and forth between march and a sort of dirge before flipping something altogether different.

Also included are two covers: Bernie Miller's "Bernie's Tune" and the oft-interpreted "Body And Soul." The latter opens up with Chiverton feeling very much in the mode of the great Vernel Fournier on Ahmad Jamal's classic 1958 recording of "Poinciana." Time Shift is a collection of tracks, primarily composed by Tim Jago, that offer both tasty grooves and a good measure of surprises. —Ayana Contreras

Personnel: Tim Jago, guitar; Mark Small, saxophone; Martin Bejerano, keyboards; Dion Kerr, electric and upright bass: David Chiverton, drums

Ordering info: timjagomusic.com

Time Shift: Time Shift; Calypso'ish; Soil To Sky; Major; Bernie's Tune; Body And Soul; Fine Line; Kind

Jimmy Farace Hours Fly, Flowers Die SHIFTING PARADIGM

Not since Claire Daly has anyone found such a piping sweet spot on the baritone saxophone as Chicago reed man Jimmy Farace. On his strikingly original debut as a leader, a bittersweet meditation on the passage of time, Farace has composed seven



tunes and arranged nine, boldly integrating string quartet with jazz quintet. He has a melodic knack and plays with a swinging, natural flow. His string arrangements succeed better on some tracks than others.

In the success column, enter the exquisite rendering of Duke Ellington's "Single Petal Of A Rose," as well as Farace's dreamy original "Ferson Creek," where the strings play answer lines and also add a fun "babbling brook" pizzicato figure. On a yearning edition of Kurt Weill's "My Ship," Farace exposes his debt to Gerry Mulligan. Toward the end of that cut, however, and at moments during "Growing Pains," "Prophetic Dreams" and "Hours Fly, Flowers Die," the music starts to feel more crowded than enriched by the strings. A little more air would have been welcome. (That may be why the straightahead blowing sans strings on "Directionally Challenged" comes as a relief, particularly Julius Tucker's splashy piano solo.) An impressive launch for an outstanding new voice on baritone sax. -Paul de Barros

Hours Fly, Flowers Die: Growing Pains; Ferson Creek; Prophetic Dreams; Directionally Challenged; My Ship; Signs Of Spring; Hours Fly, Flowers Die; Single Petal Of A Rose; Backyard Bobcat. (64:33) **Personnel:** Jimmy Farace, baritone saxophone; Kenny Reichert, guitar; Julius Tucker, piano; Clark Sommers, bass; Dana Hall, drums; Victoria Moreira, Naomi Culp, violin; Susan Bengtson Price, viola; Hope Shepherd Decelle, cello.

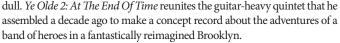
Ordering info: shiftingparadigmrecords.com

Jacob Garchik Ye Olde 2: At The End Of Time

YESTEREVE ***1/2

Trombonist Jacob Garchik is a staunch sideman and arranger for Mary Halvorson, Darcy James Argue and Kronos Quartet, to name just a

few of his associations. When he takes the driver's seat, the journey is never



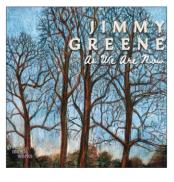
Perhaps reflecting the fact that the world has gotten a lot weirder, this time he's swapped fantasy for science fiction. Three top-drawer electric guitarists is already a lot of sonic firepower, but to realize that battle royale, Garchik marshals six. They are kept on a tight leash, executing close unisons and snugly interlocking parts; even their solos tend to follow carefully mapped paths, only flirting with entropy on the exhilarating shootout, "Exo Microbiology." At some points, Garchik further manipulates scale by pushing Vinnie Sperrazza to the front of a bass-free mix and overdubbing himself into a looming horn choir. The music feels freer, but that's mainly a product of quick tempos and cannily placed pauses. While the preponderance of guitar gets a bit tiring, the music's playful audacity is rewarding. —Bill Meyer

Ye Olde 2: At The End Of Time: One Can Only Go Up; Transcending Time; Caro Ortolano; Ex Microbiology; Dyson Spheres; Von Neumann Probes; Omega Point; Ye Olde vs. Simulacrus; Floating Brain. (42:47) Personnel: Jacob Garchik, trombone; Brandon Seabrook, Mary Halvorson (1–6, 8, 9), Ava Mendoza, Sean Moran, Miles Okazaki, (7–8), guitar, Jonathon Goldberger, guitar, baritone guitar (1–6, 8, 9); Vinnie Sperrazza, drums (1–6, 8, 9); Josh Dion, drums (7–8).

Ordering info: jacobgarchik.com



Like its three immediate predecessors, Jimmy Greene's 12th leader album honors the life of his daughter, Ana Márquez-Greene, who was 6 when a madman murdered her at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, in 2012.



Recorded in February 2024, the kinetic, harmonically intricate suite portrays the various emotions experienced by Greene and his family over the ensuing years, evoking Ana's love of dancing with seven original songs and a "Speak Low" that presents a welter of shifting meters.

Greene, now 50, frames his full-bodied, harmonically authoritative tenor and soprano saxophone voices with a core quintet of elite, generationally contemporaneous old friends and associates. No matter how complex the chart, Greene solos with transparent intensity that reminds us of his mentor Jackie McLean and his work with Horace Silver and Harry Connick, while the clarity and soulfulness of his writing speaks to his consequential tenures with Tom Harrell and Ron Carter. But Greene has long since transcended influences; the music embodies Charlie Parker's mantra, "If you don't live it, it won't come out of your horn."

As We Are Now: Praises; Seventeen Days; Impatient; Unburdened; As We Are Now; Anhelando; Flood Stage; Speak Low. (44:34)

Personnel: Jimmy Greene, tenor and soprano saxophone, percussion; Mike Moreno, guitar; Aaron Goldberg, piano, Rhodes electric piano; Shedrick Mitchell, Hammond B-3 organ; Dezron Douglas, bass; Jonathan Barber, drums; Rogerio Boccato, percussion; Javier Colon, vocals (2); Gabriel Globus-Hoenich, congas (8); Nelba and Isaiah Marquez-Greene, vocals (5).

Ordering info: jimmygreene.com

Catching the Continental Drift

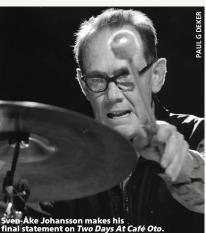
The singular Swedish percussionist, composer and visual artist Sven-Åke Johansson died June 15 in his adopted home of Berlin at 82. Prankster, conceptualist and renaissance man, he remained committed to his work right up to his passing. Two Days At Café Oto (Otoroku; ★★★★ 115:20) captures him at the titular London club in April 2024 with musicians roughly half his age, all adherents of his peculiar mindset in one way or another. Fellow Berlin-based Swede Joel Grip plays bass across the album, joined in shifting combinations by two alto saxophonists: Frenchman Pierre Borel Grip's [Ahmed] bandmate Seymour Wright. Johansson's deceptively simple playing collides swing elegance with a pointillistic surge-and-recede attack. The saxophonists are like oil and water, Borel making oblique Thelonious Monk references in his buoyant lines while Wright is a cubist. On one piece Borel plays drums in SÅJ's style while the leader straps on an accordion. It's a model of competing concepts, turning incongruity into tension-rich aesthetic.

Ordering info: otoroku.bandcamp.com

Hyperboreal Trio (Relative Pitch: ★★★1/2 43:01) is an improvising trio spanning continents and generations, with veteran Norwegian bassist Ingebrigt Håker-Flaten joining forces with Oslo-based Danish alto saxophonist Signe Emmeluth and Berlin-based Argentine drummer Axel Filip for a set of fiery three-way conversations. Across seven flinty tracks, they jab and feint, adroitly bobbing and weaving within a forward motion. Håker Flaten's fat, woody tone provides rippling muscle and propulsion, freeing up Filip to fracture time. Emmeluth thrives on that wonderfully jagged rhythmic foundation. At its most abstract, as on ferociously splintered, stop-start "Pressurized WC," the trio revels in a hot-foot display, but on "Capiango" the trio cools down, revealing its interactive modus operandi in slow motion.

Ordering info: relativepitchrecords.bandcamp.com

With most new projects. Copenhagen-based alto saxophonist-composer Maria Faust comes armed with an intellectual concept. She often explores the sociopolitical complexities of her Estonian homeland, digging into its oppressive conditions before it was freed from the Soviet voke. Marches Rewound & Rewritten (Stunt; ★★★ 42:51) is the third album by her Sacrum Facere ensemble, and as its title suggests she reimagines the propagandist military music she grew up hearing, placing martial snare drum rhythms played by Emanuele Maniscalco at the center. While much of the album strides over inside-out march cadences, the rich contrapuntal arrangements voiced by a six-strong choir of reeds and brass transcend the rhythmic foundation as they move through ornate minimalist tropes and soaring chorales



crowned by the leader's searing, soulful improvs; it's a profound act of reclamation.

Ordering info: mariafauststunt.bandcamp.com

Expat American drummer-composer Jim Black has exerted a huge impact on the European jazz scene over the years, but Better You Don't (Intakt; ★★★1/2 44:53), the second album from his band of voung EU disciples The Schrimps, focuses on his pop-informed melodies. In fact, although all 10 tunes are instrumental, the liner notes include lyrics he penned once the band left the studio. The toe-tapping grooves and sleek tunefulness could inspire singalongs, but the way Dutch alto saxophonist Asger Nissen and German tenor saxophonist Julius Gawlik dig into the hooky themes, transplanting and heating up cool jazz verities in deftly braided multilinear improvisations, confirms the band's deep traditional roots. Black and bassist Felix Henkelhausen simultaneously maintain and dissect strutting rhythms, lighting a fire under the frontline's eloquent expressionism.

Ordering info: intaktrec.ch

Bassist Olie Brice is a crucial presence on the British improvised music scene, providing the low end in numerous working bands and ad hoc assemblages, but he once again proves his mettle as a bandleader on the new quartet recording All It Was (West Hill: ★★★1/2 44:29). a no-fuss session with a stellar band: pianist Alexander Hawkins, tenor saxophonist Rachel Musson and drummer Will Glaser. His compositions are sturdy, transparent post-bop vehicles built to drive improvisation, and on tune after tune his bull-bodied tone and judiciously muscular attack carve out loose contours that his bandmates deftly color in. Hawkins reveals a nonchalant command of jazz's entire history, but I've never heard Musson modulate her penchant for exuberant free blowing with such discipline and craftsmanship.

Ordering info: westhill.bandcamp.com



Mark Solborg Tungemål: Confluencia

***1/2

Guitarist Mark Solborg's parents came from Argentina and Denmark, and he's long been probing the interior body of his guitar in Copenhagen, concentrating on ambient improvisation for much of the time. His ever-evolving Tungemål group's first three LPs were named *I, II* and *III*, with trumpeter Susana Santos Silva and pianist Simon Toldam making previous appearances. Percussionist Ingar Zach (also credited with "vibrating membranes") joins them for this latest release on the Danish label ILK.

Solborg does anything but hog the limelight, inviting trumpet and piano to tentatively open the proceedings, his own guitar creeping carefully around the perimeter or shading in the background. Both Solborg and Toldam employ electronics as texturing strokers; with Zach's anything-but-traditionalism, it's sometimes uncertain which player is responsible for certain painterly sweeps. There are subliminal bass grumblings that might seep from the guitar, but when Solborg plays acoustic traceries, he's suddenly sharpened into string-certainty. Three minutes into the second track, he'd already provided a recognisable electric guitar presence, with hovering mirage sonics. Silva and Toldam's succinct thematic arrangements are tenderly melodic, while Solborg seeks atmospheric fluidity. Almost all of the compositions are his originals. The results are extremely moodsome, evocative and filmic in their ghostly presence. The foursome possesses a careful rapport. Silva is always tuneful, no matter how abstractly spaced out her phrases are, inhabiting these concise pieces. Solborg succeeds via an intense restraint, as all group members pointedly select placement for their fragile expressions. - Martin Longley

Confluencia: Spoke; Southern Swag (6 5); The Wires; Cantamos; Planes; Inward; Janus - og sidste ord; Friction, bell, bump; Planes; Pitches & Peace. (50:50)

Personnel: Mark Solborg, guitars, electronics; Susana Santos Silva, trumpet; Simon Toldam, piano, keyboards; Ingar Zach, percussion, vibrating membranes.

Ordering info: solborg.bandcamp.com

8-Bit Big Band **Orchestrator Emulator**

TEAMCHUCK

***1/2

First and honest reaction? Sun Ra would have loved this shit. Themes from electronic games - if you know this world, you'll identify the sources; if you don't, it hardly matters — arranged for sprawling big band. The 8-Bit guys already enjoy a



cult following, and among audiences for whom "big band" must originally have seemed like very exotic fruit, indeed.

This fifth album suggests that far from being a quickly exhausted concept, a thriving subgenre has been forged. Bandleader Charlie Rosen continues to do astonishing work. What could be larky and throwaway (but still entertaining) is done in an atmosphere of high seriousness and professionalism, and that may be the most impressive

Is the Sun Ra analogy just critical reaching? Not a bit of it. There's the same combination of surrealism and straightahead swing, the same unfailing instinct for earworm melody, the same ability to stud a chart with first-rate soloing while still maintaining a collectivist identity. And don't tell me Sonny Blount didn't spend any time in arcades, space-bonnet on backwards, willing the "aliens" to get through. —Brian Morton

Orchestrator Emulator: Intro To Album 5; Wii Sports Theme; Brinstar; Super Mario Bros. 3 Overworld Theme; Kass's Theme; Waluigi Pinball; No More What Ifs; Super Mario World Overworld Theme; Space Junk Road; Tokyo Daylight; Casino Night Zone; Megalovnia; Super Mario Praise Break; Kass's Theme (Choro Version). (62:42)

Personnel: Charlie Rosen, guitar, bandleader, arranger; plus 81 others.

Ordering info: charlierosen.com/teamchuck

Benny Benack III This Is The Life

BANDSTAND PRESENTS

Benny Benack III was clearly born to be an entertainer. His grandfather (the original Benny Benack) played trumpet with Tommy Dorsey and Raymond Scott and led Dixieland groups. His father, Benny Benack Jr., is a tenor saxophonist. The youngest



Benack is a versatile trumpeter who ranges from swing to hard-bop in addition to being a likable singer who loves to entertain.

On This Is The Life, Benack III is at the Blue LLama Jazz Club in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 2024 with a fine rhythm section and, on a few numbers, his dad. The leader is in enthusiastic form throughout. His trumpet playing is excellent whether on a rare and lengthy jazz version of "The Sound Of Music," his original "Song For Our Roger" and a stirring "Sugar & Spice." The rhythm section is excellent, with Picard's solos being a major plus. The older Benack's contributions to a few songs (including clarinet on "When You're Smiling") make one wish that he were on more numbers.

So why the three-star rating? The leader's very forceful scat-singing on "Blue Moon" and "When You're Smiling" crosses the line between exuberant and annoying. A little less coffee and a bit more restraint and this would have been a four-star record. -Scott Yanow

This Is The Life: This Is The Life; The Sound Of Music; Song For Our Roger; When You're Smiling; Sugar & Spice; Crazy She Calls Me; Some Enchanted Evening; Spring In Manhattan; Pure Imagination; Blue Moon; Without A Love; Everybody (Backstreet's Back). (73:54)

Personnel: Benny Benack III, trumpet, vocals; Benny Benack Jr., tenor saxophone, clarinet; Mathis Picard, piano; Russell Hall, bass; Joe Peri, drums.

Ordering info: bandstandpresents.com

Plunky & Oneness of Juju

Made Through Ritual **STRUT**

Made Through Ritual, a pleasantly varied Afro-pop funk/fusion album, is reeds and winds player Plunky Branch's first recording of new material under his own name since Drive It in 2008; he released the historic



work Live At The East 1973 in 2019. Having co-founded the multi-kulti band Oneness with DJ-producer Jimmy Gray (now deceased) in San Francisco in 1971, debuted as a soloist on Strata East in 1973 and fronted European dance hits in the '80s, Branch has both avant-garde and crossover cred aplenty. He's also been a TV studio musician, jazz educator and celebrated creative force in his native Richmond, Virginia. Plunky has rearranged digital samples by Jamal Gray, Jimmy's son, for live performers, sometimes punctiliously multitracking tenor, alto, soprano saxes and flute parts over glistening keyboard fills, occasional synth flourishes and beds, taut electric guitar and bass and solid drumming. Several tunes here invite radio play, especially the title number and backbeat "Broad Street." Though it opens with seductive vocalist "Chyp" Green and ends with provocative poet Burnem, Plunky is the album's heart and smarts. —Howard Mandel

Made Through Ritual: Share This Love; Made Through Ritual; In Due Time; Free Spirit; Shades Of Light; Freedom's Call; Broad Street Strut; Cosmic Dust; Children Of The Drum. (34.19) Personnel: James "Plunky" Branch, saxophones, flutes, vocals, percussion, producer; Jamal Gray, sequenced sample tracks, co-producer (with Jamiah Fire Branch). Fabian Lance, electric keyboards: Carl Lester, electric guitars; Michael Hawkins, bass; Ty Onley, drums; Abdou Muhammed, djembe, percussion; P. Muzi Branch, electric bass; Bee Boisseau, keyboards, tracked instruments (1); Charlayne "Chyp Green, vocals (1); Roscoe Burnem, poem (9); DJ Punisha Anderson, tracked instruments (7).

Ordering info: onenessofjuju.bandcamp.com

Alexa Tarantino The Roar And The Whisper **BLUE ENGINE**

★★★½

"Inside Looking Out" boasts the opening title of The Roar And The Whisper. Indeed, as the newest member of the Jazz at Lincoln Orchestra, saxophonist Alexa Tarantino is the consummate



insider, in more ways than one. That in no way diminishes the high caliber of her swinging, straightahead stuff.

Primarily on alto (though the fetching soprano-led waltz "Portraits Of A Shadow" and thoughtful flute vehicle "Luminance" are both highlights), Tarantino leads an ace quartet with pianist Steven Feifke, bassist Philip Norris and drummer Mark Whitfield Jr. through seven originals, two lesser-known pieces by Wayne Shorter and Billy Strayhorn, and Cécile McLorin Salvant's "Moon Song," with the singer sweetly crooning along. Moods run the gamut, from the crawling, noir-ish title track to Salvant's whisper to the joyful exclamations of "Provoking Luck." (This last finds Tarantino as comfortable as an old shoe, whizzing around its harmonic corners like she's been through them a million times, with pointed pauses that seem to greet passing friends.) The through-line is Tarantino's clear infatuation with the music she is playing on this unpretentious charmer of a record. -Michael I. West

The Roar And The Whisper: Inside Looking Out; The Roar And The Whisper; This Is For Albert; Portraits Of A Shadow; Luminance; Moon Song; Back In Action; Provoking Luck; All Along; Tigress. (49:55) **Personnel:** Alexa Tarantino, alto and soprano saxophone, flute; Steven Feifke, piano; Philip Norris bass; Mark Whitfield Jr., drums; Cécile McLorin Salvant, vocals (6, 10), Keita Ogawa, percussion (10).

Ordering info: jazz.org/blueengine





Jazz & Hip-Hop: Us3's Creative Dialogue Returns to the Studio

uring the 1990s, genre-blending pioneers Us3's signature fusion of jazz and hip-hop became a global fixture, heard everywhere from grocery stores to barbershops. But just as quickly as they rose to prominence, Us3 quietly stepped away from the spotlight.

Now, after more than a decade of silence, Us3 re-emerges with their new album Soundtrack, featuring the single "What Have We Done?," set to drop in late summer. And for the first time in their career, the entire album is instrumental.

DownBeat asked Us3 producer Geoff Wilkinson and keyboardist/arranger Mike Gorman to share some of the inspiration behind Soundtrack and explain the approach they took in creating this landmark recording.

From Geoff Wilkinson

The new Us3 album is a lot different from anything I've done before. It's all instrumental, for a start, and features trap beats married to an 18-piece horn section. The horn arrangements are largely inspired by the work of Gil Evans, particularly in the late-50s to mid-'60s.

I always thought Gil never received the acclaim he should have had. His three albums with Miles Davis — Miles Ahead (1957), Porgy And Bess (1958) and Sketches Of Spain (1960) - tend to get written about in the context of Davis himself. Gil's own albums New Bottle Old Wine (1958), Out Of The Cool (1960) and The Individualism Of Gil Evans (1964) are all absolute classics in my household.

His work feels so cinematic to me, it's baffling as to why he was never contracted to do any movie soundtracks at the time. It wasn't until 1986 when he actually did this with Absolute Beginners and The Color of Money (both in the same year). I always thought that true innovators live at the edge of the cultural habitat.

I made a 26-minute podcast about why Us3 suddenly stopped in 2014, what happened to me (I got seriously ill) and how this album came about, which you can listen to here:

<mixcloud.com/GW333/us3-soundtrackpodcast-1-what-have-we-done>

I love the space in Gil Evans' work. The use of such a wide range of instrumentation from bass trombone and tuba to soprano sax and flute gives a depth and richness to the sound, often contrasting with the tight harmonic density of overlaid chord stabs, adding dynamic tension and color. His arrangements always captured the emotional intensity of the tune, and that was something I was very keen to also capture. It might sound strange for someone who is best known as a hip-hop producer, but I always wanted to make songs that would make people cry, or at least elicit some kind of emotional reaction. Isn't that what the best music does?

The horn arrangements on Soundtrack were done by keyboard player and long-term Us3 collaborator Mike Gorman. I played all the other instrumentation on the album, and asked Mike to embellish and develop the themes on the tracks. I sent him a description of the emotional tone I wanted to convey on each track, and he did an amazing job.

From Mike Gorman

When Geoff asked me to arrange the horns for what was to become Soundtrack, and mentioned Gil Evans as a reference point, I knew the goal posts for the project's creative palette in terms of textural and harmonic possibilities were being set wide open.

Evans' work is both enigmatic and instantly recognizable at the same time. And from twoand-a-half decades of working with Geoff, and many recording sessions for Us3 albums, I knew that his way of working was to go out of his way not to get in the musicians' way, but to provide a canvas, see what emerged, then gently nudge and suggest until his vision was realized.

So, with these arrangements it was a case of noting the mood suggestion from Geoff, then diving in feet first and seeing what came out. At each point I'd send a demo of the arrangement as it progressed to Geoff, who would feed back suggestions to convey simple creative directions in order to make the music lighter, darker, cooler, busier, sparer, etc., before I continued.

For instance, on "Resist The Rat Race," Geoff wanted horn swells to underpin the main synth melodies and themes of the sections in the first half of the piece, then suggested there were two open feature sections for the horns at 1:49 and 2:34. The approach I took for the feature sections was to use the ostinato modal bass line as a harmonic jumping-off point, and attempt to create an interwoven conversation between the various sections of the ensemble, which, although staying related to the home key (D minor), nevertheless tries to pull away with dissonant chords and exotic scales but always returning via one or all of the sections in concert to anchor back to D minor. The second horn section part from this track is shown here in an eight-bar excerpt from the score.

The same approach was used on "Dance Of The Five Fevers," but this time the various conversational themes in the horns underpin the melodies in the soprano saxophone (Wilkinson: it's actually a Turkish zurna) and sitar.

Texturally, I wanted to convey the unconventional sound that was indicative of Evans' writing by balancing the strong melodies in the horns throughout the range of the instruments, so you'll sometimes hear a leading melody at the top of the range being played by flute or soprano sax, at the same time as an equally strong theme in the bass clarinet or baritone sax. The middle of the texture was warmed substantially by the use of French horn in tandem with the trombones, and an alto flute playing near the bottom of its range (as was also used in many of Gil Evans' writings).

The sound of muted brass, playing a dynamically equal role to the unmuted brass, was also important in creating the texture, giving an edge to many of the voicings, which served to elevate dissonances out of the muddy harmonic quagmire into which it's easy to fall into when writing for such a large ensemble.

Overall, for a collaborative project like this, the ability to shape the arrangement to suit the direction and evolution of that collaboration is



just as important as having the tools and imagination to construct the music itself, so that the final product reflects the vision of the artist, and I think we achieved that here.

A Final Word from Geoff Wilkinson

We certainly did! This has ended up sounding even better than what was in my head before we even embarked on it.

In fact, when we started this it was intended to be a side project, but it sounded so good I decided to release it as an Us3 album.

It dawned on me that if I was to start Us3 in 2025, this is exactly what it would sound like a 21st-century fusion of hip-hop and jazz.

Us3's legacy of creating a cross-cultural hip-hop and jazz dialogue remains as vital today as ever with the upcoming release of Soundtrack. Visit the band online at us3.com.



Pro Tips on Making a Big Band Recording

ig band is the quintessential jazz ensemble. It contains the most common instruments associated with the genre: saxophone, trumpet, trombone and the elements of a rhythm section: drums, bass, piano and guitar. This configuration of instrumentation has been around for roughly a century, and while the number of players in each section might vary, the general grouping of instruments has remained consistent. Since the beginning, the arrangers or architects of the big band sound - Fletcher Henderson, Don Redman, Benny Carter and Mary Lou Williams - devised unique musical approaches to use the different sections of the ensemble together in unison, tutti and soli, and against each other in different call-and-response fashion.

Recording big band performances has changed radically over time. In the days of acoustic recording, balance was achieved by placing louder instruments farther from and softer instruments closer to — the recording horn. Electrical recording (using microphones) eventually replaced this approach, but the accepted process of using only one or two mics to capture the whole group did not result in much sonic separation between the sections of the ensemble. Arrangements were written to achieve a balance within and between the sections of the band.

Choosing the Method

There are different philosophies about the best method to capture a big band's performance, from the minimalist to the more complex. The minimalist approach, using two or three microphones, captures the ensemble as it is heard in a live performance environment with everyone playing simultaneously and achieving a natural balance between the sections. This method takes less time and is similar to the way bands were recorded in the early days. More control, or a maximalist approach, can be achieved in a number of different ways, typically with an alteration of the performance setup and using more microphones to achieve expanded

separation between the sections.

With the technology available to us today, we have the ability to record at different times and places, overdubbing each part until the recording is complete. This requires more time editing everything together to fabricate a convincing and coherent performance.

It's generally accepted that simultaneous recording with all players will create a more compelling performance, as the players feed off of each other's energy and vibe. There's an undeniable magic that happens when everyone is playing together that is impossible to duplicate when everyone is overdubbing their parts. This is critical because in the end, it's always about the performance, not how good the recording sounds.

The Setup

The traditional big band setup — with saxophones, bones and trumpets in three rows and typically on risers — does not provide good separation between the groups of instruments and is not ideal for rendering sectional clarity. If the natural sound and balance achieved from this setup is what you're after, then go for it. Micing can be achieved with as little as two mics (panned in stereo) placed somewhere in front of the band. Dynamics are controlled by the written arrangement and players. When you throw up the faders from those mics, there's not much you can do if one section played too loud or quietly in a part of the tune, or if someone squeaks or clams. What you hear is what you get. The reason that some of the old recordings of the great bands still hold up is because the players and the arrangements were great.

If you are attempting to get a modern sound with more separation for each section, you'll have to alter the sitting layout. Have the four sections align themselves in a square with saxes, trombones and trumpets on three of the four sides, and the rhythm section on the fourth. You have the option of recording each section with a stereo pair, or with a mic on each instrument. Position the mics within a foot-and-a-half of the instruments to minimize bleed, which will make it easier to do edits and repairs later. If you're using a stereo pair for each section, you might spot mic the bass trombone and baritone saxophone, which will give you more control of those instruments when you put the mix together.

The most practical solution for solos is to overdub them. That way the engineer and producer can focus on the ensemble and give the soloist the option of doing multiple takes while everyone else takes a break. If you want to maintain the live vibe, have a separate mic available for soloists to use during the recording.

In general, more mics equals more control but creates phasing issues caused by sound waves arriving at the different microphones at different times. Place acoustic panels or gobos between the sections to limit acoustic leakage.

A tried-and-true drum setup can be accomplished with just four mics: kick, snare top and stereo overheads. If you're recording a song that has a lot of ride cymbal, put a mic on it, as the ride tends to otherwise get lost in the mix. If you're recording funkier songs with a heavier backbeat, you can expand this setup by placing mics on the hi-hat and toms. Pushing the approach even further into the contemporary realm, add a snare bottom and kick outside mic.

Acoustic piano should have two mics (typically large diaphragm condensers in cardioid pattern) placed inside the cavity of the piano, 8–12 inches above where the hammers hit the strings.

Acoustic bass is often problematic, but if the player has a pickup, record that on a separate channel, along with a mic placed in between the f-holes and the neck. You can mix the combination of the two sounds. Pickups are generally mid-rangey and have no bottom, but the mic will fill out what's missing. Electric bass is easy: Use a DI, not the amp.

A single mic on the guitar amp will suffice. Get as much isolation on the amp as possible to minimize bleed into the other microphones. Ask the guitarist to rein in the amp volume.

The Room

If you're recording in a small room, there can be undesirable reflections or standing waves. These can be minimized by placing microphones close to the sources. If your room sounds good, put up a stereo pair (in omnidirectional pattern) some distance away to capture the ambience. You can mix in a little of it to provide some natural reverb.

Microphones

Remember that all microphones are not created equal. They all have different strengths and peculiarities that need to be considered. The pickup pattern used is also critically important. With close mic placement, use the cardioid pattern, which picks up what's directly in front of the mic. Ribbon mics sound great on brass instruments, but they are bidirectional, so they pick up what's in front of and behind the mic. With the exception of room mics, avoid the omnidirectional pattern. Dynamic microphones are not the highest-fidelity, but can be used on brass instruments if you don't have a great mic selection. Saxophones generally sound better with dark condensers.

Signal Path

Assuming you're not recording to tape, setting up your digital audio workstation (DAW)

is crucially important for a quick and painless recording process. Set up your timeline to reflect correct bar numbers, rehearsal marks and meter changes that correlate to the chart. This can be done before or after the first recording take. Make sure you leave at least one bar before Bar 1 for a count-off. Faster tempos should have at least a two-bar countoff.

If you are recording to a grid (using a click metronome) it will make your life much easier when you get to the edit and mix steps. This will depend on whether the drummer can actually play to the click, which you will discover when you hit the "record" button.

Mixing

Good sound starts with the player, so the amount of processing applied will depend on what you have to work with.

Submix and route the saxophone, trumpet and trombone sections into stereo stems or folders for quick balance control between each group. Another benefit of this method is that folders and stems can be automated and processed as a group. A little compression (low ratio) goes a long way to tighten up the dynamics on these tracks. Heavier amounts of compression can be useful on guitar, bass and solo instruments to maintain consistent dynamics.

Brass tends to get shrill in the upper midrange, and having the ability to apply equalization over the whole group can be helpful in taming those irritating frequencies.

Reverb can also be applied to each of the groups. How much will depend on what you want the final production to sound like. Piano, guitar and solo instruments are also candidates for reverb, which will connect them to the rest of the track. It's safe to say that keeping reverb

decay times under three seconds would be appropriate for this genre.

How you pan the instruments in each section will depend on their sitting position during the recording. Always maintain that position in the pan or the stereo perspective will be degraded. Don't be afraid to pan things out of the center. There are two speakers, and we have two ears, so use them.

Editing

No matter what setup you use, if you are recording to a grid (with a click), you can replace a small section of a tune without having to rerecord the whole thing because of a performance mistake in one part of the tune. Edit out regions where a section tacets, because there's not going to be any usable information from those mics except leakage from anyone who was playing. Composite (comp) tracks can be created from multiple takes of the same section or song. If there's one problematic section in an otherwise good take, you can grab it from another take.

Get it Mastered

For the final step, the mix will need to be mastered to suit various modes of delivery. Check the credits of whoever you hire as your mastering engineer, as it will make a monumental difference in the final outcome. Don't trust this critical step in the production process to an inexperienced person who will slam it with limiting as if it was a hip-hop record — unless, of course, that's what you want.

Dan Siegel is a pianist, composer and producer with hundreds of recording credits and 23 solo albums. He has toured the world in support of his numerous recording projects and maintains a global audience. He is the current music department chair at MiraCosta College in Oceanside, California. More information is available at dansiegelmusic.com.





Rachel Therrien's Trumpet Solo on 'Orun'

hen I listened to this track, I thought this would be an easier transcription — mostly modal, not many fast lines. But as I got into "Orun" by trumpeter Rachel Therrien, from her new album *Mi Hogar II* (Lula World Records), there were some aspects that did create issues.

First issue: When does the improvisation actually start? Therrien begins with what are clearly composed repetitive riffs (first in 6, then in 5), and then goes into more melodic playing at 1:46. I believe the first bit is a written melody that she deftly morphs into an improvisation. But when? Or is it all improvised?

I made a judgment call and am assuming the solo starts at about 2:48. Disagree with me? Then transcribe the previous bit yourself. (I'd suggest you do that even if you agree with me.) Also, I should mention that I transcribed this at concert pitch for the benefit of all instrumentalists.

Then there's the meter. Although the rhythm section makes it sound more like 5/8, I made another judgment call and decided to present it in 5/4 — partly because the feel is relaxed, and I felt the larger meter demonstrated that better (and puts the beat more where we might tap our feet). Also, some of the poly-

rhythms, such as in measures 8, 32 and 45, would be difficult to write if it was in 5/8.

And the rhythms were another thing that made this particular solo difficult to notate. As I often do, I strongly suggest you play these licks along with the recording, or at least listen to the recording, as at times the written music is really more of an approximation of her rhythms. Her freedom with rhythm while playing in an odd meter is testament to her skills.

As is her phrasing. There are instances when Therrien leads squarely to the downbeat (measures 12, 25, 39 and 41). More often she will anticipate the "1," and by varying degrees: sometimes by an eighth note (measures 2, 3 and 6) and sometimes by a quarter note (measures 14, 25, 43 and 47). On occasion she resolves a bit after the downbeat, as in bars 10, 23, 53 and 55. This variation is a great way of not sounding "stiff" by phrasing the same way each time, especially as the bass does play the same rhythm throughout. This prevents things from becoming predictable.

Adding to that in a big way is phrasing over the barline. Look at the beginnings of bars 17, 18, 20–22, 24, 29, 31–33, 35–37, 40, 42, 43, 45–47, 49 and 51. First off, that's a

lot of playing over the barline. But, as noted before, the bass and percussion are making the rhythm clear. This gives Therrien the freedom to play on, before and over the barline (or just avoid it altogether, as in bars 2, 14, 30, 34, 50, 54 and 56).

All these approaches give Therrien's playing more depth (and, let's face it, many musicians would have difficulty playing like this over an odd meter) and provide a nice contrast against the bass and percussion. (Note that pianist Danae Olano's comping joins Therrien in these rhythmic forays.)

The backing is basically modal, going up and down chords in C dorian (hence the Bb key signature; I generally don't like modal key signatures but it seemed to make sense here), and Therrien sticks to this for most of her solo. But when and how she deviates from C dorian is quite interesting. Other than the ornaments in bars 3 and 14, she remains in this mode until measure 29. That's half of her solo.

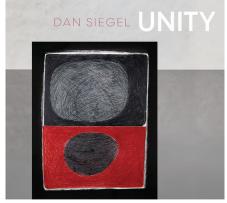
But things begin to change in bar 29, where she starts adding in some G#/Al/s. Then an F# in measure 31, some more G#/Al/s in bar 35 and a more bebop-style chromatic line over bars 36–37. A final addition of G#/Al/ in measure 41, and then Therrien is back to modal for the remaining 18 bars (almost a third of her improvisation). So her journeys outside C dorian are restricted to those 11 bars. It's a very clever way of creating a sense of beginning, middle and end to this solo.

It's also worth noting that her chromaticism itself has a motion to it. At first (and last) it's only that one note: the Ab. Since we're in C minor, it sounds at home (even though the chord progression is dorian). So it's not so "out." The F# is the #4/b5, the blue note in the blues. And here it's also kind of setting up the G that occurs after the trill — so, also not too outside, but maybe a bit more than the Ab. Or maybe not. (Feel free to come to New York and discuss it with me over pizza.)

So, at the end of bar 35 we have an E natural, the major third, one of the "outest" notes you could play in a minor key. But it sets up the descending chromatic line in the following measure. This is as chromatic as Therrien gets in this solo, and afterwards goes back to being modal (for the most part). She does revisit the $G\#/A \Rightarrow 1$ in bar 41, but the final 18 bars are all C dorian. Her choices of how and when to insert non-scale tones serve the movement of this improvisation.

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. Find out more about Durso's music at limidurso.bandcamp.com.







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or 25 years, M-Audio has remained a respected name in audio solutions for both home and project studios. Providing a wide range of offerings including keyboards, monitors, microphones and audio interfaces, they are known for their ability to consistently supply great gear at outstanding value to their customers.

Recently, the company unveiled the M-Track Duo HD Producer Pack, featuring a high-resolution USB audio interface bundled with a condenser microphone, studio headphones and cables. Just add a computer and your favorite recording package, and you have a complete

home recording setup.

M-Audio actually began under the name Midiman in 1988. They were pioneers in developing MIDI interface solutions for the rapidly emerging home studio market. In fact, their USB interface was a game changer, eliminating the need for expensive outboard gear in order to connect musicians' MIDI devices to their computers. The company officially became M-Audio in 2000 with a focus on the expanding digital audio market. They now offer a full line of interfaces, keyboards, microphones, studio monitors and accessories.

M-Track Duo HD Producer Pack is built around the Duo HD, a high-resolution two-channel USB-C audio interface with nice, clear converters and a very simple user interface. The original M-Track interface was originally released in 2021 and offered a resolution of 16-bit/48kHz. Following the success of the Duo, which offered users an amazing value, M-Audio decided to upgrade it and release the new Duo HD box, which now features an enhanced resolution of 24-bit/192kHz. The overall layout of the device remains the same, and, like the original, it also features Crystal mic preamps and utilizes the same A/D converters.

The Producer Pack is intended to offer home recording enthusiasts and podcasters a full-blown studio setup in one box by adding an M100 condenser microphone and HDH41 studio headphones. All you need to supply is a mic stand. M-Audio even bundles some software with the unit. A free copy of Ableton Live Lite is provided for those who don't already have a preferred DAW package. Also included free are the BFD Virtual Instruments plug-ins and Akai MPC Beats. There are a few promotional offers for other software such as Reason (for six months free), Antares Auto-Tune Unlimited (two months free) and Splice sample library (one month free). All in all, a pretty nice package for the slim

Setup of the Duo is fairly quick and easy. I recorded with my MacBook, and after connecting via USB-C, a simple selection in OSX's Audio MIDI was all I needed to start recording in my preferred DAW. Windows users will need to download a driver, but M-Audio provides their in Music software application to help you manage downloading drivers, as well as all bundled software and plug-ins.

The Duo HD box has two XLR/quarter-inch combo jacks on the front for connecting the M100 mic (or an instrument like a guitar, bass or keyboard) for direct recording. I plugged in the condenser mic to



The acoustic recordings were quite decent, and the M100 mic was impressively accurate for such a moderately priced product. Input recording levels are set via a single knob for each channel on the unit's top. An LED glows white when a signal is present and turns red when clipping. There are also two additional knobs for headphone and monitor speaker volumes.

Vocals were next, and the M100 also handled that fairly well. The digital converters are clean and the preamps offer plenty of gain. The large diaphragm condenser was a good choice for inclusion since it's a versatile mic, handling both voice and instruments well.

Switching the combo inputs over to the instrument setting, I recorded an acoustic guitar with a pickup and an electric guitar. It handled the acoustic just fine — but, as with any direct guitar signal, you really need use plug-ins or an outboard preamp to get the best result. On the electric guitar, the free Ableton plugins were great for adding amp simulations and effects.

Running the M-Audio M-Track Duo HD Producer Pack through its paces, it did indeed handle all tasks, and besides a mic stand, everything I needed was in the box. Overall, the quality was impressive, but obviously it will not rival the recordings made with much more expensive audio equipment. However, for those seeking a complete and easy-to-use turnkey solution for their personal projects, this is a definite consideration. -Keith Baumann

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Hyde Park Jazz Festival	30
hydeparkjazz festival.org	55
Jazz Central Studios	38
jazzcentralstudios.org	
Jazz-Con	59
jazz-con.com	
JEN – Jazz Educaiton	
Network	19
jazzednet.org	
JodyJazz	68
jodyjazz.com	
Monterey Jazz	
Festival	35
montereyjazz festival.org	
MVD Entertainment	10
mvdshop.com	
NJPAC – New Jersey	
Performing Arts Center	12
njpac.org	

Orenda Records	4
orendarecords.com	
Origin Records	11
originarts.com	
P. Mauriat	. 67
pmauriatmusic.com	
Pittsburgh Jazz Festival	. 26
pittsburghjazzfest.org	
Smoke Sessions	. 47
smokesessionsrecords.com	
SteepleChase	
Productions	8
steeplechase.dk	
TurnTable Tickets	21
turntabletickets.com	
Vandoren	3
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Blindfold Test > BY TED PANKEN

Faye Carol

Asan Francisco Bay Area hero for many decades, singer-educator Faye Carol has interpreted songs culled from numerous genres through the prism of the blues. "Miss Faye," as she's known, articulated the aesthetics that animate her artistry during her first DownBeat Blindfold Test, held live at the Healdsburg Jazz Festival on June 15.

Cassandra Wilson

"Dust My Broom" (*Loverly*, Blue Note, 2007) Wilson, vocals; Marvin Sewell, guitar; Jason Moran, piano; Lonnie Plaxico, bass; Herlin Riley, drums; Lekan Babiola, percussion; Robert Johnson, composer.

Cassandra Wilson. I believe I'll "Dust My Broom." The guitar player kind of sounds like Stevie Ray Vaughan, though it's not. It's a bit overbearing. I like the feel of the groove. I'm not crazy about this approach, but I feel where it's coming from. Whatever you've got to do to keep the blues alive and well, that's what I want you to do. [You both grew up in Mississippi.] I lived in Mississippi as a young girl, and I'd hear old blues people or gospel quartets in the train station. The turnarounds fascinated me. How does everybody get back to the same place, no matter what they're doing? I liked it without really knowing what it was. To this day, it's in there.

Dee Dee Bridgewater/Bill Charlap

"Mood Indigo" (Elemental, Blue Note, 2025) Bridgewater, vocal; Charlap, piano.

"Mood Indigo." Dee Dee Bridgewater. I understand her diction. I like her feel for what the lyrics portray. The piano sounds Duke Ellington-ish. The accompaniment is minimalist, but right on the changes. [piano solo] The pianist knows something about the history. I like Dee Dee's control of her voice. They understand this song very well. They listened to each other, and it came across. They make a good musical couple.

Eddie Jefferson

"Body And Soul" (Body And Soul, Prestige, 1968) Jefferson, vocal, alternate lyrics; Barry Harris, piano; Steve Davis, bass; Bill English, drums; James Moody, tenor saxophone; Dave Burns, trumpet.

[first 4 bars] Eddie Jefferson! "Body And Soul." I don't think you're going to play anything else I'm going to like better than that. Eddie Jefferson is one of our most underrated cats. His lyrics portray Coleman Hawkins' solo so well. Anything he approaches will be swinging and happening! I learned about him through King Pleasure, who I liked, but was a little benign for me. Eddie Jefferson had that ghetto feeling, that not-taught feeling that came from his gut and the times he lived in. His street-level scatting inspired me to try to learn how to scat and take the challenge of trying to come up with some lyrics.

Ryan Truesdell and Gil Evans Project

"Laughing At Life" (Shades Of Sound, Outside in Music, 2014/2025) Wendy Gilles, vocal; Gil Evans, arranger; Tom Christensen, tenor saxophone; Steve Wilson, alto saxophone; Augie Haas, trumpet; Lewis Nash, drums; plus others.

I like the band a lot, bebop-influenced, a vibe of the '50s with a feel of the now. I like the arrangement. The tempo makes you want to pat your foot. Lewis Nash was the drummer? I think he had a little to do with that! The singer was in there. I would have loved to feel that she was leading the band as opposed to the band leading her.

Shirley Horn

"I Got It Bad And That Ain't Good" (*Lazy Afternoon*, Sony/CBS, 1986) Horn, vocals, piano; Charles Ables, bass; Steve Williams, drums.

The incomparable Shirley Horn. I love her harmonic sense, her alternate changes, the way she plays and accompanies herself, her time feel, how



she uses dynamics, how she draws you in — everything about it. She can draw out a phrase for two months. You have to be a really good ensemble player to play with her, I would think, because of how she slows the time and sometimes accelerates a little. She lets the song breathe. I hardly ever say this, but she knows what the hell she is doing.

Mark Murphy

"In The Evenin" (Memories Of You: Remembering Joe Williams, High Note, 2003) Murphy, vocal; Bill Easley, tenor saxophone; Norman Simmons, piano; Daryl Hall, bass; Grady Tate, drums.

Is Rahsaan Roland Kirk playing tenor? Is the singer Kurt Elling? [afterwards] I wasn't crazy about the singer because the blues didn't need all those crooks and turns. Just sing the blues. Any time somebody is trying to sing a blues, it's OK. But it wasn't my cup of tea. The rhythm section was fine, but sounded a little standard; I especially like pianists to have a bit more blues flavor in their accompanying. The saxophone player to me had the most blues feeling of the whole group.

Jimmy Witherspoon

"Tain't Nobody's Business If I Do" (Singin' The Blues, World Pacific, 1956) Witherspoon, vocal; Harry "Sweets" Edison, trumpet; Teddy Edwards, Jimmy Allen, tenor saxophones; Hampton Hawes, piano; Jimmy Hamilton, bass; Jimmy Miller, drums.

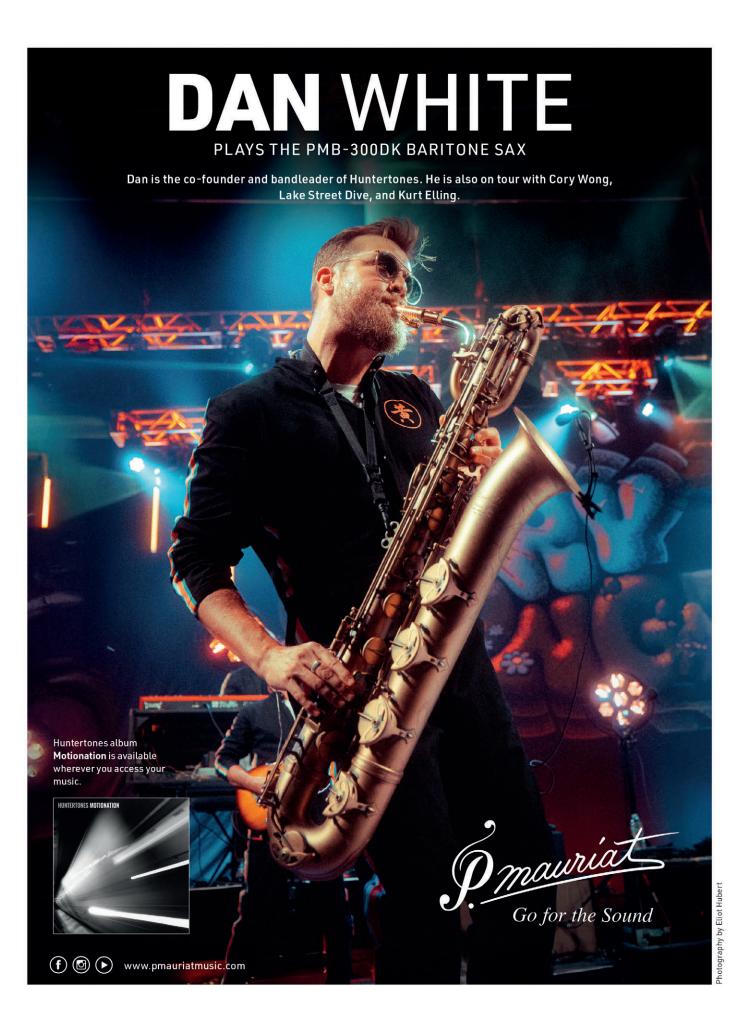
I love Jimmy Witherspoon. To me, that's just the blues. Pure and simple. His singing was simple, right to the point. And I love that trumpet. Harry "Sweets" Edison? He just set it off. Hardly anyone does that anymore. I didn't think it was recorded the best, because I heard a lot of reverb on his voice. But I loved them both.

Ella Fitzgerald/Duke Ellington

"Cottontail" (Ella And Duke At The Cote D'Azur, Verve, 1966/1997) Fitzgerald, vocals; Paul Gonsalves, tenor saxophone solo; Duke Ellington, piano; John Lamb, bass; Sam Woodyard, drums; plus others.

There will never be another Ella Fitzgerald. Was that Ellington's band? Paul Gonsalves? Oh, my God! Those two together are like a superhuman force. My God, that's stupendous. There's nothing you can say about it, but go listen, and listen again and learn something, and go listen again, and keep on listening. Ella Fitzgerald could sing anything in a pure state. She could state a ballad beautifully, without any embellishment, but when she's ready to turn that phrase, it's perfect. She had impeccable taste. And she could hang with the *best* of the boys. She did not take a backseat. She is totally captivating in Duke Ellington's band. They sounded like one unit, all the way across. Was Sam Woodyard the drummer? That is Heaven right here on Earth.

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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