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Creative Director	Žaneta Čuntová
Assistant to the Publisher	Sue Mahal
Bookkeeper	Evelyn Hawkins

ADVERTISING SALES

Record Companies & Schools

Jennifer Ruban-Gentile
Associate Publisher
630-359-9345
jenr@downbeat.com

Musical Instruments & East Coast Schools

Ritche Deraney
Vice President of Sales
201-445-6260
ritched@downbeat.com

Record Companies & Schools

Cameron Henry
Advertising Sales Associate
630-359-9338
cameron@downbeat.com

OFFICES

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

CUSTOMER SERVICE

877-904-5299 / service@downbeat.com

CONTRIBUTORS

Senior Contributors:

Aaron Cohen, Howard Mandel, John McDonough

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

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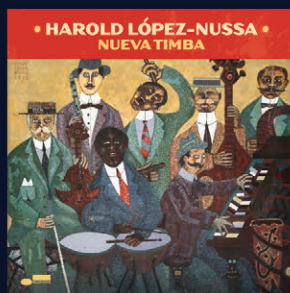
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NOVEMBER 2025

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Finding Comfort in Chaos

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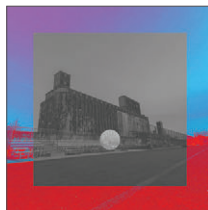
FRANK HEATH

Cha Wa released the band's newest record, *Rise Up*, on Aug. 29 as a tribute to the resilience of New Orleans 20 years after Hurricane Katrina ravaged this citadel of the musical arts.

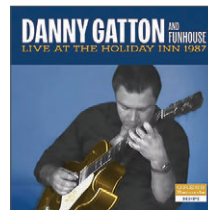
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First Take > BY FRANK ALKYER



DAVE STAPLETON

Donny McCaslin's latest recording creates a feeling of hope while channeling the rock influences of his youth.

There's Something in the Air

MAYBE WE'RE ALL LOOKING FOR A LITTLE comfort food right now. This modern world that we've built races along at unheard-of speed with highs, lows and plot twists once thought impossible, absurd. The music featured in this issue of DownBeat reflects some of the varied and vast reactions to the times. Here are three examples.

On Donny McCaslin's *Lullaby For The Lost* (Edition), reviewed in this month's Hot Box on page 54, the saxophonist leans on the rock influences of his youth, specifically citing Neil Young's "Rockin' In The Free World," to create what he says is an album "about hope ... that inner light not being extinguished, but instead transformed."

It's interesting what the reaction was from our four Hot Box critics who comment on the recording, ranging from 3 to 4½ stars, once again proving that an informed opinion doesn't equal groupthink. J.D. Considine's 4½ is closest to right for these ears. I might even throw in another half star. For starters, drop the needle on "Blond Crush" and turn up the volume. It's brilliant.

For alto saxophonist Gary Bartz, our cover artist this month, comfort comes in the form of finding chill modernism in music from the '70s on his latest recording, ironically called *Damage Control* (OYO). In the interview beginning on page 24, Bartz said he chooses to find calm in this 10-song set to

deal with a world in chaos. Bartz doing Earth Wind & Fire's "Fantasy" with an outro chant of "Music won't let me down" serves as balm. So do Quincy Jones' "One Hundred Ways," Anita Baker's "You Bring Me Joy" and others.

On a side note, this is the 85-year-old Bartz's first DownBeat cover, a long overdue ovation to a true master of the art form.

Finally, there are times when a soul just needs to go back to the source. Enter Cha Wa, that beautiful New Orleans Mardi Gras Indian funk juggernaut, honoring the 20th anniversary of a disaster: Hurricane Katrina. Sitting in this office at that time, the news reports coming in were heartbreaking. We were constantly getting updates on the sheer devastation happening to the birthplace of jazz: tracking musicians, their whereabouts, their safety. We tore up the November 2005 issue of DownBeat to deliver a special report on the crisis with trumpeter Kermit Ruffins declaring from the cover, "We Will Swing Again," four days after the hurricane struck. He was right.

How does Cha Wa honor this memorial? In true NoLa fashion: party music. Just listen to "Here We Come" for a perfect sound check to everything New Orleans.

Comfort music — like peanut butter and jelly, toasted cheese and tomato soup, red beans and rice — comes from all directions. That's why we love it.

A large portrait of Eric Darius, a Black man with short hair, wearing dark aviator sunglasses and a white shirt with a black polka-dot pattern. He is holding a silver saxophone diagonally across his body. The background is dark with out-of-focus white light spots.

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Darius



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Chords & Discords

On the Road Success

I thoroughly enjoyed reading your September “concept” issue (On The Road). I believe that was the first time you had such a featured cover story. I especially appreciated the interviews with Isaiah J. Thompson, Joe Farnsworth and Frank Elling. Thank you again to Frank Alkyer for introducing me to Isaiah several years ago.

Since then, I have caught him live twice with the John Pizzarelli Trio at a local venue. I was also responsible for getting him booked at the same venue with Isaiah’s quartet recently. In my opinion he is an excellent pianist and composer and is a must-see live musician. I expect to see him listed in your next “25 for the Future” issue: he is on my “10 for the Future” list.

I first heard Joe Farnsworth’s superb drumming on Eric Alexander’s *Alexander The*



Great record (1997) and probably every one of Eric’s records since then. I also caught his band live several times. Always a great drummer and stylish dresser. When Joe signed one of my drumheads in 2018, he found it humorous that he was considered a Rising Star Drummer the year he turned 50 years old. Finally, thank you Gary Fukushima for your 4½-star review of the

Gonzalo Rubalcaba/Chris Potter/Eric Harland/Larry Grenadier record *First Meeting*. I immediately added this excellent CD to my collection. Personally, I would give it an extra half star because of the high-quality live (front row, center) recording. Hopefully there will be more “Meetings.”

Thank you for this excellent issue that I hope will be an annual feature.

MARC NEBOZENKO
 EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

Praise for Anthony Dean-Harris

Being a former local news reporter and music reviewer for a now-defunct jazz mag, I tend to take notice of others’ writing styles and abilities.

That’s why I want to single out DownBeat’s Anthony Dean-Harris for his impressive review of Matthew Shipp’s latest solo piano CD, *The Cosmic Piano*.

When I say impressive I’m referring to the clarity of thought Dean-Harris conveys, as well as his economy of phrasing and careful choice of impactful words.

I’ve not yet listened to Shipp’s latest release, but whatever I think of it will have no bearing on my positive opinion of the Dean-Harris review. All I can say is to keep up the good work, Anthony.

CHARLES WINOKOOR
 FALL RIVER, MASSACHUSETTS

Thanks for the excellent story!

DANIEL PESQUERA
 BERKLEE COLLEGE OF MUSIC

Editor’s Note: Thanks for the correction, Daniel. We will fix that in our digital edition!

Jones-Taylor Mixup

I have spotted yet another misidentification in a DB article. In the August edition, page 68, James Hale misidentifies Brad Jones as the drummer in his critique on James Brandon Lewis’ *Abstraction Is Deliverance*. This is a blunder too many to ignore. Not sure why this keeps happening but it affects your credibility and needs to be addressed.

The critique is right on the mark, which is what matters the most, but that’s not an excuse for misidentifying the instrumentalists. Please look into this. Should be an easy fix!

JOACHIM PEKTZILIKOGLU
 HALIFAX, NS CANADA

Editor’s Note: Thanks, Joachim. Of course, the drummer on that record is Chad Taylor, Brad Jones being the bassist.

How About Eri?

I love DownBeat magazine and have bought all my music by reading your reviews. Keep up great work! I would love a story, maybe a cover, on pianist Eri Yamamoto. Thanks for the monthly joy.

JOSEPH KUBOVCIK
 VIA EMAIL

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"None of us gets to go through this life without some kinds of loss," says Nnenna Freelon of her memoir about the death of her husband, sister and even the family dog.



TANISHIA WALKER

In Her New Memoir, Nnenna Freelon Improvises with Grief

Loss is too gentle a word for the understanding of death, for the fullness of its destruction. Its injustices. Six years ago, singer Nnenna Freelon fell into cosmic shock when Phil, her husband of 40 years, died of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), followed in quick succession by the deaths of her baby sister, Debbie, and her beloved dog Basie. "It was as if there was a breaking, an eruption," she said. "Everywhere I looked for comfort and for solace

was gone. It seemed like the most cruel trick."

In the hours after Phil's death, Freelon entered a new reality she never asked for and couldn't accept. Not at first. Not for a long time. Like so many people experiencing deep, decimating grief, she walled off the world, tightened into a ball and resisted. She felt estranged from herself and the life she knew, ghost-like in the way she moved or didn't move through her days. She was grief sick. And she wanted to remain

locked inside herself until gradually — finally — she didn't.

"The resistance is, 'I am not. I cannot. I will not. No.'" said Freelon. "It is the visceral 'Nooooooooooooo!' ... Or some people say, 'Oh, hell no.' It's like, 'No, I am not dealing with this. I do not want this to be true. I do not want this to be my story. No.' And I think it's fine to be there. You will decide how long you want to sit in your 'no.' I started to feel less and less OK curled up in the worry ball — shaking my head back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, my jaw tight. That mode of being — grunting, just *urr-rggggh* — that is unsustainable."

But what could she do, really? She couldn't read because she couldn't concentrate. She couldn't sing because she was terrified of how changed she'd sound: of the seismic difference between the before-Nnenna and the after-Nnenna. But Freelon was grieving in the middle of lockdown with nothing but time on her hands. So she took them and started them writing.

"It was a really hard time," she said. "But at the same time, COVID offered me a quality of time where I could write music and words and be unbothered." And over months and months of writing within her grief, something happened as unexpected as it was anointing: "[Writing] became the thing that saved my life."

Set for release Oct. 21, *Beneath the Skin of Sorrow: Improvisations on Loss* (Duke University Press) documents Freelon's communion with grief in the months and years following Phil's death. Despite her tight grip on the last vestiges of her known world, she found she could let go. Just a little. And when she did, she began improvising with the unknown. "I thought that perhaps the jazz musician in me was well equipped to deal with this life-altering moment," she said. "Grief was saying, 'You must modulate. You must slow the tempo. You must change the key.' And those were the metaphors and the tools that came to me because they were the available ones."

Initially, Freelon felt daunted by the task of authoring a memoir. Having never written more than diary entries, she wondered how to organize her writing while preserving its dualities and chance-ness. Some days her writing manifested as an essay; other days, a poem. She wrote short stories, vignettes, even recipes. "At first, I didn't realize that they could all coexist because I hadn't really seen a book like that," she said. "And my improvisational mind — my improvi-

sational spirit — said, ‘Well of course, dear, you can do that.’”

Once she had what would become her manuscript in hand, she knelt on the floor with pages all around her and got to work. “I organized them in accordance with their vibration, their color, their feeling, their essence.” From this process emerged individual “containers,” later titled “Round Midnight,” “Stolen Moments,” “A Love Supreme” and “Time Traveler.” These containers share Freelon’s sinking anguishes but also her revelations, particularly — and especially as

a career improviser — that it was OK, even freeing, not to know.

“Releasing the need to know little by little, I stumbled across familiar feelings that at first I didn’t quite recognize. ... I didn’t immediately make the connection that deep mourning was calling me to a kind of improvisatory play. I was being invited to dance with my grief. Was this possible?” she wrote in the book.

Once she let go her clenching, Freelon allowed her grieving to open new portals. The love she shared with Phil, her soul mate, tran-

scended death. She began experiencing, viscerally, what had always been around her but took a monumental shift in perspective for her to start noticing. She observed the path of a determined turtle in her driveway, unexpected rose blooms and, yes, the ants and their stick.

“Maybe it was my imagination, but it seems like they were curious: ‘Can we go over this thing? Around? Through it?’” she wrote. “They finally (most of them anyway) decided to go around and resumed the path they’d been on before. Grief bade me notice these little ants. ... It almost seemed like they’d been waiting to be seen.”

Freelon’s path to publishing included a detour through the recording studio in June 2024. Released in March, *Beneath The Skin* (Origin Records) serves as a musical companion that reflects the vulnerability and ambition of the memoir, presenting 10 songs — nine of which are Freelon’s original compositions — in honor and celebration of great love and great grief. “This is a book meant to be sung. And the record is meant to be experienced with words,” she said. Some songs are brand new; others, renewed. She wrote the album’s anthemic modal tune “Changed” more than three decades earlier.

“Sometimes you actually write yourself into the future,” she said. “When I wrote the song, I had no idea that the lyric would make this big circle of understanding so that I felt it in a different way. ... With the human that I am now, it has an interiority that it didn’t have then. It has a life experience so that I can sing it from the root of my lived experience in a different way. And I hope it reaches people’s spirits in a different way as well.” Currently, she’s producing an audiobook that intercuts the songs from the recording with the text.

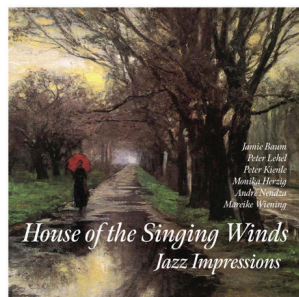
During the memoir’s editing process, an early reader delivered a note that Freelon hadn’t presented clear, concrete evidence that grief and improvisation can coexist. Her response? “That’s not this book. I am not trying to make a case for this in that way. I am showing you, by the mere fact that I could even write this book, that grief and improvisation can live together. It is its own evidence.” Had she integrated that feedback in a rewrite, the resulting book may have teetered a little too close to the edge of self-help. “This is absolutely not a self-help book.”

What the memoir *isn’t* is less important than what it is: a deeply personal reflection that invites a universal connection. “None of us gets to go through this life without some kinds of loss,” said Freelon. “I’m hoping that peeling back the layers of the onion on my experience, in an authentic way, I can maybe pull the curtain back a little for other people to say, ‘Yeah, me too.’ There’s a pure, cool spring somewhere beneath the skin of it all, where we can all drink and be refreshed. We got to get to it, though.”

—Stephanie Jones



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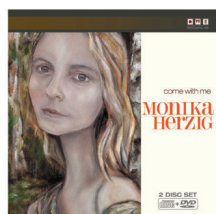
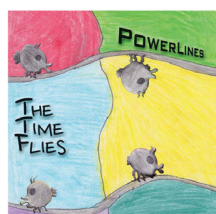


“The House of the Singing Winds project combines musical improvisation with concepts of impressionism by interpreting images as a jazz combo. Our audiences in Cologne thoroughly enjoyed the colorful interactions and high artistry of the group. It was a real hallmark within our continued concert series that is made possible by Dr. Monika Herzig promoting our sister cities activities and German American understanding.”

Hartwig Prüßmann, President Sister City Committee Cologne - Indianapolis e.V.
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"Beyoncé's doing it great, and Rihanna," says Braxton Cook of balancing family and the demands of a music career. "But we got to make that cool amongst the dudes."

RICARDO NAGAOKA

Braxton Cook Strikes a Balance of Art & Family

BRAXTON COOK, ALUMNUS OF JAZZ trumpeter Chief Xian aTunde Adjuah's (formerly Christian Scott) band who went solo in 2017, has a talent for spinning the seasons of his life into arresting musical self-portraits.

From 2017's *Somewhere In Between* (Fresh Selects), which chronicled Cook's desire to balance his two greatest loves, music and his girlfriend, to 2020's *Fire Sign* (Nettwerk), which conveyed the Aries-born musician's newfound sense of love and freedom following his marriage, to 2023's *Who Are You When No One Is Watching?* (Nettwerk), which responded to the birth of his first son, Cook has unabashedly shared his life's joys, challenges and transformations through his music.

Cook's newest record, *Not Everyone Can Go* (Nettwerk), is another kaleidoscopic vignette. Created over a turbulent couple of years for Cook, the new record is the rich next chapter in his evolution as innovative musician-to-watch and committed family man.

"It's capturing where I'm at with this transition from one child to two. You know, that, for us, it was a real one. That was a real jump," said Cook. "In addition to that, this is the state of affairs in general in my life. I was going through a lot of changes in my team, band members switching in and out, managers, agents, just like a whole shedding process."

Cook tells this story in his own signature, category-defying style. Throughout *Not Everyone Can Go*, Cook showcases his Juilliard-trained jazz saxophone chops on spacious, grooving instrumentals improvised in real time with his

band, including drummer Nate Smith, pianist Mathias Picard, guitarist Andrew Renfroe and bassist Joshua Crumbly, as well as his skill for writing soul-jazz originals featuring vulnerable lyricism and sultry vocals. Cook's proximity to trailblazing fusionist Robert Glasper, who he's toured with, is also palpable.

Not Everyone Can Go began coming together in 2024, during a particularly busy and difficult year for the musician. Cook spent most of it away from his family as he toured throughout Europe, Asia and the United States. Meanwhile, his wife was home with their toddler and pregnant with their second child.

Balancing the demands of his career and his growing family had been a lot to manage for years, but, in 2024, it came to a head. When Cook returned home from tour in November 2024, he was exhausted and frustrated, and it eventually climaxed into a depression.

"It was burnout last year and then I had a couple months of just quiet, but also another baby on the way," Cook said. "So, it was like, I have to figure this out and make this work, these loves of mine and passions of mine. I know they can work [together]. What does that look like, and who can help me do that?"

Not Everyone Can Go chronicles Cook's emotional pursuit for the answers to those questions, and it is also his most collaborative project to date. Many of the musicians featured, including vocalists NNAVY and Marie Dahlstrom, producers Bubele and Austin Brown, and bassist Kaveh Ragestar, are artists he met since moving to L.A. in 2020 and signing with independent

music company, Kobalt Music, as a music producer and writer.

"I have a rep that sets me up with a lot of sessions ... and I got to meet a bunch of really cool producers in 2024, in between all that touring. I was just driving around L.A., doing sessions, and meeting people and working on the album, and I've never done that before. It was a completely new process for me," he said.

While the story it tells is cohesive, *Not Everyone Can Go* was recorded over the course of multiple sessions in 2023 and 2024, and some of the songs were written long before the concept for this record was conceived. Cook later sequenced the songs to create the narrative arc, which splits the album into two moods.

The first half, including the bittersweet tune "My Everything," and the slow, reflective "Harboring Feelings," highlight Cook's inner turmoil, and the heavy toll this chaotic time took on his mental health and loved ones. By track seven, "We've Come So Far," driven by bright guitar chords and tender, layered vocals, it's clear there's been a breakthrough.

"It wasn't making sense, so [I'm] having to redefine things to make it fit the life that I'm in," said Cook. "There is a world where this all works, where we can travel together. We can do longer residencies and travel as a family, where I go out for a couple weeks and come back home and everything can flow nicely."

The tracks that follow are lighter and more hopeful, as the romance between his wife is rekindled on the sexy-smooth tracks "I Just Want You" and "Bad." With the driving, uptempo instrumental "Maybe I'm Too Nice," Cook gets to the heart of the overcommitment that led to burnout.

"Self-betrayal is a real thing. That's a part of me, the people pleasing part, that I've had to actively work on," said Cook.

The second half of *Not Everyone Can Go*, particularly the transcendent "All My Life," shimmers as if the storm has passed — and, for the most part, it has. The musician has shifted his mindset and made a choice to tour less and "move in a different way" when it comes to his music career.

"I got to get to that place where I truly, honestly can be grateful for the blessings that I have, the family that I have, for the things I've done and achieved, and not expect or want anything else," said Cook.

He's also leaned on the examples of other professional musician-fathers like pianist-composer Jason Moran, who he thinks strikes the balance with grace. Ultimately, Cook hopes to contribute to changing the narrative that says men must choose between being good husbands and fathers and successful musicians.

"I want to do that and I want to be that. ... I mean, Beyoncé's doing it great, and Rihanna," he said. "But we got to make that cool amongst the dudes."

—Alexa Peters

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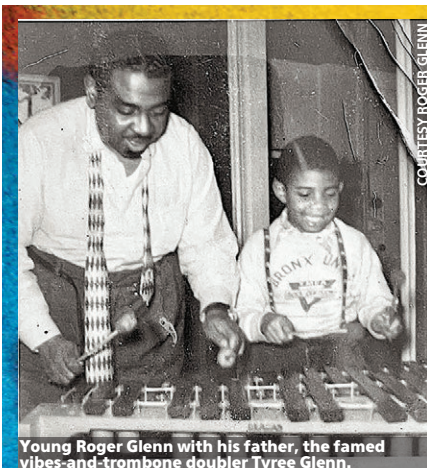
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Young Roger Glenn with his father, the famed vibes-and-trombone doubler Tyree Glenn.



BETH BRANNIN

"I stand on the shoulders of some really great people who contributed to this world, musically, and I am passing it on to the next generation," says multi-instrumentalist Roger Glenn.

Roger Glenn's Latin Heart

LIKE HIS FAMOUS FATHER TYREE

Glenn, who had the unusual double of trombone and vibes during his tenures with Cab Calloway, Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong through the '40s, '50s and '60s, Roger Glenn has the unusual double of flute and vibes. But he doesn't stop there. The New York City native, who grew up in Englewood, New Jersey, before relocating to San Francisco in the mid-1970s, also plays a total of 16 (count 'em) other instruments.

And though he was totally immersed in the swinging sounds of his father's music while growing up, courtesy of his close proximity to jazz royalty like Duke and Pops, Glenn eventually forged his own path in Latin jazz through apprenticeships with Mongo Santamaria, Cal Tjader and Dizzy Gillespie. Those deep-seated influences come to fruition on *My Latin Heart* (Patois Records), his first outing as a leader in 50 years, going back to 1975's *Reachin'* (Fantasy Records).

"Living in New York, you're exposed to a

lot of different music," said the 80-year-old multi-instrumentalist and active studio musician. "My mother was really into Latin music and my parents used to go to The Palladium to see all the greats like Tito Puente and Machito. But my own first epiphany with Latin music happened when I was coming home from school one day when I was in 7th grade, and I came across this album lying in the gutter without a label on it. I took it home and played it and I was like, 'Wow, this is some really interesting music.' It just grabbed me."

That record was 1957's *Cuban Jam Sessions In Miniature* by Israel "Cachao" López y su Ritmo Caliente. The opening track, "Descarga Cubana," kicked off with a distinctive tumbao bass line, followed in quick succession by a volley of congas, bongos, timbales and güiro. Young 13-year-old Glenn was hooked for life.

"Around this time, my father bought me a flute," he recalled. "So I started playing with this little Latin group, and the first song I learned to play was Herbie

Mann's 'Comin' Home Baby' (from 1961's *At The Village Gate* on Atlantic Records). Because I could only play like three notes on the flute at that time. Oddly enough, that went full circle when years later, in 1983, I actually toured with Herbie Mann, playing vibes."

Glenn has had a lot of those full-circle moments throughout his distinguished career. "As a kid I used to go see Mongo Santamaria at the Village Gate, and I ended up playing in his band. I also saw Cal Tjader at the Apollo Theater when he came to the East Coast, and I ended up playing on Cal's Grammy-winning album from 1979, *La Onda Va Bien* (Concord Jazz Picante)."

Glenn pays tribute to Tjader on "Cal's Guajira," an alluring cha-cha-cha from *My Latin Heart*. Elsewhere on this long overdue release, which also features guitarist and longtime associate Ray Obiedo (who played on *Reachin'* 50 years ago), pianist David K. Matthews (currently the keyboardist for Santana), bassist David Below, congu-

ero Derek Roland and drummer Paul Van Wageningen, the leader switches deftly from flute on the fiery opener, “Zambo’s Mambo,” to alto saxophone on “Brother Marshall,” then vibraphone on the aptly named mambo “Energizer,” before returning to flute on the romantic ballad “A Night Of Love.” The spirited closer, “Samba De Carnaval,” concludes on a lively note with an authentic batacoda percussion jam.

“I went down to Brazil the first time on a tour with Dizzy Gillespie,” Glenn recalled. “And I loved Brazilian music, so I was thrilled to be able to experience it first hand.

“My experiences have been all over the map, and that’s reflected on this album. And while I call it *My Latin Heart*, that’s just the tip of the iceberg in terms of my experiences. I could go on and on.”

Two other potent tunes from the album — the 6/8 “Congo Square” and the entrancing “Angola” with Yoruban vocals by guest bata players John Santos and Michael Spiro — deliver a kind of history lesson along with the churning grooves of the African diaspora.

“Those songs talk about the origins of the music,” said Glenn. “‘Congo Square’ is an example of the culture from Africa and the culture from Europe coming together to create something new. Jazz could not have been created in Africa and it could not have created in Europe. It took both of those cultural groups to get together and in a way that created the music of America. And that, to me, is a significant thing. And it’s why our music in the United States developed differently than music in Cuba or Brazil, for example.”

“I’ve had a rich life experience,” added Glenn, who also played in the U.S. Army band at Fort Dix, New Jersey, along with Grover Washington Jr. and Billy Cobham in the late 1960s. “I grew up around Donald Byrd because he was hanging out in Englewood, and I ended up playing on his 1973 Blue Note album *Black Byrd*, which was produced by Fonce and Larry Mizell, who I grew up with in Englewood. My neighbor down the block was Freddie Perren, who was the disco king in the ’70s who did albums by Gloria Gaynor and Peaches & Herb that I got to play on.

“I remember going with my father to Duke Ellington rehearsals and playing at Eubie Blake’s birthday party with Noble Sissle in attendance. And I remember seeing Dizzy, Pops and Erroll Garner coming over to our house for parties and just thinking of them as my father’s friends rather than jazz royalty. Knowing and growing up around all these people, I’ve

really been blessed.”

Now fronting a band of younger musicians on *My Latin Heart*, Glenn said he is excited to see where they might take the music next. “Being 80, I’m older than a lot of these guys who used to come and hear me when I was playing at Cesar’s Latin Palace in San Francisco — when they were all underage. John Santos I knew when he was a little kid. Some of these other guys I used to see in San Francisco with school books when they were on their way

to school. Sheila E. was in my band back then, and when we weren’t playing a set she’d have to go sit in the corner because she was underage.

“But you watch all these young people grow up and make their own statements,” he continued. “Each generation takes it to the next step. So, I stand on the shoulders of some really great people who contributed to this world, musically, and I am passing it on to the next generation.”

—Bill Milkowski

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The Kuumbwa leadership team, from left, Chanel Enriquez, Tim Jackson and Bennett Jackson.

Kuumbwa Celebrates at 50

WHEN REFLECTING ON KUUMBWA JAZZ'S mighty legacy during its golden anniversary year, consider its office equipment.

"We had a manual typewriter and a single phone line," said Tim Jackson, Kuumbwa Jazz artistic advisor and co-founder, looking back at the organization's humble beginnings in 1975. "There was certainly no internet, and there weren't even any fax machines.

"When we finally got an electric typewriter, we thought we died and gone to heaven," he continued, in an hour-long interview at Kuumbwa's conference room. Since then, the Santa Cruz, California-based non-profit has added a Meyer sound system, video recording and streaming capability and a recent \$150,000 HVAC upgrade to its Kuumbwa Jazz Center (KJC).

Founded by Jackson, former KUSP radio programmer Sheba Burney and late KUSP DJ Rich Wills, Kuumbwa Jazz has been a concert presenter and educational institution with its 3,000-square-foot center in downtown Santa Cruz since 1977. A reflection of Northern California beach culture, Kuumbwa's first event was held in a public park with saxophonist Joe Henderson and trumpeter Eddie Gale as head-

liners. Since then, the KJC has hosted concerts by everyone from pianist/bandleader Sun Ra, vocalist Helen Hume and saxophonist Teddy Edwards to pianist Geri Allen, vocalist/pianist Diana Krall and saxophonist Immanuel Wilkins.

Concerts are mainly presented on Monday evenings as well as some Thursdays, though special shows can happen any day of the week. (Kuumbwa is also rented out to independent presenters.) The Monday scheduling harkens to Kuumbwa's early days.

"When we started, it was Keystone Korner," Jackson, now 71, recounted, referring to the famed spot in San Francisco's North Beach neighborhood that hosted world-class jazz performers from 1972 to 1983. "So we glommed onto Todd Barkan's organization." With Keystone's multnight runs serving as anchor dates, Jackson booked those headliners on their off night.

Kuumbwa's current generational legacy is especially apparent in its educational program. "You'll see students like the Le Boeuf brothers," identical twins Remy (saxophone) and Pascal (piano), Jackson said. "They start out in our honors ensemble, and then they come back and perform as a big band leader and a Grammy winner."

"Kuumbwa was a perfect storm of things that were great for me as a budding musician," Remy Le Boeuf replied when asked about his personal history with the organization. "It brought in artists from around the world, and it also had the Jazz Honor Band educational program."

He recalled chatting in the green room with Michael Brecker and also shaking McCoy Tyner's hand. "So whenever I play there" — including a sold out Le Boeuf Brothers homecoming concert back in July — "I feel this responsibility to be as cool as them, which is impossible," he chuckled.

Kuumbwa's 50th is being celebrated in small and big ways. The club's decor, which has boasted oversized KJC performance candid photos of the likes of bassist/vocalist Esperanza Spalding and saxophonist Donny McCaslin by house photographer r.r. Jones, has been replaced with handbills and posters from early shows. There was a free concert in May at the very nearby San Lorenzo Park commemorating the inaugural 1975 event that started it all. And the popular Spirit of '75 Series showcases locally based musicians for a throwback \$19.75 ticket price.

The Spirit of '75 Series was conceived by 37-year-old Bennett Jackson, Kuumbwa's new creative director. As Tim's son, Bennett literally grew up at the KJC. After forging his own career path elsewhere, he became Kuumbwa's marketing director in 2017 and this year transitioned to his current position, which now includes booking and branding in addition to marketing.

Chanel Enriquez, in turn, was named Kuumbwa's executive director in March. The 30-year-old San Diego native and UC Santa Cruz alumna worked her way up from a volunteer in 2017 to development and systems coordinator in 2019 and then managing director in 2022. Replacing longtime Kuumbwa executive director Bobbi Todaro, she and Bennett Jackson form a new dynamic duo that bucks tradition to share in educational outreach efforts. As a relative newcomer, Enriquez was quickly impressed with the longstanding community — from staff to volunteers to ever-returning patrons — that was a part of Bennett Jackson's upbringing.

The capstone to Kuumbwa's 50th anniversary celebrations happens on Dec. 13 with a pair of concerts featuring an all-star group of trumpeter Ambrose Akinmusire, saxophonist Joshua Redman, flutist Elena Pinderhughes, pianists Billy Childs and Gerald Clayton, bassist Reuben Rogers and drummer Gregory Hutchinson. East Bay Area native Pinderhughes' history with Kuumbwa goes back over a decade, when she performed at the KJC in Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah's band. More recently, she gave the world premiere of *A Diaspora Journey* in February 2023, which was commissioned by Kuumbwa.

"I have nothing but praise for Kuumbwa," Pinderhughes said. "There's always a supportive family and very professionally run atmosphere at every show."

—Yoshi Kato

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Vocalist Cleo Laine: 1927–2025

CLEO LAINE, THE INTERNATIONALLY CELEBRATED jazz-inspired vocalist who got her start in the pubs and dancehalls of England in the 1950s, died July 24 at age 97. The contralto-voiced singer, a class act who was also known for her work as an actor and writer, received Grammy nominations in the jazz, popular and classical categories. In 1985 Laine became the first British artist to win a Grammy as best female jazz vocalist, for the third of her live albums recorded at New York's Carnegie Hall.

Laine and her husband, alto saxophonist John Dankworth, were long-time stars of the British jazz scene who helped introduce the genre to reluctant listeners and furthered the cause of music education internationally.

Laine was born in Southall, West London, and was raised as Clementina Campbell. As a child, she was encouraged to take singing and dancing lessons. In her mid-20s, Laine began to apply herself seriously to singing, working initially in pubs. Influenced by the Black singers she heard in American musicals, she forged

a personal style that was unique among popular female singers of the 1940s and early '50s. Eventually she auditioned for and was hired into a jazz band led by Dankworth. She found inspiration for her craft in the jazz stylings of Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan.

She toured with the Dankworth band beginning in the mid-'50s and, after marrying the bandleader in 1957, accompanied him to the U.S. in 1959 for his appearance at the Newport Jazz Festival. Laine sang with the band at Birdland in New York during the trip overseas. She made a substantial number of recordings in the '60s, performing on show-song and soundtrack projects as well as straightahead jazz albums.

Laine also found success in the realms of classical music and live theatrical productions. She starred in the 1971 London production of Jerome Kern's *Show Boat* and recorded Arnold Schoenberg's poetry-cycle *Pierrot Lunaire*.

Over the years, Laine collaborated with flutist James Galway and classical guitarist John Williams. She contributed to Michael Tilson



Thomas' LSO series *The Gershwin Years* and a tribute to women songwriters including Joni Mitchell and Holiday titled *Woman To Woman*. She teamed with Ray Charles for a 1976 recording of *Porgy And Bess* and collaborated with Mel Tormé on the 1992 album *Nothing Without You*. She also appeared alongside Frank Sinatra at London's Royal Albert Hall in 1992.

In addition to her autobiography, *Cleo*, Laine published an informal guide to singing freely titled *You Can Sing If You Want To* in 1997. Also during that year, Laine was made a dame in her native England.

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-Robert Baird, Stereophile Magazine

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Soul-Jazz Organist Akiko Tsuruga: 1967–2025

AKIKO TSURUGA, WHOSE VIRTUOSIC command and stylistic flair made her a leading jazz organist of her generation and a steward of the broader soul-jazz tradition, died Sept. 13 in Brooklyn, New York. She was 58.

Born and raised in Osaka, Japan, Tsuruga was known for her work with soul-jazz artists such as alto saxophonist Lou Donaldson, who featured her in his band for more than 15 years, and organist Dr. Lonnie Smith, who was a mentor to her. She continued a tradition set in motion by American jazz organ legends Jimmy Smith

and Jack McDuff, according to her husband, trumpeter Joe Magnarelli.

Tsuruga was born Sept. 1, 1967, and at age 3 began studying at the Yamaha Music School. “I can remember the day when the organ arrived at my house,” she said in a 2024 interview with Hot House. “The representative from the music store came and played a couple of tunes on it and I just thought, ‘wow.’ I fell in love with the organ immediately.”

Tsuruga studied at the Osaka College of



Akiko Tsuruga

Music and honed her craft at the Don Shop. After moving to New York in 2001, Tsuruga began playing at Showman's, where she caught the attention of Donaldson in 2007. In addition to her live performances, she recorded as a leader, including the 2024 album *Beyond Nostalgia* (Steeplechase). Tsuruga was a member of the all-women collective Lioness, and she also worked with the Jeff Hamilton Organ Trio.

DB

Brazilian Composer, Instrumentalist Hermeto Pascoal: 1936–2025

BRAZILIAN COMPOSER AND MULTI-instrumentalist Hermeto Pascoal died Sept. 13 at age 89. Known for his resourcefulness as an eccentric, versatile musician with a radically broad stylistic palette, Pascoal wrote thousands of compositions and orchestrated and arranged pieces for other artists including Miles Davis, who included three of his compositions on the

1971 jazz fusion album *Live-Evil*.

Pascoal was born in 1936 in the Brazilian state of Alagoas and became recognized for his ability to make music on instruments and non-instruments alike. He started on his father's button accordion and later moved to piano. He also played flute and saxo-



Hermeto Pascoal

phone and found creative ways to get interesting sounds from gourds, toys, water bottles and other everyday items, which he incorporated into his performances. Pascoal famously recorded the snorts of live pigs on his 1976 album *Slaves Mass* (*Missa Dos Escravos*).

DB

FIRST MEETING

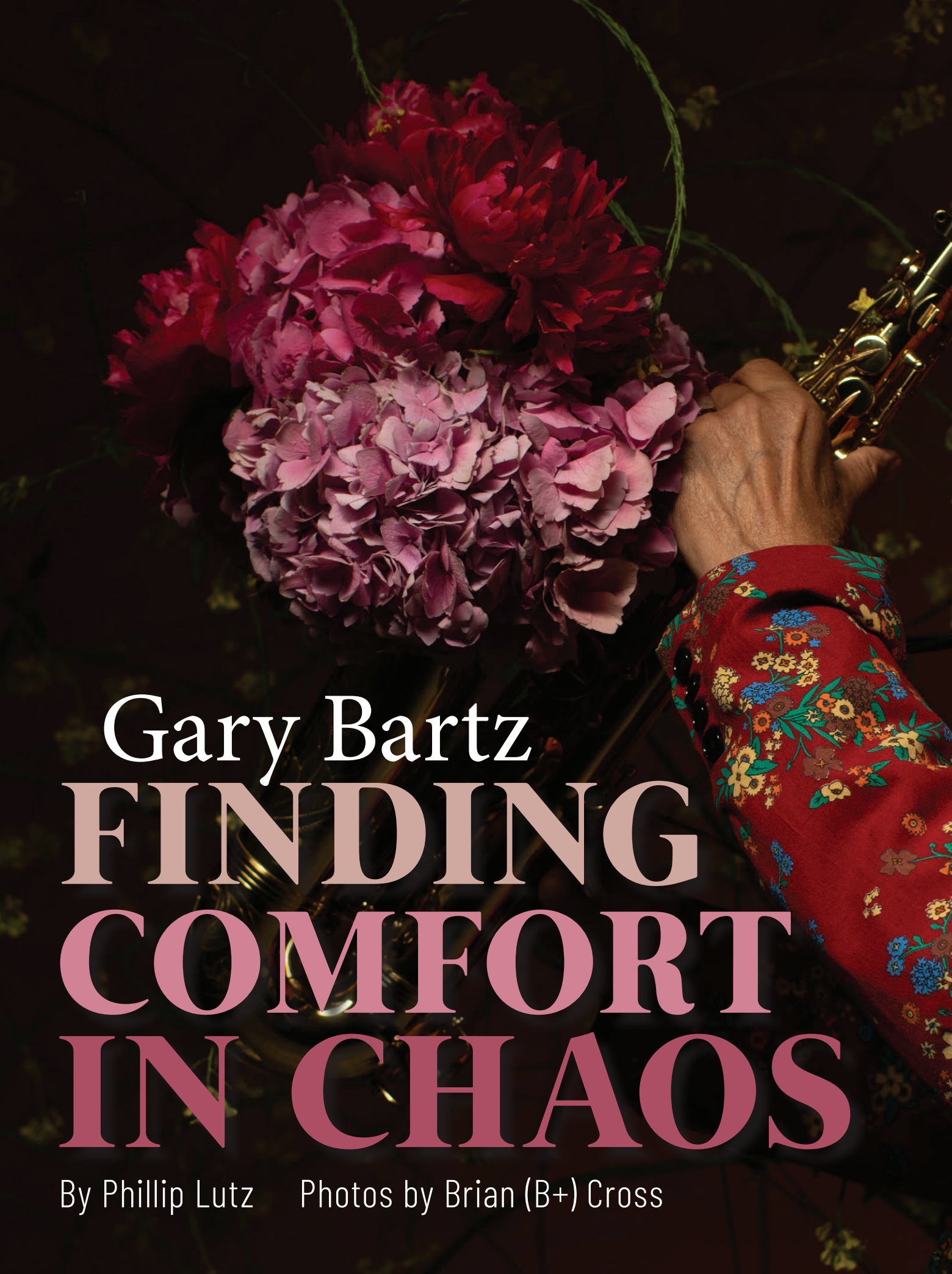
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A close-up photograph of a hand holding a large, dense bouquet of pink and red flowers. The hand is wearing a red shirt with a colorful floral pattern. To the right of the bouquet, the brass body of a trumpet or similar instrument is visible. The background is dark and out of focus.

Gary Bartz FINDING COMFORT IN CHAOS

By Phillip Lutz Photos by Brian (B+) Cross





"Miles could hear so well that he could hear the future," Bartz said of working with the great trumpeter and jazz visionary.

Resplendent in a shimmering gold jacket, his long gray locks kissed by the evening breeze, Gary Bartz was floating untethered in the Charlie Parker zone.

Physically, he was at its ground zero: onstage at the Charlie Parker Jazz Festival, a late-August affair held annually in Manhattan's Tompkins Square Park near the stretch of Avenue B on which Bartz's alto-sax-playing predecessor once lived.

More to the point, perhaps, Bartz was inhabiting a spiritual zone in which Parker as pacesetter might comfortably have played. Defying convention, Bartz was repurposing Parker's two-chorus recorded solo as a unison melody on his "Cherokee" contrafact "Ko Ko."

The move, abetted by Bartz's longtime guitarist Paul Bollenback, raised a few eyebrows among Parker aficionados in the crowd. But the brilliance of the gambit was so readily apparent that doubters were quickly swayed. The sound, quite simply, raised the bebop ante — and plumbed its very soul.

"Charlie Parker was my introduction to the religion of music," Bartz said. "And so he's always with me."

The NEA Jazz Master offered this comment in an hours-long conversation amid the faintly lit lobby of his hotel a day before the concert. Dressed down and projecting a quiet intensity, he traced his mystical bond with Parker —

and the instrument for which they both shared a passion — to a moment when, as a 6-year-old at Sunday lunch in his grandmother's home on Druid Hill Avenue in his native Baltimore, he heard his first Parker record.

"I didn't know what it was," he said. "But it was the most beautiful thing I had ever heard. I don't even know what song it was. It didn't matter. What was coming out of that recorder gave me a life."

That life has played out in phases of self-discovery, from his first solo, at age 12, rendering "I Believe" in a local Baptist Church; to his first serious encounter with the Western classics, at 17, at the Juilliard School; to trial-by-fire stints, all by age 30, with Art Blakey, Max Roach, Charles Mingus, McCoy Tyner and, in 1970, the electrified Miles Davis, who, in delivering him to the unforgiving masses from the Isle of Wight to the Cellar Door, freed him to find his voice.

"Miles could hear so well that he could hear the future," he said. "That's the job of an artist, a musician. When you can find out how you hear, nobody can sound like that. As much as I love Charlie Parker, I could never sound like him because I'm not him."

Bartz's approach to sound and its social uses

is, as much as any musician's, one of inspiration more than imitation. While the approach had been germinating since his youth in segregated Baltimore, it fully emerged in the period surrounding the Davis crucible. With war and racial strife tearing at the nation's fabric, he formed what he hoped would be his go-to vehicle for stitching things up: NTU Troop.

Taking its name from the Bantu, in which it signifies the unity of all things, the group broke down barriers and burnished the African diaspora's role in American culture. At its launch in the early 1970s, its musical method and social message were intertwined in stylistically sweeping, politically charged albums like the two-volume *Harlem Bush Music*. Dedicated to Malcolm X and John Coltrane, filled with protest songs like "Vietcong" and "Uhuru Sasa," the project gained notice as one of its day's most trenchant critiques.

Since that time, NTU has, in one form or another, been an ongoing enterprise. Bartz played under its banner at the Parker festival. And it is the name under which Bartz has embarked on a late-in-life trilogy, *The Eternal Tenure Of Sound*, whose first installment, *Damage Control* (OYO), speaks as directly to the danger of the current moment as *Harlem Bush Music* did to the peril of its day.

"I see the same thing that happened in World War II when the Nazis wanted to exterminate Jewish people," he said. "I think the people here want to exterminate African descen-

dants. They've always had a problem with us because they didn't know what to do with us. I see that coming. It's very scary."

Bartz said he has never felt safe in the United States. If the situation has grown scarier since the new album was recorded, over 35 days in 2023 and 2024 — and in Bartz's blunt assessment, "it's getting worse" — any musical response has grown more urgent.

'Charlie Parker was my introduction to the religion of music.'

The album — out on Sept. 26, Bartz's 85th birthday — proffers what on the face of it is a measured attempt to control the damage with a salve for the collective psyche, including his. It does so in takes on 10 popular or pop-adjacent tunes to which Bartz periodically — and, in tense times, increasingly — returns for a dose of comfort.

"Whenever I feel anxious, that's what I do," he said. "I'll sit down and play those songs. That's how that album came about."

Pianist Barney McAll, who has collaborated with Bartz since 1996, drafted the new album's arrangements and functioned as a kind of ringleader on what was, by all accounts, a wild few weeks of recording. Speaking by phone from Melbourne, Australia, he said he felt the album represented "an outpouring of love in a damaged world."

But as with all things Bartz, means and motives are multilayered. The choice of tunes was not predicated merely on their ameliorative qualities. In contrast with Coltrane's *Ballads*, the 1962 quartet album that Bartz said was on his mind as he made *Damage Control*, he draws on material from artists who embody the African-American experience. The tunes range from Earth, Wind and Fire's "Fantasy" to Patti LaBelle's "If Only You Knew" to a medley based on Tyner's collaboration with singer Phyllis Hyman that includes "In Search Of My Heart" and "Love Surrounds Us Everywhere."

"Trane used songs that were from Broadway and Irving Berlin," Bartz said. "I wanted to use songs more from my community."

In choosing popular songs from his community, Bartz was making a statement of solidarity consistent with his disdain for a conceptual framework — expressed in the use of terms like "jazz" and "improvisation" — that embraces what he sees as tools of categorization used

to both capitalize on and marginalize that community's cultural contribution.

"I don't see genres," he said. "I never have."

As for improvisation, he said, the word itself connotes a lack of study or preparation: "I don't use that term. I'm not doing that. It's an insult. I've studied, I'm prepared. Some people are improvising because they're not thinking compositionally. I'm thinking composition-

ally because that's where the whole concept of this thing happened that they call jazz — it came from playing off the melody."

Informed by his conservatory experience, Bartz's vision of performance crosses continents and dates back centuries. It is one in which the distinguished figures of Black American music in the modern era — he invoked the saxophone lineage of Lester Young, Parker, Coltrane and Ornette Coleman — have parallels in the Europeans who practiced spontaneous composition (his preferred term of art) with regularity.

"They're no different from Bach or Beethoven," he said.

Given Bartz's take on genre ghettoization, it would be disingenuous for him not to consider a broad range of artistic sensibilities when assembling his musical palette, according to Kassa Overall, who plays drums on the new album. He likened Bartz's breadth of vision to that of an author, and the album to a literary venture with an extra-literary objective.

"He's writing a poem," Overall said, speaking from Seattle. "By mixing that with this and this with that and playing a McCoy song, but a McCoy song that was one of his pop songs, he's creating a poem of maybe the desire, not only for him but for his whole musical community, to be seen as an integrated whole."

Such expansive views, Overall noted, once invited blowback from purists: "Gary got criticized pretty heavily at times. But the era we're living in today, it does feel a little bit like an 'I told you so' moment because it's not really revolutionary to do an Earth, Wind and Fire tune where some of it's grooving and some of it's swinging. We've made so many musical smoothies at this point."

As the target of critics, Bartz was in good company. Some labeled Davis a sellout for electrifying and adopting trappings associated

with that change. In fact, Bartz, whose pre-Davis experience had largely been an acoustic one, at first had doubts about working in an electric environment. He wondered why the bandleader hadn't summoned him earlier.

"I knew every song in his book, from 'Stablemates' to you name it," Bartz said. "So when he called me, and I knew what we were doing, I wasn't into that, necessarily. But I couldn't turn down a Miles Davis gig. In my mind I said, 'I'll give it a couple of weeks. See what happens.' And once I started, I saw I didn't have to do anything different — just listen and play."

The resulting jams, anchored by bassist Michael Henderson and captured on Davis' 1971 album *Live-Evil*, represent some of the deepest grooves and most dazzling interplay of the period, with Bartz at his incendiary peak. So it is not surprising that, when asked whether he, Davis or his minions absorbed the criticism, Bartz offered a dismissive wave of the hand.

"I don't think any of us did," he said.

More than a half-century later, reports of his mellowing may be premature. True, his concerts, which he likens to religious services, invariably end with his chant-like singing of a musical mantra on a meditative hymn to inclusiveness, "The Song Of Loving Kindness." Yet, on his instrumental journeys, he remains a freedom rider challenging his musicians to follow him as he trippingly stretches form and builds lines with fealty to little more than his powerful compositional instinct and basic charts fashioned to exploit his affinity for the Coltrane-associated cycle-of-thirds harmonic device.

McAll recalled first working the device with Bartz around the turn of the century, when they were preparing the music that would belatedly be released on Bartz's album of mostly Coltrane originals, *Coltrane Rules – Tao Of A Musical Warrior*: "We started sort of weaving them in and out of all sorts of things. That was the seed of what *Damage Control* has just in terms of its harmonizations."

The new album has a texture of spontaneity that reflects both Bartz's natural disposition and the atmosphere of the recording sessions, which he described as a "party." The scene, in a North Hollywood hub run by producer Om'Mas Keith, was open and filled with a riot of strategically placed visual and aural aids — as well as a few mind-and-body stimulants — intended to spur creativity. The flow of visitors drawn by Bartz's gravitational pull was constant.

But the studio hang was only part of the picture. A short drive away, in Echo Park, Bartz, McAll and Overall had rented a bed and breakfast, where the adrenaline kept pumping after hours. Even after months of preparatory back-and-forth between McAll and Bartz, a steady churn of new thoughts demanded new charts. McAll, working on an old upright piano,



"Whenever I feel anxious, that's what I do," Bartz said of playing the songs that appear on his new album, *Damage Control*.

would create them and present them to Bartz, who would offer suggestions. After his morning bath-and-singing session, they would head to the studio for tracking.

"Luckily," McAll said, "I was on Australian time so I could stay up until 4 or 5 no problem. But Gary doesn't sleep. He just wants to keep going. For me, as a composer-arranger, it was just a really fun time to bounce off Gary's very evolved compositional and musical ideas and try to make his vision clear."

While some tunes did not easily lend themselves to realizing that vision, others, like "If Only You Knew," were a dream. Its harmonic properties, McAll said, easily adapted to step-wise movement of the Coltrane changes they were working with: "I just kept unfolding it as the changes dictated and did some maneuvering, and it became this beautiful thing where it's moving through all these tonalities but feels natural."

"The long and short of it is I did put some of the Coltrane movements in because Gary loves to play over them, obviously, and it sort of set the pop songs apart from [run-of-the-mill] pop songs in the sense that it gives the improvising musicians something to chew on."

The guest artists, a wide spectrum of personalities, were all storytellers. Rapper Shelley FKA DRAM, whom Bartz did not even know, popped in to offer a sultry, earthbound take on Babyface's "Slow Jam." Saxophonists Kamasi Washington and Terrace Martin fashioned more stratospheric narratives on the Tyner medley, while trumpeters Theo Croker and

Keyon Harrold, among others, told their tales. But it was Bartz — and his all-embracing aura — who tied the strands together.

"I'll probably never do that again," Bartz said with a half-smile, obviously happy with the musical outcome but bemoaning the paperwork necessary to gain permissions for the artists to participate.

With that album under their belts, Bartz and McAll have turned to the trilogy's second installment. Unlike the all-covers *Damage Control*, it will largely consist of new Bartz originals and a reframing of his early "hits," among them the anthemic "Music Is My Sanctuary" (the title tune from a 1977 album) as well as "Celestial Blues" and "Rise" (both from *Harlem Bush Music*). For the reframing, Bartz traveled to Australia and collaborated with McAll and Hiatus Kaiyote, a stylistically agnostic ensemble with a decided edge.

"It's wonderful to put Gary's ideas through this distillery," McAll said.

Endlessly curious, Bartz, whose music has been widely sampled, is willing to engage in a range of projects. Some have a political overlay, like Croker's "Jazz Is Dead," a hip-hop-inflected takedown of genre labeling to which Bartz offered an unplanned and strangely beguiling vocal. Whether such commentary figures in the final Hiatus Kaiyote package remains to be seen, apparently by Bartz as well.

"I'm looking forward to seeing how that works," he said.

While that album is in post-production, the

trilogy's final installment is just taking shape. Tunes are being chosen from the 26 tracks that, in addition to the 10 that appear on *Damage Control*, were laid down in the North Hollywood sessions. All are Bartz originals, some co-written. All told, he said, the project will reveal something of the man, his music and his musical life.

"It's me," he said, emphasizing the object pronoun, pausing and adding a characteristically generous, undoubtedly justified shout-out to his chief collaborator on the project. "It's Barney, too."

At Bartz's age, any work he produces will be seen in retrospective terms. But as long as he maintains his regimen of wheatgrass, yoga and saxophone practice — this is a man who, together with Pharoah Sanders, routinely blew the hell out of his horn for hours along New York's West Side Highway — his valedictory may be a long way off.

Meanwhile, he said, his ears remain open and he is trying as hard as ever to hear the future: "What's going to be next?"

Given his druthers, he said, next on the agenda would be a return to the Parker zone with a note-for-note recreation of the 1950 double album *Charlie Parker With Strings*. Moving forward on that would be more than an aesthetic or business decision. It would, in Bartz's terms, be political as well — elevating the solos from the marginalized realm of mere improvisation.

"Bird's solos are some of the greatest compositions I'll ever hear," Bartz said.



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Steven Hardy, Eastman School of Music (Photo by Steve Edwards)



THE FIERY POETRY OF TRIO OF BLOOM

BY JOSEF WOODARD PHOTOS BY FRANK HEATH

The art of the trio is a sturdy yet intimate, changeable and sometimes fragile phenomenon. Triangular geometry has its own set of rules and structural strengths, in music as well as architectural and theoretical domains. Throughout jazz history, some trio formations have had solidity and longevity on their side, as in the case of deeply entrenched groups led by pianists Keith Jarrett and Bill Charlap and such adventurous aggregates as Tarbaby and the famously fearless team of Paul Motian, Joe Lovano and Bill Frisell.



Trio of Bloom, from left, Craig Taborn, Nels Cline and Marcus Gilmore



Gilmore, Taborn and Cline turn a producer's pet project into a jam for the ages.

And then there are more transitory outliers: Enter the unique case of Trio of Bloom, involving an enlightened confluence of important musicians, a bass-less unit with keyboardist Craig Taborn, guitarist Nels Cline and drummer Marcus Gilmore. This is a power threesome of kindred spirits brought into being by an outside source and force. At its root, Trio of Bloom is the inspired brainchild of veteran producer David Breskin, who imagined the evocative chemistry that could flower from these three prominent, progressive musicians. His instincts are richly validated on the trio's diverse and fresh-sounding new album on Kris Davis' Pyroclastic label (which Breskin has had a hand in making manifest).

Breskin's long and storied career in music, and other art realms, has impacted and expanded the jazz world, through a list of artists including John Zorn, Ronald Shannon Jackson's Decoding Society, Vernon Reid and Frisell. Not coincidentally, Breskin's more recent album projects include work by Taborn and especially Cline, going back to 2010's *Initiate* and including the guitarist's 2016 Blue Note Records debut, *Lovers*.

Taborn commented that the Bloom concept represented "an opportunity to work creatively with some people who I have long admired but with whom I had not had the opportunity to engage. I think in some way collaborations with both of these special musicians was bound to happen, and it was a happy occurrence that this situation was presented.

"So it was a chance to bring out some ideas I have had for this kind of situation and with players with these references, in particular with regard to Nels, whose unique history and combinations of influence resonates strongly with my own — in regard to the confluence of some punk rock, avant-garde and various global influences combining with our love of jazz and improvised vernaculars.

"DB simply presented the personnel idea and the recording possibility, and the rest was up to us. The simple idea being that each member would bring some compositions they want to play in this context. The rest was us finding a collective point of view, which arrived quite quickly. Having worked with Marcus before, I knew the breadth of his skill set and something of his inclinations, and I have listened to Nels since I was 12 or 13, so have dreamed of music with his particular voice for quite some time."

For his part, Cline was also excited to finally interact directly with Taborn and Gilmore. His own awareness of Taborn goes back many years. "I first heard Craig with Roscoe Mitchell — with Vijay Iyer — and then in many other places," he said. "I also loved what I heard him do with Tim Berne. One thing that surprised me about Craig was that, on top of everything else he does, he can be very punk rock. And he played that gorgeous solo piano opening on 'Eye Shadow Eye,'" Cline's composition from the new album.

DownBeat caught up with Cline in Seattle late in August, during a tour stop with his longtime "day gig" as a member of the legendary and artful rock band Wilco. Count Cline as a musician who keeps the lights on through work including pop-world work with Wilco, but he has also gained a lofty reputation as a prolific maverick guitarist/bandleader with an experimentalist bent. For proof, check out his latest project, the Concentrik Quartet, a group with drummer Tom Rainey, saxophonist Ingrid Laubrock and bassist Chris Lightcap.

Regarding Trio of Bloom, Cline asserts that "This was all David's idea," Cline explained, "with these players, the material and the production, and we recorded in the studio (The Bunker, in Brooklyn) with his longtime engineer Ben Greenberg. He asked us each to bring in original tunes and to choose an outside song for us to play.

"After the '80s, David had left the music

world years earlier, but reconnected with me, which also marked the reinstitution of his Shifting Foundation, which gives awards and funding to musicians and also writers and other artists. We continued working together. When it came time to put together Trio of Bloom, we had a natural relationship to link us."

Even so, Cline confessed, "I was scared to play with these guys."

Can't a case of nerves be valuable in creative endeavors, keeping an edge on the creative act? "That's true, but I also can freeze up when I get nervous. But this worked out very well."

Gilmore describes the working process involved, noting that "DB came up with the concept and parameters, and he set it all in motion. And then from there on it was up to us to figure it out. Everybody came with compositions, cover and original, and we worked it out. We had a couple of days to kind of go over different things. We actually had some time before the rehearsal to send stuff over, but really the rehearsal was the first time we were able to flesh things out."

As Taborn confirms, "The rapport was immediate. And I do think that the fact that none of us had to bear the burden of initiating this, and the accompanying sense of failure or success or responsibility that could bring, was in some way liberating. It felt like a good experiment that paid off, starting with the hypothetical and yielding a result that I think surpassed the initial promise of the idea."

Gilmore, grandson of the late Roy Haynes, continues to impress on various fronts. He recently served as a vital member of the Kismet trio, with bassist Dave Holland and saxophonist Chris Potter, a highlight set of this summer's Ystad Jazz Festival in Sweden. Trio of Bloom is distinctly different, but fundamentally related.

"I think there's always a triangular power with trios," he says. "I'd say that, I don't know why, but there is something about the number



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3. I will say with this particular group, it is very special because both Craig and Nels can really bring out a lot of different sounds. I mean, the sound spectrum between each of them individually is pretty wide. So with them together, of course, it's extremely vast.

"And you know, I wasn't really playing any electronic drums or anything. It was pretty much just a standard drum set. But I did have

some aspects of the Trio of Bloom ethos.

Fittingly, the *Trio Of Bloom* album sequence bursts out of the gate with the Jackson composition "Nightwhistlers," powered by Gilmore's propulsive yet textured drumming and a textural palette of riffs and noise gestures from Cline and Taborn which set the stage for the music to come.

Taborn has a particularly strong affinity for

compound rhythms."

The African musical connection turns out to be an important thread on the album, on multiple fronts — including the notion of feeding off of collective musical energies versus individual showboating. Gilmore asserts that "West African musical thinking is always gonna be a part of any modern-day rhythm section. A lot of the concepts that come from West Africa are very much a part of 21st century music. 'Queen King' makes a nod to Tony Allen [iconic Nigerian drummer famous for his work with Fela Kuti] — more than Fela, I'd say. A lot of the stuff that Fela was doing, at least speaking in terms of the rhythm section, was coming from Tony Allen."

From Taborn's perspective for "Queen King," he comments that "knowing some of Nels' inclinations, and thinking of the kinds of keyboards I was bringing in, I thought that would be a good reference point to deal with — somewhere in the nexus of West and North African music of the '70s, primarily. I also wanted to explore how that interfaces with some other things I love like '70s Sun Ra, and also things like the B-52s, or The Stickmen, or even early live Lounge Lizards when Evan Lurie was using Farfisas and things. Great sounds."

On the gentler end of the spectrum, Gilmore's choice for a cover tune is an inventive take on Wayne Shorter's ballad "Diana," from Shorter's album with Milton Nascimento, *Native Dancer*. "I'm always down for a tribute to Wayne," says Gilmore. "He is one of my favorite composers and characters. I just never heard 'Diana' covered before. Obviously, it's just one of the many gorgeous Wayne Shorter compositions that he contributed to this planet. And I just thought it would be fun to try it with these particular players."

Trio of Bloom manages to tap into historicity while forging a new agenda, unfolding as it evolved. Taborn admits that the trio drew on "references in terms of what we were using as starting points, or more accurately points of common affection that we drew on. It has more to do with engaging from places that you love musically and just drawing from that attraction to generate new music, rather than any real attempt to emulate."

"Whether it fits into a specific continuum is almost a given because we are all the sum of our influences, and this project just foregrounded a few of those more strongly."

The question remains open as to a possible future for Trio of Bloom. Could it be, like Power Tools, a bold and fruitful idea whose time came and went, leaving a beautiful recorded document for posterity?

"I don't know if there will be much in the way of live gigs, because everybody is so busy," Cline considered. "But the recorded evidence is there."

DB

'He represents a certain generation of composers who were operating at such a high level.'

—Craig Taborn on Roland Shannon Jackson

quite a few drums — one of the bigger setups of mine — and then I had quite a few tam-tams, as well. I would say this trio is definitely very powerful, and it can create so many different types of sonic layers, which to me is one of the cool things about it."

This new project is a power trio and also a live wire that gives new meaning and texture to the general concept of "electric jazz" (with acoustic asides in the case of Taborn's occasional piano turns). On the whole, the musical fare doesn't qualify as fusion, per se, though with echoes of such proto-fusion acts as the Larry Young-era Tony Williams Lifetime and John McLaughlin's Mahavishnu Orchestra work in the '70s (as on Cline's ominous tune "Forge").

Past legacy comes to bear as well, with Cline's choice of a cover tune, "Bend It," from Norwegian sound conjurer Terje Rypdal's classic 1973 ECM release *What Comes After*. "I was a huge fan of Terje Rypdal as a teenager," Cline says, "who I first heard as part of the (Jan Garbarek) *Afric Pepperbird* album. The electric guitar and its effects really jumped out at me. Of his records, I especially love the album *What Comes After*."

More importantly than its fusion antecedents, Trio of Bloom connects the dots of these specific musicians' broad vocabularies and hunger for new discoveries. One key point of reference, on historical and at least partial musical terms, is another seminal Breskin-conjured trio project, Power Tools, which released a single album, 1987's *Strange Meeting*. By now a cultish jewel in the annals of ephemeral jazz projects, Power Tools brought together the talents and big-eared interactions of then-thirtysomething guitarist Frisell, bassist Melvin Gibbs and volcanic auteur drummer Ronald Shannon Jackson, whose electro-jazz band the Decoding Society feels like something of a paradigm for

Jackson's groundbreaking jazz approach, relating to the fact of "Breskin having produced a couple of those Decoding Society albums and Power Tools. But also, in general, I have an affection for RSJ as a composer and feel his work needs to be kept alive in the wake of his passing."

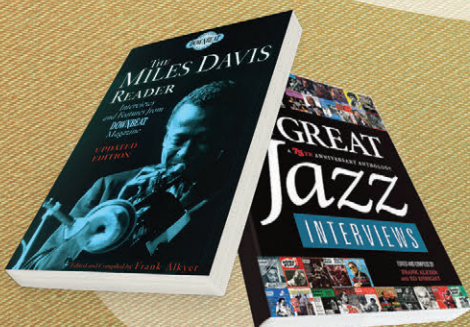
"He represents a certain generation of composers who were operating at such a high level, and yet with totally unique approaches, and they have not been elevated in the jazz canon for a variety of reasons, so I have been seeking to shine some light on some of those folks."

There are plenty of energized and electric moments on the album, as variously heard on Taborn's knotty maze of a score "Why Canada" and the potent 10-minute collective improvisation "Bloomers" (of which Cline says, "I would have liked to do more of that on the album, but we were running out of time in the studio, and we also had David's parameters to stick to.") Still, the overall programmatic scheme of the album involves a question of balance, between raw and sometimes rock-ish energy, abstraction and also lyricism along the way. Taborn notes that "all three of us are inclined to a diversity of musical vernaculars and so any real representation of our combined efforts would necessitate an exploration of a variety of sound spaces."

Gilmore's "Breath" conveys meditative, time-suspending calm, as does the first half of Taborn's "Unreal Light," which then segues into a rhythmic roil with clearly West African impulses. The same spirit segues into the following Afrobeat-inspired track, Cline's "Queen King." During the rehearsal and sessions, Cline remembers that, "at one point, (Breskin) said, 'Why so many ballads?' So I brought in 'Queen King,' a variation on my old tune 'King Queen,' this Afrobeat 6/8 groove that I knew Marcus would be great on. He's so good with those

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CHAWA

CELEBRATING NEW ORLEANS



20 YEARS AFTER KATRINA

By Cree McCree Photos by Rachel Brennecke

Cha Wa members, from left, Tajh Derosier, Joe Gelini and Spyboy Irving
"Honey" Bannister Jr.



Four years in the making, *Rise Up*, the latest album from the Afro-Indigenous funk collective Cha Wa, was released on Aug. 29, a date forever seared into the memory of their home city of New Orleans.

Did the band always intend to release the album on this profoundly significant day?

"It was in the cards once we got to this year," says Cha Wa drummer and musical director Joe Gelini, a transplant from Berklee College of Music who quickly went native when he moved to New Orleans. "The whole album is about redemption, resiliency and hope. It embodies all of the things about New Orleans that were so special about surviving Katrina."

Aug. 29 is also forever seared into the memory of Cha Wa frontman Spyboy "Honey" Banister of the Golden Sioux tribe.

"We evacuated," Banister recalls of the historic day when Hurricane Katrina made landfall on the U.S. Gulf Coast in 2005, "and

when we left all the traffic was going out. We were over the Bonnet Carré spillway when lightning hit a car in La Place and everyone panicked, running into each other trying to get off the interstate. That was scary. I've never seen the water that high." But unlike many evacuees, he didn't head to Houston or Lake Charles.

"I went to Baton Rouge, where I knew I could still get some crawfish and red beans and rice. And we had Indian practice in Baton Rouge. People came from all over, wherever they were displaced from, and every Sunday we had Indian practice." But though they were able to hold practice, the locals didn't know quite what to make of them.

"Baton Rouge is only 80 miles from New Orleans, and half the people are completely out

of touch with what we do in New Orleans,” notes Banister. “When I tried to get on a bus from Baton Rouge to New Orleans, I had my crown in my hand with all the feathers. And the bus driver refused to let me on the bus and called the police. They didn’t know anything about Mardi Gras Indians. Because the feathers were two different colors, they thought it was from a flamingo. They thought I had killed a flamingo.” [laughs]

for the tribe. It’s like a natural trademark.

Gelini: Not a bad idea. Maybe you should be our manager. [laughs]

McCree: *You have quite a track record already, but Rise Up heralds your emergence on to a larger world stage, right?*

Gelini: We hope so. You gotta manifest it, baby. This is our best work to date. It’s literally four years in the making.

‘BURY ME IN THE BACKYARD AND HAVE A CRAWFISH BARBECUE. THAT’S WHAT I WANT.’

Banister eventually came home, but “I didn’t watch the news for about six, seven months. When the Saints played, and they opened the Superdome up, I couldn’t watch it. I didn’t hear brass band music for a whole year.”

That’s hard to imagine now, since brass bands are such an integral part of Cha Wa’s sound. Highlighted by guest appearances by musical royalty, including soul queen Irma Thomas and John Boutté, *Rise Up* makes a joyful noise of redemption and freedom that propels the band on to the world stage. From the moment Cha Wa announces its arrival with “Here We Come” — which namechecks everything they love about New Orleans — the album pulsates with the rhythm of Mardi Gras Indian culture.

During a spirited conversation with Gelini and Banister, they discussed everything from Banister’s nickname to the evolution of an album mixed and recorded at several different studios over the course of four years.

Cree McCree: *Where did you get your nickname, Honey? Does it have anything to do with the Golden Sioux tribe?*

Banister: My grandmother used to call me that when I was a baby. It’s from that Four Tops song “Sugar Pie, Honey Bunch.” She cut out “Sugar Pie” and “Bunch” and started calling me Honey when she was rocking me to sleep. That’s what my mama said.

McCree: *I think you should capitalize on that and actually put out some Golden Sioux Honey*

McCree: *It’s like a cast of thousands were involved in this album, and so many different studios.*

Gelini: We were lucky because our producer Dave Trumfio lives in L.A., but he came out for the initial tracking at Dockside Studio. He arrived Mardi Gras Day, and we all went into the studio right after Mardi Gras, and stayed at Dockside. It’s right on the Red River, with apartments upstairs and a big pool house. And spring had just sprung and all the leaves were starting to bud, so it felt like a real spiritual experience. We also got to record Irma Thomas and John Boutté, here in New Orleans.

McCree: *What’s it like working with the great Irma Thomas?*

Gelini: She lives up to her reputation as a consummate artist. She said, “I want you to produce me, and give me notes and feedback if I’m doing this the way you want it.” And I was kinda like, *gulp*. [laughs] So we gave her some feedback and she was absolutely on the ball. She’s 84, and she can sing like nobody’s business still.

McCree: *“Here We Come” talks about New Orleans being the Eighth Wonder of the World world. And you do a checklist of everything New Orleans in that song.*

Banister: When I went to Southern University, I took an architecture course and the Superdome was known then as the Eighth Wonder of the World because no other dome is structured like that. So it stayed in my mind. And when I heard the beat, the first

thing I said was, welcome to New Orleans, home to the Eighth Wonder of the World. The Louisiana, the Mercedes, excuse me, the Caesar Superdome. [laughs] Somebody gimme a Hubig’s Pie. A Big Shot Cola, right? Creole gumbo.

We started off with that, and Joe really tricked me into it. The band was playing, and Joe put the microphone in front of me and just walked off. And immediately, he knew how I would react, and what would come out. We did this song a lot of different ways, but kept the original one that came straight up outta my head. Bury me in the backyard and have a crawfish barbecue. That’s what I want.

McCree: *“Music Is My Medicine” addresses your recovery from addiction, Joe, right?*

Gelini: Yeah. I’ve been sober for 15 years. And within several weeks after I first got sober, I was playing a gig, and I felt this feeling of euphoria. The same feeling I had when I was 15 years old playing drums in a band. That’s where that song came from.

McCree: *What about “Freedom Of The City,” Honey?*

Banister: Since 1970, I’ve been masking Indian, and “Freedom Of The City” talks about St. Joseph’s Night. We don’t have no permit. We don’t have no band. We come out as soon as it gets dark and stay out all night. That’s our most sacred night. People come out searching for Indians, and that’s how it’s supposed to be. Not Indians posing.

McCree: *“Elijah Rock” is a traditional gospel song. Was that recorded in a church?*

Gelini: No, it was recorded partially at Esplanade Studios, which is a former church. I wanted to put a traditional spiritual on the record and “Elijah Rock” is one of my favorite Mahalia Jackson performances.

McCree: *The other gospel song is “Revival,” featuring John Boutté. It also has a sociological meaning about coming from poverty and a broken home, and being able to escape that.*

Gelini: We wanted to talk about kids in New Orleans who get indoctrinated into these gangs and get involved in selling drugs, and how they can rise up out of that.

McCree: *And there’s no better person to preach that gospel than John Boutté. What would you most like people to take away from listening to Rise Up?*

Banister: Something from our album is going to grab you, and touch you to where you can see it. We want you to walk away with that, with people being happy. Enjoying life. **DB**

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Featuring Michael Mayo,
Tonality, and Josette Wiggan
Gerald Clayton, piano
and music director



FEB
THU 5
8PM

Arturo O'Farrill Trio

ONSTAGE JAZZ CLUB

*Swing into
the Rhythm!*

FEB
FRI 6
8PM

FEB
SAT 7
8PM

Cécile McLorin Salvant

ONSTAGE JAZZ CLUB

FEB
WED 11
8PM

FEB
THU 12
8PM

Anat Cohen Quartetinho

Featuring Vitor Gonçalves,
Tal Mashiach, and James Shipp
ONSTAGE JAZZ CLUB

FEB
SAT 14
8PM

Love Inside Out

**Valentine's Day
With Veronica Swift**

Featuring Pacific Jazz Orchestra
Chris Walden, conductor

FEB
WED 18
8PM

Preservation Hall Jazz Band

Mardi Gras Celebration

FEB
SAT 21
8PM

Alonzo King LINES Ballet

Ode to Alice Coltrane

MEDIA SPONSOR

DOWNBEAT
Jazz, Blues & Beyond SINCE 1934

*Arturo
O'Farrill*

*Veronica
Swift*

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DOWNBEAT 2025 FALL/WINTER INTERNATIONAL
FESTIVAL GUIDE

**MUSIC
ABOUNDS!**

**40-PLUS GREAT FESTS
TO CHECK OUT!**

esperanza spalding at Big Ears 2024
(Photo by Cora Wagoner)



Henry Threadgill's Air performing at Big Ears 2024.

FESTIVAL DREAMING!

As the editor of *DownBeat*, you get to go to some pretty cool places and hear some really cool sounds. But there are always places still on the wish list. While each and every fest in this guide offers up a great experience, here are five that this jazz listener would love to experience.

1. Big Ears Festival

250 concerts of adventurous beyond-genre music in four days. Sign me up. Laurie Anderson, John Zorn, Flying Lotus, Pat Metheny, Richard Thompson and Chuco Valdés just to scratch the surface. All wrapped up in the downhome hospitality and Southern comfort of Knoxville, Tennessee. Check out the listing on page 46.

2. Umbria Jazz Winter Festival

How about this? Let's all go to beautiful Orvieto, Italy, for New Year's and enjoy

five days of great music, food and culture. Umbria's summer festival is outrageous in its size and scope. Consider Orvieto a little slice of Italian dessert with some 100 acts including George Cables, Uri Caine, Enrico Pieranunzi, Paolo Fresu, Pasquale Grasso and so many more. Check out page 51.

3. Jazzfest Berlin

Known as Berliner Festspiele in German, here's another music marathon that adds some Euro grit to your musical diet. While most fests come up with catchy, cheerful slogans, the tagline for this year's fest is "Where Will You Run When the World's on Fire?" It's a nod to a lyric by guitarist Marc Ribot, who's performing there this year. That's enough for me to say, "Count me in." Add in the likes of Marta Sánchez, Tim Berne's CAPATOSTA, Lina Allemano Four, Amirtha Kidambi, just

to name a few, and it's a must-hear event. Check out page 50.

4. Havana Jazz Festival

Cuba has nurtured such a wealth of musical talent over the decades. It would be amazing to escape the brutally cold Chicago winter and head south to hear music from the land that's given us Chucho, Paquito, Gonzalo, Arturo, Mario, Chano and so many more. See page 51, and start dreaming of ropa vieja and mojitos.

5. GroundUP Music Festival

While many of my personal picks lean toward the truly experimental side of music, GroundUP should satisfy the groove side of jazz with sun, sand, Snarky Puppy and some of the band's closest friends. What could be better than three days of Miami Beach glam during the Ides of March. Snowbirds, make your plans. Check it out on page 46. —Frank Alkyer

BIG EARS

March 26-29, 2026 · Knoxville, TN · USA

David Byrne · Robert Plant · Laurie Anderson · John Zorn · Flying Lotus
Pat Metheny Side-Eye III+ · Hania Rani & Knoxville Symphony Orchestra · Richard Thompson
Chucho Valdés · John Scofield Trio · Marc Ribot · Cécile McLorin Salvant · Don Was & The Pan-Detroit Ensemble
Terry Allen & The Panhandle Mystery Band · Dirty Three · Nels Cline & Knoxville Jazz Orchestra
SHABAKA · Mary Halvorson · Julian Lage Quartet · Pino Palladino & Blake Mills · Patrick Watson
Alan Sparhawk with Trampled by Turtles · MJ Lenderman & The Wind · Perfume Genius
Caroline Shaw & Sō Percussion ft. Ringdown · Tunde Adebimpe · Reggie Watts
Cymande · Tim Heidecker & the Very Good Band with Neil Hamburger

John Zorn: 12 Performances Over 2 Days

Masada Quartet · Barbara Hannigan · Harry Smith Films · Junction Trio
Brian Marsella Trio · Awakening Ground · Cobra · Incerto
Duo with Laurie Anderson · Love Songs

Wild Up
Julius Eastman's *Feminine*
Arthur Russell's *24 to 24*

Marc Ribot
Shrek / Map of a Blue City
Hurry Red Telephone

Laurie Anderson
X² with Sexmob
The State of Love

Terry Allen
Truckload of Art
Memwars

SUSS
Presents
Across the Horizon

**Hania Rani & Knoxville
Symphony Orchestra:**
Non-Fiction (N. American Premiere)

Either/Orchestra
éthiopiennes
Plays Either/Orchestra

**Nels Cline & Knoxville
Jazz Orchestra: *Lovers***
Conducted by Michael Leonhart

Ghost Train Orchestra
The Music of Moondog

Kaoru Watanabe's
Bloodlines Interwoven (In Residence)

SML
(In Residence)

Listen.

Curated by Josh Johnson: Chicago Underground Duo · Cleo Reed · Deantoni Parks · Marquis Hill Blacktet · Qur'an Shaheed · Twin Talk · Will Graefe
Adrian Sherwood · Anna Tivel · Annahstasia · Annie & The Caldwells · BASIC · Blind Boys of Alabama · Bloodshot Bill · Brandon Woody's Upendo
Brian Marsella & Sae Hashimoto · Brian Marsella's iMAGINARIUM · Briggan Krauss · Brittany Davis · Chad Taylor Quintet · Charlemagne Palestine
Ches Smith · Chilling Bambino · Chuck Johnson · Darius Jones Trio · Dave Douglas GIFTS Quintet · Dave Harrington's Pranksters South · Deerhoof
Dither · Dom Flemons · DoYeon Kim · Eliana Glass · Film Scores for No One · Fine · Florist · Gary Lucas & Gods and Monsters · Go Kurosawa · GRRL x Made of Oak
Gwenifer Raymond · Haley Heynderickx · Hand Habits · Hannah Cohen · Harriet Tubman & Georgia Anne Muldrow · Hayden Pedigo · His Name Is Alive
Isaiah Collier & The Chosen Few · Jamie Lidell & Luke Schneider · Janel & Anthony · Jeffrey Lewis & The Voltage · Jimmie Dale Gilmore & Butch Hancock
Joe Westerlund · John Mailander's Forecast · Julia Ühlela & Dálava · Julianna Barwick · Karen Mantler Trio · Kate Gentile · Ken Pomeroy · Kishi Bashi
Lazyhorse · Lisel · Los Thuthanaka · Lubomyr Melnyk · Lucrecia Dalt · Madison Cunningham · Mali Obomsawin · Maria Somerville
Marilyn Crispell & Harvey Sorgen · Maruja Limón · Mary Lattimore · Matt Mitchell's Zealous Angles · Meara O'Reilly Vocal Ensemble
Mei Semones · Miles Okazaki · Miriam Elhajli · Model/Actriz · Moin · Natalie Bergman · Nate Mercereau · Nate Smith · Nik Bärtsch's RONIN
Openness Trio · Orchestra Baobab · Orcutt Shelley Miller · Pan American & Kramer · Patricia Brennan Septet · Rafiq Bhatia · Richard Dawson
Rosenau & Sanborn · Ryan Clackner & Tyshawn Sorey · Ryan Davis & The Roadhouse Band · S.G. Goodman · The Saami Brothers ft. Ustad Naseeruddin Saami
Saha Gnawa · Sami Stevens · Saul Williams Meets Carlos Niño & Friends · Setting · shirlette ammons · Simon Hanes: GARGANTUA · Steven Bernstein's MTO Plays Sly
Sullivan Fortner Trio · Taper's Choice · Tara Clerkin Trio · Tim Berne · Tom Skinner · Tsons of Tsunami · Turning Jewels Into Water · Uhlmann Johnson Wilkes
Walt McClements · The Westerlies · William Hooker Quartet · Winged Wheel · Wu Fei & Shanir Blumenkranz · Yagódy · YHWH Nailgun

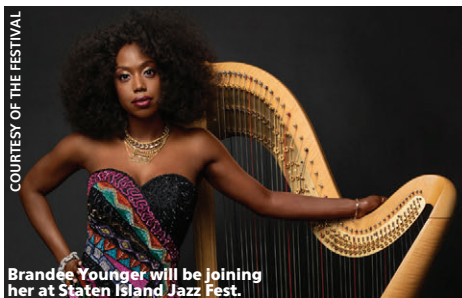
250 Performances, 20+ Venues,
Plus Films, Conversations, & More!

Weekend passes & more info
available at BigEarsFestival.org



The Benny Benack III Quartet performs at the Manchester Jazz Fest in Connecticut.

Camille Thurman will be performing at Staten Island Festival 37 in December.



Brandee Younger will be joining her at Staten Island Jazz Fest.

EAST

 This trumpet denotes a corresponding ad in this guide.

Washington Heights Jazz Festival

Washington Heights, New York City

Nov. 6-9

The 8th annual Washington Heights Jazz Festival is a four-day neighborhood-based event bringing more than 65 musicians to six local Upper Manhattan venues. The festival features top NYC jazz artists, Grammy winners and MacArthur Fellows alongside musicians from the neighborhood of Washington Heights, resulting in a world-class festival with a hometown feel.

LINEUP: Miguel Zenón + Jason Yeager; The Mark Sherman/Mike Clark Quartet; Sara Caswell Quartet; Camila Cortina Quintet; Marianne Solivan; Paul Jost; Yotam Ishay Septet (winner of the 2025 Jazz WaHi Composition Competition); Prism Trio; The Jazz WaHi Big 'Nuff Band; Louise Rogers' Jazz for Kids; Latin Jazz Party with Tres Gatos and more.

jazzwahi.org/jazz-fest

Annapolis Jazz & Roots Festival

Annapolis, Maryland
Nov. 7-9 & Nov. 14-16

Located in a centuries-old city on the Chesapeake Bay, the festival includes concerts at eight sites, including free and ticketed events. The 2025 theme is "World Travelers & Hometown Heroes." Experience Peerless Rens, an historic Black social club in Eastport for Opening Night, visit venues nearby, then enjoy the Grand Finale at Maryland Hall for the Creative Arts.

LINEUP: Alexis Tantau with Letitia VanSant & Rusty Sal; Eva Cassidy Tribute; Peerless Rens Club; Jabari and J.C. Jefferson Interview/Discussion: "Art, Music & the Muse," Banneker-Douglas-Tubman Museum; J.C. Jefferson Quartet Salute to Quincy Jones, Banneker-Douglas-Tubman Museum; Michael McHenry Tribe, Soulful Funk & Rock, Pip Moyer Recreation Center; Unified Jazz Ensemble, Ellington, Count Basie, Benny Goodman and More, Eastport UM Church; Ed Hrybyk Trio, Bass Traditions: Charles Mingus, Ray Brown, Oscar Pettiford and More, Eastport-Annapolis Neck Library; Footworks Percussive Dance Ensemble, Unitarian Universalist Church of Annapolis; Freedom Choir directed by Elizabeth Melvin, St. Luke's Episcopal Church; Joshua Redman Quartet Grand Finale Concert, Maryland Hall for the Creative Arts.

annapolisjazzandrootsfestival.com

TD James Moody Festival

Newark, New Jersey
Nov. 8-23

Presented by the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC), the 14th annual TD James Moody Festival aims to showcase jazz as a cultural force for social justice. Co-curated by Christian McBride, this year's festival is inviting performances that intertwine jazz with history and activism at performance spaces around Newark.

LINEUP: The George Cables Trio; Omar Sosa Quarteto Americanos; Stanley Clarke n-4ever; Arturo Sandoval; Savion Glover: PROJECT.9; Rachael & Vilray; Jazz, Hip Hop and Poetry with Rakim, Slick Rick, Chuck D, Tyehimba Jess, Nuyorican Slam Poetry

Team, Caridad de la Luz aka La Bruja and DJ Spinna; Carlos Varela with Diana Fuentes; the Christian McBride Big Band with Andra Day, José James and Ledisi; Stanley Jordan Plays Jimi; and the Nat Adderley Jr. Quartet. Also, the 14th annual Sarah Vaughan International Jazz Vocal Competition.

njpac.org/series/james-moody-jazz-festival

Manchester, CT Jazz Festival

Manchester, Connecticut
Dec. 6-7

Celebrating its 10th anniversary, the Manchester, CT Jazz Festival has been a cornerstone of the community, uniting music lovers, supporting local charities and showcasing world-class talent in the heart of Manchester. In preparing for the 10th annual festival, organizers invite you to join them. This year's festival promises a sold-out audience of over 600 jazz enthusiasts anticipated across two music-packed days. As a premier musical fundraiser produced by Beth Sholom B'nai Israel (BSBI), a nonprofit organization, every contribution enables BSBI to support many local charities.

LINEUP: Grammy winners Dan Pugash with his Jazz Orchestra and Nicole Zuraitis; The Vanisha Gould Quartet; Jonathan Barber-Vision Ahead; The Hall Monitors; Luvu Pop; Grass Routes Bluegrass and more.

manchesterctjazzfest.com

Universal Temple of the Arts Staten Island JAZZ Festival

Staten Island, New York
Dec. 20

Jazz takes center stage at the Universal Temple of the Arts' (UTA) 37th annual



An all-star jam at the 2024 North Carolina Jazz Festival.

Staten Island JAZZ Festival, drawing both devoted aficionados and curious newcomers to a celebration of jazz. From the moment you step into the majestic St. George Theatre, get ready to immerse yourself in an unforgettable evening of musical performances curated by Dr. Darrell Smith, a distinguished Staten Island native, educator, composer and band-leader. Guiding the night's festivities will be Sheila E. Anderson, an on-air personality at WBGO 88.3 FM. In addition to the stellar musical performances, the festival honors three outstanding individuals who embody the festival's spirit of excellence, justice and joy through their contributions to jazz and community: blues and jazz singer Antoinette Montague, acclaimed jazz producer and educator Amilcar Mtu and Richmond County commissioner and public administrator Edwina F. Martin.

LINEUP: Arturo O'Farrill & The Afro Latin Jazz Ensemble; The Brianna Thomas Band; Julie Maniscalco Dectet; Wycliffe Gordon; Sounds of April & Randall.

utasi.org

Unity Jazz Festival

Jazz at Lincoln Center
Jan. 8-9

The third annual Unity Jazz Festival transforms the House of Swing into a dynamic celebration, uniting living legends, rising stars and boundary-pushing bands. Audiences can wander between spaces, encounter fresh sounds and connect with fellow jazz lovers in an atmosphere where discovery, tradition and creativity flourish together.

LINEUP: To be announced. Past lineups have included Rachael & Vilray; Dee Dee Bridgewater; Emmet Cohen; Sullivan Fortner & His

Galactic Friends; Chief Adjua; Summer Camargo; Randy Brecker; Isaiah Collier and more.
jazz.org/concert/unity-jazz-festival

NYC Winter Jazzfest

Various venues in Manhattan and Brooklyn
Jan. 8-13

Praised by The New York Times, The New Yorker, NPR and countless other national publications, the NYCWJF has become a creative home for path-breaking artists from the local NYC scene and globally, and a pivotal destination for arts leaders and cultural cognoscenti, hardcore fans and new listeners alike.

LINEUP: To be announced.
winterjazzfest.com

SOUTH

 This trumpet denotes a corresponding ad in this guide.

Bob Masteller's JAZZ FOR ALL AGES Music Festival

Hilton Head Island, South Carolina
Oct. 12-13

The 11th annual Bob Masteller's JAZZ FOR ALL AGES Music Festival returns to beautiful Hilton Head Island at the Sonesta Beachfront Resort. The fest showcases world-class performers while raising money to keep school music programs alive and well.

LINEUP: Ulysses Owens Jr. Big Band featuring Ms. Lisa Fischer, celebrating "All Things Ellington," the Music, the legacy, the legend; Rene Marie & Experiment in Truth; JUMP IN THE LINE! A musical celebration of Harry Belafonte.
jazzforallages.com

Clearwater Jazz Holiday

Clearwater, Florida
Oct. 16-19

Great music and epic vibes prevail on the green in Coachman Park. This collaboration between the Clearwater Jazz Holiday Foundation, City of Clearwater and Visit St. Pete/Clearwater sets the stage for this year's 46th Celebration. Crowds will enjoy the fest's colorful musical lineup, from jazz to jam, funk, fusion and more.

LINEUP: Tower of Power; RNR featuring Rick Braun & Richard Elliot; Cory Wong; The War And Treaty; Trombone Shorty & Orleans Avenue; Lady Blackbird; Trampled By Turtles; St. Paul & The Broken Bones and more, including 14 additional performances on 2 side stages.
clearwaterjazz.com

Suncoast Jazz Festival

Sand Key, Clearwater, Florida
Nov. 21-23

The Suncoast Jazz Festival celebrates its 35th anniversary with three days of live music across three venues. The festival promises Big Easy-flavored early jazz, music from the American songbook, modern acoustic jazz, swing, Brazilian, blues and even a touch of rockabilly and gospel.

LINEUP: Tuba Skinny; Wycliffe Gordon; Ken Peplowski; Diego Figueiredo; Jason Marsalis; Professor Cunningham and His Old School; Dave Bennett Quartet; Tom Rigney and Flambeau; St. Louis Stompers; Chuck Redd; Ehud Asherie; Jonathan Russell; Bakey and Betty; The Legendary John Lamb; James Suggs; Bryan J. Hughes and the Crew; Don Mopsick; Nate Najjar; Daniela Soledade; Heather Thorn; Eddie Metz; Carl Amundson; Simon Lasky Trio; Theo Valentin; La Lucha; Bob Price; Joe Porter; Paul Wilborn and Eug-



Jon Batiste wows 'em at the PDX Portland Jazz Festival.



Grace Kelly jams at the 2024 PDX Jazz Festival.

enie Bondurant; The Jazz Phools; Al Downing Trio; Naples Jazz Society Jazz Band.

SuncoastJazzFestival.com

North Carolina Jazz Festival

Wilmington, North Carolina

Feb. 5-7

The 46th edition of this festival features performances by musicians from around the globe.

LINEUP: Maria Howell and The Noel Freidline Quartet; The Benny Hill Quartet; Adrian Cunningham and Chloe Feoranzo on reeds; Chuck Redd and Kevin Dorn on drums; Dion Tucker and Wycliffe Gordon on trombone; Bruce Harris and Ben Polcer on trumpet; Herman Burney and Brandi Disterheft on bass; Nate Najar on guitar; Rossano Sportiello and Ehud Asherie on piano; Jonathan Russell on violin. ncjazzfestival.org

GroundUP Music Festival

Miami Beach, Florida

March 13-15

Named by The New York Times as "Top 10 of the Decade in Music," the GroundUP Festival features daily sets by Snarky Puppy and an eclectic mix of artists with an intimate capacity of some 1,500 in a beachfront venue. Meet the artists who remain the entire weekend and offer workshops and hang with the audience.

LINEUP: Snarky Puppy; Rickie Lee Jones; and many more to be announced. groundupmusicfestival.com



Big Ears Festival

Knoxville, Tennessee

March 26-29

The multidimensional, genre-defying celebration of music and the arts returns, transforming downtown Knoxville with 250-plus concerts, films, conversations and exhibitions in more than 20 venues. Spanning generations, genres and geographies,

the lineup unites global trailblazers, iconic ensembles and boundary-breaking new artists. Tickets are on sale now — don't miss this weekend of fearless artistry and discovery.

LINEUP: David Byrne; Pat Metheny; John Zorn; Cécile McLorin Salvant; Marc Ribot; John Scofield Trio; Julian Lage Quartet; Nels Cline & Knoxville Jazz Orchestra; Patricia Brennan Septet; Chucho Valdés Royal Quartet; Mary Halvorson; Isiah Collier & the Chosen Few; SML and more. bigearsfestival.org

Charleston Jazz Festival

Charleston, South Carolina

April 13-19

The Charleston Jazz Festival has grown into a vibrant celebration of jazz, uniting world-class musicians and local talent in one of America's most historic cities. From swinging big band performances to soulful modern sounds, the festival honors Charleston's rich jazz legacy while inspiring new generations through unforgettable concerts and community connections.

LINEUP: To be announced. Past guests have included Samara Joy; Paquito D'Rivera; Diane Reeves; Jazzmeia Horn; Terence Blanchard and Donald Harrison. charlestonjazz.com

MIDWEST



This trumpet denotes a corresponding ad in this guide.

Elmhurst University Jazz Festival

Elmhurst, Illinois

Feb. 26-March 1

Entering its 59th edition, the country's best university groups once again travel to Elmhurst for memorable performances and educational sessions. Students are surrounded by some of the world's most

accomplished jazz musicians, creating an unparalleled learning environment.

LINEUP: Anat Cohen Tentet; Jeff Hamilton Trio; Guest Artists; Clinicians: Denis DiBlasio and Ulysses Owens Jr. elmhurst.edu/about/special-events/february-jazz-festival

Eau Claire Jazz Festival

Eau Claire, Wisconsin

April 17-18

The Eau Claire Jazz Festival, founded in 1967, is the nation's largest student-run jazz festival. Featuring world-class artists alongside emerging talent, it unites education, performance and community. With vibrant concerts, cultural impact and unmatched student leadership, this one-of-a-kind festival continues to shape the future of America's original art form.

LINEUP: To be announced. Recent artists have included Sean Jones; Camille Thurman; Lewis Nash; Grace Kelly; Doc Severinsen; Bob Mintzer; John Clayton; and Diane Schurr. eauclairejazz.com

WEST



This trumpet denotes a corresponding ad in this guide.

Angel City Jazz Festival

Los Angeles, California

Oct. 9-19

This small yet uncompromising festival is uniquely focused on bringing you an eclectic selection of some of the most talented performers, composers and improvisers worldwide. Get ready to be blown away by this incredible gathering of phenomenal artists.

LINEUP: Motoko Honda's Simple Excesses Quartet; Matt Small's Crushing Spiral Ensemble; The Gathering; Devin Daniels Quintet; Dan Rosenboom's Coordinates

Orchestra; Steph Richards Power Vibe; Milena Casado, Adegoke Steve Colson & Iqua Colson; Hanging Hearts; Jeff Parker Trio; Mary Halvorson & Tomas Fujiwara; Ches Smith's Clone Row; Adam Rudolph Sunrise Trio; Brandon Ross & Stomu Takeishi; Rudresh Mahanthappa's Hero Trio.

angelcityjazz.com

Earshot Jazz Festival

Seattle, Washington

Oct. 10–Nov. 2

Earshot Jazz Festival presents world-class jazz in intimate venues throughout Seattle, offering 24 days of performances that celebrate the genre's rich heritage and bold future. The 37th edition of the festival features legendary artists, emerging talents and local favorites, including Festival Resident Artist Thomas Marriott and commissioned artist Roman Goron.

LINEUP: Christian McBride and Brad Mehldau; Brandee Younger; Arooj Aftab; Bilal; Kris Davis; Ghost-Note; Zohar & Adam; Kassa Overall; Alune Wade; Miki Yamanaka; and many more.

earshot.org/festival

Sun Valley Jazz Festival

Sun Valley, Idaho

Oct. 16–19

The Sun Valley Jazz Festival, now in its 36th year, is a vibrant celebration. Over the years the festival has been dynamic and intimate

gathering, where music lovers and artists alike come together to celebrate the joy of jazz.

LINEUP: Terry Myers Big Band; Patriotic Marching Band; Tom Rigney and Flambeau; San Lyon; High Street Party Band; Leyland; Pikal & Coots Trio; Alpha Rhythm Kings; Carolyn Martin Swing Quartet; Dave Bennett Five; Hot Jazz collective; Baker Boys; Special Guests Brian Casserly, Matt Bottel, Sheri Colby, Shaymus Hanlin, Casey Parnell and Michael Summers.

sunvalleyjazz.com

Frank Morgan Taos Jazz Festival

Taos, New Mexico

Nov. 12–15

Founded in 2014 to honor the legacy of Frank Morgan, the four-day festival features an array of artists from across the spectrum of jazz, many who have worked with or been mentored by Morgan.

LINEUP: George Cables Trio; Grace Kelly; the Lorca Hart Trio with saxophonist Lyle Link; and Red Hot & Red, Native American jazz trio. The festival is organized by the Taos Jazz Bebop Society.

taosjazz.org



Tucson Jazz Festival

Tucson, Arizona

Jan. 16–24

Immerse yourself in sunshine, community

and the vibrant culture of Tucson. Enjoy nine days of main stage concerts in historic venues, open air celebrations (where dancing in the streets and plazas is encouraged), intimate jazz club sessions, music fusion events and impromptu Late-Nite Jams.

LINEUP: Cory Wong; DeeDee Bridgewater with Bill Charlap; Sergio Mendez; Emmet Cohen; Anat Cohen; Braxton Cook; Diego Figueiredo and Chuchito Valdes; Gerald Clayton; Hamilton de Holanda; Jenny Scheinman's All Species Parade; Jeremy Pelt; Joe Farnsworth; Kirk Whalum; Zona Libre; Terrell Stafford.

tucsonjazzfestival.org

Healdsburg Jazz Winter Festival

Healdsburg, California

Jan. 29–Feb. 1

Healdsburg Jazz presents its 2nd annual Healdsburg Jazz Winter Festival in historic venues throughout Healdsburg/Sonoma County wine country. The festival features an array of renowned artists in beautiful settings.

LINEUP: Joel Ross; Gabrielle Cavassa; Jahari Stampley; Tamir Hendleman; Mads Tolling; Jackie Ryan; Mimi Fox; Jeff Denson; Ben Goldberg; Scott Amendola; Tammy Hall; Sylvia Cuenca; Kanoa Mendenhall; Enid Pickett; Marcus Shelby; and many more artists.

healdsburgjazz.org

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OCTOBER 23RD
→ **NOVEMBER 09TH**

FLYING LOTUS / DIANA KRALL *preview* / SHABAKA /
ANOUAR BRAHEM / KOKOROKO /
PAOLO FRESU, RICHARD GALLIANO
& JAN LUNDGREN /
QUINTORIGO & JOHN DE LEO / AVISHAI COHEN /
ABDULLAH IBRAHIM / DEE DEE BRIDGEWATER /
SAYF • FUNK SHUI PROJECT
& JOHNNY MARSIGLIA • AINÉ /
DAVE HOLLAND *feat.* JALEEL SHAW
and NASHEET WAITS /
BLUE LAB BEATS / ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT /
{ and many more... }

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JAZZ
FESTIVAL

JANUARY 16 - 24, 2026

**ARTIST LINE-UP
SPECIAL EVENTS
& TICKETS** TUCSONJAZZFESTIVAL.ORG



DownBeat gets some South American love at the Punta del Este Festival.



Cécile McLorin Salvant entrances at the Aalener Jazz Festival.

Jazz at Naz Northridge, California Feb. 1-21

The Jazz at Naz festival has been recognized as one of the best winter jazz festivals on the West Coast. Featuring jazz club and great hall concerts as well as livestreaming events, it's showcased major debuts for emerging artists such as two-time Grammy-winner Samara Joy and created a home for the jazz legends such as John Pizzarelli, Branford Marsalis, Chucho Valdés and more.

LINEUP: Duke Ellington Concert of Sacred Music Featuring Michael Mayo, Tonality and Josette Wiggan with Gerald Clayton on piano and serving as music director; Arturo O'Farrill Trio; Cécile McLorin Salvant; Anat Cohen Quartetinho; Valentine's Day with Veronica Swift featuring the Pacific Jazz Orchestra with Chris Walden, conductor; Alonzo King LINES Ballet, Ode To Alice Coltrane.

thesoraya.org/en/jazz-at-naz

Teagarden Jazz Festival for Young Musicians

Sacramento, California
Feb. 7

Enjoy the music of Grammy Award-winning percussionist Danny Coots & the All-Star Festival Band, performances by student jazz combos; jazz workshops; and onstage feedback by experts in the field of traditional jazz.

LINEUP: Danny Coots & the All-Star Festival Band: Justin Au (trumpet), Clint Baker (all/brass), Dan Barrett (trumpet/trombone), Katie Cavera (bass/guitar/banjo), Neil Fontano (piano), Marilyn Keller (vocals), Tim Metz (drums), Joe Midiri (reeds); plus student performances. teagardenjazzfestival.org

Biamp Portland Jazz Festival Presented by PDX Jazz

Portland, Oregon
March 5-14

PDX Jazz presents more than 50 performances at venues across the city of Portland. The largest jazz festival in the Pacific Northwest, the Biamp Portland Jazz Festival includes performances from everyone from legends to rising stars, NEA Jazz Masters to Grammy winners.

LINEUP: To be announced. Past artists have included Jon Batiste; Erykah Badu; Terence Blanchard; Dianne Reeves; Nicholas Payton; Christian McBride; Ravi Coltrane; Brandee Younger; Sudan Archives; Bob James; Lee Ritenour; Louis Cole; Shabaka; John Patitucci; Julian Lage; Kamaal Williams; Bassekou Kouyate; Vieux Farka Touré; Theo Croke; Kassa Overall; Keyon Harrold; Sullivan Fortner and more.

pdxjazz.org

Denver Jazz Fest

Denver, Colorado
April 9-12

Entering its second edition, the Denver Jazz Fest will be enjoyed in 16 venues throughout Denver and Boulder counties.

LINEUP: Orrin Evans Trio; Miles @ 100 featuring Marquis Hill and Mark Turner and more; Keith Oxman; Bob James; Ghost Note and the Motet. More to be announced.

denverjazz.org

Lionel Hampton Jazz Festival

Moscow, Idaho
April 22-25

The Lionel Hampton Jazz Festival is one of the largest educational jazz festivals

in the world. Since the 1960s, the festival has brought jazz masters together with elementary, middle school, high school and college students at the University of Idaho to share and celebrate jazz, a truly American art form.

LINEUP: To be announced. Past lineups included Ella Fitzgerald; Dizzy Gillespie; Sarah Vaughan; Dianne Reeves; Stan Getz; Carmen McRae; Joey DeFrancesco; Bobby McFerrin; Hank Jones; Roy Hargrove; Diana Krall; Wynton Marsalis; Esperanza Spalding; Joshua Redman; Marcus Miller; Take 6; Kenny Garrett; and the eponymous Lionel Hampton and his New York Big Band.

uidaho.edu/class/jazzfest

INTERNATIONAL

 This trumpet denotes a corresponding ad in this guide.

Enjoy Jazz Festival

Heidelberg, Mannheim, Ludwigshafen, Germany
Oct. 2-Nov. 8

Enjoy Jazz Festival presents the duo premieres of Shabaka and Nduduzo Makhathini as well as Tania Giannouli and Nils Petter Molvaer. Artist in Residence Jazz Is Dead is featured with a whole night of appearances by Adrian Younge, Bilal and Gary Bartz.

LINEUP: Abdullah Ibrahim Trio; Thomas D & The KBKS; Angelika Niescier; Tomeka Reid; Eliza Salem; Annie and the Caldwells; Anouar Brahem Quartet; Brandee Younger Trio; Charles Lloyd's Sky Quartet; Christian Muthspiel; Claus Boesser-Ferrari; Joss Turnbull & Mia Ferrari; corto.alto; Dee Dee Bridge-water Quartet; Enji; Erwin Ditzner; Francois

Couturier & Dominique Pifarely; ganavya; Gee Hye Lee Trio feat. Jakob Bansch und Sandi Kuhn; Ibrahim Maalouf; Irreversible Entanglements; James Brandon Lewis Quartet; Jelena Kuljić—Fundamental Interactions; Johanna Summer & Malakoff Kowalski; Kruder & Dorfmeister; Loco Cello; Makaya McCraven; Mica Millar; Michael Wollny; Nik Bartsch RONIN; Shai Maestro; Simin Tander; SOAP & SKIN; Tania Giannouli & Nils Petter Molvar; Tigran Hamasyan Trio; Tribute to Peter Brotzmann: Heather Leigh & Rasmussen-Pliakas-Wertmueller; Vijay Iyer & Wadada Leo Smith; Vincent Peirani; Yazz Ahmed and more.
enjoyjazz.de

Bologna Jazz Festival

Bologna, Italy

Oct. 9–Nov. 15

The longest edition ever of Bologna Jazz Festival will display a wide range of American and Italian/European artists mostly focused on modern and contemporary jazz. Also included is an extended educational program.

LINEUP: Billy Cobham; Dee Dee Bridgewater; Monty Alexander; Mary Halvorson; Sullivan Fortner; Tim Berne; Joe Lovano with symphony orchestra conducted by Vince Mendoza; Aaron Parks; Samuel Blaser; Johnathan Blake; Lage Lund; Amaro Freitas and more.
bolognajazzfestival.com

Jazzmandu 2025

Kathmandu, Nepal

Oct. 9–15

Jazzmandu is an annual gathering of world-class musicians and music-hungry audiences in one of the most unique cities on the planet. Now into its second decade, Jazzmandu has a growing renown as a hidden gem of the international festival scene. Those who are in on the secret are treated to a week of shows in stunning venues, with traditions of jazz and improvised music from all continents crossing paths.

LINEUP: Catia Werneck; Mike del Ferro; Leona Berlin; Mohs; Nick Aggs; Cadenza Collective.
jazzmandu.com

Baloise Session

Event Hall Basel Fair, Switzerland

Oct. 17–Nov. 6

The Baloise Session — a boutique music festival with exclusive, feel-good ambience — takes place at a candlelit club table, just like in the formerly legendary New York music clubs. And all this in the smallest capacity, intoxicatingly close to the music stars from all over the world. Experience musical highlights with a mix of rock, pop, soul, jazz, world, blues, singer-songwriter and much more.

LINEUP: Amy MacDonald; Zoë Më; Parov

Stelar; Berlioz; Queens of the Stone Age; Duran Duran; JC Stewart; Paula Dalla; Peg-asus; Aloe Blacc; Johannes Oerding; Dabu; Lukas Graham; Tom Gregory; Jon Batiste; Ca7riel & Paco; Dermot Kennedy; Larkin Poe.
baloisession.ch



Oct. 23–Nov. 9

JAZZMI is Milan's jazz festival. Founded in 2016, it has already earned its place as Italy's most important indoor jazz festival and it has hosted the best artists on the Italian and international scene. Four weeks of concerts in theaters, clubs and alternative spaces of the city. Plus films, books, exhibitions, special events, meetings with artists, musical itineraries, workshops.

LINEUP: Diana Krall; Kokoroko; Shabaka; Anouar Brahem; Flying Lotus; Quintorigo & John de Leo; Avishai Cohen; Paolo Fresu; Richard Galiano & Jan Lundgren and more.
jazzmi.it/en

Zurich Jazzno jazz Festival

Zurich, Switzerland

Oct. 29–Nov. 1

This international festival is an exciting mix of urban jazz, soul-funk sounds and jazz

washington heights jazz festival
 new york city
Nov 6 – 9



Miguel Zenón



Marianne Solivan



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Groovin' at Jazzmandu.



Laura Jurd's Never Again performing at last year's Saalfelden Jazz Festival.

fusion grooves. Four nights of awesome music with true musical pearls features around 20 concerts at Gessnerallee Zurich.

LINEUP: Marcus Miller; Beverley Knight; Kokoroko; Stereo MC's; The Dee Dee Bridgewater; Mike Stern Band; Samm Henshaw; Kinga Glyk; Maya Delilah; Sam Greenfield; Rita Payés; Vincen Garcia; Kat Eaton; Gaidaa. jazznojazz.ch

Tampere Jazz Happening

Tampere, Finland
Oct. 30-Nov. 2

Tampere Jazz Happening, one of the flagship events in modern jazz, was founded in 1982. Its innovative program has made it one of Europe's most intriguing jazz festivals highlighting the influence of classical, rock and world music on the development of modern jazz.

LINEUP: Daniel Erdmann's Organic Soulfood; Émile Parisien Quartet; Goran Kajfes Tropiques; Hamid Drake; Kalle Kalima & Conny Bauer; How Noisy Are The Rooms?; James Brandon Lewis Quartet; Mary Halvorson Amaryllis Sextet; Rob Luft Quartet; The Five Corners Quintet; Tomoki Sanders; Trio Raulin; Bekka; Biayenda; Ukiyoto; Helmi Antila Quartet; Iro Haarla Ouranos Ensemble; Junnu Aaltonen; Lauri Kallio; Olli Ahvenlahti New Quintet; Pauli Lyytinen; Lehto/Korpi; Pepa Päivinen Peacepipe; Tahmela Six. tamperejazz.fi/en

Jazzfest Berlin

Berlin, Germany
Oct. 30-Nov. 2

One of Europe's most renowned jazz festivals, Jazzfest Berlin bridges past, present and future through innovative programming. Featuring global jazz legends, experimental projects and groundbreaking collaborations, it also fosters community engagement. Its outreach program creates inclusive spaces, connecting local audiences with interna-

tional artists through workshops, discussions and participatory performances.

LINEUP: Albert-Mangelsdorff-Preis; Amalie Dahl's Dafnie EXTENDED; Amirtha Kidambi's Elder Ones; David Murray Quartet; Felix Henkelhausen; Fire! Orchestra; hilde; James Brandon Lewis Quartet; Linda Allemano Four; Linton Jazz Composers Orchestra feat. Marilyn Crispell & Angelica Sanchez; Makaya McCraven; Marc Ribot; Marta Sánchez Trio; Mary Halvorson's Amaryllis Sextet; Melting Pot; MOPCUT feat. MC Dälek; Niescier/Reid/Salem; Pat Thomas Solo; Patricia Brennan Septet; Sakina Abdou; Sanchez/Guy/López; Signe Emmeluth; The Handover; The Young Mothers; Tim Berne's CAPA-TOSTA; Vijay Iyer & Wadada Leo Smith. berlinerfestspiele.de/jazzfest-berlin

Aalener Jazz Festival

Aalener, Germany
Nov. 5-9

The Aalener Jazzfest is an annual music festival that ranks among the most important jazz events in Germany. It brings together classic jazz with funk, soul, rock and world music, showcasing both renowned artists and emerging talents. The festival stands for diversity, openness and a welcoming atmosphere for music fans.

LINEUP: Elvis Costello meets WDR Big Band arranged and conducted by Michael Leonhart; Curtis Stigers; Heavytones; Electro Deluxe; Torsten Goods; Max the Sax Full Band; Theo Croker; Markus Becker & Olaf Casimir; Borja Catanesi; Late Night Sessions in The Room hosted by Max the Sax. aalener-jazzfest.de

Padova Jazz Festival

Padova, Italy
Nov. 6-23

Each of the three weeks of Padova Jazz Festival 2025 will be focused on a specific

genre, starting with Italian jazz and moving to Latin jazz and African-American Black music.

LINEUP: Stanley Clarke Band; Cécile McLorin Salvant; Camilla George; Uri Caine Trio; Alfredo Rodriguez Trio; Roberto Fonseca Quartet and others. padovajazz.com

We Jazz Festival

Helsinki, Finland
Nov. 20-29

We Jazz Festival is an adventurous jazz event hosted by the Helsinki-based music culture company We Jazz. Now in its 12th edition, the event seeks to find new spaces for the music and present an international program across the broad spectrum of jazz each year.

LINEUP: Aja Monet; Bill Frisell Trio; Cosmic Tones Research Trio; Darius Jones Trio; Ill Considered; Jonah Parzen-Johnson & Lau Nau; Kannaste4; Ken Vandermark & Paal Nilssen-Love; Muriel Grossmann Quartet; Oddarrang; SPACE; *secret gigs*; We Jazz DJs; more to be announced. wejazz.fi

Christmas Jazz

Tallinn and other cities in Estonia
Nov. 29-Dec. 9

Christmas Jazz is filling dark nights with good music in the winter wonderland of Estonia for the 30th time.

LINEUP: Sachal Vasandani; Rabih Abou-Khalil Group; Petros Klampanis with Estonian jazz pianist Kristjan Randalu and Greek drummer Ziv Ravitz; and more. jazzkaar.ee

Umbria Jazz Winter Festival

Orvieto, Italy
Dec. 30-Jan. 3

Umbria Jazz Winter in Orvieto offers a rich mix of music and tourism all in a unique



The Dixie Blue Blowers jam at Umbria Jazz Winter.



Daydream performs the music of Duke Ellington at the Tampere Jazz Happening.

location. Five days of music with more than 100 events that together make up one of the traditional dates of the Italian jazz calendar. The festival is built around a successful, tried-and-tested formula combining tourism and first-class music with the hospitality of one of the most beautiful towns in Umbria, rich in history and art.

LINEUP: George Cables; Uri Caine; Enrico Pieranunzi; Antonio Faraò; Paolo Fresu; Fabrizio Bosso; Pasquale Grasso; Marquinn Middleton & The Miracle Chorale and many more.

umbriajazz.it

Punta del Este International Jazz Festival

Uruguay

Jan. 7-11

The Punta del Este International Jazz Festival is a renowned music event held annually in Uruguay. It gathers world-class jazz musicians and passionate audiences in an elegant coastal setting. With performances ranging from classic to contemporary jazz, the festival offers unforgettable nights of rhythm, improvisation and cultural exchange in one of South America's most glamorous destinations.

LINEUP: To be announced. Past lineups have included Diego Urcola; Paquito de Rivera; Elio Villafranca; Camila Cortina; Mark Gross; Brianna Thomas; Hansel Torres.

festival.com.uy

Saalfelden Jazz Festival

Saalfelden Leogang, Austria

Jan. 23-25

For over 45 years, the Saalfelden Jazz Festival has been a meeting place for the international jazz scene, where there is always something new and innovative to discover. The combination of a breathtaking landscape and experimental sounds attracts fans from all over the world to the small town on the Steinernes Meer every year in August.

In contrast to the large summer edition of the Jazz Festival Saalfelden, the 3 Days of Jazz is an intimate festival that is held in winter in the middle of Salzburg's Innergebirge mountains. A total of nine concerts at four different locations await visitors.

LINEUP: To be announced.

jazzsaalfelden.com/de

Havana Jazz Festival

Havana, Cuba

Jan. 25-Feb. 2

The 41st annual Havana Jazz Festival takes listeners on a journey of sound, taste and sights.

LINEUP: To be announced. Past lineups have included a host of the island's amazing talent,

plus a wide array of international artists.

havanajazzfestivals.org

Jazzkaar

Tallinn and other cities in Estonia

April 25-May 2

Known as the harbinger of spring, Jazzkaar will take place for the 37th time in Tallinn and other cities of Estonia. During 8 days and two weekends, discover emerging new talents and listen to the living legends of jazz world.

LINEUP: To be announced. Previous headliners have included Snarky Puppy; DeeDee Bridgewater; Jazzmeia Horn; Kenny Garrett; Cyrille Aimee; Maria Faust and Gilad Hekselman.

jazzkaar.ee

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Reviews

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



WERNER SIEBERT

Vibraphonist Patricia Brennan makes music of the stars with *Of The Near And Far*.

Patricia Brennan *Of The Near And Far*

PYROCLASTIC

★★★★★

Using a method she based off collecting numerical data and pitch from constellations in the summer sky and overlaying the patterns over a circle of fifths, Patricia Brennan knows how to bring a weighty concept down to earth. It's complicated science, but the multi-talented vibraphonist makes all this astoundingly digestible. The collection of songs has moments of contemporary brilliance, chamber jazz exploration, electronic skronkiness and ambient breathiness. All throughout this

suite, Eli Greenhoe's conducting guides this talented group through Brennan's mindbending (but not overwhelmingly so) compositions to make one of the most accomplished, explorative albums of this year.

Opener "Aquarius" follows the rule best used in these corners of the contemporary circles: You can get away with anything if you can put it to a beat. John Hollenbeck definitely has that covered to an exacting, exuberant snap. "Lyra," not quite the album centerpiece but practically so, shuffles into a gripping beat and never lets go. It's a veritable banger, even in its searching moments that establish every bit of the built tension the composition earns in its release.

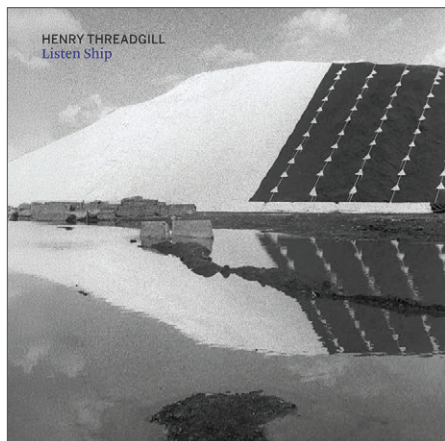
The album seemingly becomes this suite of tunes where the interstitials build to brilliant motifs coming into formation like the stars they represent. It's the kind of music that makes one want to take up an interest in astronomy. This kind of compositional care shows Brennan's clear intention throughout the album: a dazzling, cohesive gazing into the complexity of the abyss.

—Anthony Dean-Harris

Of The Near And Far: Antlia; Aquarius; Andromeda; Citali; Lyra; Aquila; When You Stare Into The Abyss. (44:56)

Personnel: Patricia Brennan, vibraphone with electronics, marimba; Sylvie Courvoisier, piano; Miles Okazaki, guitar; Kim Cass, bass; John Hollenbeck, drums and percussion; Modney, Pala Garcia, violin; Kyle Armbrust, viola; Michael Nicolas, cello; Arktureye, electronics; Eli Greenhoe, conductor.

Ordering info: patriciabrennan.bandcamp.com



Henry Threadgill *Listen Ship*

PI

★★★★

Six guitars and two pianos is an unusual orchestra, but for the Pulitzer Prize-winning composer/saxophonist Henry Threadgill, it's a concept that he has been exploring since his 1994 album *Song Out Of My Trees*. On his latest record, *Listen Ship*, he leads an all-star string octet through a rich soundscape of cerebral melodies and rhythmic asymmetries that transcend the homogenous instrumentation and highlight the individual voices of the ensemble.

Donny McCaslin *Lullaby For The Lost*

EDITION

★★★★½

Between his work with Maria Schneider, David Bowie, and both together, Donny McCaslin has long since proven his bona fides on both sides of the jazz/rock divide, while his solo work further obliterates any presumed boundaries. Even so, *Lullaby For The Lost* is an achievement. It definitely rocks more than swings — check out the punky straight-eighths on “Blond Crush” or “KID” — but that doesn't take away from the jazz content any more than the advanced harmonic language of his solo on “Wasteland” takes away from the track's rhythmic immediacy.

McCaslin manages that balance by first prioritizing the rhythm section. It's a team effort. The arcade-style pulse of “Tokyo Game Show,” for example, lets sequenced synths carry the basic pulse so Nate Woods' drums can play more freely, while “Wasteland” uses rhythm guitar riffs to anchor the groove while Tim Lefebvre's bass and Zach Danzinger's drums churn beneath McCaslin's growling tenor. But it's also dense and enveloping, pulling the listener in like a whirlpool.

Still, the album devotes much of its space to showcasing McCaslin's affinity for melody. These are earworms, running the gamut from gentle

Brandon Ross (acoustic soprano guitar) and Jerome Harris (acoustic bass guitar), who were on the 1994 record, are joined here by Bill Frisell, Greg Belisle-Chi and Miles Okazaki on acoustic guitar and Stomu Takeishi on acoustic bass guitar. In a series of brief, fleeting vignettes, they oscillate between jangly round-robin melodies, frenetic angular timbres and sparse, punctuated phrases. Pianists Maya Keren and Rahul Carlberg use Threadgill's signature intervallic syntax to mark tonal shifts and introduce new aural motifs.

A compositional system that Threadgill has been honing since the '90s with his ensemble Zooid, his serial intervallic language provides the framework for intricate, multidimensional harmonies and freewheeling improvisation. On each track, a rotating set of strings explore different intervals, forcing the octet into uncharted territory while moving through ever-shifting harmonies and counterpoint.

There are moments when the music feels a bit rigid and unfocused, but when the octet finds its groove, it feels like they're creating alchemy.

—Ivana Ng

Listen Ship: A; B; C; D; E; F; G; H; I; J; L; M; N; O; P; Q; R. (44:17)

Personnel: Henry Threadgill, compositions and conductor; Brandon Ross, acoustic soprano guitar; Bill Frisell, Gregg Belisle-Chi, Miles Okazaki, acoustic guitar; Jerome Harris, Stomu Takeishi, acoustic bass guitar; Maya Keren, piano; Rahul Carlberg, piano.

Ordering info: pirecordings.com



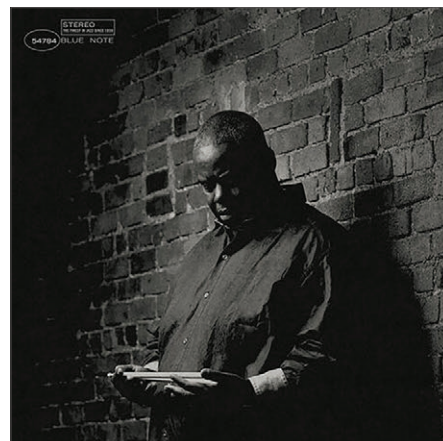
lyricism (“Stately”) to full-tilt abandon (“Blond Crush”). Its best moments take on an almost panoramic sweep, as when “Solace” builds to a soaring, majestic peak, then pulls back to conclude with a crunching, bass-driven vamp. Great writing, dramatic improvisation and riveting rhythm work — what more could you want from an album?

—J.D. Considine

Lullaby For The Lost: Wasteland; Solace; Stately; Blond Crush; Celestial; Tokyo Game Show; Lullaby For The Lost; KID; Mercy. (50:22)

Personnel: Donny McCaslin, tenor saxophone, flute, alto flute (6); Jason Lindner, synthesizers (1–6, 9), electric piano (1, 2, 5), piano (2, 9); Ben Monder (1, 3, 4, 7, 9), Ryan Dahle (4), guitar; Tim Lefebvre, electric bass (1, 4–6, 8, 9), electric guitar (1, 2, 4–6, 8), synths (2, 4–6, 8, 9), synth bass (7); Jonathan Maron, electric bass (2, 3); Zach Danzinger (1, 4, 5, 7, 9), Nate Wood (2, 3, 6), Mark Guiliana (8), drums.

Ordering info: editionrecords.com



Johnathan Blake *My Life Matters*

BLUE NOTE

★★★★

If addressing the world with pride, vehemence and expertise is a potent way of making a stand in this effed-up sociopolitical climate, then consider Johnathan Blake a force to be reckoned with. The majestic attack marking the drummer's *My Life Matters* has antecedents in Max Roach's supercharged protest music and Tony Williams' overwhelming percussion artistry. As this 14-piece suite plays out, the perilous drama people of color face in 2025 America is illustrated in ways both ferocious and forlorn.

One thing Blake has never lacked is conviction. Every snare smack on this album feeds his quintet's toggling between fetching barnburners and fiercely rendered ballads. The pulse of “Can Tomorrow Be Brighter?” sizzles thoughtfully. The insistent groove of “Last Breath” holds a sumptuous melody.

A series of solo interludes links longer performances, goosing the program's flow. Bassist Dezron Douglas delivers finesse. Vibraphonist Jalen Baker waxes poignant. Pianist Fabian Almazan offers lyricism. Saxophonist Dayna Stephens' EWI gets cinematic.

The leader's clout on “Can You Hear Me? (The Talking Drums Have Not Stopped)” is perhaps most pertinent, each wallop a virtual retaliation against the murders of Eric Garner and Philando Castile, tragedies that partially inspired this music. File it under certitude, a posture that defines Blake's art and bolsters his response to the downpressers who are currently our most pernicious foes.

—Jim Macnie

My Life Matters: Broken Drum Circle For The Forsaken; A Prelude To An Unnecessary Yet Tragically Banal Oratorio; Requiem For Dreams Shattered; In A Brown Study; I Still Have A Dream; My Life Matters; Can You Hear Me? (The Talking Drums Have Not Stopped); Always The Wrong Color; That Which Kills Us Makes Us What?; Can Tomorrow Be Brighter; Lullaby For An Eternal Rest; We'll Never Know (They Didn't Even Get To Try); Prayer For A Brighter Tomorrow. (52:00)

Personnel: Johnathan Blake, drums, cymbals; Dayna Stephens, saxophones, EWI; Fabian Almazan, piano, electronics; Jalen Baker, vibraphone; Dezron Douglas, bass; Bilal, vocals (4, 14); DJ Jahi Sundance, turntables (1, 9); Muna Blake, spoken word (6); Johna Blake, electric bass (13).

Ordering info: bluenote.com

The Hot Box

Critics	Anthony Dean-Harris	Ivana Ng	J.D. Considine	Jim Macnie
Patricia Brennan <i>Of The Near And Far</i>	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★
Henry Threadgill <i>Listen Ship</i>	★★★½	★★★	★★★★	★★★★
Donny McCaslin <i>Lullaby For The Lost</i>	★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★
Johnathan Blake <i>My Life Matters</i>	★★★½	★★★	★★★½	★★★★

Critics' Comments

Patricia Brennan, *Of The Near And Far*

As expansive and momentous as the cosmos, Brennan's latest project showcases yet another facet of her visionary artistry. A singular voice in avant-garde music, she draws on astral telemetry, classical percussion, and alt-rock fire to deliver something truly fresh and exhilarating. —Ivana Ng

Well, of course an album inspired by the cosmos is going to have some range, but even so, Brennan's compositional reach dazzles, from the Reich-ian rhythmic interplay of "Antlia" to the spacey strings and electronics of "When You Stare Into The Abyss." —J.D. Considine

More subtle than last year's celebrated whirlwind, but just as impactful in its cagey interplay and astute sequencing. Brennan's study of the cosmos accounts for the size and weight differences of all its celestial bodies, making this a fetchingly varied expedition. —Jim Macnie

Henry Threadgill, *Listen Ship*

Threadgill continues to dazzle with his tightly wound compositions and this new configuration of compatriots who accomplish his cerebral tunes with inspired understanding.

—Anthony Dean-Harris

It may lack the thunderous overkill of work by Glenn Branca or Rhys Chatham, but the sound of Threadgill's acoustic (mostly) guitar orchestra is broader and more colorful, not to mention more rhythmically dynamic. —J.D. Considine

The azure delicacy of these well-aligned strings accumulates a fetching density by the time this bold opus floats away, ultimately arriving at places unexpected. It's the kind of ingenious maneuver Threadgill has built his career on. —Jim Macnie

Donny McCaslin, *Lullaby For The Lost*

McCaslin has always played with a kind of epic-ness that his latest endeavor has aptly captured in a more grounded sound, a bold approach to restraint. —Anthony Dean-Harris

Punk-rock percussion collides with transcendent jazz reeds and danceable guitar-driven melodies, creating high-octane energy. —Ivana Ng

The saxophonist's squad splits the dif between jazz-rock and rock-jazz, coming in with guns blazing. McCaslin's lyrical lines make the onslaught even richer. But sometimes they hit a bit too hard, and sometimes a bit too predictable as well. —Jim Macnie

Johnathan Blake, *My Life Matters*

These impressionable statements and interstitials are direct, to the point and appropriately grandiose. Even the choice of Dayna Stephens' piercingly playing an EWI is a point Blake is making in his work. —Anthony Dean-Harris

With magnetic solos from drummer Blake, vibraphonist Jalen Baker and bassist Dezron Douglas, this is a record full of soul and heat. —Ivana Ng

That he doesn't play on six out of 14 tracks speaks to how seriously he takes his writing, and the vocal performances underscore how strongly he feels his politics. But it's the ferocious, unremitting swing of his drumming that most matters here. —J.D. Considine

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Jahari Stampley *What A Time*

INDEPENDENT RELEASE

★★★½

2023 was a banner year for the young pianist and composer Jahari Stampley. He won first place in the Herbie Hancock International Jazz Piano Competition. His hometown broadsheet, the Chicago Tribune, named him “Chicagoan of the Year in Jazz.” The 25-year-old was honored by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, joined Stanley Clarke’s band and released his debut album, *Still Listening*.

It was an impressive opening act, and now he’s returned with his second recording, *What*

A Time. The recording goes further in exploring and developing ideas that are both deep within the jazz tradition and adjacent to it.

Listening to the recording, it was easy to imagine a scenario where a Ramsey Lewis acolyte had a music collection full of recordings on the Windy City-based International Anthem.

At 41 minutes, *What A Time* has the crispness of a ’50s Prestige LP, but with far more guests. Stampley enlisted a stellar array of collaborators. Keyon Harrold enlivens the insistent “Freedom In The Journey.” Derrick Hodge, Morgan Guerin and Blaque Dynamite elevate the elegant “Dear Time.” Drummer Jongkuk Kim energizes “Journey To Madrid.” But some of Stampley’s most satisfying work is on his own. A solo piano version of “What A Time” highlights the touch and ingenuity the Hancock judges likely heard.

Like most solid sophomore recordings, *What A Time* builds on the triumphs of the debut and bodes well for the work ahead.

—Martin Johnson

What A Time: What A Time; Freedom In The Journey; Dream Again; To Be Alive; Dear Time; Right Here; Journey To Madrid; Rising Tide; Prelude En Trance. (38:26)

Personnel: Jahari Stampley, piano; Rhodes, synthesizers; Derrick Hodge (5), D’Erania Stampley (7-9), bass; Nicola Caminiti, alto saxophone (1); Stefan Haerle (1,8), Morgan Guerin (5), tenor saxophone; Keyon Harrold, Stephane Clement, trumpet (2); Jongkuk Kim (1,7), Luke Titus (2), Blaque Dynamite (5), Miguel Russell (7-9), drums; Elton Aura (2), India Carney (3), Michael Blume (5,6), MOE (6,7), vocals.

Ordering info: jaharistampley.com

Harold López-Nussa *Nueva Timba*

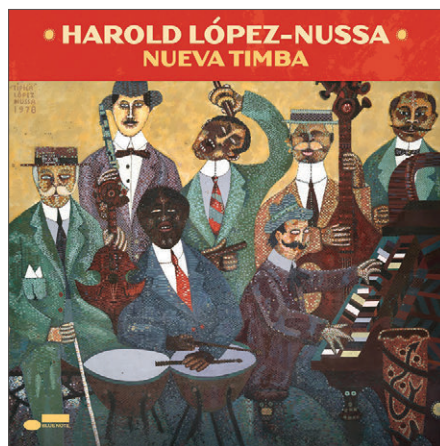
BLUE NOTE

★★★★

Sometimes maintaining tradition while breathing new life into old modes is challenging. Pianist/composer López-Nussa seems to delight in the challenge. *Nueva Timba* covers a lot of ground in regards to Cuban musical idioms (from cha-cha, mambo and danzón to rumba and timba), but his sound also includes the distinctly French-sounding harmonica stylings of Grégoire Maret.

The result is a sort of transatlantic sound that is steeped in salt and savor. Then that brew, initially recorded live at Le Duc des Lombards in Paris, was enhanced in post-production by intriguing, almost ghostly samples and electronics. (One example is “Bonito y Sabroso,” which is a reframing of a Benny Moré song that seamlessly melds past and future.) And while the tracks tackle many moods, the collection is also deeply cinematic.

“Alma y Fuego” features Maret through a filter: Imagine a psychedelic harmonica fusion track circa 1972 and you’re halfway there. Now, let your mind’s eye land on a windswept beach at dawn, just after a mournful storm. There



you are. Meanwhile “Guajira,” a live revisiting of a composition López-Nussa recorded in 2015 for the *Havana-Paris-Dakar* album with Alune Wade, reminds me of the feeling of sipping Havana Club rum at one of the many cultural centers that dot Cuba and feature a bevy of lovely artists convening each evening.

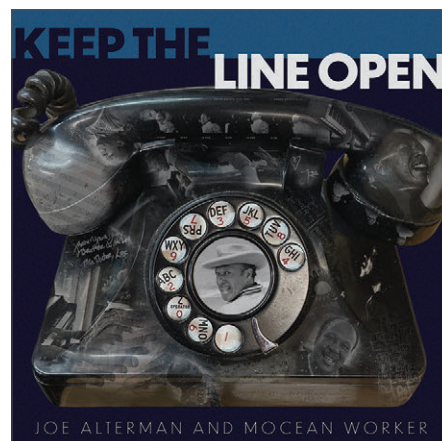
Nueva Timba is a joy; it is a sadness; but it is never a bore.

—Ayana Contreras

Nueva Timba: Open; Bonito y Sabroso; Gitanerías; a Lyle, Cerca y Lejos; Niña Con Violín; Alma y Fuego; El Manisero; Guajira; Why; Bajista Guerrero; Final/New Day. (45:05)

Personnel: Harold López-Nussa, piano; Ruy Adrian López-Nussa, drums; Luques Curtis, bass; Grégoire Maret, harmonica.

Ordering info: bluenote.com



Joe Alterman and Mocean Worker *Keep The Line Open*

ROYAL POTATO FAMILY

★★

Pianist-keyboardist Joe Alterman and bassist-producer Adam Dorn (who uses the pseudonym of Mocean Worker) were both friends of the late Les McCann. Dorn met the pianist-singer through his father, producer Joel Dorn, and had the opportunity to play bass with McCann. Alterman, who opened for McCann at the Blue Note, considered him a mentor and a strong influence.

Together, Alterman and Dorn wanted to pay tribute to Les McCann on *Keep The Line Open*, although they have done it in an unusual way. Their goal was, by using modern technology, to have the performances sound like a party with McCann attending, even though it was recorded in recent times in the studio. Audience noises are heard throughout as if this comprised outtakes from a Ramsey Lewis club set in the mid-1960s. McCann is heard telling a few short stories between songs, often laughs his approval of the music and makes occasional comments.

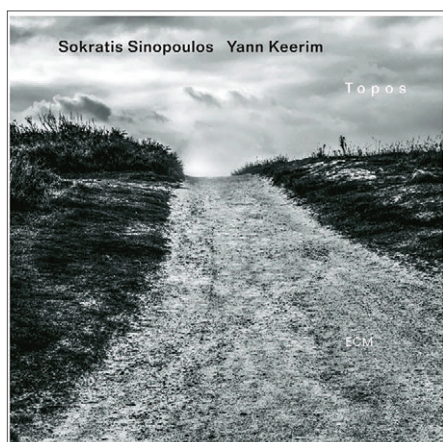
This idea could possibly have worked except that all of the songs (other than a forgettable piano solo on “Wouldn’t It Be Lovely”) are essentially one-chord vamps. While the grooves with Alterman on keyboards and Dorn mostly playing quietly on bass and programming that simulates drums and percussion, are sometimes catchy and even infectious, the music never develops nor goes anywhere. One cannot imagine Les McCann being content to play a full set of interchangeable one-chord originals. Sometimes good intentions are just not enough.

—Scott Yanow

Keep The Line Open: I Love It! I Love It! I Love It!; Yay Yay Yay; Burnin’ Coal; Gimme Some Skin; Circus Going Backwards; Get This To The People; Moses Gonzalez; Lemme Tell You Somethin’; Wouldn’t It Be Lovely. (42:08)

Personnel: Joe Alterman, piano, keyboards; Mocean Worker, electric bass, electric guitar, drum programming, synths; Les McCann, spoken word.

Ordering info: moceanworker.bandcamp.com



John Taylor/Marc Johnson/Joey Baron *Tramonto*

ECM
★★★★

Sokratis Sinopoulos/Yann Keerim *Topos*

ECM
★★★★½

These ECM releases share natures of sensitive introspection, exuberance combined with morose reflection. The previously unissued *Tramonto* was recorded live at the CBSO Centre in Birmingham, England, in 2002, with pianist John Taylor joined by Marc Johnson (bass) and Joey Baron (drums). The album arrives a decade after Taylor's demise. The opening "Pure And Simple" is perhaps pure, but not "simple," as Taylor makes gently pricking atonal statements while retaining lyricism. Bass and drums introduce a softly swinging foundation as Taylor halts and runs, flows and punctuates, combining lounge scintillation with austere classicism. The pianist draws angular, asymmetrical shapes, with sudden eruptions of jazz magma.

Taylor provides three compositions, along with pieces penned by Steve Swallow and Ralph Towner. His own "Between Moons" is more standard fare, with a classic ballad touch, pensiveness and a fine core melody. Jaunty and uptempo, "Up Too Late" perhaps lives up to its name, but with abundant reserve energy. Johnson's sour bowed bass solo prompts a pause, so Baron slides in, caressing cymbals, then introducing a stray snare, very lightly tattooing. This track is literally the centerpiece, in terms of placement and substance. Taylor invites mild tension with "Ambleside," coaxing out interior string shivers, as Johnson makes his bass sing again, entering into a lightly cantering motion. Baron takes another solo, more roused this time, and sounding like he's playing the skins with his hands.

Recorded in Athens, with ECM founder Manfred Eicher producing, *Topos* is the first duo album by the Greek players Sokratis Sinopoulos (lyra) and Yann Keerim (piano). This pair have been playing together for around two decades, but as part of the Sinopoulos quartet. The small, pear-shaped, three-stringed Cretan lyra is played vertically and bowed, on the knee.

Original pieces by the duo surround their readings of the Hungarian composer Béla Bartók's 1915 Romanian Folk Dances (six tracks), with appealingly granular lyra mostly taking the melodic lead, while Keerim concerns himself with structural progression and dappled undercurrents.

Both artists exude absolute expressivity, leaving spaces and organizing with dramatic phrasing. The self-penned works lie very well beside the Bartók compositions, also stylistically residing in melancholy southeastern European parts. Gloomy and portentous, but with rays of light, particularly in the dancing numbers. Actually, "Fast Dance" ends up quite slow, beaten in pace by "Dance From Buscum" and "Romanian Polka." We can still make a gradual sway, though.

There is just the right amount of reverb on the piano, and when the lyra comes forward, it's curving sinuously in a more untethered manner, handling a more percussive role on "Romanian Polka," as Keerim scampers out the melody. Bartók himself transformed the old Transylvanian folk songs, and now this pair are continuing the evolution. This is the moodscaping album of the month.

—Martin Longley

Tramonto: Pure And Simple; Between Moons; Up Too Late; Tramonto; Ambleside. (54:34)

Personnel: John Taylor, piano; Marc Johnson, bass; Joey Baron, drums.

Topos: Vlachia; Valley; In One Spot; Sash Dance; Dance From Buscum; Romanian Polka; Fast Dance; Mountain Path; Forest Glade; Stick Dance. (52:00)

Personnel: Sokratis Sinopoulos, lyra; Yann Keerim, piano.

Ordering info: ecmrecords.bandcamp.com



Lori Williams *Here We Are* DOUBLE MOON

★★★★½

Lori Williams has an impressive resumé as a producer, actress, radio host, business owner, teacher and session player, as well as being a singer and writer of her own compositions. Her touring has taken her around the globe, most notably to Vienna, where she began collaborating with saxophone player and bandleader Bernhard Wiesinger.

After Williams became a member of Wiesinger's sextet, they toured widely and began writing as a collective, culminating in the sessions that produced the songs on *Here We Are*.

The band's arrangements lean heavily on Brazilian rhythms, with lengthy improvisations providing a pleasing backdrop for Williams' warm vocals. There's a bossa nova lilt to "El Guindaste," a song describing happy people on an island loving, dreaming and making music together. Williams' vocals float over the band's mellow groove and laid-back solos from Wiesinger on flute and Renato Chicco's piano.

"Here We Are," a slow ballad, has the feel of a standard from the '40s. Williams adds extended notes and starry-eyed melismas to lyrics celebrating the infatuation of a new relationship. A bouncy samba rhythm introduces "Elizabeth," a simmering love song. The men in the band join in to add scattered fills that complement the long, extended notes Williams delivers with an intimate passion.

The album also includes two covers. "My Romance" is played at a jaunty pace, with Williams delivering an impressive scat solo, while James Taylor's "Fire And Rain" gets a slow, melancholy reading from the ensemble to emphasize its forlorn lyric.

—j. poet

Here We Are: El Guindaste; My Romance; Tobago; Here We Are; Elisabeth; Brazilian Nature; Hopeless Romantic; Ronco; Fire And Rain. (47:12)

Personnel: Lori Williams, vocals; Bernhard Wiesinger, tenor and soprano saxophone, flute; Christian Havel, guitar; Renato Chicco, piano; Doug Weiss, bass; Joris Dudli, drums.

Ordering info: challengerecords.com

Past, Present and Future

Past as prologue is an often-cited phrase, but sometimes the present is a reminder of the past. The recent death of drummer Louis Moholo-Moholo conjures memories of his days with bassist **Johnny Dyani (1945–1986)** in The Blue Notes. Dyani's *The Witchdoctor's Son* (SteepleChase; ★★½ 39:65), recorded in 1978, harkens back to those vibrant moments when his quartet was all the rage with their tribute to the South African revolutionary and martyr Steve Biko. Of the six tracks here, Dyani is most evident on "Ntyilo Ntyilo," where his voice is reminiscent of a Mississippi Delta blues singer. The powerful resonance of his bass is busier and more commanding on "Radebe." It is very different but compelling to hear traditional South African motifs and rhythms in concert with the avant-garde sounds of alto saxophonist John Tchicai. He and Dudu Pukwana are a potent duo, delivering lush volleys of mbaqanga straight out of Soweto. Most beguiling, however, is Dyani's pizzicato touch and arco interludes. There is something almost intuitive in his grasp of the essence of a song's sonic possibilities. On "Mbi-zo," the blast from the horns of Dudu and John conjures Albert Ayler at his screaming best. Only Dyani's occasional piano riffs cut through the raging tonality.

Ordering info: steeplechase.dk

"Eyomzi," with Tchicai's tenor leaning into elements of hard-bop and Dyani's thick explorations on bass, is about as close as these "free" performers come to approximating **Benny Golson's (1929–2024)** customary groove. The distance from Golson's hometown in Philadelphia to South Africa is almost as far away as is his jazz lineage — traced through Coleman Hawkins and Ben Webster — to Tchicai's avant-garde mooring. That fertile background is evident on practically every tune on 1959's *Gone With Golson* (Craft; ★★½ 40:33). Golson alone is treat enough, but with Curtis Fuller on trombone you have more than added value: a musician who can tastefully express a potpourri of jazz nuances. They swing smoothly together on every track and Golson is as lyrical as ever. (Who can forget his "Whisper Not" and "I Remember Clifford"?) Golson never seemed ruffled in a studio or a performance, always cleanly articulating from his horn and often burnished with a veneer of the blues. After the aptly named "Staccato Swing," launched by Fuller's punchy phrasing, Golson takes the baton and increases the speed and density of the tune. The group's pacing is much slower on "Blues After Dark," which is melodically akin to Golson's "Blues March," with the Bryant brothers, pianist Ray and bassist Tommy weaving in and around drummer Al Harewood's pulsations.

Ordering info: craftrecordings.com



Johnny Dyani as a young man.

DOWNBEAT ARCHIVE

Harewood's backbeat is picked up and accentuated by drummer Donny Donable on *Candy Girl* (Strut; ★★½ 34:25); the date belongs to pianist and composer **Mal Waldron (1925–2002)**. This is not the Waldron who was best known for accompanying Max Roach and Eric Dolphy. The title track exemplifies the album's funky Motown/Philly-sound cadence. Where is the Waldron of free-jazz, hard-bop and that distinctive style that was so engrossing and immediately recognizable? My rancor here may stem from not having the beauty of his "Left Alone" on the tracks — which, of course, is totally unfair. But once hearing how Waldron can embellish a song with chords with such a luminous array of colors and musicality, there is a hunger for more. Even the momentary tease of his exquisite way with a tune is taunting.

Ordering info: strut-records.co.uk

Discerning bassist Steven Tintweiss's visionary credentials is readily evident on *Live In Tompkins Square Park* (Inky Dot Media; ★★½ 71:27), and when he is able to assert himself between the drummer's thunder, those throbbing lines that once undergirded Albert Ayler are once again in the forefront. Even so, there is no way they are going to muffle or contrain Perry Robinson's piercing but entertaining clarinet.

Ordering info: originalvinylrecords.com/inkydot

Like Tintweiss, **Wayne Horvitz** is in his seventies and his *Live Forever, Vol. 4 '94* (Independent Release; ★★½ 60:00), recorded in 1994, is the most recent entry. The high frequency in "Stupid" — the most engaging of this amalgam of electronic funk — bears sonic kinship with Tintweiss's "Space Rocks." A cursory glance at the names of the groups he's led reveals a gaggle of genres, from The President to Pigpen. To be sure, there are elements of the past and the present here, but Horvitz augurs the future.

DB

Ordering info: waynehorvitz.bandcamp.com



Alison Shearer *In The Garden*

PINCH

★★★★½

Much like the entrance to a garden in full bloom, saxophonist-flutist Alison Shearer's *In The Garden* opens with a bustling and sonically prismatic work of overwhelming but stunning design. "Liberty Market" reflects a real Pakistani marketplace Shearer visited while touring. The quick tempo and zig-zagging time signature tease a meter in seven with the agility and unpredictability of a vendor running through a crowded street. A single Rhodes line evolves into a potpourri of tones and harmonizing contrast: the market filling up as time goes by.

"Sophie's World" offers the facade of a reprieve from the previous rush but its flashes of meter in 11 reveal Shearer's embrace of complex writing (a trend that reemerges through the Afro-Cuban bembé rhythms of "Treehouse"). The cascade of Kevin Bernstein's Wurliitzer intertwining with Horace Phillips' crackling snare and gentle cymbal splashes, before giving way to the smooth flutter of Alison's saxophone, makes for a relaxing journey, despite the sophisticated structure of "Sophie's World."

Bold downbeats and low piano notes playing against Shearer's light and vibrant melodies give "Homer" an edge, like a city with a devious underbelly lurking in the shadows. Shearer's saxophone shines on the title track, the music moving but not intimidating with excess. It's clear Shearer has settled into her musical voice. Thankfully, that voice hardly "settles" at all. *In The Garden* bears an abundance of different creative fruits, all intentional in their placement and in the end, this album makes for an impressive musical yield.

—Kira Grunenberger

In The Garden: Liberty Market; Sophie's World; But Not For Now; Homer; I; In The Garden; Treehouse; II; Remember When; Skylark. (44:23)

Personnel: Alison Shearer, saxophone, flute; Kevin Bernstein, piano, Fender Rhodes, synthesizers; Marty Kenney, bass; Horace Phillips, drums.

Ordering info: pinchrecords.com

CARMEN STAAF SOUNDING LINE



Carmen Staaf
Sounding Line

SUNNYSIDE

★★★★

Carmen Staaf is a key fixture on the New York scene through her close partnership with drummer Allison Miller and her role as musical director and pianist for singer Dee Dee Bridgewater. But the Seattle native has also made connections to the Bay Area scene thanks to her work as an educator at the Stanford Jazz Workshop in Palo Alto, something observed by concert promoter Mark Weiss. He invited Staaf to organize a project built around her connections to players

from the area including clarinetist Ben Goldberg and trumpeter Darren Johnston, and the pianist used the opportunity to celebrate the often overlooked connections between Thelonious Monk and Mary Lou Williams.

The duo performances on *Sounding Line* deftly illustrate the indelible quirks of each composer to undermine the simplified categorization of Monk as a bebop progenitor and Williams as a swing era figure. Two of the Williams tunes first appeared on her brilliant *Zodiac Suite*, a classic 1945 trio album that sounds as fresh as ever. She's joined by trumpeter Ambrose Akinmusire on the opener "Scorpio," where she transposes the original bassline with an Ellingtonian piano pattern, carving out plenty of space for her partner to growl, moan, and sigh. On Monk's "Bye-Ya" she gets support from the spry bongo playing of John Santos, whose endless invention provides a fruitful springboard for her own playing, a fluid gloss on the tune's herky-jerk rhythm. The album concludes with a pair of Staaf originals steeped in the aesthetic tendencies of its two subjects.

—Peter Margasak

Sounding Line: Scorpio; Bye-Ya; Libra; Monk's Mood; Koolbonga; Boiling Point; The Water Wheel. (36:22)

Personnel: Carmen Staaf, piano; Ben Goldberg, clarinets (3, 5, 6); Ambrose Akinmusire, trumpet (1, 7); Darren Johnston, trumpet (5, 6); Dillon Vado, vibraphone (4); tambourine (5); John Santos, bongo (2); Hamir Atwal, drums (5, 6).

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com

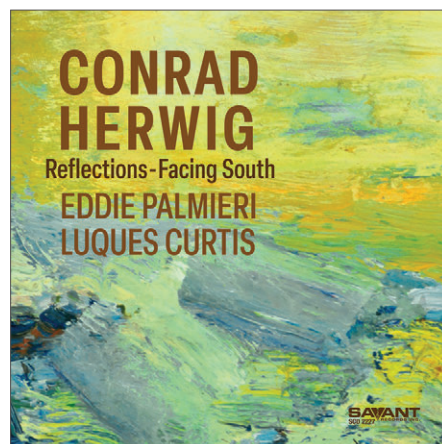
Conrad Herwig
Reflections-Facing South

SAVANT

★★★★½

It is hard to imagine any iteration of Afro-Caribbean-style improvised music that does not center on or feature the drum. Yet trombonist Conrad Herwig's trio record *Reflections-Facing South* pulls it off. It helps that the trombonist brings along veteran bassist Luques Curtis and the late pianist Eddie Palmieri for the date. Together, the group pushes their respective instrumentation to their rhythmic limits, allowing us to still feel the spiritual pulse of the clave even in its material absence. Perhaps that will be what it is like to live in the huge void left by Palmieri's passing.

Recorded in 2020, this music takes you to the sound one would hear in Havana's restaurants and shops, where it is often played in small combo formats. Not exactly background noise, these units often foreground the experience of being in space where the music is an everyday language of the people. For the last several decades, Herwig has made a name as a leader by exploring the "Latin side" of some of the music's most significant figures. But here, the program features all original music alongside the music of Palmieri. The Latin side is



implied.

Virtuosity is the mode. Without the drums, one leans closer into the interplay and exchange of Herwig and Palmieri. While it's not exactly stripped all the way down to its rawest elements, the record doesn't lend itself to the fire of Latin dance music. A small fire, it is large enough to keep us warm. And make us remember and reflect.

—Joshua Myers

Reflections-Facing South: Bianco's Waltz; C'mon (Mi Guajira); Que Viva Barry; Reflections-Facing South; Listen Lady; Augmented Blues; Cuando Se Habla De Amor; Monica; El Guerrero Solitario. (51:44)

Personnel: Conrad Herwig, trombone; Eddie Palmieri, piano; Luques Curtis, bass.

Ordering info: jazzdepot.com



Paul Bollenback/
Boris Kozlov

Synergy

STEEPLECHASE

★★½

Synergy, the new record from guitarist Paul Bollenback and bassist Boris Kozlov, is a charming tete-à-tete between two seasoned jazz musicians.

As the album's name implies, Bollenback, who's performed with greats like Stanley Turrentine and Herb Ellis and appeared on *The Tonight Show*, and Kozlov, a two-time Grammy-winner and musical director of the Mingus Big Band, do have undeniable chemistry.

On *Synergy*, that chemistry is most potent in the steady, sensitive way Kozlov holds court for Bollenback's lush chord melody. This is at its best on their tender rendition of the Johnny Mandel standard "Emily" and the sweet, two-fer Bollenback original "Child's Play." There's also an exciting spark when, as one, the pair perform the twisty bebop melodies on Bollenback's composition "B's Bounce," and in their sense of tandem on "Also."

While the record lives primarily in the straightforward jazz universe, a few blues and pop-inspired moments offer extra spice. Bollenback's tongue-in-cheek "G Blues in Bb," offers some engrossing jazz-blues, while "Jittery Bugs" offers a little surprise with its bluesy, Beatles-esque shuffle intro.

The musicians' clear connection and obvious chops are on clear display, but the record lacks freshness. There are glimmers of originality, particularly during "B's Bounce," "Also" and Kozlov's dissonant, winding "Confrontation," but the record would be improved with more exploratory moments, particularly during the improvisations.

On the other hand, the album's timeless, unflashy air is appealing. It's the ideal soundtrack for an intimate dinner party or evening at home.

—Alexa Peters

Synergy: Lope; In A Sentimental Mood; After-Thaw-T; Also; Emily; B's Bounce; Child's Play; G's Blues in B; Vernal; Benny's Vibe; Jittery Bugs; Confrontation. (68:35)

Personnel: Paul Bollenback, guitar; Boris Kozlov, bass.

Ordering info: steeplechase.dk

Ain't Gonna Suffer No More

Bill Toms & Hard Rain: *It's All We're Fighting For* (Terraplane; ★★★★★ 45:24) It's rare when one can hear every minute of every year a blues performer has expended in developing tools for creative expression. Veteran Pittsburgh-based singer-guitarist Bill Toms is such a person, every crag and cranny in his parched voice giving the impression he believed or lived his songs, nine of them aligned on his fourth album since forming the eight-piece horn band Hard Rain in the mid-1990s. The group has developed a proud identity of its own (though they sound something like the Asbury Jukes). Ultra-appealing "It's All We're Fighting For" has a humanistic grounding, as do most tunes in the lyrics department, and the Rolling Stones' "Miss You" gets a striking personalization.

Ordering info: billtoms.com

Kirk Fletcher: *Keep On Pushing* (Vizz-Tone; ★★★½ 45:02) Ex-Fabulous Thunderbird Kirk Fletcher is feeling fine, recording again after having a serious health event in 2023. On his eighth album, he plays from his heart of hearts, his command of Chicago and West Coast guitar giving him the gift of executing ideas poignantly and swingingly. For someone who started singing late in his career, Fletcher proves to be very capable of handling himself when communicating the emotionally charged meaning of words to originals and classics by Big Bill Broonzy, Percy Mayfield and other legends.

Ordering info: vizztone.com

Mother Blues With Gerald McClendon: *Sleeping While The River Runs* (Sleeping Dog; ★★★½ 57:58) Smudging the lines between Chicago blues, Robert Cray/Allman Brothers blues-rock, Southern soul and gospel, Gerald "Soulkeeper" McClendon has the time of his life in the studio making this little-known album from 2005. It's one of the best reissues of the year. The then-fiftyish Chicagoan's voice sounds fresh and he has sure control of the emotional and dynamic levels of uptempo numbers and ballads.

Ordering info: sleepingdogrecords.com

Various Artists: *Boss Black Instrumentals, Vol. 5—Ginger Snap* (Koko-Mojo; ★★★½ 64:23) This lollapalooza of early-1960s R&B, blues and rock 'n' roll has 18 tracks by as many performers whose 45s competed for attention from mostly Black record buyers. The famous — B.B. King (on the rarity "Don't Touch"), Bo Diddley and Jimmy Reed — flaunt creative vigor and unabashed spirit, as do rambunctious, reed-splitting saxophonists named Buddy Lucas, Big Bo Thomas and Lionel Torrence. It's also entertaining to be introduced to many deeply obscure bands, including multiracial Eastside Los Angeles scene-makers



Bill Toms' experience shows on *It's All We're Fighting For*.

the Mixers and white Southern California surf band the Ho-Dads.

Ordering info: mvdentertainment.com

Candice Ivory: *New Southern Vintage* (Nola Blue; ★★ 51:09) St. Louis-based Candice Ivory disappoints with her latest release. She's well-intentioned but her vocals, in a style that lies somewhere between Chicago blues and soul-blues, are bleached of interest with few convincing exhibitions of facility.

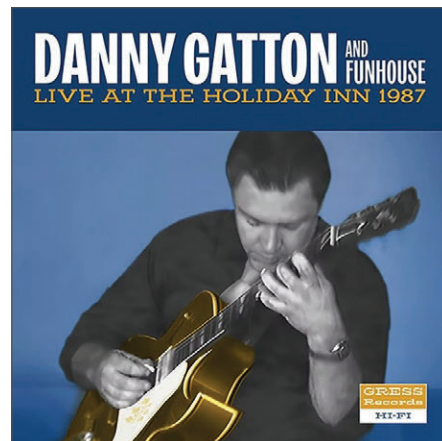
Ordering info: nolabluerecords.com

John Lee Hooker: *Boom Boom* (BMG LP; ★★★½ 40:53) Though he shuffled off to blues heaven about a quarter century ago, John Lee Hooker manages to endure as someone of fascination due in some part to a seemingly endless line of reissued records. First out in 1992, *Boom Boom* is the third of five that helped make him an international blues sensation of the late 1980s and '90s. Working a winning formula, the grand old boogie man revamps mostly standbys like "Sugar Mama" in solo stomps or spirited encounters with guitar-wielding friends Robert Cray, Albert Collins and Jimmie Vaughan. Brooding, slyly energetic Hooker is locked into a certain confidence within himself that for decades stood him in good stead. But not "I'm Bad Like Jesse James," a boring, too chatty boast.

Ordering info: johnleehooker.com

Memphis Slim: *At The Gate Of Horn* (Craft/Bluesville LP; ★★★★★ 34:00) This resuscitated Vee-Jay album from 1959, recorded at The Gate Of Horn in Chicago (with no audience present) two years before Slim quit the States to live in Europe, is a winner. On songs in his overlapping blues and R&B language, Slim presents his distinctive singing voice and piano work full of expressive sincerity. He doesn't seem the least bit weary of performing a program stacked with his old chart hits such as "Mother Earth" and the Count Basie-appropriated "The Come Back."

Ordering info: craftrecordings.com



Danny Gatton and Funhouse *Live At The Holiday Inn 1987*

GRESS

★★★★½

This recording is a bit of a miracle. It was a Holiday Inn brunch set in Tysons Corner, Virginia, captured on VHS tape and emerging as if from a dream 38 years later. The band includes a smoking Chris Battistone on trumpet, plus bassist John Previti and drummer Barry Hart.

Most folks associate Danny Gatton with rockabilly, country and blues, but he was also one of the great straight-ahead jazz guitarists of our time. Here he demonstrates deep knowledge of the history, stretching back to Charlie Christian and before, George Barnes, Tal Farlow and a ton of Wes Montgomery (octaves, chord solos, hip phrasing). Gatton's technique and multifarious stylistic mastery are dumbfounding — but not really the point. What you hear is Danny having fun. He can't help peppering his jazz with rock 'n' roll, Western swing and country licks, all spontaneous; the rhythm section lays a sure foundation for torrents of fabulous invention. Gatton was always at his best live, as this set further proves.

On "When You're Smiling," a dusty tune from 1928, Gatton explodes into uptempo gladness that name-checks Bill Haley, Barney Kessel, Eldon Shamblin and Jimmy Bryant. Benny Goodman's "A Smooth One" brings choruses of lyrical inspiration from Johnny Smith, Les Paul and steel guitar before an eruption of double-time madness that must have made polyester-suited tourists spill hollandaise sauce on their shirts. The fantastic rhythm section plays way on top of the beat, but the urgency has everyone listening and contributing equally: e pluribus unum in sound.

—Joel Harrison

Live At The Holiday Inn 1987: Besame Mucho; On Green Dolphin Street; Fried Potatoes; A Smooth One; Unknown; Killer Joe; Secret Love; Witch Doctors; When You're Smiling; One For Lenny; Take The A-Train. (70:23)

Personnel: Danny Gatton, guitar; Chris Battistone, trumpet; John Previti, bass; Barry Hart, drums.

Ordering info: dannygattonguitar.com



Scree August RUINATION ★★★★½

Scree is a guitar-bass-drums trio whose music is in a lineage that starts with instrumentals like Santo and Johnny's "Sleep Walk" and ZZ Top's "Asleep In The Desert" and ends (at least for now) with Khruangbin, plus nods to Bill Frisell and other chilled-out post-jazz guitarists here and there. It's got a vaguely Southwestern quality, though they're from Brooklyn, and a reverb-heavy (but not quite dubbed-out) mellowness that nevertheless allows for the occasional crescendo. Guitarist and primary composer Ryan El-Sohl comes up with atmospheric, emotive, retro but never winky melodies that leave plenty of space for bassist Carmen Quill to blur the line between solo and soliloquy, as drummer Jason Burger keeps rock-steady time, occasionally slipping sideways into brief explorations of his own.

August is their second studio album, following 2023's *Jasmine On A Night In July*, and it features an expanded sonic palette courtesy of violinist Zosha Warpeha, cellist David Balatero, Ivan Arteaga and Levon Henry on reeds, Luke Bergman on pedal steel and producer Ari Chersky on keyboards and glockenspiel. The freighted sonic signifiers that haunt this music make it difficult to hear what El-Sohl and company are really doing — on first listen, anyway — so they better get resigned to shorthand descriptions like "Lynchian." The occasionally eerie clarinets do their best to nudge the proceedings to life, drawing it out of the realm of mood music on "Zikra" and toward something more exciting. But for good or ill, a lot of this stuff seems best deployed as lullabies.

—Phil Freeman

August: Lethe; Zikra; Shadows In The Library; White Roses; Me Me Me; Either Way; Season 2; TV Sometimes; My Life Through The Eyes Of A Cat; Look Back; August. (42:10)

Personnel: Ryan El-Sohl, guitar, keyboards; Carmen Quill, bass; Jason Burger, drums; Zosha Warpeha, violin; David Balatero, cello; Ivan Arteaga, clarinet; Levon Henry, clarinet and saxophone; Luke Bergman, pedal steel; Ari Chersky, keyboards and glockenspiel.

Ordering info: screeband.bandcamp.com



Miguel Zenón Vanguardia Subterránea MIEL ★★★★½

Observing the 22nd anniversary of his first quartet album (2022's *Looking Forward*) with pianist Luis Perdomo, bassist Hans Glawischnig and drummer Antonio Sanchez, and the 15th anniversary of his present quartet with drummer Henry Cole (2009's *Esta Plena*), alto saxophonist Miguel Zenón used his fifth Village Vanguard residence in September 2024 to record and self-release the group's first on-location album. The hour-and-change program comprises six new pieces by Zenón and his reworked arrangements of two staples of the Puerto Rican Songbook: the 1970 Willie Colon-Hector Lavoe hit "El Día de Mi Suerte" and "Perdóname," popularized in 1990 by sonero Gilberto Santa Rosa.

Zenón is a unique soloist and an original musical thinker. His immediately identifiable sound — tart, full-bodied tone through all the

registers, minimal vibrato, immaculate articulation, mercurial over-the-bar phrasing in the manner of Charlie Parker, melodic ingenuity, a palpable sense of pace and narrative as each story unfolds, and a take-no-prisoners mentality when he's in the flow — is front-and-center throughout on a succession of resourceful, declarative solos.

Each bandmate is a world-class practitioner, and they maintain an unfailingly collective attitude, anticipating and complementing the leader's and each other's moves on the vertiginous rhythmic counterpoint of "Dale la Vuelta"; the lyric romanticism of "Vita" and "Bendición" (Zenón's tone parallels to, respectively, his 95-year-old grandmother and his mother); and the continuous stream of melody that encapsulates his feelings about the hallowed basement on the title track.

—Ted Panken

Vanguardia Subterránea: Abre Cuto Güiri Mambo; El Día de Mi Suerte; Vita; Dale la Vuelta; Coordinadas; Vanguardia Subterránea; Bendición; Perdóname. (62:03)

Personnel: Miguel Zenón, alto saxophone; Luis Perdomo, piano; Hans Glawischnig, bass; Henry Cole, drums.

Ordering info: miguelzenon.bandcamp.com

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THE JAZZ BARN

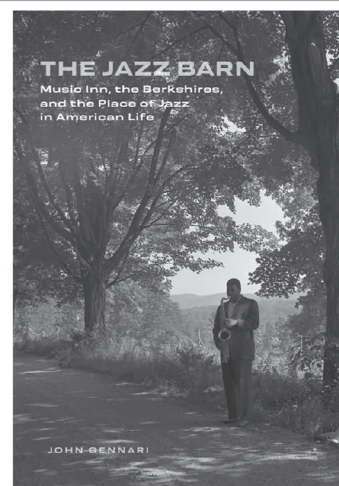
Music Inn, the Berkshires,
and the Place of Jazz
in American Life

JOHN GENNARI

Photography by Clemens Kalischer

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Clearing Your Headspace

Music appreciation is highly subjective to begin with, and free improvisation only heightens the extent to which a listener's taste plays a role in how it is received. Truly spontaneous composition runs the gamut of aesthetic qualities, and one might look at pianists Keith Jarrett and Cecil Taylor to define the boundaries, with one being known for gorgeous, aurally pleasing flights while other seems like more of a struggle for both player and listener. The challenge freeform music provides is that the audience must often tolerate extended periods of musical digging and probing before a gem reveals itself.

Beacons, a series of four recordings by the independent, artist-driven label Out Of Your Head Records, presents us with this full range. Each digital-only release documents a live, entirely improvised performance with different personnel, many of which have some previous connection to the label. The sonic approach of the ensembles is as varied as their members' personalities and the instruments they use to express themselves.

Vocalist/saxophonist **Caroline Davis** and guitarist **Dustin Carlson** convened in 2023 to record *Sprites* (Out Of Your Head; ★★★★★ 35:02), which is the *Beacons* series' standout release. Importantly, its relatively abbreviated time made the experience more digestible, given the material's demanding quality. The word "sprite" has several meanings, ranging from fairy-like creatures to electrical currents in nature. Davis and Carlson aimed to capture all these meanings in this recording to great success. This conceptual framework centers the improvisation, elevating the noisier moments above mere noise. The title track is a whimsical dialogue between guitar and saxophone with electronic embellishments, while "Nude" has a similar quality. The duo also gets dark on occasion, notably on the closing track, "Starlit Wasteland." Even through the wild mood changes, Carlson and Davis are telling a story.

If the previous album's conciseness serves as one of its strengths, then it is the lack of brevity that serves as the biggest weakness of *Lunches For The Week* (Out Of Your Head; ★★★★★ 61:05). There are plenty of engaging and intriguing moments sprinkled throughout this recording by an electro-acoustic trio consisting of **Mabel Kwan**, **Mauricio Pauly** and **Carrie Shaw**. The album's 20-minute centerpiece, "Sister Sister Brother," is a journey and could be a release in and of itself, opening with rhythmic vocal effects, winding way through industrial booms and concluding with dark, foreboding synths. The opener, "The Wood That Holds Our Meals," is like a yoga track that was remixed by Stephen



Beacons is a series of freely improvised music released by Out Of Your Head Records.

King's Pennywise the Clown. The feeling of discomfort it brought is something worth sitting with, just not for 10 minutes. The album is a commendable effort, but engaging with the darkness for over an hour (52 minutes, without the closing outtake) proved to be a bridge too far.

The Shelter Collective's Improvisations 1 (Out Of Your Head; ★★★ 49:06) proves how centering and grounding the human voice is in music, irrespective of genre or form. Indonesian vocalist Candra Rini is a featured guest throughout the album, offering timbres ranging from angelic to animal-like. The ensemble plays a supportive role for the most part, offering a sonic cushion whereby the changes in texture come mainly from the vocal. The more melodic, operatic and pleasant tones that Candra Rini conjured made the more lasting impression, though that reaction likely runs counter to the risk that free improvisors take in creating abrasive sounds, and counter to what listeners of avant-garde music seek.

Live At FEMA (Out Of Your Head; ★★½ 53:20) brings together trumpeter **Dave Ballou**, guitar wiz **Anthony Pirog** and percussionist **Devin Gray**, performing together for the first time. As with any conversation involving a spoken language, there are lulls and pauses interspersed among periods of frenetic activity. One key to the album is Gray's extensive use of brushes, a wise choice given that thunderous drums and cymbals on top of the trumpet's cutting sound would result in a harsh and likely unpleasant listening experience. Repeatedly, the interaction slowly builds until reaching a crescendo before the energy, but not the intensity, diminishes. This becomes a pattern over and over and acts as a throughline that probably brought cohesion to the live experience but becomes predictable as a recording. **DB**

Ordering info: outofyourheadrecords.bandcamp.com



Rico Jones *BloodLines* GIANT STEP ARTS

★★★★★

Rico Jones is an intriguing young artist, debuting with a quartet album comprising a five-part suite and four similarly original compositions, recorded live at Brooklyn's Ornithology Jazz Club in June '24. In evidently complete control of his tenor saxophone, Jones shows a fondness for its aspirational upper register, but also plays the whole of the horn with Lestorian ease, never straining or showing excess effort.

It seems that Jones' focus, with the support of his united ensemble, is on being serious, devotional, significant, following the Coltrane path. Nothing wrong with that; there's urgency, truth and raw beauty to be mined from that legacy. Jones joins Immanuel Wilkins and Joel Ross as current leaders with roots in the Black church, famously a source for Coltrane and many others. Is it a trend?

Max Light is an electric guitar discovery, exacting, lyrical and fluid with a well-considered, bright and solid sound. Veteran Martin knows where the music's going and how to take it there. Waits, a melodic rhythmist, swinging subtly, adds richly.

Unexpected turns characterize the moody compositions. "Dwennimmen" starts with a nearly two-minute bass solo that comes to sync with a funk-leaning guitar figure, but then Rico enters at a right angle to them — which surprisingly fits! — and thereupon heads out, determined.

To claim direct access to "The Voice Of God" may seem like a bold statement for a jazzman in his 20s, but why doubt another's faith? May it be so. Jones and company seek meaning if not transcendence in improvised music.

—Howard Mandel

BloodLines: Suite Of The Omnipotent And Eternal Spirit: Invocation, Lone Wolf, Blood Lines, Queen Isabelle; Dwennimmen; Judgement And Absolution; Across Time; The Moment; The Voice Of God Shines Brightly On My Heart. (62:07)

Personnel: Rico Jones, tenor saxophone; Max Light, guitar; Joe Martin, bass; Nasheet Waits, drums.

Ordering info: giantsteparts.org



Nils Petter Molvær

KHMER Live In Bergen

EDITION

★★★★

The Norwegian trumpeter and sonic architect has been shaping his brand of “future jazz” since he first plugged into a bank of electronics on his ECM debut as a leader, 1997’s *Khmer*. This 2024 live recording, his modernist take on the older work, is more cinematic and cutting edge.

While Molvær’s experiments were preceded by effects-laden trumpet pioneers like Don Ellis (1968’s *Electric Bath*, 1970’s *At Fillmore*), Randy Brecker (1970’s *Dreams* and later with

Billy Cobham and the Brecker Brothers) and Miles Davis (1971’s *Live-Evil*, 1972’s *On The Corner*), he takes more of his cues on this live outing from trumpeter Jon Hassell’s ambient soundscapes from the early ’80s and his subsequent blending of ethnic traditions and modern electronics into a “unified primitive/futurist sound” he dubbed Fourth World music.

Backed by his flexible Norwegian crew, Molvær adds elements of trance-like dub, hyper drum ‘n’ bass, electronica and trip-hop while emulating Miles’ renegade stance. The result is a psychedelic haze of dreamy atmospheres, slamming beats, skronking electric guitar (courtesy of Eivind Aareset), deep grooves and shimmering Nordic lyricism (as on the beautiful, sparse ballad “Kakonita,” in which the trumpeter’s unaffected horn is accompanied only by chordal swells from Aareset’s guitar). From the 13-minute rave on “Tjøn” to the brooding dub of “Maja” to rock-fueled jams like “Vilderness” and “Ligotage” to the disco-funk of “Solid Ether,” this volatile mix may alienate the strictly acoustic set while offering layers of intrigue for more adventurous listeners.

—Bill Milkowski

KHMER Live in Bergen: Song of Sand; Platonic Years; Kakonita; Ligotage; Wilderness; Solid Ether; On Stream; Tjøn, Maja. (70:43)

Personnel: Nils Petter Molvær, trumpet; Eivind Aareset, guitar and electronics; Jan Bang, live sampling; Pål “Strange Fruit” Nyhus, dj, mpc programming; Audun Eriksen, bass; Per Lindvall, drums; Rune Arnesen, drums, percussion.

Ordering info: editionrecords.com

Aruán Ortiz

Créole Renaissance

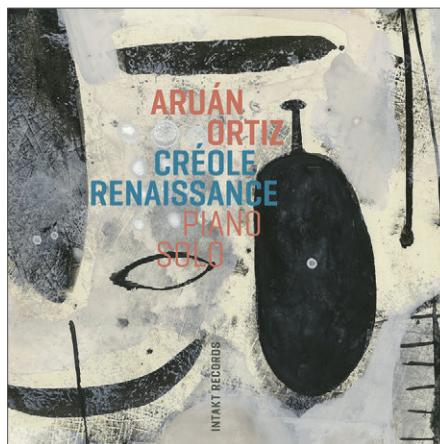
INTAKT

★★★★

Aruán Ortiz’s music is diasporic in conception. Born in Santiago de Cuba and currently based in Brooklyn, he applies a deep engagement with American jazz, from Duke Ellington to Muhal Richard Abrams, to present-day associates such as James Brandon Lewis, to concerns that leave no footprint on U.S. soil.

The toll of exile is implied in the title “Seven Aprils In Paris (And A Sophisticated Lady),” which incorporates elements of Ellington’s standard into a deliberate, brooding performance that lingers long on single notes and their decays. But perhaps it takes a perspective that transcends nationalism to reckon with the circumstances of an African-descended artist operating on a world stage. The music on *Créole Renaissance* references the aesthetics of Négritude, a racially conscious 1930s intellectual movement led by Caribbean students living in Paris. Several pieces are titled after journals they published, and Ortiz invokes the dualities and perspectives addressed by Négritude poets in his recitation on “From The Distance Of My Freedom,” the sole vocal piece on what is otherwise a selection of solo piano performances.

Ortiz employs aspects of classical, jazz and



Cuban song, but they’re part of a bigger and more personal aesthetic. There’s a baseline solemnity running through the record, and the piano preparations on “We Belong To Those Who Say No To Darkness” feel like a bell rung to acknowledge loss. But there are also moments of athleticism and unfettered flight that vary the vibe.

—Bill Meyer

Créole Renaissance: L’Etudiant Noir; Seven Aprils In Paris (And A Sophisticated Lady); Légitime Défense; From The Distance Of My Freedom; Première Miniature (Créole Renaissance); The Great Camouflage; Deuxième Miniature (Dancing); We Belong To Those Who Say No To Darkness; The Haberdasher; Lo que yo quiero es Chan Chan. (53:32)

Personnel: Aruán Ortiz, piano.

Ordering info: aruanoortiz.bandcamp.com



Joe Bowden

Music Is Life

INDEPENDENT RELEASE

★★★½

Bowden, from Nova Scotia, has been a fixture on drums in Toronto since the 1980s. For this album the veteran has surrounded himself with fellow Torontonians bassists Rich Brown and Mike Downes, with the always-immaculate vibraphonist Warren Wolf and keyboardist Manuel Valera helping to move this collection of archetypal fusion-era pieces into something more exceptional.

Bowden’s composition “Impulse Response” is a rock-inflected vamp tune that allows Wolf and Valera to flex their chops. The title track is an outlier from the rest of the album: a breezy acoustic swinger that showcases Valera’s virtuosity on piano. The music literally breaks into song with Robert Ball’s gorgeous tone providing some stability to a rather disjunct progression on “Way Out,” and again with a quartet of gospel singers leading the way to a brighter day on “Someday.”

The strongest tune is “Sunny Day,” with a harmony and groove reminiscent of Return to Forever’s “500 Miles High,” with Valera’s impassioned solo emphasizing the piece’s epic nature. “Wolf Ticket” in funky 3/4 and “The Next Step” (no relation to Kurt Rosenwinkel’s famous piece) in brisk 7/4 showcase Wolf’s impeccable linear conception in a variety of time feels.

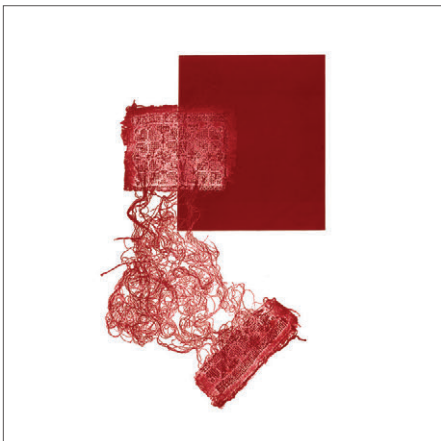
The pieces themselves are quite varied, but the album overall plateaus at a relatively high level of energy, seldom delving into subtler layers of emotion and color. Yet Wolf and Valera’s excellent solos, buoyed by Bowden’s polished drumming and simpatico with solid bassists Brown and Downes, drive the album with energetic fluidity in a solid and enjoyable listen.

—Gary Fukushima

Music Is Life: Impulse Response; Music Is Life; Way Out; Spacing Out; Sunny Day; The Next Step; The Way; Wolf Ticket; Someday. (46:00)

Personnel: Joe Bowden, drums; Manuel Valera, piano and keyboard; Warren Wolf, vibraphone (1, 2, 5, 6, 8); Rich Brown, electric bass (1, 5, 6, 7, 9); Mike Downes, acoustic bass (2, 3, 4, 8); Robert Ball, vocals (3, 9); Quisha Wint, Joanna Majoko, Wado Brown, vocals (9); Jeremy Hector, guitar (9).

Ordering info: theurbanyoda.com



Alex Hitchcock *Letters From Afar*

NEW SOIL

★★★★

British saxophonist Alex Hitchcock celebrates his fruitful relationship with the New York jazz scene on *Letters From Afar*, a cerebral, high-energy album. Its tracks include the dramatic “Yellow Greens” and the disquieting “Invisible Beasts,” a showcase for pianist Lex Korten and trumpeter David Adewumi.

The subtle interplay between Korten’s piano and Hitchcock’s liquid tenor saxophone gives “Yellow Greens” drama and drive. It’s a per-

fect introduction to this ambitious effort, especially when Adewumi weighs in with an insistent, almost intrusive solo. Tension is part of the appeal of this strong, well-designed track, particularly when Korten and Hitchcock clash — and then resolve.

Swaggering and aggressive, “Invisible Beasts” effectively sets Hitchcock and Adewumi against the rhythm section. Hitchcock darts in and out of the musical icebergs drummer Jongkuk Kim throws in his path, and Adewumi’s sneaky, complicated runs add to the subversion.

While all these Hitchcock compositions bristle with virtuosity, the slower ones, like “Bright White Light,” the similarly structured “EO” and “41” are the most impressive and moving. Harish Raghavan’s bass opens the meditative “Bright White Light,” allowing him to shine as this austere and luminous tune unfolds. Korten’s ascending lines sparkle as this imaginative player lays the foundation for a beautiful tune, setting the stage for Adewumi and Hitchcock’s union, probing lines. It’s the welcome still center of this often-turbulent recording. —Carlo Wolff

Letters From Afar: Yellow Greens; Wishbone; EO; Invisible Beasts; Bright White Light; Banshees; 41; Rio (live track available only via digital download). The LP running time is 45:15; “Rio” extends the total to 57:08.

Personnel: Alex Hitchcock, saxophone; David Adewumi, trumpet; Jongkuk Kim, drums; Lex Korten, piano; Harish Raghavan, bass.

Ordering info: alexhitchcock.bandcamp.com

Bill Laurance *Lumen*

ACT

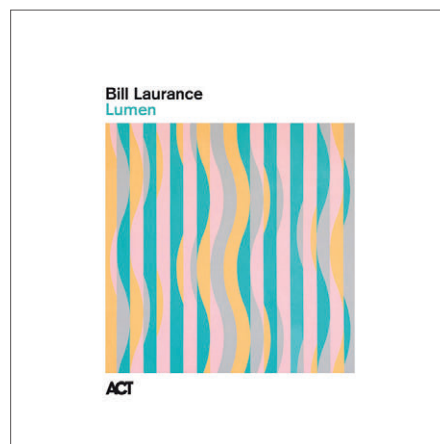
★★★★½

Snarky Puppy-launched British pianist Bill Laurance has worked in various ensemble settings, but he presents a very different side on *Lumen*. He burrowed into the sacred, reverberant space of London’s St. Faith’s Church, exploring his relationship with the solo piano format and the transformative process of facing his musical muse over two days and nights.

The end effect sometimes resembles the secular hymn-crafting of popular Norwegian pianist Tord Gustavsen. Improvisation or soloing, in the familiar jazz sense, are only rarely involved on the album, focused more on musical mood pieces, coated with florid fills and octave runs, and some heavy pedaling, to atmospheric ends.

When Laurance does stretch out as soloist — especially on “Opal” and “Sera” — we are reminded of his strengths as an improviser, wishing more of that element was in that house of God.

Varied approaches and musical cross-reference emerge. “Lumen” suggests a Philip Glass-like effect, its simple four-note figures laid atop a bed of rippling arpeggios, while “Mantra” builds atop a few cyclical chords. He dips into the post-Keith Jarrett terrain of a gospel-pulsed



feel on “Dove” and generates a pleasant impressionistic idyll on “Treehouse.”

On “What You Always Wanted,” the subtle presence of dissonant tones creates an air of musical intrigue and tension too often missing elsewhere. Laurance’s music sometimes runs the risk of fading into aural wallpaper status, but his nuanced dynamics and touch and his earnestness of intent keep the aesthetic ship afloat and moving towards its destination of transcendence.

—Josef Woodard

Lumen: Fils D’or; Lumen; Mantra; What You Always Wanted; Dove; Treehouse; Lovers Leap; Opal; Sera; Even After All. (45:13)

Personnel: Bill Laurance, piano.

Ordering info: actmusic.com



Stephen Philip Harvey Jazz Orchestra *Multiversal: Live At Bop Stop*

HIDDEN CINEMA

★★★★½

It’s an arduous undertaking to assemble a 17-piece orchestra for a live recording at a small jazz club, but saxophonist Stephen Philip Harvey makes it look and sound effortless. Filled with genre-defying compositions that fuse jazz, classical, funk, hip-hop and gospel, *Multiversal* (recorded at Cleveland’s Bop Stop) captures some of Harvey’s imaginative takes on large-ensemble works.

His 2022 debut release, *Smash!*, established him as a composer and bandleader with a knack for translating comic-book action into instrumental jazz fireworks. *Multiversal* goes further — making the listener feel not just like a reader of the story, but a participant in this cinematic, superhero-themed recording.

The opening title track wastes no time pulling listeners in as the brass and reeds lock into bold fanfares, while the rhythm section drives the action forward; trumpeter Tommy Lehman steps out with a solo that is both smooth and daring in its execution. Harvey’s humor shines on “Ain’t No Sidekick,” where Chris Coles’ impish alto solo becomes the voice of a character who refuses to play second fiddle. The piece provides comic relief while still swinging hard, which is central to Harvey’s vision.

There is much to appreciate in this slickly put-together orchestral jazz recording; being recorded live only adds to the momentum, which motivated Harvey all along. —Veronica Johnson

Multiversal—Live At Bop Stop: Multiversal (feat. Tommy Lehman); Covert Ops (feat. Max Schlenk); Mind Your Weather; Weather Your Mind (feat. Bobby Selvaggio and Dan Bruce); Earth-Two (feat. Ben Tweedt and Garrett Folger); Men Of Steel (feat. Zach Warren and Clint Bleil); Ain’t No Sidekick (feat. Chris Coles); Inner Beast (feat. Johnny Cochran Jr. and Dustin May); Tectonic Shift (feat. Dan Bruce and Bobby Selvaggio); Band Intro Blues; Covert Ops (Alternate Take); Earth-Two (Alternate Take). (75:35)

Personnel: Stephen Philip Harvey, composer, arranger, conductor; Bobby Selvaggio, Chris Coles, alto saxophone, flute; Max Schlenk, Johnny Cochran Jr., tenor saxophone, clarinet; Clint Bleil, baritone sax, bass clarinet; JD Chaisson, Tommy Lehman, Jakobe Henry, Garrett Folger, trumpet; Zach Warren, Will Horner, Lauren Rudzinkas, trombone; Amer Forrer, bass trombone; Dan Bruce, guitar; Ben Tweedt, piano, Fender Rhodes; Jordan McBride, basses; Dustin May, drums.

Ordering info: stephenpharvey.com

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"I never want to release a record I wouldn't buy myself," says Siegfried Loch of ACT Music.

Siegfried Loch

DEVELOPING EUROPE'S PASSION FOR JAZZ

By Ammar Kalia Photo by Steven Haberland

On the eve of his 85th birthday, Siegfried "Siggi" Loch is reflecting on six decades spent defining the world of European jazz.

"It's a very personal affair," Loch says from his Berlin apartment. "I have only ever wanted to record artists who make music I love and that touches people. I never want to release a record I wouldn't buy myself. That's always been my ethos."

Since founding his record label ACT in 1992, Loch has honed his personal sense of taste into a distinct modern jazz genre in and of itself. ACT's debut release, 1993's *Jazzpaña*, earned two Grammy nominations for its jazz-flamenco crossover, riffing on Miles Davis' *Sketches Of Spain* and enlisting Spanish and American musicians alongside the Cologne-based WDR Big Band to deliver fiery rhythmic fusions. Loch went on to sign and champion artists like Swedish funk trombonist Nils Landgren and influential pianist Esbjörn Svensson, while the current ACT roster includes everyone from rising British saxophonist Emma Rawicz to Snarky Puppy pianist Bill Laurance and bassist Michael League, Moroccan oud player Majid Bekkas and, most recently, the American duo Theo Croker & Sullivan Fortner.

"All my life I've been more interested in discov-

ering and developing talent than buying market share, and that's how ACT was built," Loch says. "It's all based on trust and a very personal relationship between ourselves and the artists. As long as that trust is intact, the work is wonderful."

Prior to setting up ACT, Loch was equally influential in the jazz industry and beyond. He worked as a producer for German jazz star Klaus Doldinger as well as American artists like Jerry Lee Lewis, Dave Brubeck, Gerry Mulligan and Paul Desmond. During the 1970s and '80s he was the founder of WEA, which later would become Warner Music Europe. Alongside working with artists like Prince, Led Zeppelin and the Rolling Stones, he was instrumental in signing singer Al Jarreau. To top it off, Loch and his wife, Sissy, are passionate collectors of modern European art and were early champions of painter Gerhard Richter. Their collection adorns the covers of ACT releases, lending a distinct visual language to the label roster's equally personal sound.

Celebrating this storied career, Loch has been named as DownBeat's recipient of the 2025 Lifetime Achievement Award for Recording,

joining the likes of previous honorees Bruce Lundvall, Manfred Eicher and Michael Cuscuna. It's a personal honor as much as a career milestone, Loch explains.

"When I first heard jazz, I was 15 and a friend of mine had convinced me to go and watch Sidney Bechet in concert," he says. "That show changed my life. It made me want to play that music myself and also made me want a DownBeat subscription, so I could keep up with the latest happenings in the music. It wasn't until I started working for EMI in the '60s that I finally got one. I've kept it up ever since."

Loch began working his way in the record industry, initially for EMI, then at Philips Records. It was during this time that he came across saxophonist Klaus Doldinger and went on to produce the first internationally released German jazz record, 1963's *Jazz Made In Germany*. In demand as a producer from then on, Loch was enlisted to capture a raw-edged live sound from pop, rock and jazz acts, including American rock pioneer Jerry Lee Lewis' 1964 turn at Hamburg's Star Club, where Loch had seen the Beatles honing their own sound two years previously, as well as French jazz artist Jean-Luc Ponty and Swiss jazz pianist George Gruntz.

Going on to work alongside Atlantic Records producer Nesuhi Ertegun, Loch veered further into the pop music industry and was ultimately named president of Warner Europe, until in the late 1980s he finally decided to pursue his dream in earnest. "I had to go back to my roots and fulfill my dream of making jazz and making no concessions," he says. "That's when I left Warner to go independent and start searching again for talented jazz acts who could make the audience enjoy what they were doing as much as they themselves were onstage."

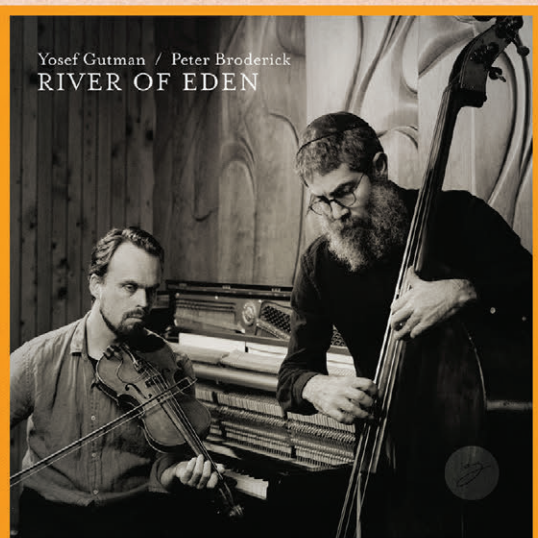
On one of his usual European jazz festival jaunts to scout out new acts, he came across the artist who is perhaps associated with ACT more than any other: Esbjörn Svensson. "I saw the trombonist Nils Landgren playing, and he had the crowd in the palm of his hand, he was so captivating. I offered him a deal then and there," Loch says. "When he came to Hamburg to record, he brought a keyboard player with him who hadn't been onstage. Once he started playing he blew me away — and that was Esbjörn."

A decade and five albums later, Svensson tragically died during a diving accident and Loch considered ending ACT altogether, but he had just signed pianist Michael Wollny and was looking into young German artists. He kept going.

It proved to be a wise decision. In 2015 he did step back from the day-to-day, handing those responsibilities over to CEO, producer and partner Andreas Brandis. Since then, ACT has become a 360-degree label, artist management, publishing, booking and concert company. "We knew we needed to change our business if we wanted to keep nurturing talent," he said. And ACT continues to do so.

DB

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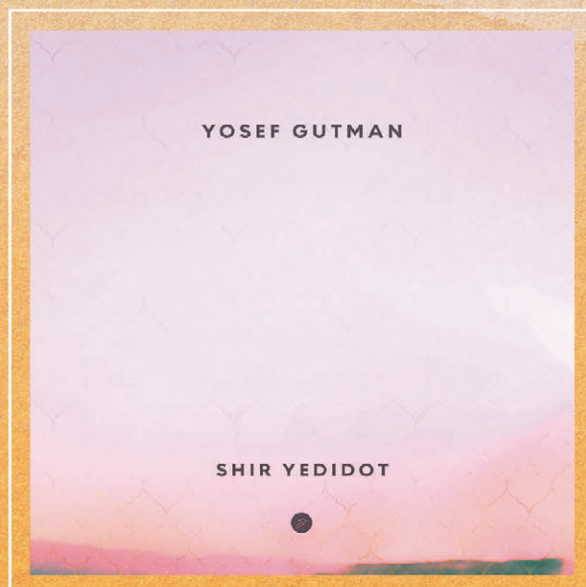
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THE MUSICIAN AS PRESENTER

By Ted Panken Photo by Jimmy Cho

Late in August, Marty Ashby, DownBeat's 2025 Lifetime Achievement Award for Presenting honoree, was on Zoom describing the day Bill Strickland, his boss and good friend, hired him as executive producer of MCG Jazz.

It happened in mid-September, 1987, when Ashby, 26, was beginning his second season as manager of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra's telemarketing office. He was supervising a "staff of 60 working three shifts" to "sell millions of dollars' worth of tickets and raise millions for the institution over the phone." Ashby also was playing guitar in local venues, while producing club concerts and small-scale festivals, as he'd done since his undergraduate years at Ithaca College, where he majored in classical guitar. As a sophomore, "tired of smoky bars" after playing professionally with his father's family band since age 8, Ashby launched the Ithaca Jazz Festival.

For the second edition, in 1982, Ashby booked Paquito D'Rivera and the Havana New York Quintet, including Claudio Roditi and Portinho. Their manager, Helen Keane, supported Ashby's projects after he moved to New York in spring 1983, as did Roditi, who taught him Brazilian nuances on gigs with Ivan Lins and Duduka DaFonseca. Ashby soon took a "third job" selling tickets from the New York Philharmonic's phone room via a third-party contractor, which promoted him to telemarketing manager at the Cleveland Symphony Orchestra in January 1984.

"I got an on-the-job Ph.D. in how to do marketing, promotion, fundraising, development,

etc.," Ashby said. "Opera, theater, ballet, modern dance, symphony orchestras — I call them OPAs, for Other Performing Arts — had a level of infrastructure that I didn't see in jazz." He conceived and began to proselytize a path toward creating a national jazz subscription series to place "great jazz artists like Dizzy Gillespie, Max Roach and Carmen McRae, who were still alive and bringing it," in classical venues.

Having fleshed out his back story, Ashby reset to Pittsburgh circa 1987. Guitarist Emily Remler, then a Steel City resident dating his younger brother, trombonist Jay Ashby, asked them to help her scope out a new venue in an industrial park on the dilapidated north side that wanted to book her. Strickland greeted them at the front door of the Manchester Bidwell Corporation's year-old headquarters, designed by a student of Frank Lloyd Wright, in which Strickland had consolidated the operations of Bidwell Training Center, an adult vocational and technical education program he'd run since 1971, and the arts-oriented Manchester Craftsmen's Guild, an arts organization he'd founded in 1968.

Strickland ended the tour at MCG's just-completed music hall, an acoustically pristine, 350-seat space with two-track and eight-track analog recorders installed in the projec-

tion booth tech deck. "I built this because jazz music saved my life, but I need somebody to run it," Strickland told Ashby, who responded, "Mr. Strickland, we need to talk." Strickland suggested the next morning at 9. "I stayed up half the night writing a proposal," Ashby said. "I talked about creating a jazz subscription series, but also an educational program, an attempt to synergize Pittsburgh's jazz ecosystem, and archiving the concerts.

"Bill gave me the keys to the front door," Ashby said, displaying them for the Zoom camera. "He said, 'Have a nice life.'"

The cumulative metrics of Ashby's 38-season stewardship are impressive, bearing out the remarks of Ken Kimery, the recently retired Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra and Jazz Oral History Program director, who noted, "Marty has approached this as a producer, a performer, a businessman, a conservator, a curator and a scholar." He's presented more than 2,000 concerts. He's overseen 70-plus albums for MCG's eponymous label (including five Grammy winners and 10 more Grammy nominations) on more than half of which he played.

"He's established a robust educational program in Pittsburgh and neighboring West Virginia, hosted over 300 radio programs during the last seven years, sponsored 34 oral histories with Pittsburgh jazzfolk, produced the award-winning documentary *We Knew What We Had* on Pittsburgh's distinguished jazz history. The archive holds 350,000-plus photos, a catalog of 3,100 works of commissioned and arranged music, 41,000-plus hours of video footage, and more than 25,000 hours of audio recording."

"Marty is a pragmatic visionary," said Todd Barkan, a friend since 1983, when he moved to New York after closing San Francisco's famous Keystone Korner. "He doesn't behave like he's presenting and the musician is on the other side."

Early plaudits for MCG from several nonsense veterans support those assertions. In May 1989, late in MCG's second season, Dizzy Gillespie told Strickland after his tour, "You think like a jazz musician." Strickland responded, "I don't play music." Gillespie retorted, "Yes, you do; this school is your song; I am going to tell everybody about this place." A few months earlier, Pittsburgh-born Ahmad Jamal told Ashby and Strickland to join him at Steinway Brothers in New York as he tested five Steinway D pianos, chose his favorite and gifted it to MCG, which deployed it until 2019.

"We dedicated that piano to Ahmad on stage," Strickland said. "Marty had everyone in his rolodex. They came because of him. But they fell in love with the center, and many became friends for life."

At 64, Ashby responds to inevitable questions about retirement with, "And do what?" "I'm pretty sure I'm still useful here. I think our best days are ahead."

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"Maybe I would have been more famous had I joined Woody's band in 1976, but I could not possibly have had a more fulfilled life," says Shelly Berg.

Shelly Berg

OUT-OF-THE-BOX ED

By Gary Fukushima Photo by Gabriella Gabriellaa

"I would love for playing the piano and writing music to be my day job," Shelly Berg says, having never stopped doing those things in 18 transformative years as dean of the Frost School of Music at the University of Miami.

In that time, he's recorded five albums under his own name and garnered six Grammy nominations as a composer, producer and/or arranger. Berg looks refreshed and rather youthful for someone who just celebrated his 70th birthday. He smiles warmly, via video from his second home in Marina Del Rey in Southern California, soon to be his primary residence once he retires from his duties at Frost after this academic year.

Berg has taught at the collegiate level for 44 years — 10 years at San Jacinto College in Houston, and then 16 years at the Thornton School of Music at the University of Southern California, before switching coasts for the warmer Atlantic waters of southern Florida. His former piano students include Gerald Clayton, Taylor Eigsti and Emmet Cohen, the jazz influencer who has featured Berg on his popular video series *Emmet's Place*. His teaching acumen has long been recognized, as early as 1999 when he was profiled by the Los Angeles Times as one of their "Educators for the Millennium" followed by accolades from Los Angeles Jazz Society, the Ronald McDonald House, the International Association of Jazz Educators and DownBeat

magazine, which honored Berg in 2011 with a Jazz Education Achievement Award and is now inducting him into the DownBeat Hall of Fame for Jazz Education. All for a jazz pianist who has never had a formal jazz piano lesson or taken a collegiate jazz course.

Shelton Glen Berg grew up in Cleveland, Ohio. Very early on he demonstrated an unusual musical aptitude. Before age 10, he was studying at the Cleveland Institute and had composed his first work for children's choir and orchestra.

Berg's father, a siding salesman who moonlighted as a jazz trumpeter, knew enough piano to show his son a few chords, and before long Berg was accompanying his father to jam sessions, including one hosted by saxophonist Arnett Cobb in Houston, where Berg's family had moved when he was 15.

Berg enrolled at the University of Houston as a classical piano major, but he was already deep into his jazz education gigging six nights a week — and at Cobb's weekly jam session at the White House Motel, where he "got schooled by Arnett Cobb, who yelled at me repeatedly," Berg recalls, "I had played with all the guys in Woody

Hermann's band, Buddy Rich's band, Stan Kenton's band ... Count Basie's band, they'd all come and hang out at the jam session." Berg was even invited to join Hermann's band on tour but decided to stay in school.

Berg remained at UH for graduate school, teaching college students for the first time as a teaching assistant in music theory. "After being a TA," he explains, "I knew how much I loved to teach, because you can see when those light bulbs go off that you're changing people's lives."

At 23, Berg began his higher education career at San Jacinto College in Houston, where he began to hone his own philosophies about teaching jazz. "I was looking at every [jazz book] that was out there, and they kept talking about modes," he says. "And then I wrote my first article for the Jazz Educators Journal, which was called 'Tonal, Not Modal,' which asked: Why is everybody teaching modes when we're playing tonal music?" That article formed the basis for his first of many books in jazz education.

While at San Jacinto, he started an annual jazz festival that allowed him to invite guest artists to perform with his school jazz band. One was trombonist Bill Watrous, who encouraged the pianist to move to Los Angeles.

In 1991, Berg accepted an assistant professorship at USC's Thornton School of Music. In that decade he would become the head of the jazz studies program.

And he began to develop some outside-the-box ideas for jazz education. He sought to establish a curriculum that could fuse the music training he learned in college with the musicianship skills he had honed outside of school, such as reading and playing chords, learning tunes and solos by ear, improvising and more. When he suggested this to Thornton's curriculum committee, Berg recalls, "The head of classical instrumental performance said to me, in the middle of the committee meeting, I've never had to improvise a note in my life, and I don't see why anybody would."

Berg ultimately found an audience for his viewpoints at the University of Miami, where he became dean of The Frost School of Music.

It didn't take long for Berg to implement his ideas. "By my third year, every freshman classical student that came in the school was taking the Experiential Music Curriculum, where we put you in the middle of 'classical garage bands' for ear training and theory, and you're [playing] and writing and hearing it back and improvising. And our students know that they're getting skills that their peers at almost every other school are not getting."

Those skills include work on television specials, major label albums, film scores, working with everyone from Pharrell to John Williams.

"Maybe I would have been more famous had I joined Woody's band in 1976, but I could not possibly have had a more fulfilled life." **DB**

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Dana Landry

BUILDING JAZZ PROGRAMS BY THE DEGREE

By Terry Perkins Photo by Thomas “Woody” Myers

Dana Landry’s dedicated efforts to build highly successful jazz studies programs at East Tennessee State University and the University of Northern Colorado over the past three decades has earned him a well-deserved 2025 DownBeat Achievement Award for Jazz Education.

After all, under Landry’s leadership, the UNC jazz department has earned 95 DownBeat Student Music Awards.

In addition to his work as an educator, Landry has an impressive musical resume. He has played piano with Ingrid Jensen, Milt Jackson, Béla Fleck, Jeff Coffin, Eddie Daniels, Rufus Reid, Bill Watrous, Billy Pierce, Lew Tabackin, David Liebman and Slide Hampton, among others. He’s recorded several albums as a leader and appeared on more than a dozen other releases. Landry also enjoys playing classical music. He’s performed often with the Colorado Symphony Orchestra, and recently returned from Brazil, where he played *Rhapsody In Blue* with an orchestra in Natal.

Landry’s achievements as a jazz educator as well as his diverse musical interests are rooted in his early years in Bangor, Pennsylvania. His parents were both educators, and his father was also a jazz drummer.

“My parents were both great teachers,”

Landry recalls. “They were always searching for ways to inspire their students. My grandmother was the secretary of the local Lutheran church, and after school I’d wait at the church for her to get off work. I’d go to the auditorium, play piano, then write on the blackboard — pretending I was teaching. So, I guess it was in my blood.”

Bangor was near the Delaware Water Gap, and Landry’s dad would often take him to the famed Deer Head Inn to hear jazz musicians such as the club’s regular pianist, John Coates, as well as touring jazz musicians. And as Landry grew older, he would accompany his father to jazz clubs in New York and Philadelphia where his dad was performing.

“My father went back and forth in his career between focusing on music while working toward a doctorate, and teaching high school while doing occasional gigs,” recalls Landry. “Eventually he got his degree, began teaching at Utah State, and we moved to Ogden, where I graduated from high school, then enrolled at

Berklee College of Music.

“At Berklee, I started majoring in performance, but I took a music business class taught by Gary Burton and that really inspired me to learn more about that. I ended up getting a degree in Professional Music. I also took a class on improvisation from Gary, and in 2005, he played on my first album, *Journey Home*.”

After graduation, Landry decided to study for a master’s degree at the University of Northern Colorado at Greeley.

“My father and I had driven through Greeley one summer while I was going to Berklee, and I was really drawn to the idea of going there to do graduate study at UNC,” he recalls. “I didn’t even apply anywhere else. I likely would have stayed in the area after I got my master’s, but I got a call from James Williams. I had gone to hear him at the Willow jazz club in Boston before I even started classes at Berklee. I had already been listening to his album, *Arioso*. We became close friends and kept in touch. His phone call let me know there was a late search for a teaching job at Middle Tennessee State University, and he encouraged me to apply. I did, and I got a one-year contract in 1995, applied for tenure track and became director of jazz studies there.”

“Working with my colleagues, we were able to put a curriculum together and create a bachelor’s degree in jazz studies and eventually create the curriculum for a master’s in jazz studies as well. I was there for seven years, and it was great to be able to play in clubs in nearby Nashville with Victor Wooten, Béla Fleck, Jeff Coffin and other great musicians.”

In 2002, Gene Aitken, who later would be named to DownBeat’s Jazz Educator Hall of Fame in 2007, announced he would be retiring as director of jazz studies at the University of Northern Colorado.

“I got the position, and I’ve been at UNC since 2002,” Landry says. “The first thing I wanted to do was start an official jazz studies program.”

In two short years the curriculum was built and the school offered both bachelor’s and master’s degrees in jazz studies.

“We now have a talented full-time jazz faculty,” he explains. “And with adjunct faculty, including the great Marian Powers teaching vocal jazz, we can now offer a doctorate degree. We have 32 doctoral students and 120 jazz majors — and it’s growing every year.”

Landry and his colleagues also designed a curriculum for a LatinX program master’s degree that started in 2023.

“I’ve been incredibly fortunate to be surrounded by colleagues whose unwavering commitment to student success has been a constant source of inspiration,” says Landry. “The greatest reward has been working with students who not only love music, but also have the curiosity, discipline and drive it takes to grow as artists and people.”

DB



Lisa Linde

MODELING SUCCESS

By Terry Perkins Photo by Cynthia Cavanaugh

2025 has been quite a year for Lisa Linde, music director at Newton South High School in Newton, Massachusetts.

At the Jazz Education Network conference in January, Linde was named the 2025 John LaPorta Jazz Educator of the Year, an annual award presented by JEN to honor outstanding jazz educators who represent the highest standards of teaching and who bring distinction to their institution and their students. Linde's NSHS Jazz Ensemble was one of 30 finalists in this year's Essentially Ellington competition, marking the third time Newton South was invited, following appearances in 2018 and 2021. The NSHS Jazz Ensemble was also a winner in the Large High School Jazz Ensemble category of the 2025 DownBeat Student Music Awards.

And to top off the year, Linde recently received the DownBeat Achievement Award in Jazz Education. Although her interest in playing jazz didn't blossom until high school, when she switched from playing flute in the marching band to playing trombone and joining the school's jazz lab band, she's certainly made up for her late start through her outstanding career in jazz education.

"I remember picking out an instrument to play in 4th grade," recalls Linde. "I had a friend who picked flute, so I did, too. In freshman year at high school, I auditioned for the marching band and barely made it as the second-to-last flute. When the band director told us we had too many flutes and saxophones, and needed people

to switch, one of the instruments they needed was trombone, which was an instrument I really liked. I made the switch, was recruited into the jazz lab band and vividly remember getting the chance to do a scoop on a note or put a little vibrato on a phrase. I really loved the creative possibilities."

After high school, Linde attended the University of Massachusetts Amherst, where she played in the jazz band, the big band, the jazz combo and a trad New Orleans group. After graduation, she began teaching music at Franklin High School while also pursuing a master's degree at the New England Conservatory of Music, where she studied with legendary educator Frank Battisti. After she received her master's degree, she began teaching at Newton South High School, and began to shape and build the jazz program there.

"I modeled what I wanted to do to grow the jazz program at Newton South on my high school program," explained Linde. "And on the amazing program that Jeff Leonard had at Lexington High School. Jeff had a strong emphasis on small group improvisation playing, but improv instruction was not a strong thread when I was in high school. Back then, teaching improvisation was, 'Here's a scale and here's a Jamey Aebersold record. Good luck to you.' I wanted to teach it differently, help my students solve the mystery of it."

When Linde started at Newton South, there

were no middle school music programs that served as feeders for high school jazz. She decided to start by working with her high school students in small groups that focused on improvisation and personal expression, transcribing and arranging jazz solos.

"I was never the greatest improviser when I was younger, so I was transcribing along with my students when I first started teaching," explains Linde. "'Here's a Miles Davis solo, let's transcribe it together.' One term we studied the music of Thelonious Monk. I'd read books about him, so in many ways I was learning with the students. For a long time, I thought you shouldn't ever write out anything for a student, but I quickly figured out that if you don't give them a starting point, a snippet of something, they're just gonna play up and down scales and it's not going to sound like jazz. You teach them to take apart those snippets and use them to improvise. It's a balancing act. You give them some framework to start with and eventually it becomes a pathway for them to improvise on their own. You want to get to the place where you set the students free."

In addition to teaching advanced jazz ensemble and advanced concert band at summer sessions at the University of New Hampshire, Linde founded the non-profit organization JazzHers in 2018. The JazzHers website home page (jazzhers.com) states the organization's mission: "JazzHers is dedicated to driving change in the jazz community by advocating for and empowering young women, non-binary and other underrepresented musicians with a focus on mentorship, performance and connection."

Linde was inspired to start JazzHers at a Q&A session between high school music students and Wynton Marsalis when she and the NSHS band attended Essentially Ellington in 2018.

"A young girl told Wynton that she didn't see herself represented at EE, and in jazz in general," recalls Linde. "She asked him what he could recommend for her to do to help that situation. At Essentially Ellington, the bands were made up primarily of boys. Even my jazz band that year only had two girls. Wynton answered the girl's question by saying that when you see a lack or a void in your circumstances, you must strive to put yourself in there and work to make it better. ... I came home and decided that I will take that message. Later that same year we started JazzHers and held our first event."

Entering its eighth year, JazzHers presents an annual series of one day events at schools across Massachusetts called JazzHers Jams. The events include a free clinic for that school's jazz band.

"Research shows that if you feel like you're in the minority in a situation, you're going to close up and not be as expressive as you should be," explains Linde. "One way to fix that is through these JazzHers Jams. ... We're in a huge growth mode, and we're frantically fund-raising to continue to make it all happen."

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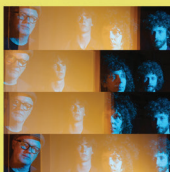


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"Listening to old jazz records from the '50s and '60s, I was transported to another time and place in this sort of magical way," Jacob Garchik says. "It's almost like you're entering this parallel universe."

JACOB GARCHIK BLENDING YE OLDE WITH THE NEW

The quirky, thematic concept for trombonist Jacob Garchik's album series *Ye Olde* (the first installment was released in 2015) came about one day while he was strolling down his Flatbush neighborhood in Brooklyn and noticed the medieval architecture of knights and castles embedded within the stonework.

"I mean, I've been in New York now for over 30 years, and I never saw this stuff before. I was just oblivious to it," says Garchik from his home in Brooklyn. "And then

once I started noticing it, I learned that in the 1930s, they really played up this whole medieval stuff. These neighborhoods were built at that time, and the developers were

using all that stuff over and over again and in other cities, too."

Little did Garchik know the medieval Flatbush setting he became fixated with would become the impetus for his fifth record. The first album in the series is an epic tale, which took place 1,000 years ago and imagines "Ye Olde" as a band of heroes, traversing Brooklyn, taking part in surreal adventures in a landscape of ruined castles/apartment buildings.

The band's goal is "to defeat the evil plan of architect Mortise Mansard the IVth, whose castles dotted the landscape from South to North," as described on Garchik's website.

Whereas the first project was about a "fantastical Brooklyn," his new recording *Ye Olde 2: At The End Of Time*, ventures into space and time, loosely narrating a voyage that ends in a cosmic battle with doppelgängers. The point, he insists, isn't the storyline itself but the playful world it opens for the music.

"The music is supposed to just transport people to a fantastical universe of sound," he explains.

Putting Garchik's music into context is mind-boggling because he's heavily influenced by sci-fi, punk rock, orchestral music and jazz, and he immersed himself in sci-jazz pioneers Sun Ra, Chick Corea and Lenny White. Listeners will immediately hear their influence on Garchik's music and the grit and edge that have become his hallmark. On recordings, he strives to enforce the rawness of the trombone.

"I studied in conservatories and played in an orchestra, but I like music that has an edge, whatever that means," he says. "My favorite jazz performers are the ones where you really hear the humanity. I mean, Miles Davis is punk rock, especially that 1970s Miles. It's like you're in New York City in the '70s when you're listening to those records. You're feeling what it was like to walk down the streets of East Village. That's how I hear it, and I really love that."

Garchik's musical eccentricity has boded well with his work as a sideman for jazz stars Miguel Zenón, Mary Halvorson, Ethan Iverson and Lee Konitz.

He's been an in-demand trombonist since moving to New York in 1994 to attend the Manhattan School of Music. There, he quickly engaged in the city's jazz scene and discovered that his instrument opened doors to an unusually wide range of gigs — from salsa and merengue to Jewish weddings and avant-garde big bands. He thrived on the variety, drawing from each style to enrich his own artistry.

In his hometown of San Francisco, Garchik says the jazz scene was small compared to New York's. But the music education scene was vast. He attended Stanford Jazz Camp and Santa Cruz Jazz Camp, and was part of the All-City Big Band, the All-State Big

Band and the All-American Big Band. He was drawn to both classical music and jazz as a kid, but jazz had the biggest impact.

"I was talking about science fiction and how it transports me. It's escapism. There's an element of that in jazz. When I was lis-

Garchik has also built an impressive portfolio as a composer and arranger, notably through his decades-long collaboration with the Kronos Quartet, a string ensemble from San Francisco. He has contributed over 100 arrangements and original compositions, in-

As a composer and lead trombonist for other leaders' ensembles, Garchik finds it difficult to carve out time to compose and record his own records. Ten years have passed since the release of *Ye Olde* and the new sequel.

"I wish I could finish projects sooner," he says. "It takes me a long time, but I love the process and it's so satisfying."

Garchik held an album release party for the new record at Nublu on the Lower East Side in August.

He is preparing for stateside and European tours with guitarist Mary Halvorson and performances at the Village Vanguard with Ethan Iverson in October.

Although sometimes sideman jobs delay his personal projects, he's fueled by both sides of his career, believing each feeds the other.

As for his conceptual albums, Garchik says sequels are always brewing. The medieval sculptures he's drawn to in Brooklyn, he believes, have multiple narratives, and he's anxious to continue exploring ways to infuse them into his music.

"The conceptual records lend [themselves] to more installments," he says, comparing his work to sci-fi franchises that thrive on continual storylines.

—Veronica Johnson

'The music is supposed to just transport people to a fantastical universe of sound.'

tening to these old jazz records from the '50s and '60s, I was really transported to another time and place in this sort of magical way. It's almost like you're entering this parallel universe when you put on Art Blakey's version of 'A Night In Tunisia' or something like that."

cluding the film score *The Green Fog* and a project about Pete Seeger.

Working for strings, he says, challenged him to adapt his jazz instincts to a centuries-old classical tradition, and positioned him as a bridge between improvisation and written composition.



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A Tribute to Wes Montgomery



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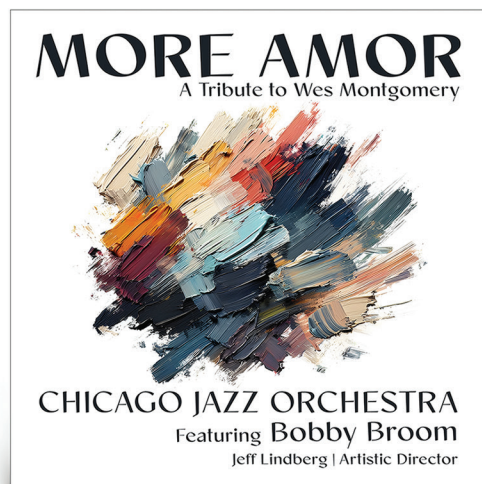


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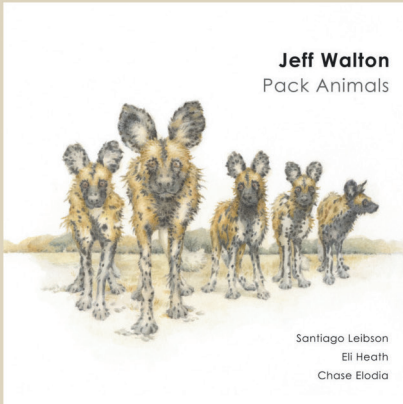
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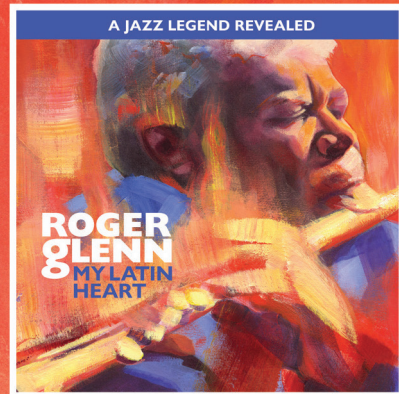
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"Working at so many arts organizations over the years, I've been trained by some of the best..." Lisa Mezzacappa says of her DIY ability and drive.

THE BUZZ ON LISA MEZZACAPPA

It's natural to assume that Lisa Mezzacappa is the titular monarch from which Queen Bee Records takes its moniker.

Her "micro-label," which has turned into a vehicle for her macro 12/12 project, is in the midst of a year-long, milestone-marking initiative in celebration of her 50th birthday and quarter-century residence in California. Looking to plant a flag for the San Francisco Bay Area creative music scene, the Berkeley bassist, composer, curator, bandleader and all-around catalyst launched 12/12 in February 2025, and it's already expanded the visibility of a scene that tends to fly under the radar,

even at home.

Encompassing a dozen disparate albums by an array of ensembles and projects with a good deal of overlapping personnel — Mezzacappa performs on all 12 releases, for starters — it's a grandly ambitious enterprise reflecting an array of improvisational strategies and compositional practices. The Queen Bee label might suggest that she's the regent responsible for populating a buzzing musical apiary, but Mezzacappa sees her role as

more akin to a worker bee. Tirelessly tending a fertile field festooned with an intoxicating assortment of sonic blooms, she's gathered ensembles performing through-composed works, free improvisation and multiple gradations in between.

"A lot of people think it's me, but the label was named for my Brooklyn-born grandmother, who I always called the queen bee," Mezzacappa explained during a conversation at the North Oakland rehearsal space where many of the 12/12 groups hone material. "The whole family circulated around her, and she was no-nonsense and unfussy in how she took care of people. One of the values I got from her was about looking around, seeing what's needed and doing it. It's very grassroots and mutual aid, though my grandmother wouldn't have called it that. If you wait around for the world to invite you and provide the support you need, it might never happen."

The first wave of 12/12 releases included *Luminous Axis* by duo B., her drums-and-bass ensemble with Jason Levis interpreting Wadada Leo Smith's graphically notated scores. *Nature Channel* by Green Mitchell Trio features Levis, Mezzacappa and reed expert Cory Wright on a program of his quick-shifting, outside-in originals. And *Archimera* documents Bristle, a singular chamber quartet with Wright and Randy McKean on woodwinds and Murray Campbell on violin and oboe. All of these groups made their New York debut at the Stone in July as part of Mezzacappa's four-night curatorial run at John Zorn's performance space (now ensconced at the New School).

If there's a verdant scene for Mezzacappa to champion, she credits a thick web of fellow artists for laying the groundwork. Arriving in the Bay Area from her native New York in 2000, she landed in the midst of the first internet bubble, a time when the Bay Area's creative music scene was buoyed and buffeted by the boom and bust. Mezzacappa points to players like saxophonist Rent Romus, guitarist Paul Drescher, percussionist Gino Robair, clarinetist Matt Ingalls and saxophonist Phillip Greenlief for their work as label proprietors, curators, website builders and venue pioneers in the decades before and after she joined the scene. Queen Bee is hardly the only outlet covering these activities, as the French label Rogue Art recently released the luminously cinephilic *Citta di Vitti: Music Inspired By The Films Of Michelangelo Antonioni*, a long-running trio project with Mezzacappa, Levis and Greenlief, a 2024 Oakland-to-Maine transplant.

Brought into the North Oakland studio by multi-instrumentalist Dan Cantrell about 15 years ago, she's turned it into something of a Queen Bee hive. It brims with a menagerie of keyboard instruments, including pump organ, Rhodes, Hammond B-3, Wurlitzer and

grand piano ("There used to be celeste and a harpsichord," she said) as well as vibes, drums and sundry percussion implements. "There has been so much music rehearsed, written, taught and practiced here," she said. "We share a Google calendar, share equipment and work around each other's deadlines."

In many ways Mezzacappa's efforts have rippled across the region, elevating a scene that manifests mostly outside of flagship venues like the SFJAZZ Center, Yoshi's and Black Cat, relying instead on a loose constellation of storefront performance spaces, cultural centers and bookstores. Cellist Crystal Pascucci-Clifford, who plays on Nathan Clevenger's lapidary 10-piece 12/12 album *Astrolabe*, has worked closely with Mezzacappa in a wide variety of configurations since moving to the Bay Area in 2011, including *Glorious Ravage*, the bassist's large-scale, free-jazz song cycle inspired by women explorers. As the executive director of InterMusic SF, an organization that supports Bay Area jazz, new music and chamber music ensembles, Pascucci has spent a lot of time developing programming to help musicians acquire the skills they need to build sustainable careers. In Mezzacappa she sees an artist "leveraging a unique set of skills to bolster the community."

"Everyone shouldn't have to do every piece in the puzzle," Pascucci-Clifford continued. "But it's great to see how Lisa is uplifting the scene. What's exciting about this project is her approach to collective identity. Working to compose, record and present independently as an individual artist is such a tall order. What she's doing is bringing creative artists together to make something like a school. The creative jazz/experimental mishmash in the Bay Area deserves to have a prominent place on the world stage."

Mezzacappa's DIY ethos is supported by her extensive experience working for arts organizations from the Oakland Ballet and Cal Performances. Her hustle is driven not only by the need to support her music making.

"I'm not making a living playing experimental jazz, so having other jobs is just a necessity," she said. "Working at so many arts organizations over the years, I've been trained by some of the best in terms of how to do things — publicity, communications, marketing and promotion. How to be a project manager and bring people together around an idea. Timelines, and how long things take. It can sound really boring on a certain level, all this admin work — but when it leads to a DownBeat article about our music scene out here, it's totally worth it."

With Queen Bee Records' 12/12 project, Mezzacappa isn't just generating a buzz. She's showing how scenes are built and sustained by the artists willing to do the repetitive, unglamorous work that makes it possible to share the fruits of creative labor.

—Andrew Gilbert

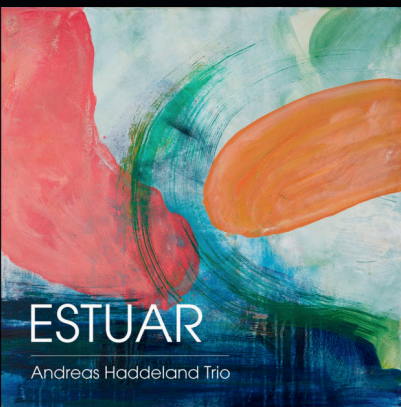


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"I have a small label, I'd like to make some music with you," is how producer/DJ Sonny Daze introduced himself to saxophonist Isaiah Collier. *Cosmic Transitions*, their first project together on Daze's Division 81 Records, was a hit.

SONNY DAZE SEIZES THE MOMENT

Sonny Daze dubbed Division 81 after a thoroughfare in his home town of Chicago. His favorite record shop, Dusty Groove, is located on Ashland Avenue, but Division Street had a better ring to it, Daze explained when DownBeat met him to revisit some old haunts.

Eloquent and debonair, Daze grew up in Chicago's South Shore neighborhood, adjoining "Terror Town," where life was precarious. When he moved with his mother to Logan Square on the city's North Side, it was "hell to heaven," said the producer and DJ, who finally felt free to roam the neighborhood and interact with the community. As a pre-teen in his new home, he'd rig a speaker into an open window. "I thought, 'I'm gonna play music for the people.' I was already messing with the EQ, turning up the highs, cutting the midrange."

He favors bold volume, bringing the vibe, scaring off the old folk. But he's open to dynamic extremes. Check *I Am Beyond* with Isaiah Collier and Michael Ode, with surprise guest shaman Jimmy Chan barely audible at first conjurings.

This interest in impactful sound stems from memories of his youth, riding in his defacto Uncle Paris' Cadillac, pimped out with a bombastic stereo. "The music would be on 10, clean, no rattling, full of bass and clarity," Daze recollected. Later in life, he slipped an Earth Wind & Fire cassette into Paris' casket when he died at age 42, a tribute to those sonic sojourns.

Early on it was The Fat Boys, plus MJ's *Off The Wall*, Anita Baker's *Caught Up In The Rapture* and Sade's *Diamond Life*, then John Coltrane, that beguiled him. He'd bike ride

to Gramophone Records on Clark Street coping *Enter The Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)* and Jamiroquai or *The Great Adventures of Slick Rick*. Def Jam impresario Russell Simmons inspired Daze's perceived trajectory; so did Rick Rubin. "Atlantic, Motown, Quincy Jones ... but Rubin's sherpa-like energy, his concept of a recording as a thought process ..." riffed Daze. "I've got a ways to go, in all directions, but each project is an opportunity to grow."

While studying at Columbia College Chicago in the early 2000s, Daze interned at Columbia Records in New York. There were cool moments and cool people, but disenchantment with major label priorities. "Certain artists' careers were disassembled because the industry played safe. I remember Bilal's 'Soul Sista' single was big. We had the promo, and I was excited. I'm an appreciator of music, I don't say a fanatic, don't wanna be fanatical. They wanted some famous producer on an additional single, waited six months by which time the buzz had gone."

Such procrastination and product manipulation was exasperating. "That was a lesson. When it's time to put music out, seize the moment."

Daze practiced what he preached when he connected with saxophonist Isaiah Collier. "I was at the Whistler in Chicago hanging with (International Anthem's) Alejandro Ayala, didn't even know who was playing. Freshly

laid off as assistant to the president of a local union, it was the dead of winter, right before the pandemic. I had my back to the stage, then heard this sound. It was the same with 'Rock With You,' Earth, Wind and Fire or being magnetized by Coltrane — this was it!"

Between sets Sonny walked up to Collier: "I have a small label, I'd like to make some music with you." That serendipity quickly yielded *Cosmic Transitions* (2021), recorded at the storied Van Gelder Studio. Collier's sincere, driven message channelled Coltrane. Daze describes the music as "wild, viewed in the world as chaotic, but a focused energy, sent to sage the place up, cleanse the world."

Daze chose Trane's birthday for the session, on the autumnal equinox, start of Libra season (he's Libra, too). He insisted on recording live, in the most honest manner possible. At one point he had to vacate the sound booth, snapping photos amid the musicians, fully entering the moment.

Division 81's initial releases include *LSD pt. 1*, a collage of hip-hop and deep house from beatmaker Radius; *Afro Patterns*, with Detroit DJ/techno house producer Alton Miller (vinyl only) and Sardinia-based Two Thou's *Oraculu*. British tuba titan Theon Cross' live New York recording with Collier, *Affirmations* (a joint release with New Soil Music), fared well in DB's August reviews section, but extra vivid is the debut from brilliant bassist Emma Dayhuff.

Innovations & Lineage: The Chicago Project was actually captured in Wisconsin at Madison's Cafe Coda, boasting Dayhuff and Collier alongside Windy City legends Dee Alexander and Kahil El'Zabar. Corollary to Dayhuff's doctoral thesis, the Coda concert is a doozy. At time of writing, the 38-year-old duetted superbly with Patricia Barber at the Chicago Jazz Festival, and Daze already has her follow-up (recorded at UCLA's Herb Alpert Studio) readying for release next spring. Dr. Dayhuff, assistant professor at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, said, "Sonny is an incredibly adept community builder ... who keeps the creative process at the forefront of his vision and business model."

Despite Division 81's commitment to newfound expectation, Coltrane's centennial in 2026 augured a return to Van Gelder's this September with Collier. "We touched on it with *Cosmic Transitions*," Daze said, "but this will be straight to the point. People will say, 'It should be Isaiah's music,' but it'll be a substantial dedication to our hero. It's 100 years since this brother came to Earth. Where would his music be if he'd lived five years longer?"

There's no time like now for Sonny Daze. Division 81 seeks out-of-body, yet real, aural trips. "At my father's funeral they said, 'Life is a but a vapor,'" Daze remembered, and telescoped back, disavowing a sardonic mantra he'd hear from Uncle Paris on those musically intoxicating cruises of his youth: "It'll be greater later!" —Michael Jackson

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Mark Sherman's new album, his 22nd as a leader, is titled *Bop Contest*.

Doubles for Drummers

As I begin my 18th year as a Juilliard Jazz studies professor, I have been asked to contribute a Woodshed article to *DownBeat* magazine. Since this is a drummers issue, I will focus on my relationship to the drums as well as the pathway I have tried to cultivate for any of my drums, percussion, vibraphone and piano students. As an educator and player of a wide range of percussion instruments — including piano, which officially falls under the percussion classification — the global message I try to bring to my teaching is “versatility.”

Originally when I was hired as a professor at Juilliard it was to teach a course that I proposed to Carl Allen, the director of jazz studies. It's a course I have always felt would be of great value to drum majors in jazz studies programs. The course is titled “Doubles For Drummers.”

My students study vibraphone/piano harmony/classical percussion, improvisation skills, the necessary scales, chord outlines, harmonic language skills, mallet technique necessary to improvise, negotiating chord changes and applying general functions for performance of the various song forms used in jazz and commercial music.

The ultimate goal is for all drummers to round their individual musicianship out by learning to function as a harmonic musician, and not just as drummers. To learn tunes, form and language tools necessary to improvise on vibraphone and piano. Ultimately this roundedness can assist each musician in their careers whether they work as educators or freelance musicians, or become global performing jazz artists and composers/arrangers.

Each session presents a different set of

drills, tools, scales, chord outlines and tunes that will be assigned to the students gauged by their individual level.

I also supplement the materials presented to these drummers in their improv class to be sure they are clear on what they are studying. They often come to me with this material and questions — especially when they are assigned to write a tune or arrangement.

The last component I have added into this course is “percussion ensemble” performance. Each semester, two to three sessions are dedicated to rehearsing and videotaping a quintet or sextet percussion ensemble piece. This has a tremendous effect on the growth level, as playing live with a group is always the best way to get better. Every tour I have ever done has improved me in a big way. Anyway, this is a very productive and fun part of the “Doubles For Drummers” semester.

The ultimate goal is to improve general technique on mallet instruments, percussion instruments and piano. I instruct students to learn chord voicing at the piano and memorize voicing number groups. I want them to improve their language skills for jazz improvisation, learn to negotiate chord changes on piano, and master and memorize various tunes assigned on vibraphone. Rounding out your overall musicianship and functionality is the true goal. It can help turn a drummer into a composer of tunes with harmonic substance.

Figure 1 is an example of the final exam for this course. It covers 2–5–1 progressions in all keys using all six voicings. Additional alterations are added afterwards.

Deeper Bebop Language

In Figure 2, I have notated eight possible bebop shapes that can be useful in developing deeper bebop language. Of course, there are many other possible shapes to use. It's necessary to multi-key these shapes for application into your favorite tunes. Shape #8 presents a bit of shape #7 going directly into the tritone substitution of 2–5–1 in the key of B $\flat$. This tritone substitution approach using dorian (minor chord) and mixolydian mode (dominant chord) puts you one half step away from the altered mode (which would be a melodic minor scale one half step up from the root of the dominant chord). Interestingly, the B $\flat$ as opposed to the B natural creates a cool outside sound as opposed to the regular alt/melodic-minor-up-a-half-step sound. Both work really well for a modern sound on any 2–5 motion.

After learning these bebop lines in 12 keys, begin to insert them into your solos to create your linear approach. A great practice is to insert one shape at a time into a form like “All The Things You Are,” or any of your favorite standards. Practice dropping the same shape for the entire form, Vary it, and connect them throughout. After using one shape at a time for the entire form, you can then readily mix them all. Try two at a time, three at a time. However you want, you can use them to enlarge your language palette, and voice, and sound like you are inside the straightahead jazz idiom. It helps to create good jazz language. Also keep in mind these lines I offer were snippets that I transcribed from my favorite masters.

This brings to mind a concept I like to share regarding transcription, and the art of transcribing. It is a great challenge to transcribe an entire solo of one of the masters. However, I find that the more valuable learning tool is to transcribe line snippets played by the masters, and learn them multi-key. After all, you will not perform their exact solo in your solo, so it's better to master snippets of language in various keys. This will give you a fresher voice. (Ultimately, you don't want someone saying you sound like “so-and-so.”)

Opening Up Your World

The result can be the great ability to say “Yes” to anything asked upon you as a musician. My versatility served me very well in the freelance industry in New York for many years. When playing Broadway show, and the studio work, it's great to be able to say yes when you finish a recording playing drums, and the producer asks if you can play a percussion or mallet part as an overdub. This versatility earned me a lot of extra money doubling on countless recordings.

I did Broadway shows for 25 years from age 21 to 46. And I'm still doing studio dates as a multi-instrumentalist once in a while, although I spend most of my time and passion recording and touring with my own music and reharmonizing standards.

Becoming a good jazz player/composer has always been my number-one focus, and still is as my 22nd recording as a leader releases this month. But still inside of the framework of being a recording, and touring musician, I have opened my world to being a leader as a pianist as well as a vibraphonist.

In 2019 I played only piano on my album *My Other Voice* featuring saxophonist Vincent Herring, bassist Ray Drummond and drummer Carl Allen. Interestingly, I had somewhat of a hit on Spotify in which one tune earned over 8 million streams. For the next five recordings I was a piano leader with success touring Europe and Asia playing

both piano and vibes on each set. Truthfully, the time had come for me to do a vibraphone quartet recording. I challenged myself with composing a nice bebop tune, as this is what I grew up on and is the vital language all of us jazz musicians must address in our quest to become seasoned interpreters of our music.

With that in mind, my latest recording is *Bop Contest* (Miles High Records), featuring pianist Donald Vega, “The Maestro” Ron Carter on bass, drummer Carl Allen and trumpeter Joe Magnarelli as a guest on two

tracks. I am very proud of this effort. It has been a long time coming.

DB

Vibraphonist, pianist and composer Mark Sherman is a DownBeat Critics Poll winner who has performed for conductors including Leonard Bernstein, Georg Solti, Zubin Mehta and Herbert Von Karajan. In jazz, he has worked as a sideman and leader with Kenny Barron, Peggy Lee, Wynton Marsalis, Joe Lovano, Michael Brecker, Larry Coryell and others. He has also worked with pop artists Michael Bolton, Natalie Cole and Michael McDonald. A passionate educator on the faculty of The Juilliard School, Sherman teaches jazz percussion as well as improvisational thinking and professional savvy that can help students develop their own careers. Sherman's new album, *Bop Contest*, will be released Nov. 7 on Miles High Records.

Figure 1

Figure 1 displays musical notation for closed and open voicings. The top section, labeled "Closed Voicings", shows three chords: 1357 (C-7), 3579 (F7), and 7935 (Bbmaj7). The bottom section, labeled "Open Voicings", shows three chords: 1573 (C-7), 3795 (F7), and 7359 (Bbmaj7). The notation is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat.

Figure 2

Figure 2 displays musical notation for a bebop line. The notation is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat. It shows a sequence of chords: 1 (Cm7), 2 (Cm7), 3 (Cm7), 4 (Cm7), 5 (Cm7), 6 (Cm7), 7 (Cm7), and 8 (Cm7). The line includes various chromatic alterations and accidentals, such as F#7, Bb, and B7.



Rhythmic displacement is a high-level jazz concept that Bill Stewart has mastered.

Bill Stewart's Drum Solo Trading on 'Ten Foot Two'

Certain drummers just have that “it” factor. Their ideas come though so clearly and their groove is unmistakable. Bill Stewart has always been one of them. His sound is perfectly balanced, his articulations are crisp and his listening skills are off the charts. His drumming is instantly recognizable. Put simply, he’s the best in the business. When *DownBeat* asked me to do this article, I immediately gravitated toward the first track from his 2025 album *Live At The Village Vanguard* with Walter Smith III and Larry Grenadier, titled “Ten Foot Two.” I chose it not just because it’s fabulous and inspiring, but because I was watching from a few feet away when they recorded it. I remember the amazing energy in that hallowed room and the special connection I felt between the musicians.

As Grenadier’s bass solo concludes, the band gears up for three choruses of trading eights over the 32-measure A-A-B-A form, with saxophonist Smith taking the first turn. Stewart is also an accomplished composer, and the melody of this tune has a jaunty, Monk-like feel with tons of useful rhythmic and melodic information to build a solo. I’ve labeled the eights using numbers 1 through 6 to make them easily identifiable, and “Drums 1” features a few of Stewart’s trademarks. He leads into the solo

by beginning his musical phrase on the eighth bar of “Sax 1,” playing a syncopated melodic polyrhythm with the bass drum, snare and toms while the ride continues to swing. The left-hand buzzes are a concept he uses frequently to create a loose, almost greasy feel. The tempo is fast, but he remains totally under control in executing his idea. It concludes with a few crashes and a floor tom fill. (Stewart uses all ride cymbals in his setup, giving even the “crashes” a crisp, clear tone.)

Smith grabs the reins for “Sax 2” with some staccato bursts, which Stewart acknowledges with a signature hi-hat/cross-stick moment of interaction. “Drums 2” is all fire and brimstone, again starting on the last measure of the sax solo with triplets between the toms and bass drum. Another of his frequently used solo devices is to repeat the same rhythm but begin it on a different beat each time to create phrases over the bar line. This rhythmic displacement seems so simple, but it’s a high-level jazz concept that Stewart has truly mastered. He ends with another triplet idea, only this time it’s a descending quarter-note triplet starting with the hi-hat and moving down the toms. Stewart’s creative use of the hi-hat as a melodic voice is one of my favorite things about his drumming.

“Sax 3” really gives Stewart a lot to work with, as Smith starts out shredding but ends with a silky-smooth landing. This time, Stewart doesn’t begin until the middle of the first measure, choosing to give the music a moment to settle. Even at such a fast tempo, his use of space is intentional and effective. “Drums 3” combines many of the best elements of the first two solos: tight buzzes and polyrhythmic independence. We also see the introduction of another Stewart calling card, the five-over-four quintuplet (measure 4). So many jazz drummers get caught up in a constant swirl of threes and fours; it’s refreshing to hear him use complex polyrhythms in such a natural way.

“Sax 4” is really about Grenadier, as he pushes the band out harmonically and sets Stewart up for another fiery explosion. “Drums 3” begins with a quarter-note triplet on the bass drum, and Stewart again uses displacement to turn the repeating melodic phrase on its head. One thing I remember from this performance was how he used one mounted tom and two floor toms, giving his overall sound a beefy quality. He does a quick descending fill, and we’re on to “Sax 4.”

After Smith plays a run of eighth notes, “Drums 5” kicks off with Stewart effectively tell-

ing everyone to take a breath. This is perhaps the simplest of all his eights, but it's one of the most impactful. It's a two-measure, over-the-bar-line phrase with gentle snare rolls and light ride hits, repeated three times. I've always been impressed with Stewart's willingness to take risks; this is a high-energy tune, they're at the Vanguard, everyone is shredding and he totally takes the air out of the balloon for one brief moment.

Smith plays a melodic phrase for "Sax 6," and Stewart brings things

to a blistering conclusion with a flurry of 16ths, quintuplets and triplets leading back into the head. Even at this tempo, his playing is melodic and his ideas are totally clear. This is a some truly brilliant and inspiring drumming, and I'm so happy I was there to see it in person. **DB**

Drummer Rob Mitzner is the author of the best-selling book *Drumming In A Band: Stuff You Can Use* and writes for various music publications. Visit him at online at robmitzner.com.

Ten Foot Two

♩ = 228

by Bill Stewart

Sax 1 **7x**

Drums 1

Sax 2 **7x**

Drums 2

Straight 8ths

Sax 3 **8x**

Drums 3

Sax 4 **7x**

Drums 4

Sax 5 **8x**

Drums 5

Sax 6 **7x**

Drums 6

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Jeff Hamilton-Inspired Hand-Hammered Cymbals for Large Ensemble Drumming

The new Hammertone family of cymbals from Sabian are a collaborative effort with jazz drummer Jeff Hamilton. A variety of different sizes and weights are available within the Hammertone range, and they are an expansion of Sabian's popular HH (Hand Hammered) line. A 21-inch ride and 15-inch hi-hats are the newest offerings to this line. Both were developed specifically to give more focus and clarity in higher-volume situations without sacrificing the best qualities of hand hammered cymbals. Upon seeing the cymbals and tapping on them out of the box, I was excited to see that a lot of care and attention to detail went into making these. Let's get behind the kit and see how they perform.

The Hammertone Ride (shown here) speaks with authority and clarity. The 21-inch size hits a sweet spot for acoustic higher volume situations. I really like how clean stick definition is without being overly "ping-y." Achieving this is helped by a couple of design details: making the playing area of the cymbal slightly thicker, giving the cymbal a higher bow and giving the bell a very flat profile. In the world of jazz drumming, this 21-inch ride would normally be considered medium-heavy in weight (2,270g), but it certainly plays like a thinner cymbal — meaning it has some give under the stick when pushed. You can really lay into it and the wash and overtones never build and remained quite controlled.

On the other hand, the cymbal is quite crash-able if you choose to do so, as the outer edge is thinner. Crashes are explosive and very controlled, giving you a beautiful dark and washy flash of sound that dissipates very quickly. I was really impressed with how the cymbal has the clarity to cut through higher volumes without relying on a heavy weight and piercing frequencies to do so. It can project while retaining musicality and that is quite an accomplishment in design. The bell is very flat in profile and features an alternating unlathed and lathed pattern with ball-peen hammering. This contributes to the excellent control of the cymbal, but it's also very dark in pitch, which is somewhat unexpected but a good thing in my book. It's probably not the right bell for funk or similar styles, but man, does it sound great on a salsa tune.

The 15-inch Hammertone hi-hats are spectacular and, like the ride, they're designed to provide more clarity and power in higher-volume situations. The top cymbal is thinner and heavily hammered, giving it a slightly "trashy" sound, while the bottom cymbal is heavier and gives

the pair of cymbals more focus. In Sabian's promotional video, Hamilton talks about the kind of sound they were going for when designing these hats. To paraphrase, he talks about how the "chip" sound of the cymbals should mimic the frequency of finger snaps or hands clapping. Musically, that's a deep observation, but more importantly, other manu-

facturers rely on extra weight and higher frequencies to pierce their way through volume. That's fine (and sometimes necessary) for certain types of

music, but the Hammertone hi-hats accomplish this in a different way; the reference Hamilton describes is exactly what they do. The "chip" of the hats is lower in pitch, trashy, but also very clean and crisp. Some of the best vintage hi-hats I've played on do the same thing. Stick definition is very crisp and articulate, with a beautiful shimmering wash underneath when slightly opened. Similarly to the Hammertone 15-inch ride, Sabian nailed the ability to cut through higher volumes without relying on piercing high frequencies. The result is a pair of dark, buttery and very focused sounding hi-hats that would work in a number of different musical situations.

For some drummers, the 21-inch and 15-inch sizes might not be their first choice. Remember, though, that there are several other options and sounds in the Hammertone family, and that gives Sabian the ability to develop different cymbals for more specific uses. Yes, they were essentially designed with big bands in mind, but I wouldn't hesitate to use them in a smaller group situation. They perform beautifully in lower-volume acoustic settings, especially if you're in a loud club competing with crowd noise. If mic'd, I could also see them able to handle high-volume situations with amplification.

In a market saturated with boutique (and very expensive) custom cymbal makers that do everything by hand, Sabian is hanging in there nicely. They still employ a select group of people who hammer and shape the cymbals with expert attention to detail. When you pair that skill with a jazz legend like Hamilton, his ear for cymbals and experience on the bandstand speaks for itself through the

Hammertones. That was clear to me within the first few minutes of playing on them. I highly recommend a trip to the local drum shop to give them a try. The Hammertone 21-inch ride retails at \$644.99, and the 15-inch hi-hats retail at \$789.99.

—Ryan Bennett



sabian.com

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1. Flexible E-Kit

ddrum's E-Flex BT8 electronic drum set is designed for beginning players or drummers seeking a quiet practice solution with a small footprint. The unit builds upon the strengths of the brand's original E-Flex by adding a new bass drum pad with bass drum pedal, rather than a basic foot controller, and a new module with Bluetooth connectivity. The E-Flex BT8 features responsive and natural feeling mesh heads, Double Bass Mode and a red-and-black color scheme. Double Bass Mode is useful for players looking to improve their double-bass patterns.

More info: ddrum.com



2. Enhanced Cajon

The LP Black Box II Cajon offers an enhanced playing experience while sticking to its eco-friendly ethos and affordability of the original Black Box Cajon. Retaining the MDF body, which gives it density and durability, it now boasts a Meranti soundboard for punchy, bright tones. Its two internal snares add crispness to the characteristic buzz, and an integrated bass port boosts projection during live performances.

More info: lpmusic.com



3. Shell Sonics

Drum Workshop has introduced SonicPly drum shells to its Collector's series, the first new shell construction since PurpleCore in 2021. Developed by DW woodologist John Good, the latest design blends the best characteristics of wood and metal to offer a new sonic experience. SonicPly drums, available in shell sizes ranging from 10 to 24 inches in diameter, fuse eight plies of maple with a 0.6mm core of aluminum, while the snares have been built using 12 plies of wood with two strategically placed aluminum plies. This precise construction balances the warmth and resonance of the maple wood with the crisp attack and dry sustain of the aluminum alloy.

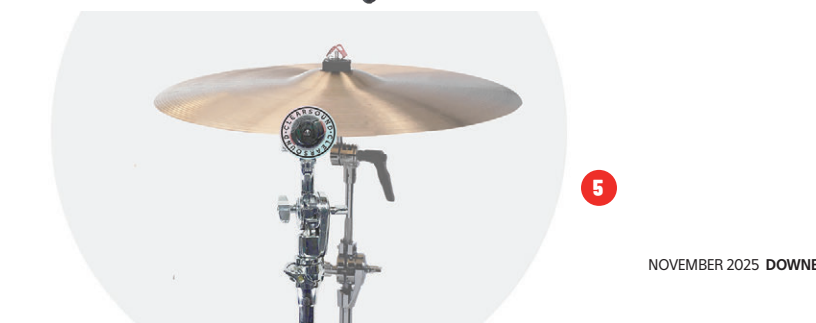
More info: dwdrums.com



4. Anniversary Special

Sonor has released a limited edition 150th Anniversary AQ2 Shell Set. Based on the company's AQ2 drums, the 150th Anniversary AQ2 Shell Set features 100% maple shells made from a combination of North American and Chinese maple. Ebony replica veneer is used for the outer ply of the shells and the bass drum hoops. The drums use Sonor's AQ-series shell hardware, including the die-cast AQ lugs with TuneSafe, the SMART Mount tom suspension system and the DTH 4000 double tom holder.

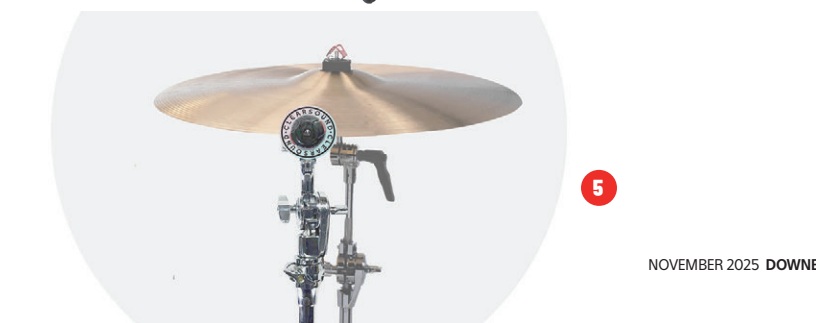
More info: sonor.com



5. Cymbal Bleed Reduction

Clearsound Baffles reduce bleed from cymbals into other microphones on stage and naturally dampen delicate high-end frequencies. Unlike other acoustic treatment options, each Clearsound baffle is lightweight and can be quickly and easily mounted on a cymbal stand, then positioned wherever treatment is necessary. The baffles eliminate the need to cage in your entire drum kit with an unsightly, vibe-killing drum shield.

More info: clearsoundbaffles.com



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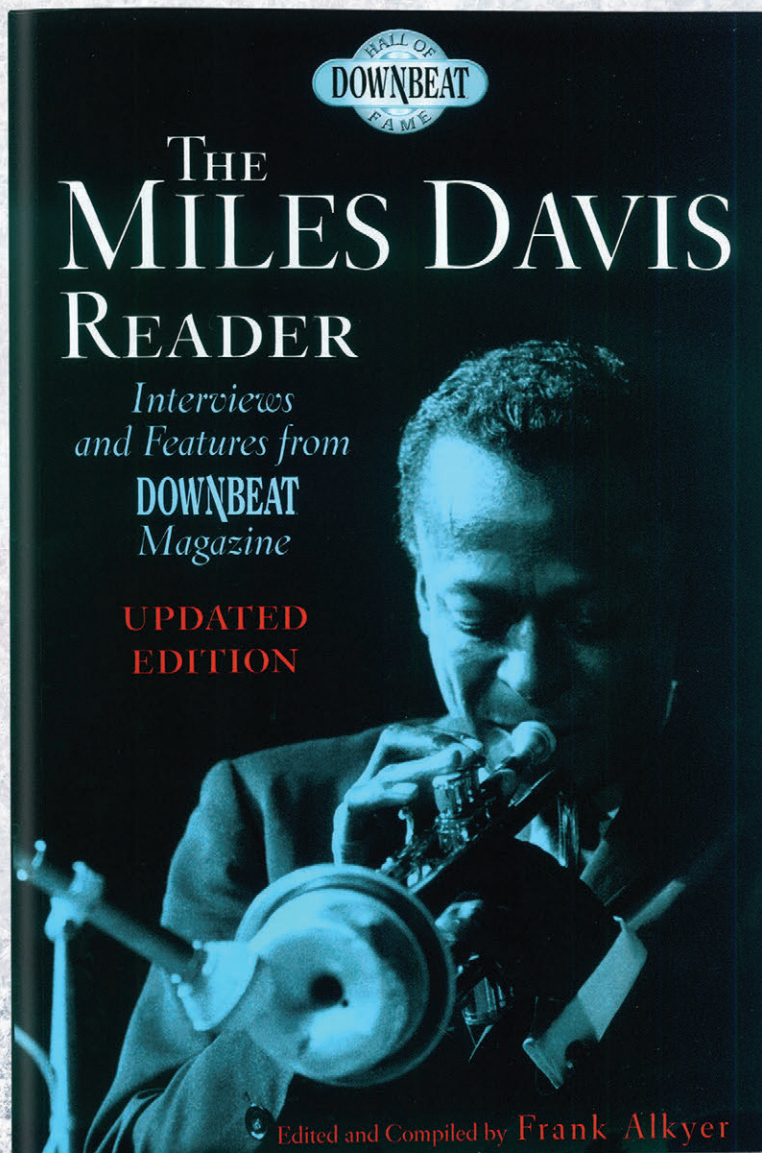
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Lee Ritenour

Genial and relaxed at 73, guitarist Lee Ritenour took time while on tour in Europe this summer to participate in his first Blindfold Test. The public event took place as part of the Umbria Jazz Festival in Perugia, Italy, Ritenour playing his Sadowsky electric nylon guitar, unplugged, while he spoke about the following selected tracks.

George Benson

"Dinorah, Dinorah" (*Give Me The Night*, Warner Bros/Quest, 1980) Benson, electric guitar, scat; Jerry Hey, trumpet; Kim Hutchcroft, Larry Williams, saxophones; Greg Phillinganes, electric piano; Claire Fischer, piano, synthesizer, electric piano; Herbie Hancock, synthesizer; Louis Johnson, bass; John Robinson, drums; Paulinho da Costa, percussion.

That's one of our closest friends, the composer Ivan Lins — his song "Dinorah, Dinorah," and that was George Benson's version, Quincy Jones producing. I didn't play on this track, but I was there that day. It was such an honor to be part of Quincy's family. There's a funny story about this album. I lived very close to the studio Quincy used and he called me one night. I was sleeping and he said, "Lee, you gotta come down to the studio now!" I said, "Who is this?" "It's Q. The second engineer accidentally erased part of George's guitar solo on 'Give Me The Night' and you gotta fix it." It took maybe one hour and then Quincy said, "Whew, OK. Lee, never tell George this happened. Promise me." The end of the story is 20 years later, I'm walking in an airport with George. We were on the same bill, and I said, "George, I gotta story to tell you." He listened, and said, "It was a hit, so it's all good."

Joe Pass

"Round Midnight" (*Virtuoso*, Pablo, 1974) Pass, electric guitar.

Wow. Great. Incredible performer. I wanted to say at one point Joe Pass. The command of the guitar first of all was fantastic, and the chord substitutions on that classic melody. But Joe was not an acoustic guitar player. It sounds like that period when Joe did his solo acoustic guitar album. My dad used to take me to hear him play when I was a teenager, and I loved Joe Pass.

Julian Lage

"Fairbanks" (*View With A Room*, Blue Note, 2022). Lage, Bill Frisell, electric guitars; Jorge Roeder, bass; Dave King, drums.

It's a wonderful composition and arrangement and player. I don't think it's Julian Lage but it sounds like him, or someone from this more contemporary era. I think I was one of the players, along with Metheny and a couple of others, who bridged to this period when our compositions and arrangements became part of the records as much as the improvisation. This is an example where the tune is as important as the actual playing. [afterward] Ah, with Bill Frisell! That was throwing me off a little bit. Julian's a little cleaner, and Bill's a little rougher, and they're both incredible.

Stuff

"Reflections Of A Divine Love" (*Stuff*, Warner Bros., 1976) Cornell Dupree, Eric Gale, guitars; Richard Tee, piano; Gordon Edwards, bass; Clarence Penn, Steve Gadd, drums.

Very nice track. Is this guitarist Eric Gale, Richard Tee and Stuff? This was an incredible group of primarily New York musicians in the '70s and '80s who played on everybody's records. I loved Cornell Dupree and Eric Gale's playing like crazy. It was a very small world in those days. In Los Angeles, it was me, Harvey Mason, Dave Grusin and another wave of players. If those guys recorded with a particular artist like Paul Simon, Paul would then come out to Los Angeles and then he would hire us



Lee Ritenour, right, with journalist Ashley Kahn, center, and pianist Greg Burk, who translated for the Italian audience.

sometimes to do the same song. Aretha Franklin did the same thing. We were very respectful of each other but very competitive.

Pasquale Grasso

"And So I Love You" (*Fervency*, Sony/Masterworks, 2024) Grasso, electric guitar; Keith Barra, bass; Ari Roland, drums.

An incredible player. I can't remember the name of the tune but it's a great standard. I'm thinking Barney Kessel but sometimes Barney was not as clean as this. I don't think it's Jim Hall, either. The guitar player is definitely a jazz player, doing jazz choruses and less concerned about the overall production, more concerned about the actual playing.

John McLaughlin

"Song For My Mother" (*My Goal's Beyond*, Douglas, 1971) McLaughlin, guitar; Airtio Moreira, percussion.

I'm thinking Paco de Lucia and Al Di Meola? It could be somebody else in that territory. [afterward] Right, right, right. A very different John McLaughlin in that first era. When we first heard his group Mahavishnu with the great Billy Cobham on drums and Jan Hammer, they came to Los Angeles to play at The Roxy, and I was in the front row. I think I was about 19. They were loud and aggressive and everyone was a virtuoso on their instrument.

The Poll Winners

"On Green Dolphin Street" (*The Poll Winners*, Contemporary, 1957) Barney Kessel, electric guitar; Ray Brown, bass; Shelly Manne, drums.

Great playing, playing a great standard. Again, I've heard this record, and I'm going back again to Barney Kessel. In the early days of his career, he was also a studio musician playing on movie and TV soundtracks. A lot of the great jazz players came out of the L.A. studio scene. At night they would play jazz clubs but not make any money, and during the day they would work on these films.

Larry Carlton

"Room 335" (*Larry Carlton*, MCA, 1978) Carlton, electric guitars; Greg Mathieson, keyboards; Abraham Laboriel, bass; Jeff Porcaro, drums; Paulinho da Costa, percussion.

Is that Larry Carlton? That's with the rhythm section that eventually became Joni Mitchell's band. Larry and I grew up within 10 minutes of each other. 335 was the name of Larry's home studio and also the Gibson model he and I both used to play. Larry worked quite a bit with Steely Dan, and I used to get called for more Steely Dan stuff than I could do. [Donald and Walter] were completely crazy and unbelievable geniuses, and they would sometimes record the same song with seven different guitar parts by seven different players. Larry, myself, Steve Lukather, Jay Graydon. Then, the record would come out and the conversation was, "Did you make the cut? Are you on the record?"

DB

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

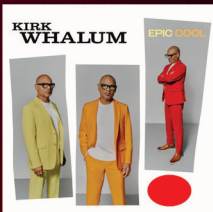
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