

APRIL 2021—ISSUE 228

YOUR FREE GUIDE TO THE NYC JAZZ SCENE

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THE NEW YORK CITY JAZZ RECORD

DIGITAL
ONLY
EDITION



**ZEENA
PARKINS**
INTERLACING

IN MEMORIAM
**MILFORD
GRAVES**

**DAVID
OSTWALD**

**STEPH
RICHARDS**

**CALVIN
KEYS**

**AARON
BELL**

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US Subscription rates: 12 issues, \$40
Canada Subscription rates: 12 issues, \$45
International Subscription rates: 12 issues, \$50
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THE NEW YORK CITY JAZZ RECORD

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Just like every day really should be Mother's Day and Earth Day and National Doughnut Day, so too should every month be Jazz Appreciation Month. Maybe John Edward Hasse, Curator of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, picked it because there are so many jazz tunes with the word in their titles or maybe since jazz, like spring, is about rebirth. Whatever his reason, it all culminates with International Jazz Day on Apr. 30th, which, well, see above...

One of the great things about appreciating jazz – for a day, month, year or lifetime – is that it is, by extension, an opportunity to appreciate American history, warts and all, and how it created an environment for this art form to blossom. And it is a chance to appreciate the larger history of music and how myriad elements from numerous cultures and traditions have been folded into jazz through song forms, instruments and, of course, players. Think of jazz as a mosaic, each new influence a new tile contributing towards a picture that is constantly changing.

Our features this month reflect that progress, whether it be Zeena Parkins (On The Cover) redefining what the harp can do; David Ostwald (Interview) using his tuba as an archeological tool; Steph Richards (Artist Feature) making her trumpet something more than a collection of tubes and valves; Calvin Keys (Encore) taking from and adding to the long history of the guitar; Aaron Bell (Lest We Forget), a significant thread in the distinguished tapestry of Ellington bassists; or Milford Graves (In Memoriam), whose influence as a drummer and philosopher is remembered by his peers and students.

*On The Cover: Zeena Parkins (photo by Peter Gannushkin/DOWNTOWNMUSIC.NET)
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ZEENA PARKINS

INTERLACING

BY TYRAN GRILLO



PETER GANNUSHKIN/DOWNTOWNMUSIC.NET

It's tempting to draw a connection between ancient meanings and modern practice. In the case of LACE, an ongoing project from harpist Zeena Parkins, such connections become more tangible than any etymology ever could be. The word "lace" is derived from the Latin *laqueum*, meaning "a noose, a snare", but any negative connotations of such parlance turn to a cloud of dust that Parkins draws, particle by particle, into light. LACE began with an invitation in 2008 from the Merce Cunningham Dance Studio as part of its "Music Mondays" series. "There was an impending deadline," she recalls, "and most of my compositions at the time would have taken months to learn. I had collected fabrics over the years and I just grabbed some graphic-looking pieces of lace and made conditions for improvisers to read each piece as a score. It worked."

Since then, she has created an action card-based game piece, recently recorded by percussionist William Winant, a project for her band Green Dome—with Ryan Sawyer (percussion) and Ryan Ross Smith (piano and electronics)—based on transforming the lace knitting patterns from the Shetland Islands to scores and a fourth movement, entitled "Stitchomythia", performed on an anamorphic carpet designed by Nadia Lauro. If anything, Parkins does not tie snares but unravels them in hopes they might reach the soil of the ear and grow without forsaking their precise comfort.

Such impulses have been a running thread of her ethos since 1993's *Nightmare Alley*. Across the terrain of that formative album, a near-catharsis unfolds, as if the very zeitgeist from which it arose were crying in search of change. Parkins cites it as an important turning point in her career. "I felt a need to do a solo record, lay my gauntlet down and take a place. It's not like I had a manifesto, but I was really at the beginning of a process of determination to do something that I hadn't heard exactly the way I was doing it. My mission was to do something with the harp that was unfamiliar to me." To be sure, it was just as unfamiliar to the audience who came to hear her play at New Langton Arts, curated by visual artist Nayland Blake in San Francisco in the summer of 1991. "I hadn't done that many solo shows and they didn't have an acoustic harp available, so I played with my electric harp. The gallery had rake seating fanning out from the center—and it was packed. I was in a state of shock. Inspired and excited, I just improvised. That's when Table of the Elements approached me and asked if I would be the first artist on the label. It was a special way to start."

Besides introducing listeners to a voice that needed hearing, *Nightmare Alley* revealed the harp's multifaceted potential. Though the credits list "electric and acoustic harps" as its material resources, the album was a revelation of immaterial forces that betrayed next to nothing of their origins. "I'm very connected to the harp," notes Parkins, "but not in a way meant to convey technical virtuosity." Trained in the rigors of classical piano yet aware that it wasn't the path she wanted to follow, she encountered the harp while attending Cass Technical High School in Detroit. "They took pity on us pianists for being isolated in our

practice rooms, so they assigned us orchestral instruments to get us out there performing. The school had many orchestras and I was willing to give it a try. Walking into a back room without windows and seeing eight concert harps was the most unexpected situation I could ever have imagined myself in. I totally fell in love with the instrument; it made total sense to me physically. When I realized that I was really going to seriously be involved with harp, I trained privately knowing I wasn't ever going to play it live in a classical setting." Out of that training emerged a musician who understood the corporeal math needed to bring forth a sound that translated her inner equations into a language that we on the outside could understand.

It wasn't long before her interest in developing that language opened a portal into the harp's very soul, pulling from that formless void a second heartbeat in electric form. The earliest version of her electric harp was built by late cellist and Skeleton Crew bandmate Tom Cora and visual artist Julian Jackson in 1985. The following year, it was remade by luthier Ken Parker as a freestanding instrument allowing her to play standing up. Next, sound artist and clandestine instrument builder Douglas Henderson added, among other things, new pickup placements and an ebony strip along the whammy bar side, which Parkins praises for a certain physicality, noting that it "profoundly changed the instrument, creating a fingerboard-like environment for me to develop different kinds of playing techniques."

At the same time, there is a deeply metaphysical aspect to her work that has continued to evolve from one setting to the next. For Parkins, however, it's less of a dichotomy than a spectrum: "The physical can become metaphysical because gesture and materiality are so important. It's about presence, which is very much a part of how I am as a performer. Not just the body, but also one's intention and absence of intention, desire, expectations, failures—all these things help." A case in point is her latest album, *Glass Triangle* (released in February on Relative Pitch Records), for which she joins with Mette Rasmussen (alto saxophone) and, again, Sawyer. Despite having played together only once at The Stone Series at Happylucky no.1 in Brooklyn, the trio made the studio its crucible. What ensued in the freely improvised session was reverse alchemy—not turning lead into gold but breaking down the latter into its constituent parts, each no longer precious alone yet all the more authentic for having been liberated. Thus, what begins as a fragmentary coalition gathers around the campfire of an intimately connected excursion. Sounding at times like an electric guitar, at others like a voice dying in its attempts to communicate from behind the wall of noise erected by recent politics, harp hoists a protest sign for a generation woefully uncertain of the future, as if some gargantuan lie were morphing into truth. In this space, magic is outed as a restless muse that would sooner destroy its adherents than enable a miracle. Between dips into sustained beauty, one encounters the profundity of "The crystal chain letters", a track

that references Bruno Taut, whose legendary correspondences with kindred architects imagined a future in which urban planning welcomed rather than dictated human behavior. The letters were also, more importantly, a honeycomb around World War I, the traumatic effects of which begged not for utopia but for an ability to use the rubble of the past as material for mosaics of the future. This sensibility is broken and rubbed into the skin of *Glass Triangle* as if it were a necessary armor for the road ahead.

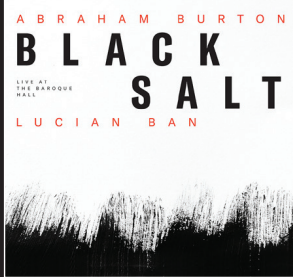
In light of this historical awareness, Parkins reflects on her beginnings as an artist as follows. "I was myopic then in thinking about the future, just living in the moment. Growing up with an immigrant father and a first-generation mother, I was encouraged to be practical, to be good in school, to do music on the side but focus on a career. But I just wanted to be in the world of music, to be surrounded by a community of musicians, to hear things I'd never heard before. I wanted every experience." Under the current circumstances, one would be remiss to ignore this motivation. The need for community seems to have grown in proportion to the world's tendency to fall down the rabbit hole of isolation. Such concerns were already on Parkins' mind before the pandemic, when questions of safety and practicality prevented her from touring with the electric harp. The mindset of quarantine rekindled her relationship with the instrument. With the help of her partner, filmmaker Jeff Preiss, she began shooting solo performances as a means of reaching out. As she sees it: "You put a recorder up and instantly it's more than just you in the room."

Seeking other channels through which to foster a sense of community, including a virtual book group, has allowed connections that might not normally have crystallized to take root and flourish. "This situation we've been enduring is like a combination of patience and faith, but also the understanding that there need to be points of correction, a sense of urgency for transformation. It gives us a new way to look at our world with brutality and honesty, knowing that we are faced with a different kind of time." What a sonic blessing, then, that we can wield the lanterns of her creations to show the way. As justice shines like a constellation above a horizon that only seems to recede the more we approach it, we need all the light we can get. ❖

For more information, visit zeenaparkins.com. Parkins live-streams Apr. 8th at roulette.org.

Recommended Listening:

- Zeena Parkins—*Something Out There* (No Man's Land, 1986-87)
- Butch Morris—*Dust to Dust* (New World, 1990)
- Zeena Parkins—*Nightmare Alley* (Table of the Elements, 1992)
- Phantom Orchard Orchestra—*Trouble in Paradise* (Tzadik, 2008)
- Myra Melford/Zeena Parkins/Miya Masaoka—*MPM* (Infrequent Seams, 2014)
- Zeena Parkins—*Glass Triangle* (Relative Pitch, 2019)



**ABRAHAM BURTON
LUCIAN BAN
BLACKSALT**

SSC 1609

AVAILABLE 4/9/21

—“There is an alluring timelessness to the music created by pianist Lucian Ban” *Down Beat* *****

—“Abraham Burton has developed a reputation as a seasoned musician as well as an explosive soloist”

Jackie McLean Institute of Jazz



**JENNIFER WHARTON'S
BONEGASM
NOT A NOVELTY**

SSC 1612

AVAILABLE 4/23/21

—“(Jennifer Wharton) blows the doors wide open for the bass trombone” *All About Jazz*

—“Her gorgeous turns as a low-frequency melodist... are breathtaking” *Down Beat*

JOHN FEDCHOCK trombone
NATE MAYLAND trombone
ALAN FERBER trombone
JENNIFER WHARTON bass trombone
MICHAEL ECKROTH piano, fender rhodes
EVAN GREGOR bass
DON PERETZ drums
SAMUEL TORRES percussion (1 & 8)
KURT ELLING vocals (10)



**TOBIAS MEINHART
THE PAINTER**

SSC 1613

AVAILABLE 4/30/21

TOBIAS MEINHART saxophones, flute, vocals
INGRID JENSEN trumpet
CHARLES ALTURA guitar
EDEN LADIN piano, keyboards
MATT PENMAN bass
OBED CALVAIRE drums

—“Not only a commanding saxophonist, but also a keen composer. — John Murph” *Down Beat*



**CLOVIS NICOLAS
AUTO PORTRAIT**

SSC 4117

AVAILABLE 4/16/21

—“A formidable walker with a big, resonant tone, Nicolas distinguishes himself as a first-rate composer”

Down Beat

CLOVIS NICOLAS bass



Sunnyside

www.sunnysiderecords.com

Jazz vocalists are judged on tone, technique, originality and, above all, the ability to embody and project the depth of life's experiences. Dallas-born **Jazmeia Horn**, who turns 30 this month, is blessed with the first three and developing the fourth, as she showed at a live-streamed duet with pianist **Keith Brown** at Dizzy's Club (Mar. 4th). Seated on a stool, dressed in stark primary colors and her trademark Queen Nefertiti-style headdress, Horn was equally playful and serious, childlike and mature. Introducing her originals she spoke of women's rights (the “infinity of femininity”), motherhood, cyber-bullying and the travails of college dating. Her delivery of the songs was a mix of mercurial vocal tones (she often sounded like several different singers simultaneously) and daring improvisations during which she would seem to paint herself into a musical corner, only to leap out suddenly with a harmonically ‘correct’ note or a rhythmically ‘correct’ accent. Besides her own “Free Your Mind”, “Where We Are”, “When I Say”, “Let Us”, “Legs and Arms” and “Searchin’”, Horn covered “East of the Sun and West of the Moon”, “Have You Met Miss Jones?” and “If You Can't Smile and Say Yes”. Her rapport with Brown was cozy and comfortable: instead of trying to compensate for a lack of bass and drums, he gave her open spaces, trusting their collective rhythm to hold the momentum while she threaded his harmonies with intricate scat solos, adroitly adapting her melodic shapes to the changing chords.

—Tom Greenland



Jazmeia Horn @ Dizzy's Club

When is a bass more than a bass? When it's in the hands of **Ron Carter**. There isn't an inch of the upright that the miraculous Carter hasn't explored. Not only is he a virtuoso of styles and techniques, but what he elicits from his instrument is magical. It can sound like a guitar, a harp or more, yielding to his seemingly infinite creative will. For his Radio Free Birdland concert (Mar. 6th), Carter was joined by pianist Renee Rosnes, tenor saxophonist Jimmy Greene and drummer Payton Crossley. The quartet hadn't played in a year, but you'd never know it. With musical ‘muscle memory’ they fell into the pocket with total ease. The first half hour was devoted to an intertwining medley of two Carter originals with Miles Davis standards “Flamenco Sketches” and “Seven Steps to Heaven” (Carter played on the latter's original recording). The themes integrated seamlessly, with a couple of bass solos in the off-the-charts category. A lot of the heavy lifting fell to Greene, whose overall suavity was smooth as honey, with tone to match. A commonality among the four is lightness; their notes, not without power, seem to rise almost ethereally into a synchronous whole, including Crossley, who tamed and coaxed rhythm from his kit in support. The ballad feature for Rosnes was a beautifully creative take on Richard Rodgers-Lorenz Hart's “My Funny Valentine”. Arthur Schwartz-Howard Dietz' “You and The Night and the Music” closed the set with a happy-making, uplifting swing.

—Marilyn Lester



Ron Carter @ Birdland

People often moan about the psychic distancing concomitant with COVID-19 quarantining, an effect particularly grating to aficionados of live music, but this reviewer was pleasantly surprised by the deeply immersive experience provided by the **Take Off Collective's** live-stream gig at Brooklyn's ShapeShifter Lab (Mar. 6th). Thanks to top-shelf technology—artful lighting schemes (monolithic black baffles mounted on a white brick wall were sequentially bathed in dark purple, metallic blue, hell-fire red and neutral light to render a cave-like ambiance) and a sensitive crew (the mix was impeccable and the cameras weren't on autopilot, as they are in many venues, but followed the onstage action)—both the sights and sounds of saxophonist Ole Mathisen, bassist Matt Garrison and drummer Marko Djordjevic (all of whom doubled on electronics) improvising together were imminent and tangible. Listening with headphones only heightened the illusion of a three-dimensional soundscape. Starting with no set game plan (though Mathisen admitted he had pre-programmed a few sounds in his computer), each artist was admirably balanced and separated, both in terms of the electric/acoustic mix and their artistic interactions. Referencing Jaco Pastorius-era Weather Report, especially in Garrison's fleet, highly expressive fretless bass work, the trio's musical explorations were notable both for changeability and cohesion. It was a set for inclusion on one of those end-of-the-year “Best of” lists. (TG)

Grammy Award-winning composer and bandleader, **Maria Schneider** has never met a genre she couldn't master. In concert with the New England Conservatory Jazz Orchestra (Mar. 10th), six distinctive compositions capped a week-long residency with students in the “Grow Your Art” program. Despite social distancing and an ominously stark, bare stage, the wonderfully talented band played sharp and tight as Schneider led with vibrant enthusiasm. Schneider is an incredibly accomplished musical storyteller. Her thematic work vividly paints unmistakable pictures in the mind's eye; and although her work is very much her own, two pieces squarely stood on the shoulders of other works. Her ode to her Midwestern roots and childhood, “The Pretty Road”, had the sweeping breadth of Aaron Copland while “Gumbo Blues” was much akin to the dynamic Duke Ellington-Billy Strayhorn film score for *Anatomy of a Murder*. Among other stellar compositions, the pièce de résistance was “Data Lords”, the title track from her 2020 ArtistShare double-CD, an intense, dark and dystopian work about the rise of the machines and the resultant subjugation of humans. Becoming increasingly discordant, it ends with the kind of painful cries an animal might make while dying so what else could come to mind but T.S. Eliot's ending of “The Hollow Men”: “This is the way the world ends. Not with a bang but a whimper.” On a more cheerful note, the concert ended with a beautiful, lilting Brazilian-inspired number, “Choro Dançado”. (ML)

"I'm very happy to be playing with my compatriots, live!" **Kenny Barron** said from the Jazz Forum's Steinway grand piano, following the opening number of his live-stream by his trio with bassist Kiyoshi Kitagawa and drummer Johnathan Blake (Mar. 20th). The group had gotten things started with a swinging rendition of "Bebop", a song that reached back to the pianist's early days on the jazz scene as a member of the band of its composer, Dizzy Gillespie. The original arrangement, which included a dissonant Monk-ish piano interlude along with a lyrical bass solo and series of crisp drum exchanges, exhibited the NEA Jazz Master's ability to make the even the most iconic material his own. Remaining rooted in the classic jazz tradition, the set continued with an easy-grooving interpretation of Billy Strayhorn's "Isfahan", which gradually built in tempo and intensity as Blake moved from brushes to sticks following Kitagawa's dug-in solo. Things heated up with the trio's fiery uptempo outing on Barron's "New York Attitude", a multi-climactic tour de force that had the composer stretching out for multiple incendiary choruses driven by fast walking bass and propulsive drums. The mood calmed with Barron's stirring reading of Richard Rodgers-Lorenz Hart's "Blue Moon", conjuring a romantic atmosphere persisting with his own Brazilian-tinged "Magic Dance". The set closed, traveling full circle back to the bebop era, with "Bud Like", Barron's potent homage to Bud Powell.

—Russ Musto



Kenny Barron @ Jazz Forum

This Women's History Month, an original Downtown new music maven, **Shelley Hirsch**, broke the spell of COVID onstage at Roulette (Mar. 15th). Starting full throttle with her "Paper Piece" of 1986, Hirsch's aerial vocals, theatrics and trademark affective shifts were on full display amid shreds and sheets of wrappings and newsprint. Spotlights on an otherwise darkened stage expanded for "Letting the Electronics Lead Me", exposing a table of digital gadgetry feeding Hirsch's voice through mixers, faders and delays. In a burning sort of *sprechgesang*, she emoted "I was...I was lost...I was found", natural octave leaps enhanced with digitally generated drones. She was next joined by Michael Schumacher, wielding an array of electronics around her operatic vocalizations as she engaged in writing real-time poetry on large pads. Schumacher provided counterpoint often captured directly from the singer and played back in treated repetition. The final piece was a duet with violist Joanna Mattrey who played rich, dark accompaniment to Hirsch's spoken prose being projected on a large screen as she created it. The work was a meditation on the anniversary of New York's lockdown: "To be here still in a room..." As Mattrey's haunting modal improvisation, so spare in its vibrato, resounded across the hall, Hirsch assured, viewers as much as herself, "We will touch again." Masterful camera work served as another aspect of the performance, fading and overlapping the imagery, moods and messages.

—John Pietaro



Shelley Hirsch @ Roulette

Since first coming on to the American jazz scene, taking top prize in the 2013 Thelonious Monk International Jazz Competition, **Melissa Aldana** has consistently lived up to the promise of her initial exposure, demonstrating growth as both a player and composer leading her own variously configured units. At Bar Bayeux (Mar. 3rd) the Chilean tenor saxophonist unveiled her latest ensemble, featuring guitarist Charles Altura, along with bassist Pablo Menares and drummer Kush Abadey, on a set largely comprised of original music written specifically for the band. The set began with atmospheric guitar setting up Aldana's "Emilia", a relaxed tango-flavored outing, the saxophonist blowing airy flowing lines that sighed and moaned with restrained intensity, buoyed by Altura's spacious underpinning. A solo saxophone interlude segued the band into the jaunty "Elsewhere", Aldana delivering tonally compelling, twisting melodic passages over a three-note bass ostinato, after which Altura took off swinging. Solo drums introduced Aldana's "The Bluest Eye" before harmonized tenor and guitar came in playing a somewhat ominous melody, which served as a jumping-off point for their extended improvisations. Aldana's mastery of the ballad form was evident on Bill Evans' "Turn Out The Stars", which she began with an unaccompanied intro. Before ending with her "Falling" and "Goodbye Song" Aldana dedicated the set to her mentor, the recently departed drummer Ralph Peterson.

(RM)

In honor of Women's History Month, **Musique Libre Femmes** played a remote concert as part of the annual Lady Got Chops Festival (Mar. 7th). Cheryl Pyle (C flute, alto flute) gathered flutist Haruna Fukazawa, bassoonist Claire de Brunner and vocalist Judi Silvano for a set of improvisations, starting with a *klangfarben*-like call-and-response chase, which morphed into a flowing piece led by a dual flute melodic line. The pairing, especially with both on standard C flutes, painted sinews of lush, impossibly close harmony, the sonorities enmeshed in a manner neither coupled nor chaste. During the third improvisation, the hauntingly atonal melody was appropriately reminiscent of "World Without Time", for decades the opening theme of PBS' *The Open Mind*. De Brunner cast rhythmic basslines and counterpoint, often of swinging broken triplets, and embarked on solo ventures indicating how under-appreciated her instrument is within jazz. Silvano's vocalizations, deeply expressive, used extended techniques including strained whispers. At times she sang modal lamentations while reaching across the octaves. Pyle spoke about the next day's global honor of International Women's Day and read a list of women artists who'd died over the past year. The sad reality turned glaring in light of the historic injustices lodged against women, including women within the creative community; Pyle's founding of *Musique Libre Femmes* in 2014 was in itself a statement against the male-dominated free jazz genre.

(JP)

WHAT'S NEWS

2021 Grammy Awards winners have been announced. In relevant categories: Best Contemporary Instrumental Album: Snarky Puppy—*Live at The Royal Albert Hall* (Ground Up Music); Best Improvised Jazz Solo: Chick Corea, "All Blues", (*Trilogy 2*, Concord); Best Jazz Instrumental Album: Chick Corea, Christian McBride & Brian Blade—*Trilogy 2* (Concord); Best Jazz Vocal Album: Kurt Elling—*Secrets Are The Best Stories* (Edition); Best Large Jazz Ensemble Album: Maria Schneider—*Data Lords* (ArtistShare); Best Latin Jazz Album: Arturo O'Farrill—*Four Questions* (ZOHO); Best Instrumental Composition: Maria Schneider—"Sputnik" (*Data Lords*, ArtistShare); Best Arrangement, Instrumental or A Cappella: John Beasley—"Donna Lee" (*MONK'estra Plays John Beasley*, Mack Avenue); Lifetime Achievement Award: Lionel Hampton; and Trustees Award: Benny Golson. For more information, visit grammy.com.

The **2021 NEA Jazz Masters** Tribute Concert will take place online on Apr. 22nd, 2021, honoring Terri Lyne Carrington, Albert "Tootie" Heath, Henry Threadgill and Phil Schaap. For more information, visit arts.gov/honors/jazz.

Jazz at Lincoln Center's 2021 gala, **Innovation + Soul**, will take place Apr. 15th with a virtual concert by the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra and guests President Bill Clinton, Pedrito Martinez, Lil Buck, Veronica Swift, Michael Rodriguez and Sean Mason. For more information, visit jazz.org/gala2021.

The **22nd Annual Central Brooklyn Jazz Festival** will take place Apr. 16th-30th in a blend of in-person, live-stream and pre-recorded music hosted by restaurants and cultural institutions located in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Clinton Hill, Crown Heights, East New York and Gowanus. For more information, visit cbjazz.org.

Among the recordings added for 2020 to the **Library of Congress National Recording Registry Listing** are a 1938 Decca single of "When the Saints Go Marching In" by Louis Armstrong and Pat Metheny's 1975 ECM album *Bright Size Life*. For more information, visit loc.gov/programs/national-recording-preservation-board.

Jazz Standard, the midtown club that closed its physical location last year, has announced "The Flip Side Sessions", running every Friday through May 14th with performances by Bill Charlap Trio, Chris Potter/Craig Taborn Duo, Christian Sands Group, Dave Holland/Kenny Barron/Johnathan Blake, Fred Hersch Trio and Melissa Aldana Quintet. For more information, visit jazzstandard.com.

The **2021 BRIC Jazz Festival** will be live-streamed Apr. 8th-10th with Roy Ayers, Phony Ppl, Nikara Presents Black Wall Street (Apr. 8th); Meshell Ndegeocello, Keyon Harrold, Justin Hicks (Apr. 9th); and Robert Glasper, Nate Smith x Van Hunt, MAE.SUN (Apr. 10th). For more information, visit bricartsmedia.org/events-performances/bric-jazzfest.

The latest recipients of the **Herb Alpert Young Jazz Composer Awards** have been announced. Local winners include Andy Clausen, Eliana Fishbeyn, Chase Kuesel, Lesley Mok, Alex Weitz, Matt Wong and Courtney Wright. For more information, visit ascap.com/herbalpertapp.

We spoke too soon...seems that Washington, DC's **Blues Alley**, open since 1965, is still operating, albeit online.

Joel Harrison, mastermind behind the Alternative Guitar Summit, has launched **AGS Records** with a solo recording by Anthony Pirog and an album of duo recordings of Harrison with Ben Monder, Pete McCann, Steve Cardenas, David Gilmore and bassist Steve Swallow. For more information, visit alternativeguitarsummit.com/ags-records.

In award news, Andra Day won Best Actress in a Movie Drama for *The United States vs Billie Holiday* while *Soul* won Best Animated Film and Best Original Score - Motion Picture (for music written by Jon Batiste) at **The Golden Globes** while for the first time in **The Academy Awards** history two Black composers are nominated for Best Original Score: Batiste for the aforementioned *Soul* and Terence Blanchard for *Da 5 Bloods*. In related news, Charlie Parker will receive a star on the **Hollywood Walk of Fame**.

Blank Forms will open the exhibition "**Organic Music Societies**", the first retrospective examining Don and Moki Cherry's collaborative practice during a decade in Scandinavia starting in the late '60s, on Apr. 8th at its space at 468 Grand Avenue in Clinton Hill, Brooklyn. For more information and to schedule a viewing time, visit blankforms.org.

Reports have pianist Orrin Evans departing **The Bad Plus**.

Submit news to ahenkin@nycjazzrecord.com

PHOTO BY KATE DELACORTE / COURTESY OF THE ARTIST



DAVID OSTWALD

BY MARILYN LESTER

David Ostwald began studying piano at 7, taking up the tuba at 11, headed, he thought, for a career in classical music. But then, in his junior year at the University of Chicago, the jazz bug bit. Ostwald was already primed, having discovered the joys of Louis Armstrong while still in high school. He formed his first jazz band at that time and after moving to New York, the Swarthmore, PA native created the Gully Low Jazz Band, which in 2000 morphed into the Louis Armstrong Eternity Band with a weekly gig at Birdland. His second album, with blues great Big Joe Turner, was nominated for a Grammy Award in 1986. Ostwald has performed with the likes of Wynton Marsalis, Dick Hyman, Nicholas Payton, Clark Terry, Benny Waters, Woody Allen, Jon Hendricks, Leon Redbone and the Oxford University Orchestral Society under Sir Jack Westrup. For many years, he has also presented jazz education programs for children at Lincoln Center's "Meet the Artist" and "Reel to Real" series and at the Louis Armstrong House in Corona, Queens. He has also written extensively about jazz music.

The New York City Jazz Record: As we know all too well, the pandemic has wiped out most gigs. But recently, you've been playing outdoors at Holocaust Memorial Plaza and also recorded for Radio Free Birdland's streaming series. What was that latter experience like, playing to an essentially empty house?

David Ostwald: Over the years we all get used to playing for an empty room. So, I just pretended that there were people there! I draw inspiration from Louis Armstrong — as I always do — who, once at a concert in North Dakota where there was a huge blizzard, played to five people in a 2,000 seat hall. He said, they showed up, so we're gonna play. So, we just had to psych ourselves into thinking that there was an audience there. I went through all my usual shtick. I asked the audience to please remain seated, even though they weren't there, so it was fun. As for the park, it's dependent on the weather, but it's a really nice experience for us and for the audience, especially in these times. It's a fun thing. So, I encourage people to check out when we're playing there because there's also a natural dance floor. We've been getting a lot of swing dancers, which we never had at Birdland.

TNYCJR: You were thwarted in having a major celebration this past year.

DO: Yes, and it was quite jarring to have to stop everything, having been used to playing for 20 years every week. March 11th, 2020 was our last regular Wednesday at Birdland and May 8th was going to be our big 20th anniversary. I'm very proud of that. We were going to really celebrate that.

TNYCJR: Prior to Birdland, you had a long run as the Gully Low Jazz Band. I'm curious about that name.

DO: I came to New York in the late '70s, right after

college. I used to hang out at the Red Blazer Too, a club that had a different band every night. That's where I first met Vince Giordano. I'd tape all the bands, with their permission, and go home and learn the tunes. After a certain point, I realized I was doing gigs with other people's bands but I didn't have my own band yet. You think to yourself, well maybe I'd like to play the music my own way. So, I started putting together a group of people that I played with and one night I said to the owner, I don't want to take anyone's gig away, but if there's an opening, I have a band, although I didn't really have one yet. I wasn't expecting him to say yes, but he did and asked, what's the name of your band? The first thing that came to my mind was a Hot Seven tune running through my head at the time called "Gully Low Blues". I had to appear as though I already had a name for the band so that's how that got started.

I stuck with the name though, because we started getting a lot of work. Fast forward to 2000 and the 100th anniversary of what Louis Armstrong thought was his birth date of July 4th, 1900. I'd become good friends with George Avakian, who was a great supporter of the band and who thought it would be a good idea to talk to the owner of Birdland, Gianni Valenti, about starting a gig there. Gianni was all for it, but for publicity purposes, wanted to give the band an identity. I was a little bit leery about the name change because my idea of the band has never been to imitate anything anybody does, but rather to be inspired by them. I didn't want to be trapped into being identified with Louis Armstrong, so for a while we used both names. We started gathering a following and as 2003 came along it looked like we were safe that the gig was going to be ongoing — so the name stuck.

TNYCJR: Along the way you've had the distinction of having some major guests sitting in with the band.

DO: Some of them weren't famous at the time, but then got famous, like Wycliffe Gordon and Anat Cohen. They both still play with us from time to time. Names aren't important. My attitude is that no matter how famous you are, everyone in the band is the same. My number one rule of bandleading is not to have any players who don't fit in because the band's just not going to sound good. Part of the reason we get the sound we do is because we make each other laugh. We listen to each other, we like each other, we enjoy each other and people can feel that. Solid musicians know their roles as sidemen even if they're leaders of their own bands, like Wynton Marsalis. When I've played with him, I'm a sideman. It's a dynamic we all respect.

TNYCJR: Besides the band's sound, what do you strive to achieve in performance? If I'm sitting in the audience, listening to you, what is it that you want me to experience?

DO: Heart to heart. That's what I want. I want you to

be moved to joy or sadness or reflection or whatever it is without a filter. That's what Louis Armstrong did for people. And it was direct from one soul to the other. What my goal is is to have the band be one soul and emotionally on the same page. And I want that to go directly to someone else's heart, without them thinking about anything, without barriers. The variety of people who one can affect if we're doing our job properly is infinite. It's as infinite as nature.

TNYCJR: You were attracted to the music of Armstrong around age 15. What is it that clicked, whereupon you said, Oh, my God, this is the guy for me?

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 25)

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STEPH RICHARDS

BY ROBERT BUSH

Trumpeter Steph Richards has been quietly taking the world of improvised music by storm. The classically-trained Alberta, Canada native didn't exactly plan her career in terms of becoming a free jazz MVP, but what else would one call a person who has shared the stage with iconic saxophonist/composers like Anthony Braxton, Henry Threadgill and John Zorn?

Music was always a part of her life, before she knew about jazz, before she felt the pull of the trumpet. "I've played the piano for as long as I can remember," Richards recalls. "We always had one in the house and I started writing from the beginning, just composing my own songs." She came to the horn circuitously, through an early exposure to Scottish pipe and drum music, where she played the tenor drum, digging the visual choreography as much as the sonics. "And then I chose the trumpet. I loved its flexibility. It could play classical music, it could play jazz, it could play pop. That's what attracted me to it at the age of 12 and it still does. I had a love for Scottish folk music and Joni Mitchell and then I picked up the horn and was lucky enough to have an amazing teacher who made some great recommendations of what to check out."

Initially, she was set on classical music. "I was doing a lot of competitions, flying across the country to perform some big concerto. That was 75% of my musical diet, but in my heart, whenever I had any extra time to practice, I'd be transcribing Freddie Hubbard solos or listening to Ellington. This was the music that spoke to me."

Richards went to the Eastman School of Music, earning her Bachelor's studying orchestral music, but she switched gears and moved to Montréal, getting her Graduate degree. At that point, she came to the West Coast, to study with bassist Charlie Haden at Cal Arts. "That changed everything for me. That's where I started really improvising and writing," says Richards. "Charlie was my teacher there and a big influence. He taught me to play the ocean and stressed that beauty comes first and I'm still trying to implement that." Richards has studied with some of the most significant players on the planet, including trumpeter Ron Miles, while she was still in high school (the family moved to Colorado) for her senior year. At Cal Arts, she had the privilege to seek out trumpeter Wadada Leo Smith. "He wasn't my official teacher, but we would play. I learned what it meant to play with fire—when he brings it, the room is electrified, you know?"

After graduation, Richards stayed in L.A. for six months, taking advantage for a moment, to explore commercial music at the big-time level, when she joined the touring band of rapper Kanye West. "I got the opportunity through a friend of a friend who couldn't do it. My first gig was the MTV Video Awards show." Following the Kanye tour, Richards moved to New York. She attended a workshop organized by pianist Fred Hersch where she met pianist Jason Moran, saxophonist Jane Ira Bloom and trumpeter Ralph Alessi, all important connections. She was

attending the wedding of a friend when she met conductor Butch Morris—perhaps her most significant mentor. "He kind of took me under his wing. He would tell me about concerts I shouldn't miss. If he was doing a conduction, he would invite people to come hear me. That's how I met Henry Threadgill. Butch was a really important part of me connecting to New York and feeling some sort of drive. He was hard on me, but it was just that his music was life and death and he taught me that."

Also while in New York, Richards began working with trumpeter Dave Douglas and the Festival of New Trumpet Music and she continues to be involved at the administrative level many years later. Through the festival, she connected with cornet player Taylor Ho Bynum and through Bynum, she caught the ears of Braxton. Eventually, that led to an invitation to join the Braxton group.

"To me, Braxton's music reflects voices of humanity in a way that is genuine—feminine, masculine, all that is in between and beyond. If the world is 50% female, music should reflect that. Working with Braxton is true joy." Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the cancellation of a European tour with the Braxton group, but Richards did manage to make a record with the maestro, which will be coming out in June on Firehouse 12.

Richards was a vital force in the Brooklyn improv scene in 2014, when she was approached by bassist Mark Dresser with an invitation to apply for a position at the University of California at San Diego. "He emailed me, but I didn't think I could ever qualify for it, so I didn't even apply. But he kept after me and I gave it a shot and I got the job! I reconnected with the West Coast, which I love and it's really helped support me making the kind of music I love."

Speaking of the music she loves, Richards just released her third album as a leader, the volcanic *Supersense* (Northern Spy), with Moran, electric bassist Stomu Takeishi and drummer Kenny Wollesen. She had this to say about the new album, which is designed to work with a scent card provided to the musicians at the session. "I'm always playing with compositional structure to find a way to empower and lift up all the players as best as I can with my music. So this record combines traditional notation with graphic notation and scent, you know, how your body processes that information."

And what kind of response has the new album gotten? "There's a lot of curiosity. I was worried the critics might say it stinks. But the reviews so far have been very positive. My whole hope for this project was to bring people closer to the music."

On a personal level, Richards and husband Andrew Munsey had a baby girl, Anza, during the pandemic. "I don't know how much [being a mother] will change my music, because COVID happened...I do feel a deeper connection to this idea of humanity. I think my heart has softened, so we'll see what comes." ❖

For more information, visit stephrichards.com. Richards live-streams Thursdays in April at [facebook.com/stephiesoundz](https://www.facebook.com/stephiesoundz).

Recommended Listening:

- Asphalt Orchestra—*Eponymous* (Cantaloupe Music, 2009)
- Steph Richards—*Fullmoon* (Relative Pitch, 2014)
- Steph Richards—*Take The Neon Lights* (Birdwatcher, 2015)
- Steph Richards—*Supersense* (Northern Spy, 2016)
- James Carney—*Pure Heart* (Sunnyside, 2016)
- Vinny Golia/Steph Richards/Bert Turetzky—*Trio Music* (pfMENTUM, 2017)



CALVIN KEYS

BY ANDERS GRIFFEN

Guitarist Calvin Keys hit his stride as a teenager in the late '50s and has enjoyed a career filled with decades of performance. He has worked with Ray Charles, Ahmad Jamal, Earl "Fatha" Hines, Sonny Fortune, Pharoah Sanders, Blue Mitchell, Bobby Hutcherson and just about all of the great organ players, including Jack McDuff, Richard "Groove" Holmes, Jimmy McGriff and Jimmy Smith. In the early '70s he recorded with Gene Russell and Doug Carn for the Black Jazz label while leading his own, now classic, sessions *Shaw-Neeg* and *Proceed with Caution*. Both titles have been reissued perennially; the former received a new treatment in January 2021 (by Real Gone Music) and the latter will be reissued later this year.

Keys was born in Omaha, Nebraska in 1943 and started playing the guitar around the age of 13 or 14, though he wasn't really supposed to be playing it. "My uncle Ivory introduced me to the guitar. He told me and two of my cousins if he ever caught us with the guitar he was gonna put his foot... [laughs] But I didn't care, because I was fascinated by it. I used to sneak down in the basement after school, hook it up and figure out how to play it, because I'd seen him do it."

Uncle Ivory finally caught him one day, but instead of punishment, he asked the youngster to play what he learned. He played what he'd seen his uncle play as well as some things he'd picked up from the radio and told his uncle that he was saving his money from his weekend job at the carwash to buy himself a guitar. His uncle was touched and told him he could have his guitar. Every day after school, Keys would go home and play that guitar until well after dark. Finally, the police knocked on his door and said the neighbors were complaining. They just asked him to turn it down.

He'd stay up and pick up all he could from the radio.

"There weren't that many stations working late at night, but we could get Stan the Record Man [Lewis] out of Tennessee. He would have all the new blues tunes and I used to listen to him every Saturday night: Bobby 'Blue' Bland, Muddy Waters and all the cats during that time." He also sought out any guitarists he could find in the area. There was Papa Luther Guitar Woodruff and The Night Riders and Clon Von Fitz in Council Bluffs, Iowa who showed him some things. His neighbor Richard Gardner played and his wife was the sister of Wayne Bennett who played with Bland.

"Wayne used to come to Omaha when he wasn't out there on the road with Bobby. We sat at the barbershop and I'd pick up a few more chords. There were four or five different guitar players in Omaha during that time and if you didn't know none of them blues tunes you wasn't in the game: Freddie King's 'Hideaway' or Bill Doggett's 'Honky Tonk', 'Gatemouth' Brown... he had that popular guitar blues, Jimmy Reed and all of them cats. Any guitar player comes through town and we heard about it, we'd go down there and worry him to death trying to figure out and learn stuff. So, that's where it started, socializing with them different guys."

By the age of 16 or 17 he started playing with Doctor Spider and his Rock'n'roll Webs at local clubs like The First and Last Chance, The Off Beat and up the road in Sioux City, Iowa at trumpeter Clarence Kenner's Poor Boys Club 54. At the same time, he started working with another group called Andre and the Ramrods, playing the blues and covering tunes they heard on the radio. They were working for a couple years when Little Walkin' Willie came through town and heard the young Keys. He needed a guitar player to cover about a month of work and invited Keys on the road, but his mother said no, since he was still in school. He had enough credits to graduate, so he said, "Mom, you know, you always told me to be up front with you ... Well, I'm gonna go [with] Little Walkin' Willie if I have to sneak out while you're asleep." She said, "Well, I don't want you to be a musician, young man, but if you're going to be one, try to be the best."

They went on the road to the Riviera Ballroom in

St. Louis, Gleason's in Cleveland and DWI Dave's Walnut Inn, in McKeesport, Pennsylvania. Keys had the time of his life and couldn't believe it when the month was suddenly over and he was on the train back to Omaha. He'd got a taste of life on the road in crowded clubs and would never be the same. So as soon as he got home, he moved down to Kansas City where his father lived and where there was more live music. He got a trio gig at the Nightingale and then started working with saxophonist Preston Love. Love's ensemble was a nine-piece dance band and while traveling the region, Keys started learning to perform standards.

Next, Keys got a call to join Frank Edwards' organ trio along with drummer James Gadson. "So, we started playing that circuit: O.G.'s Lounge in Kansas City, Allen's Showcase Lounge in Omaha and then to Leroy Smith's The Voters Club, the oldest club in Denver. We'd leave there and go to Booker T. Washington Hotel over on Ellis Street between Fillmore and Webster in San Francisco. Charles Sullivan owned the Fillmore Auditorium and a bunch of other clubs and businesses around here; he was a very prominent, successful Black man. Then over here to Oakland to Don Barksdale's joint. He had two clubs, The Showcase and The Sportsman, and we'd work in either one of those lounges and go back to West Oakland to Esther's Orbit Room. Now we worked eight weeks in each club and I was getting 150 dollars a week. So we was out here in the Bay Area for two, three months, man. So that was the gig. That was the chitlin' circuit that we knew. Frank was an outstanding organ player, man. So, Jimmy McGriff, Jimmy Smith, all of them knew him, 'cause he could play."

In 1967 and 1968, Keys was back at O.G.'s in Kansas City with his own trio, during which time Pat Metheny's father used to take him to see Keys play. But California was calling to him and he was ready to move on from the organ. "I moved to L.A. in March of 1969. I had saved up my money, I had a nice little bank roll... bought me a brand new guitar, a new wardrobe and a brand new 1969 Deuce and a Quarter Buick 225, so when I hit L.A. I was rollin' [laughs]. Then I played all

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 25)

LEST WE FORGET



AARON BELL

BY GEORGE KANZLER

By 1960, when he was 39, Aaron Bell had been playing bass professionally since 1946, after serving four years in a U.S. Navy band during World War II. He played with Billie Holiday, Lester Young, Stan Kenton, Cab Calloway, Carmen McRae and Dick Haymes. Along the way he acquired an M.A. in Social Work from NYU and was raising a family with four children in Mt. Vernon, NY. But that year became the most important of his musical life: he became an Ellingtonian.

"Dad had great respect for Duke Ellington as an artist and as a man," remembers Robin Bell-Stevens, Bell's only daughter and Director of JazzMobile.

"I learned more in the school of Ellington than I ever did in school," The bassist told this writer in an interview for the [New Jersey] *Star Ledger* in 1989. "When you played with Ellington's band you learned to apply the knowledge as you gained it."

Bell was in the Ellington Orchestra for two years and worked on and off on projects with Ellington and

his collaborator Billy Strayhorn for another four years, returning to play with the band on the Duke's tribute album to Strayhorn, who died in 1967, *...And His Mother Called Him Bill* (RCA, 1967). It was a fertile period for Ellington and Bell appears on seven albums from the band during 1960-63. He is also the bassist on two of Ellington's more celebrated small-band dates of the period, *Duke Ellington Meets Coleman Hawkins* and *Duke Ellington & John Coltrane*, both recorded in 1962 for Impulse.

Besides being the bassist in the band, Bell also had the opportunity to write out parts for Ellington and Strayhorn scores. "It was really educational," he said, recalling an incident when he went to Ellington to point out what he thought was a mistake. "In school they tell you not to cross your parts and being a kid I thought I knew more than I did, so I went to Ellington and said, 'I think you made a mistake here, sir.' He said, 'That's alright, just copy it as it is.' And when you heard the orchestra play it, you knew he was right. But Ellington never wrote a book about his technique, so people are still trying to figure it all out. Whatever it was, he arrived at it through experience, through writing for his band.

"He studied in school, not music, art, but I think he picked up a lot of traditional composing ideas from Strayhorn. But I could always tell the two apart. Strayhorn was smooth, almost classical, but Duke had that rough cut to it, he did very original things.

"Strayhorn was also a genius. I think most of his songs are comparable to art songs of the Romantic Period, like the songs written by Schubert, Brahms and Hugo Wolf. They are beautiful, but so are Strayhorn's. If you take them and analyze them you find the same elements in 19th Century art songs as you do in Strayhorn's 'Lush Life'. That's why Ellington didn't like the word 'jazz'; it put things apart in categories and Strayhorn was like Ellington, who described his music as 'beyond category'."

"Duke was pretty close to my dad, personally," says Bell-Stevens, "and when my grandfather died Duke told my dad that as long as he, Duke, was alive he'd always have a dad." She also remembers that Bell's closest musician friends were trumpeters Clark Terry and Joe Newman and saxophonist Frank Wess and that their families socialized together.

From 1970-90 Bell was head of the jazz program at Essex County College in Newark, NJ. He brought in visiting artists to give concerts and sometimes teach semesters and inaugurated a Performing Jazz Institute in 1989 (it disappeared when he retired in 1990).

In 1976 he finished his doctorate at Columbia Teacher's College, his dissertation a "Bicentennial Symphony" for string orchestra and jazz horns and reeds, which, according to Bell-Stevens, "traces the history of black Americans from Africa and slavery, musically, through the Great Migration to the present,

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 25)

OUT OF YOUR HEAD

BY JOHN SHARPE

Starting a label as a self-help mechanism has become a well-trodden route, particularly in the wilds of avant garde jazz. But not all such ventures take off like Out Of Your Head Records (OOYH). Uncertain of being able to find a suitable outlet, bassist Adam Hopkins launched the imprint in 2018 to release his leadership debut *Crickets*, by the sextet of the same name with Anna Webber, Ed Rosenberg, Josh Sinton, Devin Gray and Jonathan Goldberger. It marries tight arrangements, spontaneous outbursts and indie rock attitude and was deservedly successful.

Hopkins explains what happened next: “Immediately after I did it I had friends reaching out saying, that Out Of Your Head thing was really cool, I have something, can I send it to you and put it out? I never expected to be putting out this much music per year but all these people were sending me this amazing music so we’re doing as much as we can.” Talking to Hopkins, his enthusiasm for the music comes across loud and clear and it’s been a key factor in the growth of the brand. So much so that since then he has issued 14 albums with more planned.

Aside from the punningly effective name, which derives from an improvised music series that Hopkins ran, first in Baltimore and later in Brooklyn, the visual element forms a distinctive aspect of OOH. Hopkins works closely with artist and longtime friend TJ Huff, who contributes specific artwork for each release, as

well as other artist friends who design the logo, branding and merchandise. When Hopkins moved from Brooklyn to Richmond, VA, coincidentally on the same day *Crickets* came out, he invited Richmond-based drummer Scott Clark (who dropped a solo set on OOH early in 2021) to join him. Consequently they co-curate the label, both listening to prospective releases and agreeing what to put out.

Among the releases are *Échos la Nuit*, a remarkable one-man band airing from Michaël Attias on which he plays saxophone and piano simultaneously, The MacroQuartet’s *The Complete Night*, featuring the fabulous two trumpet frontline of Herb Robertson and Dave Ballou, and bassist Nick Dunston’s leadership unveiling *Atlantic Extraction*, which turned heads thanks to its genre-spanning realization of his crisply plotted charts. Dunston is entirely complimentary: “It’s kind of a perfect label in many respects. They treat the artists right because they themselves are ridiculous musicians, they’re genuinely into all of the music they put out, so they give complete artistic control to their artists. And the artwork is dope!”

Bassist Michael Formanek, who was Hopkins’ teacher at the Peabody Institute in Baltimore, also figures in the label’s mix of peers and elders. *Dyads*, a delightful duet with his saxophonist son Peter, came out in January. Formanek explains his choice: “Adam was really into it and excited about it. For me, record companies that I work with, the enthusiasm and the interest of the people that are putting out the music, that means a lot to me. Another reason that I chose to do this with Adam is that he saw Peter grow up. Peter participated in the OOH Series a few times. So for me putting it out on Adam’s label, brings the whole thing

full circle in a really good way.”

Formanek has an enlightening perspective on OOH’s development: “There are very few people I know who have that kind of personality that allows them to get things going in a certain way that people are just attracted to whatever charisma that they generate. Adam really had that and it was really important for the scene down there in Baltimore at the time. It’s just his way of doing things and he just transposed what he had been doing with these different series to a record label.”

Compelling evidence of Hopkins’ knack for making things happen and building community comes from Untamed, the digital-only DIY side of OOH, which focuses on high-quality performances that may not have the pristine sound of a traditional studio session. During the pandemic he asked friends and colleagues for unreleased live or home recordings for which he could provide artwork, then distribute. Because costs are minimal, all proceeds go direct to the musicians, along with a donation from OOH, providing valuable income when there are no live dates. So far the series numbers six, including entries from Dunston, Formanek, Tim Berne (whose Screwgun imprint was a big inspiration to Hopkins) and Webber’s quartet, which includes Hopkins and is responsible for the stunning *Rectangles*.

For physical releases OOH covers production costs upfront then, once recouped through sales, split any further takings with the artist. Thus far Hopkins has found the economics sustainable. “Some of the albums lose money, which is fine. When you are putting out avant garde free jazz you don’t necessarily

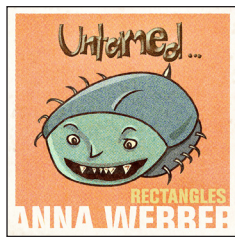
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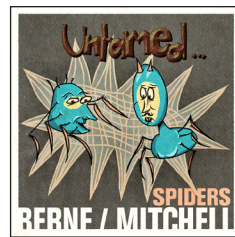
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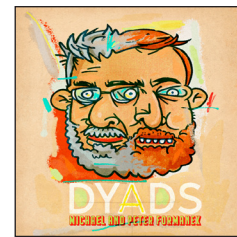
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Nick Dunston



Rectangles
Anna Webber



Spiders
Tim Berne/Matt Mitchell



Dyads
Michael and Peter Formanek

VOXNEWS

HOME, NOT ALONE

BY SUZANNE LORGE

London’s Edition Records has expanded its roster of select U.S. jazz vocalists—a propitious move. **Kurt Elling**, who signed to the indie in 2019, debuted *Secrets Are The Best Stories* a year ago this month, taking home a Grammy in the Best Jazz Vocal album category for it earlier this year. **Gretchen Parlato** chose to launch *Flor*, her first album as a leader in six years, last month. And **Sachal Vasandani**, the label’s latest vocal signatory, drops *Midnight Shelter* on Apr. 23rd. Like Elling and Parlato, Vasandani sings with rich expressiveness, never sacrificing the lyric to empty embellishment. Thus, you feel as much as hear the longing in his minimal renditions of The Beatles’ “Blackbird” and Harry Styles’ “Adore You”, jazz classics like Abbey Lincoln’s “Throw It Away” and Wayne Shorter’s “Dance Cadaverous” and originals like “Summer, No School” and “One Last Try”. Recorded in Brooklyn last July, with pristine comping by French-born pianist Romain Collin, this duo album isn’t a pick-me-up as much as a cathartic antidote to pandemic stir-craziness.

Begun before and completed during the coronavirus crisis, **Allan Harris’** *Kate’s Soulfood* (Love Productions) celebrates the post-Renaissance Harlem

of the guitarist/singer’s youth. These 10 tracks reverberate with gospel-infused inspiration (“Wash Away My Sins”), romantic R&B (“Color of a Woman”) and soul grooves (“I Grew Up (Kate’s Place)”). Harris continues the uptown tribute each Tuesday evening with “Harlem After Dark, Unplugged”, live-streamed via Facebook from his living room.

Singer/trumpeter **Chet Baker** came to New York in 1958 to record for Riverside, which had started only five years before. Though young, the record company was behind the important reissues of artists like Jelly Roll Morton and Ma Rainey and would go on to produce some of the most influential names in jazz. Last month, Craft Recordings re-released four classic Baker albums from the Riverside collection: (*Chet Baker Sings*) *It Could Happen to You*, *Chet Baker in New York*, *Chet* and *Chet Baker Plays the Best of Lerner and Loewe*. These records, pressed on vinyl from the original analog masters, feature Baker with several fine New York musicians of the day—drummer Philly Joe Jones, pianist Bill Evans and guitarist Kenny Burrell among them. Be forewarned that beloved as Baker’s voice is, the dated arrangements on these albums veer at times toward the treachy. (Then again, sometimes you just want something sweet.)

These days, for all practical purposes, musicians outside of New York are as close as those within; until live stages return to supplant our devices, we should bend this unusual situation to our advantage and discover some non-resident voices. Take singer/pianist **Bruce Brown**, for

instance. Raised in L.A., residing in New Zealand, the artist draws vocal inspiration from Chet Baker’s California cool and his songwriting bent from Dave Frishberg’s cleverness. His *Death of Expertise* (s/r) stands out for its gentle swing (“A Mind Is A Terrible Thing”) and tongue-in-cheek delivery (“Losers Are People, Too”). Ohio-born, Chicago-based **Joanie Pallatto**—formerly with the Glenn Miller Orchestra—also turns a smart phrase, both vocally and lyrically. She wrote music and/or lyrics to all but one of the 14 cuts on *My Original Plan* (Southport), demonstrating equal dexterity in jazz and pop idioms. To hear her smooth scatting, listen to the title track, a Latin-feel exposition on the value of accepting change. The new album hits online stores Apr. 16th.

Originally from North Dakota, San Francisco singer **Sandra Marlowe** brings classical training and big band experience to *The Heart Always Remembers* (Lovedog! Media). Her strong arrangements provide just the right frame for her luscious tone on tunes like snappy “Fascinating Rhythm”, Irene Kral’s charming “Nice Weather for Ducks” and the elegant title cut. Estonia violinist/singer **Ingrid Hagel** just launched *New Beginnings* (WinterDreamMusic), nine compositions of restless beauty with her skilled sextet of Baltic musicians. For a teaser, listen to their eerily satisfying tune “Breathless” on YouTube. In explaining the song title in an email, Hagel wrote: “During the last year, the events and pandemic have left me, many times, breathless.” She is not alone. ❖

CHICK COREA

BY ANDREY HENKIN



Chick Corea, keyboard player, NEA Jazz Master, 25-time Grammy Award winner, most recently this year with Best Jazz Instrumental Album (*Trilogy 2*) and Best Improvised Jazz Solo ("All Blues"), multiple *DownBeat* Jazz Artist of the Year, member of the Society of Jazz Arrangers and Composers Hall of Fame, BBC Lifetime Achievement Award recipient and among the most significant jazz players of the past seven decades, died Feb. 9th, 2021 at 79, shortly after being diagnosed with cancer.

Corea, né Armando, was born in Chelsea, Mass. on Jun. 12th, 1941 and introduced to music via his Dixieland trumpeter father. He began piano lessons as a young child and was already gigging as a high schooler. He came to New York for university but got his real education on the bandstand through early work with Mongo Santamaria, Blue Mitchell, Dave Pike, Hubert Laws, Montego Joe, Herbie Mann, Cal Tjader, Stan Getz, Pete La Roca and Donald Byrd.

His leader debut came in 1966, *Tones For Joan's Bones* on the Mann-produced Vortex label. 1968 was the year, however, that began his stratospheric rise. In March, he recorded the seminal trio date *Now He Sings, Now He Sobs* (Solid State) with bassist Miroslav Vitous and drummer Roy Haynes. Then, that fall, he recorded on Miles Davis' *Filles De Kilimanjaro* sessions, beginning an affiliation that would last through 1972.

Corea was one of the large group of musicians who came out of the trumpeter's electric period to found their own fusion bands. Alongside John McLaughlin/Billy Cobham's Mahavishnu Orchestra and Wayne Shorter/Joe Zawinul's Weather Report was Corea's Return to Forever (RTF), which debuted on ECM in 1972 and stayed active, albeit with personnel changes, through 1978 (reuniting briefly in the new millennium). Previous to RTF, Corea had established himself on ECM with a pair of solo albums, dates with A.R.C. with bassist Dave Holland and drummer Barry Altschul and the cooperative Circle band of Anthony Braxton, Corea, Holland and Altschul. Another milestone came at the end of 1972 with *Crystal Silence* (ECM), a duet with vibraphonist Gary Burton, a relationship the men continued well into the new millennium.

The following decades saw dozens of releases with almost as many bands for Polydor, Stretch, GRP and Concord, whether the *Friends* group of 1978 with reedplayer Joe Farrell (who had been on *Tones For Joan's Bones*), bassist Eddie Gomez and drummer Steve Gadd; duets with fellow pianists Friedrich Gulda or Herbie Hancock; the ElektriK, Akoustic and Origin bands; collaborations with Bobby McFerrin and Béla Fleck; Five Peace Band with McLaughlin and Trilogy with bassist Christian McBride and drummer Brian Blade, all accompanied by constant touring. In addition, numerous Corea compositions have entered the jazz canon and been recorded by myriad artists.



CHRISTIAN BROECKING (Jun. 5th, 1957 - Feb. 2nd, 2021) The German musicologist and critic wrote liner notes for releases on Intakt, hatART and Jazzwerkstatt, founded Jazz Radio Berlin and the culture-related publishing house Broecking Verlag, was a jazz juror for the annual German Record Critics' Prize and a noted lecturer. Broecking died Feb. 2nd at 63.



CLAUDE CARRIÈRE (Mar. 14th, 1939 - Feb. 20th, 2021) The French producer, journalist, radio show host and noted Duke Ellington expert was involved in archival releases by Ellington, Charlie Christian, Oscar Peterson, Hank Jones and others for Média 7, Dreyfus Jazz, Nocturne and Cristal and wrote liner notes since the '70s for compilations released by RCA Victor, Black and Blue, Pathé, Savoy, Vogue, BMG France, Saga and others. Carrière died Feb. 20th at 82.



DENNY CHRISTIANSON (Sep. 12th, 1942 - Feb. 10th, 2021) The Canada-based trumpeter, bandleader and arranger had several albums since the '80s on Justin Time, mostly with his big band, and sideman work with Gabor Szabo, Roland Bautista, Jean Robitaille, Michel Donato and others. Christianson died Feb. 10th at 78.



PAULY COHEN (Oct. 3rd, 1922 - Feb. 8th, 2021) The trumpeter was active from the early '40s-late '80s with Claude Thornhill, Artie Shaw, Woody Herman, Benny Carter, Count Basie, Roy Eldridge, Clark Terry, Oliver Nelson, Machito, Quincy Jones and others. Cohen died Feb. 8th at 98 of complications from COVID-19.



MILFORD GRAVES (Aug. 20th, 1941 - Feb. 12th, 2021) The drummer, whose earliest recorded appearances in the mid '60s—with Montego Joe and Giuseppe Logan—reflected his roots as a Latin percussionist and future as a free-improv drummer, was part of the seminal New York Art Quartet, recorded notable duets with Sonny Morgan, Don Pullen, Andrew Cyrille and David Murray, had an important 1977 collaboration with members of Japan's avant garde scene (*Meditations Among Us*), sideman credits with Miriam Makeba, Paul Bley, Lowell Davidson, Jazz Composer's Orchestra, Albert Ayler, Sonny Sharrock and others and his own albums for IPS, Tzadik and TUM. Graves died Feb. 12th at 79. [An In Memoriam spread for Graves is on pgs. 12-13]



JOHNNY PACHECO (Mar. 25th, 1935 - Feb. 15th, 2021) The Dominican saxophonist/flutist had dozens of albums since the mid '60s both as a leader and in collaboration with Pete Rodriguez, Celia Cruz, Jose Fajardo and others, mostly on Fania Records, which he co-founded in 1963 with Jerry Masucci, for which he also produced hundreds of records by the likes of Larry Harlow, Bobby Valentin, Joe Bataan, Willie Colon, Ismael Miranda, Fania All-Stars and many more. Pacheco died Feb. 15th at 85.



ULI RENNERT (1960 - Feb. 5th, 2021) The Austrian pianist had releases since the '80s on Bellaphon, Extraplatte, SOS-Music, PAN TAU-X, Natango and other labels, sideman work with Wolfgang Schalk, Uli Soyka and Lakis Tzimkas and longtime membership in the Jazz Big Band Graz. Rennert died Feb. 5th at 60. ❖

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Milford Graves had the courage to be himself. In any walk of life, not an easy thing for many people to do—to be themselves, doing what they think and feel good about, whether liked, disliked or misunderstood by others.

As with other outstanding artists, within the realm of jazz and improvised music, his musical signature was unique—instantly recognizable! And with his display with an imaginative, personalized trap drum set, along with assorted percussive instruments, and his vocalizations while playing, he contributed musical ideas, giving and taking to those who created music with him in the creative moment.

He was also an extraordinary person, gifted in many ways, notably with practices and information pertaining to good health. He shared them with many people who sought his advice re: same.

Milford was a family man, my friend, a business partner, a peer and a musical colleague of my generation. Over the years, we played many performances in duets and other varying formations together...too many to mention here! He also had a great sense of humor. I will remember and treasure all the fun and performances we had during those times.

As with so many other great musicians, and the many other things he was known for, he will be missed a lot by me and many others. He was truly a unique and giving human being.

—ANDREW CYRILLE, DRUMS

Milford Graves was not only a unique and innovative drummer, but exists as a great soul in the modern world. He had a rare ancient wisdom that continued to explore and practice the total way of life.

We have been interacting with each other since 1976, playing together and talking with each other in Japan and U.S. What I have learned from him is immeasurable and I want to keep watching his eternal soul, which will not perish even though he has died.

—TOSHI TSUCHITORI, DRUMS

Milford Graves had an important influence on my life before I had ever met him. I was introduced to the late John Stevens by Alfreda Bengé in 1966. In the ensuing conversation, I got my first taste of John's own brand of intensity. The conversation was in effect a job interview. Once John realized that I knew Milford's work, especially the solo record for ESP I got the "job". More accurately I was invited to play at the, now legendary, Little Theatre Club and soon after to join the Spontaneous Music Ensemble.

Years later when I played on the same festival as Milford in Tampere, Finland I was able to introduce myself and thank him for his music, his powerful presence and the role it had played in my life to that date.

When John Zorn gave me weeks at The Stone between 2009 and 2014 I summoned up the nerve to ask Milford to play duo with me. The first set on the first night was so well attended that the Fire Brigade shut the show down. After that dramatic start things went without interruption for the next five shows spread over several years.

It was an honour for me to play with such a totally realized individual.

There is no higher praise—A TOTALLY REALIZED INDIVIDUAL—with all the powers that such a state can bring.

—EVAN PARKER, SAXOPHONE

The primary objective of the totality of the Celestial-Mystic-Spiritual-Scientific musician is to initiate an intradynamical thrusting force on the various particles that comprise Earth's conscious cosmic mysteries that interact with the human biological system. Understanding the unique rhythmic thrust and fractured sonic patterns of Milford Graves' tribal matrix is like trying to synchronize raindrops. Time is lapsed, accelerated and finally erased. Time is that which ends.

When I was 14 or 15, I put a magazine centerfold on my wall: Albert Ayler playing on a flatbed truck in Harlem. Directly behind him was a drummer with a big afro and a painted drum kit, like a psychedelic rock kit. He was teaching for 36 years at Bennington College, not someone you would run into at a festival in Europe. I finally met him when John Zorn organized a trio. And we did a lot of concerts... sometimes with guests, Steve Coleman, Wadada Leo Smith, Bill Frisell, Larry Coryell, Terry Riley and Lou Reed. Milford Graves, a great, original musician... Big Respect.

—BILL LASWELL, BASS

I have known Milford for many, many years but it wasn't until recently—through Jake Meginsky's film *Full Mantis*—that I understood the full measure of the man. I did not know him to be the fighter and interpreter of the body as a way for protection. I knew him as one who told me that the drums, however configured, is a living and breathing organism. I can't overemphasize the importance of this ageless interpretation. It enables one to eliminate indecision, self-doubt and jealousy. The beauty that *Full Mantis* revealed is the revelation that all of his creativity and NOWNESS come with compassion: for humanity, for the mystery of breath, for the child, for this planet's NOMMO.

—WILLIAM HOOKER, DRUMS

I first met Milford through the documentary, *Speaking In Tongues*, about the life of Albert Ayler. It took eight years to make, from when I was 21 to 28 or 29 when it finally was finished; I became a man during that process and am very thankful for sharing some intimate musical moments with him. I learned a lot from Milford the way he carried himself. He was always teaching. We did a lot of duet concerts over the years. So much dynamics between the two of us it sounded like a whole orchestra at times.

—DAVID MURRAY, REEDS

I was honored to present the many-faceted work of Professor Graves and to share the space of ideas and music and conversation with him and our community, in what turned out to be his final months. As the curator of "A Mind-Body Deal", with our friends at the Institute of Contemporary Art, I was given a life-changing opportunity: to spend days and days in Milford's presence, at his home, entering into his world as one of his students. The experience has forever changed me.

As heartbroken as I may be now that Professor Graves has passed on, I am thrilled to know that this exhibition introduced more people to his work and connected him to so many of his appreciative admirers. The outpouring of love shown for Milford from family and past students, as well as lifelong fans and even strangers, was overwhelming. He was deeply loved and I am privileged to have provided a channel for these deeply held feelings and to have been witness to them.

—MARK CHRISTMAN, ARS NOVA WORKSHOP

I am so grateful to have been able to spend time early on studying drums and percussion with Prof. Milford Graves at his home in Queens NY. I am grateful for his lifetime of practice in drumming, research in medicine, visual and martial arts and performance that he strived so hard to fulfill and expand each day.

It is a beautiful, profound and inspiring legacy that Milford has left to the world. A great connector and communicator, Milford understood, learned and taught what our bodies need to be healthy, our vibratory energy, studying this and connecting our heartbeats with drumming and improvisation through medicine and music.

Such beautiful drumming and singing and what an amazing aesthetic! This has always been in my ears and in my heart and I am filled with gratitude and joy to hear this every day at the drums.

Thank you Milford for your wisdom, empathetic spirit and enormous inspiration. You gave everything you had to all of us in the world. It's time for us to carry on the work.

—SUSIE IBARRA, DRUMS

Milford Graves and Bill Dixon were my heroes before I enrolled at Bennington College in March of 1982 as a rebellious 27-year old to get my BA in Black Music. I studied two semesters as a private student of Professor Graves and one in workshops.

The knowledge he shared with me was invaluable. His lessons improved the independence of all four limbs and my ability to play the whole drum set. I would never be the free jazz drummer I am today without his totally unique teachings and seeing his amazing solo drum performances.

He was known to have said, "The music you hear is your own heartbeat." Over the years, I assimilated those words in my own way and it has worked for me to this day. Thank you, Professor Graves.

—WHIT DICKEY, DRUMS

I have been listening to Milford Graves on recordings and YouTube videos since 2003. Something that got my attention was his singing and drumming together but I never connected to that until I met him in person at the 2019 Vision Festival after his duo concert with Andrew Cyrille.

After the concert I went to introduce myself and as soon as I mentioned to him that I was from Cuba, he opened his eyes wide and grabbed me by my arms and invited me to his house in Queens!

Milford really loved Cuban music. I went to his house and we got to talk more about music and drumming. Then he asked me if I sang when I played, I said yes, which made him SO happy. Then we kept talking and talking about his musical concept until he said to me very softly, "I want to invite you to play with me, but I better don't say it because of my health condition. I don't want to talk about it if it is not going to happen." In that moment I said to myself, "Milford I am already playing with you here."

Milford really changed my life in drumming, my vision and my approach and I feel so grateful for that but at the same time very sad because I couldn't share with him what I learned from him. He really taught me how powerful music is when we sing and play at the same time.

Thanks very much, Milford.

—FRANCISCO MELA, DRUMS

Milford lived every moment of his life using all of his God-given abilities and instincts. Searching and discovering his purpose in life. Then living inside that purpose, music healing singing a song inspired by the elders from Africa to South Carolina to Jamaica, Queens. A grandfathers song, which trains you to trust one's intuitive nature. Baba Milford Graves was something else, as anyone who met him could attest to. His creative spirit was unstoppable. An extraordinary human being.

—WILLIAM PARKER, BASS

I was truly saddened to learn of Milford's transition. For more than 50 years I have been an enthusiastic follower of Milford's numerous creative activities in multiple disciplines. Through reading, listening, watching, performing, phone calls, rehearsals and visiting his home, I can truly say he was always full of energy, challenges AND surprises.....ASHÉ!!!

—FAMOUDOU DON MOYE, DRUMS

The night I got the sad news about Milford's death from Michael Ehlers I was reading some old Japanese poems (translated by Kenneth Rexroth) and on the page I opened there was the following poem:

*Did a cuckoo cry?
I open the door
And look out in the garden
There is only the moon
Alone in the night*

I think that is a good way to remember that great man.

—PETER BRÖTZMANN, SAXOPHONE

Another terrible loss: the great Milford Graves. A unique and amazing soul. Nobody played like him, nobody thought like him, nobody sounded like him. A true original. Milford (or "The Professor", as he was called by many of us who knew him) did everything his own way. His music, his sound, even his physical drum set, were like no one else's. Refused to play a snare drum, feeling that snares got in the way of the natural sound of the drum. Wouldn't use bottom heads on his drums either. The shells, and even the heads, were custom hand-painted—no factory finishes for Milford Graves! Professor Graves was an artist, thinker, philosopher, scholar, sculptor, teacher, writer, healer, scientist, herbalist and more, as well as a creative musician of the highest order. His decades of work and study on heart rhythms, and heart rate variability in particular, informed his playing style and his way of life. Listening to the rapid-fire crackle and intensity of his music was like being connected to an electric current, a stream of mental energy...a flow. In 2015, after many years of thinking about it, I finally got up the nerve to invite Professor Graves to my ScienSonic Laboratories recording studio. I recruited two other saxophonists I'd worked with previously, both masters of the creative music world: Marshall Allen and Roscoe Mitchell. Turns out that Roscoe had never played with either Allen or Graves, so it was a first-ever meeting. I am extremely grateful and proud that we were able to make this record (*Flow States*, released last year). Milford pronounced it "historic" and I believe it may be his last studio album. Now, sadly, our collaborative science/music performances will not be able to happen the way we had hoped...

—SCOTT ROBINSON, REEDS

MILFORD GRAVES 1941-2021





II
Nir Felder (Ropeadope)
by Robert Bush

II is Nir Felder's sophomore document, a followup to his debut *Golden Age* on OKeh released back in 2014. Felder has become more of a presence on the jazz guitar scene since that effort, logging high-profile gigs with Jason Robinson, Greg Osby, Esperanza Spalding and Jack DeJohnette.

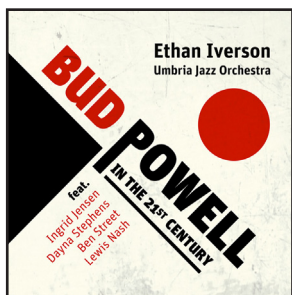
The new album makes good use of multi-tracking, allowing Felder to play a ton of instruments, including mandolin, banjo, electric sitar, keyboards, Theremin and loads of electric guitars. In support of all of that is Matt Penman (bass) and Jimmy Macbride (drums).

Felder has got a warm, rich legato and a gift for clarity, apparent from the opener, "Longest Star", which finds him in the center of a swirling mix of stringed instruments. There is an even split between modal rockers and more agitated material. "Interregnum" is an attractive example of the former, reminiscent of some of Steve Khan's work in previous years; Felder unwinds a long and complex solo over layered keyboards. "Fire In August" is another rocker, with power chords and snare drum on 2 and 4. It has an anthemic feel, which wouldn't be out of place on the Pat Metheny Group album *American Garage* and Felder's solo narrative commands considerable interest. The band reaches an apotheosis on "Coronation", where the guitarist spins that country twang that Bill Frisell and Metheny both do so well. His version of that aesthetic employs deft voice-leading and chord melody and the tune caps out with a lovely Penman solo.

There's a kind of 'techno' feel to "Big Heart", which begins with wicked distortion over a crackling backbeat before lurching into a series of tempo manipulations, sounding like a needle skipping on vinyl or a jump-cut in video editing. Also noteworthy is "Big Swim", which employs sequencing and a melodic function on the key bass to achieve a sci-fi soundtrack vibe. The album closes on "War Theory", a big fusion opus with singable melodies, whiplash beats and enough carefully cloaked bebop to keep more traditional listeners on the edge of their seats.

Felder is definitely a player on the rise and the music on this album indicates that he may well become more of a household name in the very near future.

For more information, visit ropeadope.com. Felder live-streams Apr. 7th at barbayeux.com.



Bud Powell in the 21st Century
Ethan Iverson & Umbria Jazz Orchestra (Sunnyside)
by Brian Charette

This compelling new recording from pianist Ethan Iverson was inspired by 1949's Bud Powell's *Modernists* with Sonny Rollins and Fats Navarro. The tunes are by both Powell and Iverson who uses the former's solo

ideas as well as classic big band and contemporary classical techniques to inform his section writing. Intermezzi entitled "Five Simple Spells 1-5" break up the bop action. These are generally more meditative in nature and provide a lovely foil for the mostly swinging set. In his liner notes, Iverson refers to them as séances designed to reach the bebop giant in the spirit realm.

The core group is Ingrid Jensen (trumpet), Dayna Stephens (tenor saxophone), Ben Street (bass) and Lewis Nash (drums). The album was recorded live, which makes the brilliant performances of the Umbria Jazz Orchestra even more impressive. On the opening title track, cymbal-washed ambience welcomes angular brass harmony in mostly quarter notes offset by occasional stabs from the saxophone section. Lush and mysterious chords spawn a sequence that runs through the arrangement. In the second movement, the tempo quickens. Iverson's deft bop lines and left-hand shell voicings display a deep understanding of his subject while Nash is simple and grooving. The horns take up the bass ostinato with a rhythmic grouping in five, rubbing against the swinging bebop, which Stephens continues on his solo. The sections split and build in intensity with a surprise "Cherokee" ending.

"Tempus Fugit" has a swinging drum intro with great idiomatic snare work. Saxophones play the melody in unison with snappy hits from the brass. Iverson's solo swings hard; he nails Powell's style, especially in his triplet turns and left-hand voicings. A well-written interlude brings us to Jensen's solo, which is more angular and covers a wide range of the horn. Quarter-note triplets accompany the supersax bebop and sharp ending.

The first of the "Simple Spells" could serve easily as a hymn in the bebop church. Iverson's orchestration is subtle and advanced, his shapes always well spaced with excellent voice leading. "Bouncing with Bud" stays very true to the original: block chords on the bridge are on point; Stephens' solo borrows several Rollins riffs, merged with his own interesting ideas that fly at wide intervals up and down the horn; Jensen has a cool solo that stays in the low register. Iverson is also chill, playing simply but swinging hard.

Thelonious Monk's "52nd St. Theme" is a fun uptempo romp, which tumbles into the head at a brisk clip with witty piano fills. Stephens dips slyly in and out of the key and Iverson works pedal points against his tight right-hand lines. The tune ends with a rousing shout chorus and burning drum solo. Iverson keeps to the aesthetic of Powell while expanding his concepts with slick compositional techniques, gelling perfectly with the classic bop structures.

For more information, visit sunnysiderecords.com. Iverson live-streams Apr. 6th at underexposed.live.



L'Impact du Silence
François Bourassa (Effendi)
by Pierre Giroux

Pianist François Bourassa has been a fixture on the Canadian jazz scene for some 25 years. Although he has toured internationally and did a six-month residency in New York City, his comfort zone remains firmly anchored in his native province of Québec.

On his first solo recording, which relies entirely on his own compositions, Bourassa explores a broad soundscape of ideas encompassing improvisation, introspection and abstraction. By way of a disclaimer,

it would only be in a more liberal interpretation of the word 'jazz' that these compositions could be considered to fall into that category.

The opening number "Small Head" is a probing improvisation filled with harmonic tension, dense texture and moody undertone. The segue composition is "Blues Masqué", relatively brief with a reflective and pensive theme Bourassa slides lucidly through each register with precision. "Interludes Y, X, Z" are amuse-bouches meant to whet the musical palate but are without much substance and disappear quickly without leaving any traces.

"Gaspard" was written for Bourassa's younger son and has an airy and dreamy theme. The interpretation is artfully restrained, thoughtful and sensitive. "La Buissonne" is the name of a record label that won an award in 2018 as the Best French Jazz Label; Bourassa's homage is dirge-like, with stony command and a somber sound. The longest track is "Musique Pour Film", which thematically fits with all the other compositions herein. Bourassa is clearly a virtuoso with an ethereal approach to his material. Nothing appears to be done by rote or perfunctory. The challenge is that it is not broadly accessible despite being so richly configured.

These are parlous and uncertain times. Individuals and families are isolated. Social interaction is dominated by the use of inanimate objects not offering any human warmth. One may have hoped that this music might have brought some relief and anticipation of brighter days. But this is not the case. The music is filled with angst and gloom, Bourassa appearing to be held captive by the weight of his own design.

For more information, visit effendirecords.com. Bourassa live-streams Apr. 10th at jazzenrafale.ca/en/events.

RECOMMENDED NEW RELEASES

- Hasaan Ibn Ali — *Metaphysics: The Lost Atlantic Album* (Omnivore)
- François Bourassa — *L'Impact du Silence* (Effendi)
- Jeff Coffin/Helen Gillet — *Let It Shine* (Ear Up)
- Satoko Fujii — *Hazuki (Piano Solo)* (Libra)
- Brian Marsella/Trevor Dunn/Kenny Wollesen — *John Zorn: Calculus* (Tzadik)
- Evan Parker Quartet — *All Knavery and Collusion* (Cadillac)
- Punkt.Vrt.Plastik (Kaja Draksler/Christian Lillinger/Petter Eldh) — *Somit* (Intakt)
- Reut Regev/Igal Foni — *Two Much: Never Enough* (Relative Pitch)
- Scott Robinson — *Solipsisms* (for unaccompanied C melody saxophone) (ScienSonic)
- Sonic Twist (Judi Silvano/Bruce Arnold) — *Unity* (Muse-Eek)

Laurence Donohue-Greene, Managing Editor

- Gabriel Alegria Afro-Peruvian Sextet — *Social Distancing* (Saponegro)
- Sergio Armadori/Fritz Hauser — *Angelica* (Leo)
- Emmet Cohen — *Future Stride* (Mack Avenue)
- Yelena Eckemoff — *Adventures of the Wildflower* (L&H Prod.)
- Mark Feldman — *Sounding Point* (Intakt)
- Barry Guy — *Irvin's Comet* (NoBusiness)
- Stephanie Nilles — *I pledge allegiance to the flag — the white flag* (Sunnyside)
- Evan Parker Quartet — *All Knavery and Collusion* (Cadillac)
- Art Pepper — *Unreleased Art, Volume Eleven: Atlanta* (Widow's Taste)
- Soft Works — *Abracadabra In Osaka* (MoonJune)

Andrey Henkin, Editorial Director



**Griot: This Is Important!
Jeremy Pelt (HighNote)
Ascension**

**Black Art Jazz Collective (HighNote)
by Marco Cangiano**

These CDs celebrate the African American tradition. The first builds on trumpeter Jeremy Pelt's recently self-released book, *Griot: Examining the Lives of Jazz' Great Storytellers*, an heir of sorts to Art Taylor's 1977 tome *Notes and Tones: Musician-to-musician Interviews*, while the other is the third outing from the Black Art Jazz Collective (BAJC), which Pelt co-founded in 2012 with saxophonist Wayne Escoffery and drummer Johnathan Blake. Both projects embody BAJC's stated purpose of "celebrating African American cultural and political icons, as well as preserving the historical significance of African Americans in Jazz".

Many, therefore, are the commonalities, besides Pelt's presence: the material, which combines an updated version of the somewhat ethereal atmosphere of mid to late '60s Blue Note's along with a more assertive Jazz Messengers edge; dedications to elders, such as Larry Willis and Harold Mabern, who have recently passed; and pianist Victor Gould's imprint as both an essential soloist and composer.

Griot cleverly combines brief intimate interviews, including with Willis and Mabern, with heartfelt musical statements. These either blend in with the storytelling, as in the case of Pelt's introduction, Warren Smith's testimony and the brief conversation with Bertha Hope, followed by beautiful ballad "A Seat at the Table", or take off and get inspiration from the oral testimonies.

A case in point is René Marie's harsh recollection of her embarrassment at being American, reflected in the ensuing "A Beautiful (F*cking) Lie", which also benefits from Brandee Younger's harp. The group includes young Taiwanese vibraphonist Chien Chien Lu, bassist Vicente Archer and drummer Allan Mednard in addition to Pelt and Gould, the latter clearly inspired by the storytelling, delivering relaxed, almost restrained, lyrical performances. Lu is reminiscent of Bobby Hutcherson in her rhythmic yet suspenseful approach on the Eric Dolphy-inspired "Don't Dog the Source". Pelt's playing continues to evolve with total command of the full range of the instrument while adding a touch of romanticism, smoothing out some of his early hard edges. "Relevance" rounds out the proceedings with a tight dialogue between tense trumpet and bouncing vibraphone on top of a dense tapestry provided by the rhythm section.

Ascension relies on a tightly assembled group of musicians cruising through a varied set of original compositions. The programmatic approach directly influences the music with varying degrees of success in a relatively short CD (less than 48 minutes) by today's standards.

By looking backward while moving forward along the Jazz Messengers' hardbop tradition, particularly the frontline of tenor, trumpet and trombone, the music provides a sense of predictability, which, while appealing, risks diminishing its more ambitious reach. Each piece sticks to an extremely well executed theme-solos-theme pattern inclusive of brilliant solos but lacking some depth. Jackie McLean's "Twin Towers", recorded here for the first time, and Gould's "Iron Man", dedicated to Mabern, are the perfect examples of this approach: driving and quite appealing, even exciting in the solo sequences, but hardly surprising.

The more politically-motivated tracks, trombonist James Burton III's "Tulsa" and Escoffery's "Involuntary Slavery", are more complex and satisfying offerings, yet fail to convey fully the drama that those historical events elicit.

With bassist Rashaan Carter and drummer Mark Whitfield, Jr. taking over for Archer and Blake, respectively, from previous CDs, BAJC has become more assertive and driven, while Gould replacing Xavier Davis adds depth in the composition department. The use of the electric piano, however, sounds a tad dated in "For the Kids", possibly the least interesting piece of the CD. Other pieces, such as "Mr. Willis" and brief ballad interlude "No Words Needed", suffer from the above noted predictability.

For more information, visit jazzdepot.com. Pelt live-streams Apr. 14th with Clovis Nicolas at smallslive.com.



**Sure Thing
David Kikoski (with Boris Kozlov) (HighNote)
by Dan Bilawsky**

When two master musicians get together, it's a safe bet that things will go well. And when they're friends who've been working side by side for nearly a quarter of a century, resonating on the same wavelength while shifting in and out of different formats and settings together, it's practically a sure thing.

So is it any wonder that pianist David Kikoski and bassist Boris Kozlov – a tight twosome bonded through work in the former's combos, the Mingus Big Band, Beatlejazz and collective quintet Opus 5 – should hit it off in a duo setting?

Putting aside that rhetorical question and a front-loaded stamp of quality, Kikoski and Kozlov go on to earn their praise at every turn in this eight-song set. The pianist's well-structured offerings capture the imagination while the bassist carries his weight and then some, acting as counter voice and hinge. The plainly-titled "B Flat Tune", undergirded by Kozlov's life-affirming pulse, radiates beauty in its own sweetly logical way. "E" provides a touch of McCoy Tyner's line language in its head but moves further afield in its development. A stop-off in the world of Emerson, Lake & Palmer – "Fugue" from "The Endless Enigma", harkening back to 1972's *Trilogy* album – gives Kikoski a chance to revisit an early influence in his own fashion. And the ruminative "Strength for Change", auguring hope in its every line, finds comfort in its spaces.

Kicking off the second half of the program with the recently departed Chick Corea's "Quartet #1", Kikoski and Kozlov flex their minds and musical muscles without ever breaking a sweat. Then they run laps through John Coltrane's "Satellite", a classic referencing "How High The Moon" in structure and representing advancement through the composer's signature harmonic changes; tackle the Jerome Kern-Ira Gershwin title cut, nodding to the version on 1953's *The Amazing Bud Powell, Vol. 2* while sprucing things up with new harmonies, rhythms and an odd-metered gait; and finally call it a day with "Winnie's Garden", a contrafact on "Sweet Georgia Brown" interpreted with alacrity and shot through with animated exchanges. Matching the gazes on the cover photo, this album delivers the sound of looking up.

For more information, visit jazzdepot.com. Kikoski live-streams Apr. 17th at southfloridajazz.org.



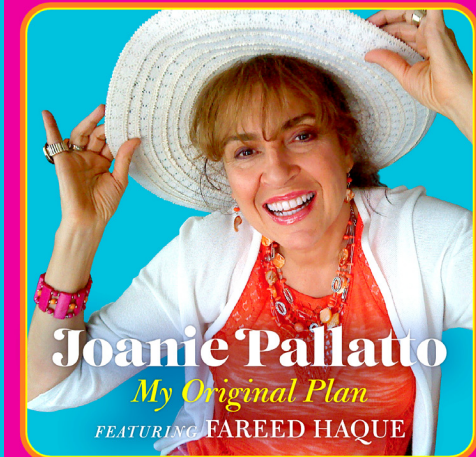
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GLOBE UNITY



MP85

Michel Portal (Label Bleu)

Full Sun

Ziv Taubenfeld (Multikulti Project)

Notre Dame - Meditations and Prayers

Mathilde Grooss Viddal (Losen)

by Tom Greenland

I'll never forget my first time. I was listening to *Bitches Brew* and a haunting, almost reptilian sound seemed to slither through the electro-acoustic jungle of Miles Davis' music. It was Bennie Maupin's bass clarinet. Three recent projects led by bass clarinetists place the low reed's unforgettable tone front and center.

85 year-old Michel Portal is one of the founding figures of the French free improv scene, recording in the late '60s and early '70s with groups like New Phonic Art, later winning three César Awards for his film scores. *MP85* is an adventurous yet accessible outing with trombonist Nils Wogram, keyboardist Bojan Z, bassist Bruno Chevillon and drummer Lander Gyselinck. The repertoire, often written in minor keys with propulsive, riff-based grooves and hummable melodies, supports fluid interplay between the bass clarinet, trombone and keyboards. Portal seems to favor the upper register of his bass clarinet, often sounding like an alto saxophone until he dips down into the instrument's *Twilight Zone* range; during free blowing sections he draws on multiphonics, growls, trills and electronic effects to vitalize his ideas. Wogram, equally adroit, versatile and creative, serves as Portal's sparring partner.

Israel-born, Amsterdam-based bass clarinetist Ziv Taubenfeld seems more interested in the instrument's lowest registers and raspiest timbres, using a grab-bag of extended techniques to push its sonic possibilities. *Full Sun* is the eponymous debut of his septet with reedplayer Michael Moore, trumpeter Luís Vicente, trombonist Joost Buis, pianist Nicolás Chientaroli, bassist Shay Hazan and drummer Onno Govaert, close listeners with outwardly bound intentions. Though based on compositions, much of the music, even the cued sections, sounds intuitively generated. The musicians aren't afraid to lay out, leaving expansive spaces, or else chatter together energetically in thick, four-part polyphony, like a barbershop quartet with all lead parts. Closing "Natufian Dream" is especially good, with fine solos by Taubenfeld and Vicente and a surging climax.

Norwegian reedplayer Mathilde Grooss Viddal's *Notre Dame - Meditations and Prayers* is very different, comprised of four-part chorales based on folk songs and hymns projecting a subdued but powerful numinosity. On most tracks, each member assumes a vocal part: trumpeter Hayden Powell the soprano, tenor saxophonist Børge-Are Halvorsen the alto, trombonist Øyvind Brække the tenor and the leader's low clarinet 'singing' bass. Recorded over a three-year period in Oslo, the chorale tracks are hypnotic and reverential, somber yet uplifting, the homophonic texture peppered with short but telling improvised gestures, the most potent instance occurring at the end of "Reflection V". Four tracks are more free-form: three pairing Grooss Viddal (doubling on saxophones) with trumpeter Per Willy Aaserud (all recorded at Færvik Kirke on Tromøy island) and another with Halvorsen.

For more information, visit label-bleu.com, multikulti.com and losenrecords.no



Love Right

Noah Baerman & Friends (RMI)

by Elliott Simon

Pianist Noah Baerman's *Love Right* sometimes tries too hard but in the main is a glorious spectacle of song and emotion borne out of despair. Baerman is a wonderfully lyrical storyteller and living as a musician with a physical disability has prepared him in part to deal with, capture and create a work of art in the aftermath of tragedy: vocalist Claire Randall's senseless murder.

Baerman's student and musical colleague, Randall sings on "Sans Toi, Sans Toi", a Paul Simon-esque AfroBeat gem with French lyrics. Baerman plays electric bass and the tune highlights Sam Dickey's guitar, Kate Van Eyck's pumping euphonium and very physical vocals from Gina Ulysse. Sales benefit Claire's Continuum, an organization founded in Randall's memory as a tribute to her spirit, which funds novel artistic partnerships and promotes social justice (clairescontinuum.com).

From the superb Billy Joel-meets-Steely Dan pop of "Cheese Time", which features Baerman on vocals, to a live church-like performance of John Coltrane's "After the Rain" with Baerman on organ, Jen Allen on piano and drummer Johnathan Blake, the diversity of music and musicians on the session is daunting. Baerman has a lot of friends and over 100 musicians are spread across 17 pieces with the listening experience divided into four sections to mirror that of a double-LP. The only way to get the music, however, is digitally with an offered insert that identifies each musician and their respective contributions. It includes a clever photo collage of all the participants with a numbered map to identify each person.

Myriad styles and settings bear testimony to Baerman's excellent arranging skills and abilities as a talent scout. In addition to the aforementioned Coltrane tune, rearrangements of the Jimmy McHugh-Dorothy Fields standard "I Can't Give You Anything But Love" that features tenor saxophonist Jimmy Greene, Joni Mitchell's "Good Friends" with an on-point vocal from Mel Hsu and Bruce Cockburn's "Joy Will Find a Way" are tailored to fit the players and interspersed among the original music.

There is a definite '60s pop ethos here and although the collage insert reminds more of the cover to The Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (Capitol, 1967) the feel is more akin to their *White Album* (Capitol, 1968). Songs switch styles from cut to cut without any seeming unifying thread save for Baerman himself and music written and arranged for the strengths and emotions of the various artist groupings. These include "I'm Goin Home", a heart wrenching blues perfect for Garth Taylor's vocal counterpointed by Baerman's acoustic guitar and Sam Friedman's harmonica, as well as the classic country-infused "Beautiful and Cruel" pleadingly delivered by vocalist Rebecca Koval, Baerman's electric slide guitar, Rani Arbo's fiddle and Karen Hogg's mandolin.

"Cliff Palace", an expansive modern jazz instrumental suite, which pairs Baerman's piano with an exceptional rhythm section of bassist Henry Lugo and drummer Tyshawn Sorey, takes up one full "side". The offering draws its wonderful depth from the textural voicings of Nadjé Noordhuis' trumpet and Kris Allen's alto saxophone. The title song is presented as a four-part a cappella lyrical statement with Mariana

Quinn-Makwaia on lead vocal. On Side 4, the melody is elegantly reprised in an instrumental setting by Chris Dingman's stunning vibraphone, Baerman's electric piano and Amanda Monaco's electric guitar.

On several tunes, vocals, perhaps amateurish by intention, lack control and while an overabundance of '70s *Godspell* cliché detracts from bassist Dave Kopperman's "Mercy" and Cockburn's "Joy Will Find a Way" could use more clarity, the missteps are minor and *Love Right* impresses as a sweeping soundtrack in search of a magnificent musical.

For more information, visit resonantmotion.org. Baerman live-streams Apr. 19th at continue.wesleyan.edu/register/InfoandJazz.



Power from the Air

Brian Charette (SteepleChase)

by Phil Freeman

Organ player Brian Charette is one of the most creative players on his chosen instrument. He frequently experiments with other sounds, including acoustic pianos and various synthesizers, and sometimes cracked electronics of his own devising, and his allergy to orthodoxy also manifests in his ensembles: he has made two solo Hammond B3 albums, 2013's *Borderline* and 2019's *Beyond Borderline*; on 2017's *Backup*, he was joined by pianist Henry Hey and drummer Jochen Rueckert; and the collaborative 2017 project *Kürrent* and its eponymous self-released debut was with Charette's organ and electronics, Ben Monder's guitar and Jordan Young's drums and electronics.

In 2012, he released *Music For Organ Sextette* (SteepleChase), which had Joel Frahm on tenor saxophone, Mike DiRubbo on alto sax, Jay Collins on flute and baritone saxophone, John Ellis on bass clarinet, and Rueckert behind the kit. On 2014's *The Question That Drives Us* (SteepleChase), Kriss had replaced Collins. *Power from the Air* is the third release by his sextet, which currently is comprised of Kriss, DiRubbo, Kenny Brooks on tenor saxophone, Karel Ruzicka on bass clarinet, and Brian Fishler on drums.

The album is long—10 tracks, nearly 72 minutes—but Charette's compositions (and a few well-chosen standards) are creative enough to hold the listener's attention. The reed arrangements are frequently surprising; toward the end of an already unorthodox version of Earle Hagen-Dick Rogers' "Harlem Nocturne", on which the organ is shadowed by gentle flute drones, the music stops and all four horns burst forth in all-too-brief freedom.

The longest track on the album by far is a version of Ray Noble's "Cherokee" that lasts nearly 14 minutes. That's a long time to spend on such a familiar theme, but Fishler keeps the rhythm twitchy and energetic and everyone else involved speaks bebop with equal fluency so, as it's been for what seems like a century, it serves as a trampoline from which to launch high-flying, fleet-fingered solos all around. The title piece is much more interesting; the horns weave past each other like dancers performing a complex ballroom routine, before the ensemble settles into a gentle soul-jazz groove. "Silver Lining" is set to a harder, strutting beat and Kriss' solo in particular has a surprising intensity. It could have come from one of Larry Young's later Blue Note albums.

For more information, visit steeplechase.dk. Charette live-streams Tuesdays at facebook.com/pinchbrian.



Dark Is Light Is
Elsa Nilsson (s/r)
 by Alex Henderson

The term “concept album” is usually used in connection to classic rock of the ‘60s-70s. But jazz has also had its share of imaginative concept albums over the years, from Miles Davis’ *Sketches of Spain* to Duke Ellington’s *The Far East Suite*. Swedish flutist Elsa Nilsson’s *Dark Is Light Is* easily qualifies: instrumental jazz spins on familiar Nordic songs associated with Lucia, a Swedish holiday celebrated in December, with a quartet of guitarist Jeff McLaughlin, acoustic/electric bassist Alex Minier and drummer Cody Rahn.

Although Lucia-associated songs like Ruben Liljefors’ “När Det Lider Mot Jul” and Carl Bertil Agnestic’s “Så Mörk Är Natten” are traditional in Sweden, what Nilsson does with them is not. She draws on elements of postbop, avant garde jazz and fusion, with McLaughlin bringing a lot of rock muscle to his solos. When he stretches out on “När Det Lider Mot Jul”, Emmy Köhler’s “Nu Tändas Tusen Juleljus” or Christmas song “När Juldagsmorgon Glimmar”, the influence of John Scofield, Bill Frisell and other fusion guitarists comes through.

Many of Nilsson’s solos are highly lyrical. The Swedish flutist, who was born and raised in

Gothenburg, Sweden but now lives in Brooklyn, brings a warm, lilting quality to “Nu Tändas Tusen Juleljus”, “När Det Lider Mot Jul” and other melodic offerings, favoring an inside/outside approach.

Anyone who expects to hear these Lucia-associated songs performed in a strictly traditional way will have to adapt. Nilsson isn’t shy about taking chances with it. “Sankta Lucia”, for example, receives a Latin jazz-influenced makeover while “Julpolska” and “Hej Tomtegubbar Slå I Glasen” incorporate elements of Middle Eastern music. *Dark Is Light Is* celebrates Swedish culture, but it doesn’t claim to be a typical Swedish folk date. Nilsson has put a lot of thought into it—from the musicians to the choice of material to the arrangements—and it pays off.

For more information, visit elsanilssonmusic.com. Nilsson live-streams Apr. 22nd at soapboxgallery.org.



Human Dust Suite
Miki Yamanaka (Outside In Music)
 by Ken Dryden

A native of Japan who moved to New York City in 2012, Miki Yamanaka is a promising young composer, pianist and arranger who has studied with notables like Fred Hersch, Jeb Patton and Larry Goldings. For

Human Dust Suite, she brought demanding original music into the studio for a quartet of alto saxophonist Anthony Orji, bassist Orlando Le Fleming and drummer Jochen Rueckert.

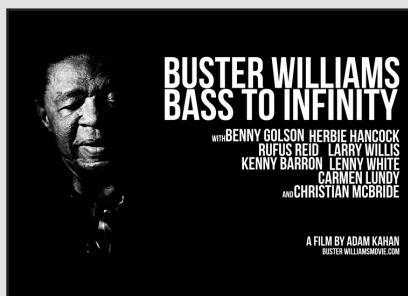
One can hear a multitude of influences in her writing while her self-confident arrangements turn over much of the spotlight to her fellow musicians, all of whom are outstanding players. Opener “Pre-School” is anything but elementary, a darting bop anthem with repeated lines and sudden twists before it moves into more straightahead territory. Her liner notes tease that it is a contrafact of a standard (“I Remember You”), inspired by Lee Konitz, but dry, mysterious saxophone and the striking interplay of the rhythm section keep one guessing. Her spirited “March” blends an upbeat theme with just a hint of melancholy infused by soft, intricate horn.

The centerpiece is the five-part title suite, inspired by her viewing of a photographer’s shots of cremated remains. Of the individual movements, the humor within “Feet Go Bad First”, with Le Fleming carrying much of the load and Yamanaka overdubbing vibraphone in the background, is an obvious favorite. To wrap the project, Yamanaka’s lively interpretation of the late Randy Weston’s “Berkshire Blues” builds upon its Caribbean flavor, though she doesn’t attempt to duplicate Weston’s heavier touch at the piano. Just as with her original compositions, her band devours this infrequently performed work, conjuring a virtual street parade as they sway down the street playing this jazz anthem. With her inventive songwriting and considerable chops, more great music is expected from Miki Yamanaka.

For more information, visit outsideinmusic.com. Yamanaka live-streams Wednesdays at facebook.com/mikiyamanakamusic.

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ON SCREEN



Buster Williams: Bass to Infinity
A Film by Adam Kahan
by Kevin Canfield

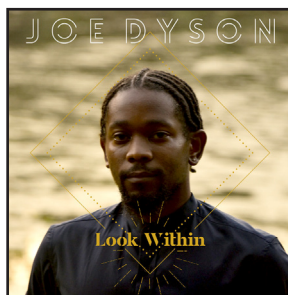
In the opening minutes of this skillful documentary, a bit of nifty craftsmanship gives the viewer a striking view of Buster Williams. Placing a camera at his feet and shooting skyward, director Adam Kahan and cinematographer Jennifer Cox film Williams from an angle that makes both him and his bass look a dozen feet tall. The sequence presents the musician—a bandleader and treasured sideman to Sarah Vaughan, Nancy Wilson and Herbie Hancock—as a monumental figure, setting the tone for this admiring film.

Instead of attempting to cram a comprehensive biography into its 90-minute running time, *Buster Williams: Bass to Infinity* is primarily composed of new sequences filmed at famed performance spaces and other notable jazz sites. At each venue, Williams teams with fellow musicians on casual renditions of well-known songs. Much of the footage, which predates the pandemic, was apparently shot during off-hours in mostly empty spaces, uncannily foreshadowing the long period of enforced isolation that was to follow. At the National Jazz Museum in Harlem, Williams and saxophonist Benny Golson saunter through Clifford Brown's "Tiny Capers". Seated before Birdland's red curtain, Williams backs singer Carmen Lundy on an impressionistic rendition of Jimmy Van Heusen's "But Beautiful". At Jazz at Lincoln Center, one of the only performances with an audience, he's part of a rhythm section that anchors an introspective version of his "Christina".

Adding texture to the proceedings, Williams swaps memorable anecdotes with friends and family. As a boy, Williams recalls, he bought a bass from his father, also a musician, in \$2 installments. Barely 21 and playing with Vaughan, he wanted a bass with "a fat neck" and "big hips"; she loaned him \$450 for the instrument. In Seattle, circa 1970, Williams and fellow members of Hancock's Mwandishi Band played a set that moved some fans to grateful tears. "The engine for this was Buster," whose muscular intro to a midtempo number "woke everybody up," Hancock says.

This is a stylish, intelligent film, a capable blend of recent footage and archival clips of a young Williams on various bandstands, absorbed in his work. Anecdotes for which there's no accompanying film are told via vibrant animation by Matt Smithson. One scene, an allusion to the "infinite" spiritual journey of Williams' Buddhist faith, shows him determinedly wheeling his bass down a paved path in a wooded area. Not everything in this documentary works. An awkward scene in which Williams and other musicians trade some aimless chat about the *Godfather* films could've been trimmed. Meanwhile, if Williams has sharp edges or even basic human flaws, Kahan isn't interested—the tone is one of unflagging approbation. But if this film doesn't go as deep as it could have, it nevertheless is an admirable work, an aptly likable portrait of a talented, wise and beloved musician.

For more information, visit busterwilliamsmovie.com



Look Within
Joe Dyson (s/r)
by Alex Henderson

New Orleans drummer Joe Dyson is known for his work with trombonist Delfeayo Marsalis and organ player Dr. Lonnie Smith. *Look Within* finds him leading a band of trumpeter Stephen Lands, tenor saxophonist Stephen Gladney, pianist Oscar Rossignoli, bassist Jasen Weaver and percussionist Daniel Sadownick on a program combining elements of Blue Note postbop with the '60s spirituality of saxophonists like John Coltrane, Yusef Lateef, Pharoah Sanders and Rahsaan Roland Kirk.

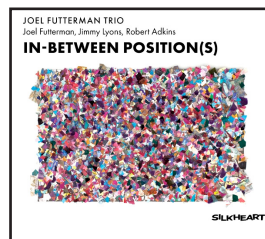
When the horns of Lands and Gladney come together on "Pious Walk", "Forward" and "Fleeting Faith", one hears some of the crispness and energy that Blue Note's small groups were known for during the '60s. Lands is obviously well aware of big-toned Blue Note trumpeters such as Freddie Hubbard, Woody Shaw and Lee Morgan and Coltrane's early '60s quartet is an equally prominent influence, Gladney and Rossignoli recalling the saxophone trailblazer's work with pianist McCoy Tyner during that era.

A female singer, L.E., is featured on the title track, which combines postbop with a touch of '70s soul, L.E.'s performance, stylistically, somewhere between Abbey Lincoln and early Deniece Williams. On other vocal offerings, however, Dyson doesn't feature actual singing but, rather, uses samples from church or mosque sermons, including "Naysayers" and "Come to Thee". The speakers sampled include his father Rev. J.C. Dyson and Nation of Islam leader Minister Louis Farrakhan.

Out of ten tracks, nine are Dyson originals. The exception is Thelonious Monk's "Rhythm-a-Ning", tackled at a medium tempo, giving it an unexpected Caribbean flavor. With its festive mood, this is a departure after so much Coltrane-minded introspection and nods to Tyner, Sanders and Lateef, feeling like a vacation in the Bahamas. Dyson was wise to place it at the end.

Look Within doesn't pretend to point jazz in any new directions. Nonetheless, this is a respectable, albeit derivative, outing from the young New Orleans drummer.

For more information, visit joedyson.com. Dyson *live-streams* Apr. 28th at barbayeux.com.



In-Between Position(s)
Joel Futterman (Bellaphon-Silkheart)
Spirits

Kidd Jordan/Joel Futterman/Alvin Fielder
(Silkheart)
by John Sharpe



Although Joel Futterman has pursued his career out of the limelight, having moved to Virginia from his native Chicago back in 1972, that hasn't held him back. The pianist, who turns 75 this month, still actively adds to a discography of over 70 entries, showcasing

a style in which his laser focus, independence of movement between hands and articulation at speed are given full rein. Two reed titans stand out among his many collaborators and a brace of newly issued albums on the Swedish Silkheart imprint offer an opportunity to revisit his interface with both.

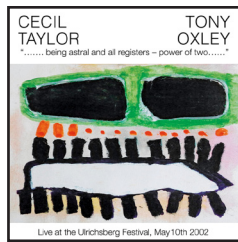
In 1980 Futterman encountered a kindred spirit in alto saxophonist Jimmy Lyons, six years before the latter's untimely death at 54, and they spent many hours in intensive practice. Four recordings reveal the fruits of their alliance, of which *In-Between Position(s)*, recorded in concert in 1982, but not originally released until 1990, was the first.

An undulating piano motif, answered by a paraphrase from Lyons, nudged along by Robert Adkins' cymbals and they're off in a high intensity exchange, which runs unbroken for 67 minutes. The pace and density of the interaction, particularly between Futterman and Lyons, is breathtaking. In Lyons' extended tenure with pianist Cecil Taylor he mastered the febrile sustained invention, which meshes so well with Futterman's sensibility. Like Taylor, Futterman feeds Lyons with material, which the saxophonist transforms, repeats and expands into continuous dialogue. Futterman's flowing horn-like phrasing touches on melodic kernels as much as percussive emphasis, but always proves liable to sparkling digression. Adkins' amalgam of hi-hat chatter, rumbling drums and incisive accents supercharges the momentum, which emerges from saxophonist and pianist. Though the sleeve partitions the piece into eight sections, it's tracked as a single cut. Regular keystone passages for piano, either alone or with only drums for company, serve to initiate further trio extrapolation and may indicate the divisions. Futterman's composition has been so thoroughly internalized by the principals that what could be fragmentary themes may equally be skilful extemporization. While not everyone will invest the meticulous attention needed to appreciate the overall architecture, just to luxuriate in their dazzling interplay is ample reward.

Futterman began a highly productive association with New Orleans tenor saxophonist Kidd Jordan in 1994 lasting to the present day. Indeed, the pair appeared at the 2019 Vision Festival, in a tribute to late drummer Alvin Fielder, who is the third member of the group on *Spirits*.

This previously unreleased studio date from 1997 finds all three at the top of their game. As was their custom, they collectively improvise all of the seven cuts, which include three duets and a Futterman solo alongside the trio outings. With Jordan the tradition, from John Coltrane to spirituals, is never far away even in the most freeform moments. The saxophonist's soulful soliloquy on "Opening" sets the scene, aligning a yearning keen with his trademark falsetto. Fielder's mallets and Futterman's sparse chording join tentatively, but the complexity of their interchange soon increases, as Futterman's responsive lines intertwine with Jordan. So attuned are they to each other's trajectories that they forge an almost symbiotic partnership. That's most obvious on the tandem "Serenity" where point/counterpoint proves an utterly inadequate description of their quicksilver movement and near instantaneous rejoinders. Even alone, as on "Ripples", Futterman can seem as if he is in conversation, as fast streams of notes in his left hand contrast with a crystalline staccato in the right. Not content with keyboard dexterity, Futterman broadens his palette by switching to Indian flute part way through "Double Strike", his birdlike twittering flickering between Jordan's altissimo filigree, then later on "Start-Continue" he unleashes his curved soprano saxophone in consort with Fielder's tuneful but buoyant drum pulse.

For more information, visit silkheart.se



Lifting the Bandstand

Cecil Taylor Quintet (Fundacja Sluchaj!)

Being Astral and All Registers

Cecil Taylor/Tony Oxley (Discus Music)

by George Grella

One of the more overused quotes from Ralph Waldo Emerson is, “A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.” Fair enough, but the following sentence goes: “With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do.” This perspective actually leverages the greatness of pianist Cecil Taylor. His playing over the last 40-plus years of his life, up to his death three years ago this month, was nothing but consistent and by that not only was the quality always astounding—a vital value in free playing, when a wayward thought can turn into disaster at any moment—but the bulk of the notes he brought out of the piano was also consistent. Taylor used a specific set of musical ideas and gestures, notably a rising and falling set of minor-key tremolos that were never anything but breathtaking and that very consistency was essential to the greatness of his art and soul. The intellectual and aesthetic stakes of his music were so profound and expansive that each performance and record was a step in chipping away at an edifice, which, given an infinite amount of time, could have rivaled the scope of the universe. Taylor’s consistency was the tool with which he fashioned his legacy.

These two live recordings were captured four years apart, a hair’s breadth in Taylor’s world and, except for the acoustics, could be consecutive performances from the same stage. The Quintet played in Finland in 1998, Taylor and Oxley at the Ulrichsberg Festival in Austria in 2002. Both would be at home in the live discography on FMP that is the centerpiece of Taylor’s late style and along with Oxley, the Quintet shares some personnel from those albums, with cellist Tristan Honsinger and drummer Paul Lovens joined by saxophonist Harri Sjöström and bassist Teppo Hauta-Aho.

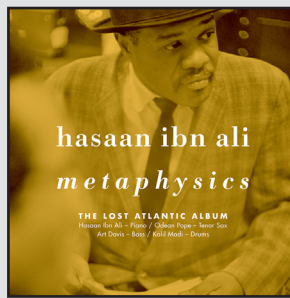
The differences in musicians make for significant contrasts. Taylor is Taylor; his followers will want to hear every note they can find over the last two decades of his life, when recordings were almost nonexistent. And he is as penetrating, dazzling and imaginative as always with the Quintet. But Sjöström is a wayward presence for much of the first of the two tracks. He plays with misdirected energy, running through and over the music without showing any response to what Taylor and the others are doing. Perhaps he had to blow off some nerves, because he’s far better integrated in the second of the two long tracks, though still dependent on free-playing clichés like smears and squawks. One misses Jimmy Lyons’ lyricism.

Oxley was one of Taylor’s finest partners, the best behind the drumkit, and his self-effacing quick-thinking and choice of colors are an almost Bach-esque counterpoint to Taylor’s clusters, runs and sonic mysteries. As usual with the two, they start playing but the music feels like it had been going on all along between them, before they sat at their instruments. As much as Taylor could stab down on a moment in time, there is a constant linear flow to the music, a flexible suppleness that integrates every event with all those that have come before.

The Quintet was recorded by Finnish Radio while Oxley himself made the duo recording. You’d never know—the sound has space and depth while the Quintet comes off flat and not well integrated. Consider that one for fans only while *Being Astral* is essential.

For more information, visit fsrecords.net and discus-music.co.uk

UNEARTHED GEM



Metaphysics: The Lost Atlantic Album
Hasaan Ibn Ali (Omnivore)

by Duck Baker

For over half a century, the reputation of Philadelphia-based pianist Hasaan Ibn Ali has rested on a single record, *The Max Roach Trio Featuring the Legendary Hasaan*, which appeared on Atlantic in early 1965. Given what an astonishing record it is, many have always believed that reputation should have been greater. Roach, for example, considered Ali as one of the three great pianist/composers of his generation, along with Thelonious Monk and Herbie Nichols and the *Legendary Hasaan* date confirms that he was an extraordinarily original musician. His piano technique could be almost overwhelming and as an improviser he can seem, at first blush, like a missing link between Bud Powell and Cecil Taylor, though this description is not quite satisfactory on either end. Ali does feel a bit like Taylor in terms of harmonic density, but he is usually referencing ‘normal’ jazz harmonic thinking, albeit in a way that is further removed than what we are used to, even in 2021. And the strongest earlier influence was another underrated genius of modern jazz piano, Elmo Hope, rather than Powell.

Some listeners are aware that Ali did lead a followup quartet session for Atlantic later in 1965, but that the unissued masters were later lost in the notorious 1978 warehouse fire. Rumor of a surviving tape copy persisted, however, and this unissued date assumed legendary status in its own right, the stuff jazz dreams have been made of, ever since the idea of a Buddy Bolden cylinder recording first circulated. Some of these dreams have materialized over the years, such as Dean Benedetti’s recordings of Charlie Parker or the session featuring Albert Ayler with Cecil Taylor. And it’s wonderful to have these, even when the historical value supersedes their musical worth, but it’s hard to remember a case where the reality of one of these dreamed-of lost sessions exceeded expectations.

Metaphysics will exceed expectations. It is even stronger in some ways than the trio record and helps us understand why people like Roach, Johnny Griffin and so many other musicians considered Ali a genius. The presence of Odean Pope is essential. He is one of the great line of Philadelphia tenor saxophonists, which included Bill Barron, John Coltrane and Archie Shepp, and Ali, like many pianists, assumes a different role when there is a horn player present both because we hear him comp behind a soloist but also because his own solos are constructed differently. He’s delivering a chapter, not a whole novel. Pope sounds great on this, his debut recording. Ali had been mentoring the younger man for over a decade by the time of these sessions and Pope was not only comfortable with Ali’s compositions but also able to expand on them. He is viewed as coming out of Coltrane, stylistically, and there is nothing but honor in this, but we should remember that Ali was a major influence on Coltrane, and Pope often heard the two older musicians play together (there was even a recording of Coltrane and Barron jamming with Ali, though that really has been lost, alas).

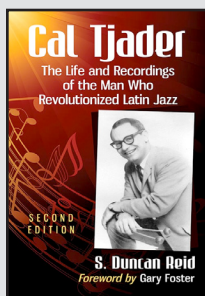
Accepting that Ali was an important influence is one thing, but explaining that influence is difficult. Pope and others tell us that the pianist provided a model for Coltrane’s demanding work ethic and influenced his harmonic thinking, as well as his “sheets of sound” approach to improvising. But we cannot point to any unified theoretical approach like George Russell’s Lydian Chromatic Concept and it doesn’t clarify things much when we hear that Ali talked about things like twenty-ninth chords. He himself felt that he was extending an approach used by Hope, though most people would hear Hope as an advanced bebopper. It’s easy to hear his influence, though. Something of the brooding harmonic quality of Hope ballads like “Barfly” was heard in “Hope So, Elmo” on the *Legendary Hasaan* record and is heard again on the dedication here to another pianist, Bud’s brother Richie Powell, “Richard May Love Give Powell”. There are also specific chord voicings that sound similar and Ali, like Hope, made ample use of the higher registers of the piano while soloing, though his touch was always more assertive. Both Hope (“De-Dah”) and Ali (“Almost Like Me”) wrote great tunes based on riff figures, but so did Monk and Herbie Nichols, among others. *Metaphysics* opens with a textbook example of such a tune, “Atlantic Ones”, a performance that evokes a genie bursting free from confinement. Apart from Coltrane himself, it’s hard to imagine a tenor saxophonist who could have sounded as assured as Pope in this rocky harmonic terrain. The next tune, “Viceroy”, is like bent bebop, written over the chord sequence of “Mean To Me”, and both Ali and Pope reference the normal changes as well as mysteriously derived substitutions. The tag to this tune is reminiscent of Hope’s recording of “It’s a Lovely Day Today”.

The self-referencing title “El Hasaan” is particularly impressive. It is not a complicated melody but takes two or three cubist turns and the structure and chord sequence also feel slightly off-kilter. Appropriately, Pope takes a more abstract approach, so that while we hear echoes of Coltrane’s sheets of sound, they seem to come from unexpected directions. When his solo ends abruptly in mid-phrase, we are left feeling that every unpredictable twist follows the piece’s internal logic. Ali’s own solo evokes not only Hope and Monk but Count Basie, Art Tatum and even boogie woogie pianists like Cripple Clarence Lofton, but again, we feel that every note and nuance makes perfect sense. This is also a good place to note how much the rhythm team of Art Davis and Kalil Madi add to the music. The latter was a fine drummer who has been heard mostly in situations that required him to rein things in (Freddie McCoy, The Three Sounds, Earl Hines), but this situation requires a lot of push and imagination and he provides both. He is assertive on tracks like “Viceroy”, but the tension he generates while holding things down for much of “El Hasaan” is impressive and frames Ali’s solo perfectly. Davis is invaluable as well, as he was on the trio date. His bass sound is so enormous that we might not even notice how complex his lines are at times. Not busy, but complex—there’s no need to be busy behind the likes of Ali and Pope!

The outstanding liner notes are by Alan Sukoening, who also wrote the notes for original release of the *Legendary Hasaan*, with additional notes from Coltrane biographer Lewis Porter, and both writers give us a much fuller picture of Hasaan Ibn Ali than we had before, depressing as some of the story is. Sukoening also has other unreleased recordings that we may hope to hear on a future release, which gives us further reason to buy this long-awaited masterpiece, if any is needed.

For more information, visit omnivorerecordings.com

IN PRINT



Cal Tjader: The Life and Recordings of the Man Who Revolutionized Latin Jazz (Second Edition)
S. Duncan Reid (McFarland Books)
 by Ken Dryden

Cal Tjader's contributions to Latin jazz have been somewhat overlooked since his death in 1982, though he was a pioneer whose innovations were absorbed into the style after his career began to blossom in the '50s.

S. Duncan Reid's first biography of the vibraphonist, composer and bandleader explored much of his life but Reid felt compelled to expand it into a second edition, due to additional interviews he had since conducted. There is now more detailed background of Tjader's childhood, including his tap dancing before he turned to music, stories by friends of his youth who remained close to Tjader for the rest of his life, along with musicians not interviewed for the first edition.

After serving in WWII, Tjader played drums, vibraphone and percussion in Dave Brubeck's trio and octet, until the pianist's swimming accident and lengthy recovery ended the band. Tjader then played in pianist George Shearing's quintet for over a year before concentrating on working as a leader for the remainder of his life. Among the musicians who worked in Tjader's bands before gaining greater fame were pianists Sonny Clark and Vince Guaraldi, reedplayer Paul Horn, percussionist Mongo Santamaria and bassist Eugene Wright.

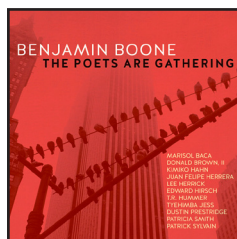
Part of the issue with Tjader's not receiving due credit from critics is that the bandleader was a bit humble, not overly aggressive at promoting himself, and that much of his performing career was on the West Coast, rather than appearing regularly in New York City. Instead he was focused on his music and getting the best possible players to help make it happen. His skills as an improviser, composer and arranger also deserve greater study.

One of the author's greatest strengths is weaving together concert and LP reviews, memories of those who witnessed or took part in performances, along with honest assessments of his recordings, a few of which Tjader himself openly detested. Reid also discusses the difficulties from Tjader's alcoholism.

Included are numerous footnotes, plus a thorough discography (including known but unissued tapes) by Tjader discographer Mike Weil with additional contributions by the author, along with an extensive musical glossary. The addition of excerpts from concert and LP reviews during his lifetime and previously unpublished photographs also add value.

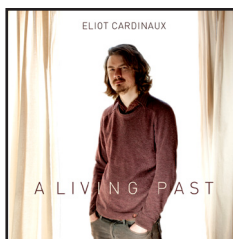
Reid is a talented storyteller who has seemingly left no stone unturned in his research. It is the kind of volume that will encourage readers to seek and hear the recordings. Although Reid detours on occasion to discuss certain subjects in detail, the book is very fast-paced and an easy read. This greatly expanded biography/discography should be essential reading for anyone interested in both Cal Tjader and Latin jazz.

For more information, visit mcfarlandbooks.com



The Poets Are Gathering
Benjamin Boone (Origin)

A Living Past
Eliot Cardinaux (The Bodily Press)
 by John Pietaro



Jazz has had a century to flourish in the company of poetry – Langston Hughes and the Harlem Renaissance through the Beats, Umbra, Bob Dorough, the Barakas and Black Arts, Ishmael Reed, David Henderson, William Burroughs, Anne Waldman, John Giorno, Louis Reyes Rivera, Philip Levine and voices well beyond – and yet this commix stands boldly tenacious, seeking further expanse. Especially now, during National Poetry Month.

In his foray through the fused genre of spoken word/jazz, saxophonist Benjamin Boone now unites a dozen celebrated poets in *The Poets Are Gathering*. This album follows two posthumous releases Boone recorded with Levine, so he's all too familiar with the terrain. Boone's alto and soprano partner with Kenny Werner's piano, Corcoran Holt's bass and Ari Hoening's drums, but multiple other musicians are called to duty on varying cuts, adding horns, guitars (Ben Monder and Eyal Maoz) and rhythm sections for seamless blends in the rage of emotions. Right from the top, Patricia Smith (author, *Incendiary Art*) launches into "That's My Son There", a piece at the very core of the Black Lives Matter movement. Boone seems to reimagine John Coltrane's "Alabama" as Smith, alarmingly static, embodies a parent grieving one more police killing, numbed with reality. The effect is nothing short of chilling. "That's my son there / shot as kill / shot as prey... / shot as payback / shot for sport / shot as history".

The album's liner notes cite injustices of the Trump years and Boone's 2017 start of this project, culminating in the leadup to the 2020 election. But under no circumstances is this agit-prop at the cost of creativity. Pulitzer-winning Tyehimba Jess emotes in "Against Silence" with Werner casting harmonies of perfect dissonance against the naming of the many murdered in police shootings: "I'm a question passed from one generation to the next...ask the silence about your rights...My name is a nation of funerals..."

Juan Felipe Herrera, 2015 U.S. Poet Laureate, has the title piece, one based on a driving rumba by drummer Nathan Guzman, percussionist Richard Juarez, pianist Craig Vonberg, bassist Patrick Olvera and Boone. Symbolizing the words of poets as the people's voice, it's steeped in pathos. The album also includes poets Edward Hirsch, Kimiko Hahn, Patrick Sylvain, Dustin Prestridge, Lee Herrick, hip-hop artist Donald Brown II, Fresno Poet Laureate Marisol Baca and T.R. Hummer. The latter's "The Sun One", dedicated to Sun Ra, offers the virulent drama of spoken word matched by the pure joy of sound. *The Poets Are Gathering* stands as a vital addition to the proud history of verse in and as the jazz artform.

Whereas Boone is an instrumentalist enamored with the joint venture of improvisational music and poetry, Eliot Cardinaux embodies both roles. On *A Living Past*, the pianist/poet debuts a new international quartet, which may best be described as progressive in the best sense possible. Alto saxophonist Jonas Engel, bassist Asger Thomsen and drummer Simon Forchhammer, with the leader's piano, forge music at once modern and post-mod, tossing in liberal doses of what we used to call 20th Century music as well as theater music for drama of the mind's eye. The collection functions best as a whole, with the 12-tone piano riffs and wandering alto lament of "Ion", an instrumental

work, leading directly into "Age Old Tale" wherein Cardinaux seems to conjure the tormented spirit of Charles Bukowski, reciting caustically: "Alcohol hands the clocks diseases / rising the moon looks down between orange scales / tells the age old tale".

Strains of Mingus' orchestral concepts are evident, yet a Brechtian feeling never appears far off, particularly in "Disillusionment" on which Cardinaux sings the words in tandem with piano, doubled by alto. By the time the rhythm section joins in, the leader's solo, a single-handed, spacious line, sounds as faltering and wounded as the title would indicate. Intriguing is the role of the bass throughout: an ongoing collaborator of Cardinaux, Thomsen is prominent, adding gripping countermelodies and rhythmic challenges to the music, somewhat reminiscent of Scott LaFaro's iconic vision, though of a more pensive sort. A musical highlight is "Theme", the primary melody of which is a wonderfully stressful jaunt of liberated harmony before erupting into an Eric Dolphy-esque saxophone solo fading into the seeming night.

Much of the poetry herein, primarily drawn from Cardinaux' 2020 book *Around the Faded Sun*, could be labelled experimental ("In the newspaper of the future / wounds were read / by light cast on sky"), but then so much of the music, too, fits this mold. But the symbolism's strength in memories of 9/11 ("I rage at the sky in blue") and its aftermath of white supremacy ring out with clarity.

For more information, visit originarts.com and bodilypress.bandcamp.com/album/a-living-past



George the Bomb!
George Freeman (Southport)
 by Kyle Oleksiuk

A blues record from a jazz master who's been around since 1927 and who turns 94 this month. If you've got any respect for your elders, you've got to check it out. It's got that easy, wailing, frailling feeling that makes you just want to take your pants off and run down the highway. All the songs but two on this album are originals by guitarist George Freeman, but to listen to them you would think they'd been written by Howlin' Wolf or Muddy Waters in their electric blues heyday.

Billy Branch makes major contributions to this record. His harmonica is some of the most natural and expressive you'll hear from anybody living. He also sings with extreme competence on "Help Me" and has a few funny vocal exchanges with Freeman throughout the album (his questions about food and drink on "Where's the Cornbread?" are a particular joy).

Every track on this album has something to offer and the whole thing is highly recommended, but if you must only listen to one track, let it be "Help Me". Other notable tracks include "Cha Cha Blues", which will have you looking for Stan Getz behind the curtains, and "Al Carter-Bey", a tribute to the Chicago jazz radio personality known as "The Impresario of American Classical Music", which begins with an incredibly rousing riff on "Eeny, meeny, miny, moe". This reviewer's favorite track is "Gorgeous George," named after the pro wrestler and master showman, famous during Freeman's youth, whose slogan was "Win if you can, lose if you must, but always cheat!" – a vivacious, artistic, bluesy sentiment if ever there was one.

For more information, visit chicagosound.com



Tough Baritones
Gary Smulyan/Ronnie Cuber (SteepleChase)
Our Contrafacts
Gary Smulyan (SteepleChase)
 by Jim Motavalli

Horace Silver isn't obscure, but he deserves even greater recognition than he gets as an incredible composer. Gary Smulyan, who turns 65 this month and Ronnie Cuber, who will reach octogenarian status at the end of 2021, do their part on *Tough Baritones* by recording four of his tunes in an uncompromising hardbop session. Think back to those '50s blowing dates on Prestige for what this album sounds like. It could be described as a "cutting session" if these two veteran baritone saxophone masters were trying to one-up each other.

Let's start at the beginning with Silver's "Blowin' the Blues Away". Both players come boiling out of the speakers at breakneck speed, Smulyan (in the right channel throughout) and an equally intense Cuber (on the left). Then pianist Gary Versace shows why he's on speed-dial. Red Prysock's "That's the Groovy Thing" is a honker, with the guys walking the bar. Dig the way they throw the simple melody back and forth. Cuber, in particular, really gets into the spirit of this one. Freddie Hubbard's "Little Sunflower" slows the proceedings slightly, but still swings mightily. Cuber's tone is slightly darker than Smulyan's, but they are

very well matched. Jay Anderson's bass solo is soulful and fed by Versace.

"Nica's Dream" (Silver again) finds the players overlapping each other to enhance an already strong theme. Smulyan's solo entry is like being hit by a steam train and includes a hint of welcome dissonance that Versace picks up. Cuber's own "Damn Right Blues" is an in-the-pocket piece of soul jazz, the composer channeling Cannonball Adderley as Smulyan honks in counterpoint. Versace sparkles in this context, bowing to Joe Zawinul and Les McCann. Richard Rodgers' "Lover" starts out at a saunter and soon turns into a sprint as Smulyan heats things up. There's strong drum work and a solo by Jason Tiemann here. After Smulyan and Cuber navigate the familiar chords of Monk's "Well, You Needn't" in perfect sync, they take turns in muscular explorations of its mysteries. "Split Kick" is another Silver gem, first recorded with Art Blakey at Birdland in '54. His "The Preacher" is much more familiar and given a loping treatment. Listen to Versace supporting the horns on the closer, Cuber's "Intervals". The album is beautifully recorded with each instrument clear as a bell. This is pre-COVID work, but it still sounds like two giants tasting free air after a long down time.

Tough Baritones has no Smulyan tunes, but he makes up for that on *Our Contrafacts*, which has six of them—based on the harmonic structure of standards, an old practice popular in jazz to avoid paying publishing fees but also a way to put new wine into old bottles—in a no-hiding trio with bassist David Wong and drummer Rodney Green. Not quite as viscerally exciting as the duo album, *Our Contrafacts* is a celebration of the leader's on-steroids baritone playing, heard without a net.

"Quarter Blues" is a cool tune from Green's pen

others should pick up on and it really gives Smulyan a chance to stretch out. The solo ends with the theme again, sliding into a relaxed solo from Wong and Green gets some at the end. Smulyan's "Drink Up", a variation on "Angel Eyes", is equally catchy. "Homebody" is another Smulyan original and a standout for the sheer authority of his solo. This is what it would be like to hear Smulyan live, with the tarnished bell of his baritone mere feet away from your head. Wong takes out his bow as the three musicians trade licks. Green's "It Happens" is based on "Watch What Happens" and shares a pensive feel. Smulyan plays with a lighter touch, though the intensity builds. The tune is nearly stolen by Wong, whose solo swings the second half. Smulyan's "Miles Tones" is based on, well, you know. Smulyan really digs into the lower register of his horn and Green is heard to good advantage, supporting another typically probing Wong solo, before Smulyan leaps back in. "How Deep" is Wong's take on Irving Berlin and the bassist is featured, but Smulyan is particularly bright—and there's lovely drum work. Smulyan's "Tritonious Monk" is the pianist filtered through "I Got Rhythm". Continuing the trickery, Smulyan's horn on "What's Her Name" initially sounds like it's going to slide into "But Beautiful" but, in fact, it's Wong's variation on "My Old Flame". Whatever the source material, it's a welcome ballad.

Finally, lest we forget that Smulyan came to swing, there's his sprightly "Sourpuss" to clean the palate. It's in fact anything but sour. All three are really on for this one and Green is particularly strong. If one has to choose, give the nod to *Tough Baritones*, simply because it's such a simpatico meeting of the horns, but either is a good introduction to the artistry of Gary Smulyan.

For more information, visit steeplechase.dk

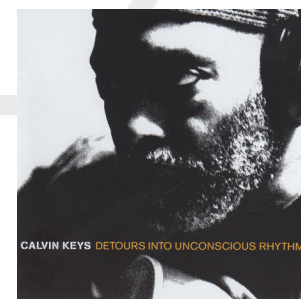
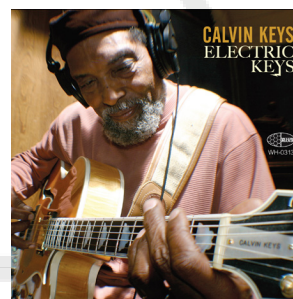
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Abracadabra In Osaka
Soft Works (MoonJune)
by Marc Medwin

Of course, there had to be more. It seemed obvious that live performances by a band consisting of bassist Hugh Hopper, drummer John Marshall, saxophonist/keyboard player Elton Dean and guitarist Allan Holdsworth must have been documented, demonstrating that other level to which this extraordinary group ascended beyond studio confines; finally, we have an official release! As satisfying as their 2003 album *Abracadabra* often is, the extremes of this performance, recorded in Japan in August of the same year, offers the urgency and immediacy of an audience experience and that makes all the difference.

The double-disc constitutes one of only 11 performances Soft Works gave us before Holdsworth resumed his solo career. For the die-hard Holdsworth fan, of which your humble narrator is one, the album contains an official release of the Soft Works take on "Alphrazallan", a delightfully swinging Holdsworth composition. As for his playing, every solo is precious. Yes, there's a gorgeous solo on "Alphrazallan", but the one on Dean's "Seven Formerly" attains concise mastery as it rises angelically and returns to Earth against its composer's Fender Rhodes and the filigreed brilliance flung and laid down by Hopper and Marshall. The latter is in especially fine form, digging firmly into jazz and rock traditions while coloring each moment as he has done so often over the past half century.

To hear Dean in a similarly ecstatic state, check out Hopper's no-holds-barred "Facelift" concluding the album, one of only a few tracks not taken from *Abracadabra*, even the first few notes from his saxello, jumping register and transgressing timbral boundaries, his playing even more rawly beautiful as he and the band propel each other to new dialogic heights, especially at the gloriously unbuttoned five-minute mark, with Holdsworth floating those magical chords over Hopper and Marshall's bone-and-fire groove and riffage. What drummer besides Marshall could be so sensitive as proceedings wane, letting gentle cymbals and a breath or two from the snare bring everything serenely to rest on those luscious B-flats Dean halos around everything? Hopper is magnificent throughout but especially on his rollicking "First Train", where the overused term 'walking' doesn't even begin to describe the majestic tones and dare-devil intervallic jumps as he lays the foundation for another Holdsworth solo.

Yes, the band is wonderful, the audience appreciative, and, despite some deep reverberation, the sound very good, but there's a moment to consider, one that brings another side of Soft Machine's legacy to listener attention. When Soft Machine co-founder Robert Wyatt used to do "Dedicated to You, but You Weren't Listening", he'd bring a deep and slightly snarky humor to the table and Soft Works does the same on the exquisite Phil Miller-penned "Calyx". As on the studio album, Hopper and Dean play the tune in octaves, but dig the last note of the second phrase as Dean drops down to the unison and changes up the overtones, introducing just a microhint of growl, but the microtonally-inflected octaves concluding the third phrase are even better, an irreverent inclusion that might bring a smile to Wyatt's face. Yet, when that last unison is reached and Holdsworth comes in with his jasmine-scented harmonies, frozen moments in first thaw, humor gives way to transcendence and two polar

but intricately linked aspects of Soft Machine's influence are encapsulated.

Like the current Softs lineup, the intergenerational dialogue Soft Works brings to the table goes well beyond the music of that seminal '60s and '70s band whose legacy they perpetuate. Such is also the case with Leonardo Pavkovic, boss of MoonJune, which celebrates its 20th anniversary this year, whose tireless work and commitment to all things Soft Machine cannot be overstated. The long and intersecting journeys leading to this concert, Pavkovic being at their center, are expertly documented and exhaustively presented in the set's accompanying booklet. The multiple reminiscences therein place the music in wonderful historical perspective, crowning a package whose pride of place in the broader Soft Machine discography is matched only by the sonic pleasure and intrigue it will afford.

For more information, visit moonjune.com



Open Ends
Frank Paul Schubert, Uwe Oberg, Paul Rogers,
Mark Sanders (Trouble in the East)
by John Sharpe

British bassist Paul Rogers, who turns 65 this month, may be best known as part of the collective Mujician, sadly defunct since the deaths of drummer Tony Levin and pianist Keith Tippett, but he's also a fixture in other groupings, including the Anglo-German quartet Rope. Rogers replaces Dutch bassist Wilbert deJoode for the band's second release, this 2017 live date from Münster, which finds him alongside compatriot Mark Sanders on drums and the Teutonic pairing of Frank Paul Schubert on soprano saxophone and Uwe Oberg on piano. Long-form improvisation is their speciality, evidenced by the two near-set-length pieces of high-order free jazz that constitute *Open Ends*.

On "First Movement" they conjure controlled pulsing menace from sparse components—deep bass twangs, nagging piano phrases and cymbal scrapes—until offset by lightly cavorting soprano. It's an opening gambit that speaks to trust, lack of ego and understanding that something worthwhile will happen. In the subsequent animated interplay Schubert's undulating lines, which can flirt with melody or become hoarse with excitement, predominate. As they circle through varying permutations Rogers comes to the fore, his customized seven-string bass stretching up into the cello register with an acerbic wiriness in one of the passages of individual brilliance which periodically illuminate the egalitarian exchanges.

"Last Movement" reveals further opportunities for sustained invention, even more space and contrasting dynamic extremes. In one remarkable episode of unaccompanied bow work, Rogers seems to access more strings simultaneously than should be possible. A lyrical solo spot from Oberg morphs into a jazzy-tinged ensemble, which gradually orbits further and further from convention. Here and throughout Sanders constantly recalibrates the emphasis between texture and impetus in a peerless cascade, the only downside being that his drums are recorded slightly hot, muddying the bottom end in the densest moments. However, that doesn't detract from a cohesive outing, which generates tension, disquiet and exhilaration, but ultimately, and most importantly, satisfaction.

For more information, visit troubleintheeast-records.com



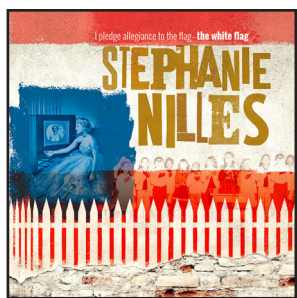
Creation
Sabir Mateen (577 Records)
by Phil Freeman

Saxophonist Sabir Mateen, who turns 70 this month, is an old-school fire-breather. He started out as a member of Horace Tapscott's Pan-African Peoples Arkestra in the late '70s and early '80s, but came back to the East Coast (he's originally from Philadelphia) and made his name during the free jazz resurgence of the '90s, most notably as a member of TEST with fellow reed player Daniel Carter, bassist Matt Heyner and late drummer Tom Bruno. Their subterranean performances were notable for being audible over the crash and roar of subway trains and MTA announcements. Mateen performed and recorded in any number of other situations, of course, including brilliant duo recordings with drummers Hamid Drake and the late Sunny Murray. Of late, he lives in Europe, which is where this set was captured; it's a document of a 2012 show in Berlin, featuring three German musicians: vibraphonist Christopher Dell, bassist Christian Ramond and drummer Klaus Kugel.

The physical version of this release contains just over 45 minutes of music, divided into a 15-minute track and a 31-minute track, though they flow seamlessly into each other. The digital version adds a third piece, running about 24 minutes. The performance starts off relatively gently, with Dell setting a meditative mood even though Mateen is already off and running. The two men take turns in the spotlight and the vibraphonist's initial solo is quite beautiful, a fine counterpoint to Mateen's hoarse, harmonically fierce, almost Charles Gayle-ish eruptions. The long second piece begins with another lovely passage of vibraphone, accompanied by bass and very minimal drumming. About halfway through, after an initial salvo, Mateen puts the horn down and begins vocalizing—scatting isn't the right word, but what he's doing is fascinating.

On the digital-only third track, he duets with Ramond, bowed drones from the bass matched by soft squeals and murmurs from the saxophone. Eventually, though, Kugel rises up again like an undersea volcano and the quartet launches a final sprint. Though this is free jazz, there's plenty of bebop language in Mateen's playing and the sustained intensity never becomes mere scorched-earth abstract expressionism.

For more information, visit 577records.com



I pledge allegiance to the flag—the white flag
Stephanie Nilles (Sunnyside)
by George Kanzler

"I consider Charles Mingus a beacon in a world gone mad. His music celebrates the joy of living, mourns the pain of grief - and simultaneously harangues injustice. That it manages such a feat boggles my mind (and, I believe, transcends the construct of genres). I hope to

continue to live with this music as long as I'm privileged to do so," writes Stephanie Nilles in the notes to these solo piano (and occasional vocal) renditions of music by the legendary bassist/composer, who would have turned 99 this month.

Nilles doesn't employ a band here and the 30-something singer-songwriter confesses to a classical piano background. In fact, she doth protest too much, claiming she doesn't swing when she obviously does. Just listen to her "East Coasting" or "Remember Rockefeller at Attica". But Mingus' music has often been characterized by the often-headlong energy of ensembles, testifying horn soloists and rhythm sections accelerating and decelerating behind it all. Nilles jettisons all that, paring down Mingus' pieces to skeleton and scaffolding, showing us the bones that hold the tunes together. Nilles does employ one favorite Mingus strategy: varied dynamics. The contrasting melodies of "Pithecanthropus Erectus" rise up off her piano keys like the titular character rising from the primordial ooze into great clashing, banging chords. And "Peggy's Blue Skylight" contrasts soft tinkling intro with sprightly main melody.

The hypnotic, mesmeric quality of Mingus' best melodies comes out in a deeply meditative "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat" while the longest track, "Fables of Faubus", reels off into an extended improvisation, which includes quotes from "Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho", "Yankee Doodle", "Lift Every Voice and Sing" and some classical pieces, as well as including Mingus' lyrics. Nilles also sings and bluesily plays "Devil Woman" and "Oh Lord Don't Let Them Drop That Atomic Bomb On Me". This album pares away Mingus' music to its core, in revelatory fashion.

For more information, visit sunnysiderecords.com



Rituals of Transition
Misha Mengelberg (I dischi di angelica)
by Kurt Gottschalk

Brimming though he was with ideas during his life, Dutch composer, bandleader and Instant Composers Pool co-founder Misha Mengelberg released only a handful of unaccompanied piano albums during his six decades of making records. He was committed to the band dynamic and, it often seemed, didn't quite feel the need to play all of the time anyway.

Notable among them is the FMP release *Impromptus*, a set of improvised miniatures recorded in a Berlin studio in 1988. *Rituals of Transition* is a considerably different collection than that earlier gem, but sits comfortably alongside it as a fine example of Mengelberg's quizzical mind at work. Where *Impromptus* was 13 pieces of a whole, the six tracks on *Rituals of Transition* are culled from appearances over a span of eight years, from 2002-10 in Bologna, Italy; Kiev, Ukraine; Pantin, France; and Amsterdam, Holland. (He retired from public performance in 2014 and died three years later.)

Mengelberg was the rare example of a performer with deep knowledge and nothing to prove. There were plenty of quotes and phrases up his sleeve, but he was as committed to absurdism as he was jazzology. He could work in prolonged ideas, but was nevertheless happy to have plans interrupted or subverted. That playfulness, the willingness to accept the accidental as intentional, is on display within the first 60 seconds of *Rituals of Transition*, when a baby in the audience

erupts in what sounds like amused delight and Mengelberg accepts it as an invitation to a duet.

It was easy during Mengelberg's concerts to be distracted by waiting for the humor, rather like the anticipation that arises while anticipating Inspector Clouseau's return to the screen during a *Pink Panther* movie. *Rituals of Transition* rewards the wait in the final 14-minute track. In between times, there's plenty of the rest of what made Mengelberg great: a wonderful ear for melody, an odd predilection for broken syncopation and an ever-endearing playfulness in the playing.

For more information, visit idischiangelica.bandcamp.com

DROP THE NEEDLE



Talking Gong
Susie Ibarra (New Focus)
by Franz Matzner

The centrality of percussion on Susie Ibarra's *Talking Gong* is nothing shocking, considering her prolific awards as a percussionist, composer, sound-stylist and researcher. It is the nature of the percussion that both surprises and mesmerizes. The album has Alex Peh on piano and Claire Chase on woodwinds, offering an amalgam of the novel sounds each has developed on their respective instrument. Utilized in ways that merge traditional Western-European, jazz, folk styles and pure innovation, the overall effect is like nothing else.

Drawn from Ibarra's Filipino-American heritage and the Philippines' environment, *Talking Gong* reflects the traditional Philippine use of gongs to communicate. Ibarra also folds in other percussive tools, including a standard drumkit. Chase presents her own diversity of wind instruments, including piccolo, flute and bass flute. Peh's notes and plucked strings dance and dart with unexpected techniques. Expanding overtones spread through gaps of silence. The piano rumbles in its lowest register. A piccolo breaks forth, simulacrum for more ancient instruments. Melodic shapes flicker. A plucked piano string here, a jaunty rhythm there. Drums and piano chase and tumble in a playful duet.

"Kolubri (hummingbird)" and "Sunbird" underscore Ibarra's environmental engagement. Dedicated to a tiny Philippine hummingbird, the former solo drum piece is astonishing in its sheer technical achievement. The triumph, however, is Ibarra's ability to evoke the bird's singular beauty and strength in exquisite detail. Extraordinarily fast brush-snare rolls flutter like wings, complex tom patterns dart and dive. Similarly, "Sunbird", a songbird known for its gorgeous music, gives Chase a platform to develop her own crystalline evocations. Trills, whistles, scattered melodies, tremulous bass, all unfold into a detailed sonic rendition of the attributes of the unique winged species.

An album of joy and insight, sophisticated technique and improvisational delight, *Talking Gong* is a nuanced universe of sound grounded in traditional musical roots and natural splendor.

For more information, visit newfocusrecordings.com. This project live-streams Apr. 19th at twitch.tv/bennington_college_music.

BOXED SET



Passion Flower (for Doris Duke)
Joe Castro (Clover-Sunnyside)
by Scott Yanow

Pianist Joe Castro (1927-2009) is today best remembered for recording two albums for Atlantic (1956's *Mood Jazz* and 1959's *Groove Funk Soul*) and working with tenor saxophonist Teddy Edwards. However there was much more to his musical life than that relatively brief period, as the liner notes for the six-CD Sunnyside set *Passion Flower* (and the previous *Lush Life*) reveal. A professional musician by the time he was 15, Castro served in the Army during 1946-47 and then formed a trio that spent time working in Hawaii. Influenced by Bud Powell, Castro gradually developed his own bop-oriented style. After he met Doris Duke (one of the richest women in the world) in 1952, they had a 13-year relationship. At her homes in Beverly Hills and New York, Castro hosted allstar jam sessions, much of which was recorded but unreleased until recently.

In the late '50s, Castro worked in L.A. both with Edward's quartet and bassist Leroy Vinnegar's trio.

He also was an accompanist to Anita O'Day, June Christy and Tony Martin. In 1963, he and Duke started Clover Records. Several albums were recorded but all that was released was 1965's *Lush Life* and a few singles. In 1966 both their relationship and the label were finished. Strangely enough Castro made no further recordings (although a cassette with O'Day in 1985 later came out) despite being active for another 43 years. The pianist worked in Vegas, most notably as the musical director for the Tropicana Hotel's Folies Bergère for quite a few years and he was happily married from 1967 until his wife's passing in 2008.

The 2019 Sunnyside six-CD set *Lush Life - A Musical Journey* consisted entirely of previously unreleased performances from 1954-66, including a complete disc dedicated to Teddy Wilson (highlighted by a wonderful quartet session with Stan Getz) in which Castro does not appear. The more recent *Passion Flower - For Doris Duke* is also comprised of six CDs; most of the music is making its first appearance.

The first disc features Castro during 1955-56 at the head of trios with either Vinnegar, Red Mitchell or Paul Chambers on bass and Jimmy Pratt, Lawrence Marable or Philly Joe Jones on drums. This CD serves as an ideal place to get introduced to Castro's playing. As on *Lush Life*, Castro does not appear on the second disc. Pianist Paul Bley is featured on five solo numbers and five with a trio from 1956 when he was a fine boppish player who had not yet formed his own style. Also on this disc are eight numbers featuring singer Flo Handy, her husband pianist George Handy and, on three songs, an orchestra. These art songs are difficult to sit through, a bit pompous and easily the low point of this release.

The third CD brings back Castro's *Mood Jazz*

album. The leader is featured while accompanied by the Ray Ellis Orchestra and Voices, the Neal Hefti String Orchestra or the Neal Hefti Singers. While this project does not seem too promising on the surface, Castro flourishes in these settings with strings and voices and on a few numbers he is joined by Cannonball and Nat Adderley. The original album is augmented by two additional songs plus four alternate takes. The *Groove Funk Soul* album returns on the fourth disc. This is a much more freewheeling session, Castro with what was really the Edwards Quartet, which also includes Vinnegar and drummer Billy Higgins. The original six numbers are joined by four previously unreleased performances: two other songs and two alternates. While Castro plays quite well, Edwards often steals the show with his inventive playing and big tenor sound.

The final two discs jump to 1965-66 and mostly have Castro playing with bassist Teddy Kotick and drummer Paul Motian. The fifth CD features the trio performing nine standards, a Johnny Hodges blues and one original. The final disc showcases the trio by themselves on three numbers, becoming a quartet with Edwards on "Just Squeeze Me" and playing four songs in which they are joined by six horns (the Bob Cooper Ensemble) arranged by the pianist. The final two performances on this box ("Passion Flower" and "Remind Me") have Castro and the trio interacting with another pianist, possibly Duke herself.

While there is a great deal of rewarding music on *Passion Flower* and *Lush Life*, one hopes that Sunnyside will eventually put together a third Castro set, one that includes the elusive *Lush Life* Clover album along with more unheard gems.

For more information, visit sunnysiderecords.com

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(INTERVIEW CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6)

DO: This is what I was just talking about. What I want to project with the band is what he did to me in an instant. I felt like every human emotion was embodied in every note that he played. He gave me chills down my spine. He made me cry. He made me joyous. He made me think about other people. He seems to hit all the common nerves of humanity and it just knocked me over, that there could be one person who could do that. "Swing That Music" in particular. As a 15-year-old full of pep and vigor, I was excited by the speed and the unbridled joy of the music. And so that's what kind of caught my attention. That was the first one. I started getting more and more interested in reading about him and learning about him, learning about how he lived his life and how he was treated and how he treated other people, how he dealt with adversity and it all matched up with his playing.

TNYCJR: Was your attraction to the tuba as dramatic as your discovery of Armstrong?

DO: The passage of time has revealed an answer, but it took a while for me actually to realize what it was about the tuba because for years, when I was asked that question, I would give a flippant sort of silly answer. Like how can you not want to play the tuba? A few years ago, I was hanging out with a friend of mine who showed me a clip of a 1965 ballet of *Romeo and Juliet* with Margot Fonteyn. There was a musical section called "March of the Capulets", which has the most incredible, beautiful, heavy, deep tuba part. I'd actually seen that production when I was 10. Shortly after, I was passing the band room in school as we were running out for recess. I saw the tuba there. It was actually a sousaphone, the kind that wraps around. It was gold and beautiful. And, as I remember it, there was a ray of sunshine coming in through the window onto this golden horn. I screeched on the brakes, like in a cartoon, and I ran in and I started blowing on it. The band director came out and gave me my first lesson on the spot. I realized when I saw the clip that there was a connection between it and learning to play the tuba. That ballet experience sunk into my head and it changed my life. Since then all I ever wanted to do was to have kids and play the tuba in that order.

TNYCJR: And because of that first desire you also became a lawyer.

DO: I did. In the beginning I tried to keep it secret that I was a lawyer because I didn't want people to think I was a part-time musician. I found a position where I could cut out to do gigs and I never turned down any gigs. I didn't make huge amounts like some lawyers do, but I made enough to assure an income and I was able to do gigs along the way. I had worked for two years for a lawyer who did personal injury and divorce cases and I really hated it. So, I quit without another job. I wasn't married at that time. When I did go back to being an attorney, during my interview my prospective employer allowed that he'd spoken to my old boss and learned I'd leave the office for a gig from time to time. I wanted to be up front about it, so I told him that most of my gigs are at night or on weekends so those won't affect the job. I added that occasionally a gig will come up during the day and I won't turn it down. Let me assure you, I said, if you hire me, I'll continue to do that. He hired me and it worked out. I've been very lucky.

TNYCJR: How do you feel about the future?

DO: We can't be stopped. At some point we're going to be back at Birdland. I'm sure of that. I think that, before you know it, things will ease back into where they were. Hopefully, having lost so much, I think that people will appreciate more what they have, because of

what was taken away from them. And so, I'm optimistic about the future, not only for my band, but also for humanity. As for streaming and virtual concerts—for music, it really needs to be live, so those platforms we rely on now will fade away eventually. And on a bright note, things are beginning to pick up. On April 30th on International Jazz Day, we're going to be doing a live stream from Flushing Town Hall. We're going to be playing at the Newport Jazz Festival on July 30th and we also have a concert that Ricky Riccardi of the Louis Armstrong House runs at Ocean County Community College in Toms River, New Jersey on June 27th. ❖

For more information, visit ostwaldjazz.com. *Ostwald's Louis Armstrong Eternity Band live-streams Apr. 30th at flushingtowhall.org.*

Recommended Listening:

- Big Joe Turner — *With Knocky Parker And His Houserockers* (Southland, 1983)
- Gully Low Jazz Band — *In Dreamland* (G.H.B., 1983)
- David Ostwald's Gully Low Jazz Band — *Down To Earth* (G.H.B., 1985)
- The New York Allstars — *We Love You, Louis!* (Nagel Heyer, 1995)
- David Ostwald's Gully Low Jazz Band — *Blues In Our Heart* (Nagel Heyer, 1998)
- Randy Sandke and The New York Allstars — *George Avakian Presents: The Re-Discovered Louis and Bix* (Nagel Heyer, 1999)

(ENCORE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8)

the clubs, met a lot of musicians and did a few sessions and I said, 'there's still something I wanna do'. Then I got a call from Ray Charles. I think I joined Ray in 1970 and I worked with him '70 through '72 and part of... actually I worked with Ray off and on for the next 25, 30 years."

It was also in 1970 that he met Gene Russell, who was about to get Black Jazz Records off the ground. Keys realized his dream of producing his own albums, *Shawn-Neeq* (1971) and *Proceed with Caution* (1974). "Cause it was a movement going on then. Whatever you're about you better proceed with caution in this madness. And I had that experience. We were going through the same thing that we're going through now, but it was 50 years ago!"

In 2020, Keys took part in the Black Jazz 50th Anniversary tour with Doug Carn, Henry Franklin, Michael Carvin and Jean Carne, breaking attendance records at performance halls in Paris and Berlin before the pandemic put a stop to everything.

After his first stint with Charles, around 1974 is when Keys got the opportunity to join Jamal's trio with bassist Jamil Nasser and drummer Frank Gant. "He called me and he gave me a couple charts and we started playing some of his music. He looked at me and he said, 'Calvin, do you read that well?' I said, 'tell you the truth, no, I don't, but I know all your music because my aunts and uncles used to play it on the weekends, that's how I learned most of the stuff.' [laughs] He was just an incredible master of this American classical art form." Between Charles and Jamal, when he wasn't working with one, he was working with the other for decades to follow.

Keys has two albums in the can, including *Silver Keys* dedicated to Horace Silver and *Simply Calvin* coming out on LifeForce Records. As soon as the venues start opening again, he'll be back on the bandstand as he's been for over 60 years.

"I've been so blessed, it's unbelievable, to be able to play this music. I'm fortunate enough to [have been] in the company of some of the greatest musicians on the planet and I'm still searching for that note. This music is one of the most powerful forces on the planet. It's all about life and love... Without this music, what

would it be?" ❖

For more information, visit calvinkeysjazz.com

Recommended Listening:

- Calvin Keys — *Shawn-Neeq* (Black Jazz, 1971)
- Ahmad Jamal — *Steppin' Out With a Dream* (20th Century Fox, 1977)
- Calvin Keys — *Standard Keys* (LifeForce, 1992)
- Calvin Keys — *Detours Into Unconscious Rhythms* (Wide Hive, 1999)
- Gloria Coleman — *Sweet Missy* (Doodlin', 2007)
- Calvin Keys — *Electric Keys* (Wide Hive, 2012)

(LEST WE FORGET CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8)

using elements of classical music and jazz, the latter heavily influenced by Ellington."

His Ellington connections also continued in his semi-retirement years. "He got to play Duke Ellington's role on piano in Clark Terry's Spaceman bands, tributes to the Duke, on summer tours in the '90s," remembers Bell-Stevens. Aaron Bell died in 2003 at 82. He would have turned 100 this year on Apr. 24th. ❖

Jazzmobile's "Keep The Music Playing" celebrates Bell's centennial on International Jazz Day, Apr. 30th, on JZMTV. For more information, visit jazzmobile.org.

Recommended Listening:

- Aaron Bell — *After The Party's Over* (RCA Victor, 1958)
- Duke Ellington Orchestra — *The Nutcracker Suite* (Columbia, 1960)
- Duke Ellington — *Piano in the Foreground* (Columbia-Legacy, 1961)
- Duke Ellington — *Meets Coleman Hawkins* (Impulse, 1962)
- Cat Anderson — *Plays W.C. Handy (Definitive Black & Blue Sessions)* (Black & Blue, 1978)
- Harold Ashby — *I'm Old Fashioned* (Stash, 1991)

(LABEL CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9)

expect to make money. Some of the albums have met their buy back and the artists make money off of it and we make a bit to put towards future releases. Overall it has been incredibly successful and we're going to keep pushing forward and putting music out."

Whereas Hopkins and Clark schedule the physical releases so they are far enough apart that they can devote attention to the production and marketing, they aim to issue Untamed albums as fast as possible. Upcoming physical releases include *Asp Nimbus* from cellist Christopher Hoffman's quartet and a solo guitar/banjo outing from Wendy Eisenberg while the latest editions of Untamed are live documents from Jonathan Goldberger/Simon Jermyn/Mat Maneri/Gerald Cleaver and a saxophone/drum duo from Chicago pair Nick Mazzarella and Quin Kirchner.

Beside sharing music, OOOYH has engendered other benefits. "In hindsight it was a great thing for me to start when I left NY. The record label has been an incredible way, especially during COVID, to stay in touch with people, still be involved in the music scene and hear about all this great music that's coming out. I was pleasantly surprised that my friends kept calling me to play with them." ❖

For more information, visit outofyourheadrecords.com. Live-streaming events this month are Nick Mazzarella/Hamid Drake on Apr. 4th at constellation-chicago.com; Anna Webber with Simon Jermyn, Devin Gray/Simon Jermyn with Nick Dunston, Cansu Tanrikulu, Jim Black on Apr. 6th at a-trane.de; and NEA Jazz Masters Presents: Henry Threadgill with Christopher Hoffman, David Virelles and Román Filiú on Apr. 22nd at arts.gov/about/news/2020/national-endowment-arts-announces-2021-nea-jazz-masters.

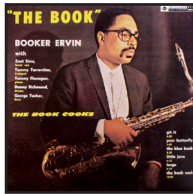
ON THIS DAY

by Andrey Henkin



Vol. 2
Johnny Griffin (Blue Note)
April 6th, 1957

On Apr. 17th, 1956, tenor saxophonist Johnny Griffin waxed his leader debut for Blue Note. Then, as the story has it, on his way back to Rudy Van Gelder's in Hackensack to record the followup, he ran into John Coltrane and invited him along. Thus this date has three of the era's premier tenors in the leader, Coltrane and Hank Mobley. Plus you get Wynton Kelly (piano), Paul Chambers (bass) and Art Blakey (drums)...and a free set of Ginsu steak knives. Two Griffin tunes and two standards make up what was later issued as *A Blowing Session*.



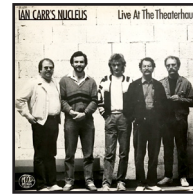
The Book Cooks
Booker Ervin (Bethlehem)
April 6th, 1960

Texas tenor Booker Ervin packed much music into the ten years he was active, dying in 1970 at 39. This leader debut was made after work with Charles Mingus and is not to be confused with *Cookin'*, made almost eight months later for Savoy. Bassist George Tucker and Mingus drummer Dannie Richmond are on both, the rest of the band Tommy Turrentine (trumpet, older brother to Stanley), (Zoot Sims, tenor) and Tommy Flanagan (piano). The program is five Ervin tunes and Raymond Hubbell-John L. Golden's "Poor Butterfly".



Club Jazz 5
Opposite Corner/Palle Danielsson (SRP)
April 6th, 1971

This is the fifth of nine volumes of SRP's *Club Jazz* series, split LPs by mostly Swedish artists. While others feature more obscure bands, Side B here is a sextet led by bassist Palle Danielsson with Roland Keijser and Lennart Aberg (tenor/soprano saxophone, flute), Bobo Stenson (piano) and Bengt Berger and Jon Christensen (drums), playing four leader pieces. Opposite Corner also has Stenson and Christensen, plus Gunnar Lindgren (tenor/soprano), Gunnar Fors (trumpet) and Lars-Urban Helje (bass).



Live At The Theaterhaus
Ian Carr (Mood)
April 6th, 1985

By the time of this live recording from Stuttgart's Theaterhaus, British jazz-rock band Nucleus was known as Ian Carr's Nucleus, reflecting the trumpeter's founding of the group in 1969 and leading role alongside a few dozen different players through the '80s. Though archival releases have continued into the new millennium, this is the band's last official album, a quintet with Phil Todd (saxophone), Mark Wood (guitar), Dill Katz (bass) and John Marshall (drums), the latter a veteran of the earliest iterations, on five of Carr's originals.



Carnegie Hall Salutes The Jazz Masters
Various Artists (Verve)
April 6th, 1994

While this concert, hosted by Vanessa Williams and Herbie Hancock, was convened to celebrate 50 years of Verve, it is more of a rounded-up golden anniversary for Norman Granz, who started Clef back in 1946, Norgran in 1953 and Verve in 1956. The then-recently founded Carnegie Hall Jazz Band led by trumpeter Jon Faddis is the foundation upon which dozens of stars—from Ray Brown to Abbey Lincoln to J.J. Johnson to Joe Henderson to John McLaughlin to Jackie McLean to Pat Metheny—play 16 jazz standards of varying vintage.

BIRTHDAYS

April 1
†John LaPorta 1902-2004
†Harry Carney 1910-74
†Duke Jordan 1922-2006
Eric Ineke b.1947
Frank Tusa b.1947
†Gil Scott-Heron 1949-2011
Antoine Roney b.1963

April 2
†Max Greger 1926-2015
†Booker Little 1938-61
†Sal Nistico 1940-91
†Larry Coryell 1943-2017
Rahsaan and Roland Barber b.1980

April 3
†Bill Potts 1928-2005
†Scott LaFaro 1936-61
†Jimmy McGriff 1936-2008
†Harold Vick 1936-87
Linda Sharrock b.1947
Eric Kloss b.1949
Ali Jackson b.1976

April 4
†Gene Ramey 1913-84
†Buster Cooper 1929-2016
†Jake Hanna 1931-2010
†Hugh Masekela 1939-2015
Ole Kock Hansen b.1945
Ray Russell b.1947
Michel Camilo b.1954
Gary Smulyan b.1956

April 5
†Stan Levey 1925-2005
†Stanley Turrentine 1934-2000
Evan Parker b.1944
Jerome Harris b.1953
Håkon Kornstad b.1977

April 6
†Charlie Rouse 1924-88
†Randy Weston 1926-2018
†Gerry Mulligan 1927-96
†André Previn 1929-2019
†Art Taylor 1929-95
†Bill Hardman 1933-90
†Horace Tapscott 1934-99
Manfred Schoof b.1936
Gene Bertone b.1937
†Noah Howard 1943-2010
John Pizzarelli b.1960

April 7
†Billie Holiday 1915-59
†Mongo Santamaria 1922-2003
†Victor Feldman 1934-87
†Freddie Hubbard 1938-2008
†Pete La Roca Sims 1938-2012
Alex von Schlippenbach b.1938
†Bob Berg 1951-2002
Fredrik Lundin b.1964

April 8
†George Dixon 1909-94
†Carmen McRae 1922-94
†Paul Jeffrey 1933-2015

April 9
†Teddy Roy 1905-66
†Julian Dash 1916-74
Steve Gadd b.1945
Hugh Ragin b.1951
Dave Allen b.1970

April 10
†Fess Williams 1894-1975
†Morty Corb 1917-96
†Fraser MacPherson 1928-93
†Claude Bolling 1930-2020
†Barbara Lea 1929-2011
Omar Sosa b.1965

April 11
†John Levy 1912-2012
Emil Mangelsdorff b.1925
Raymond A. King b.1929
Matt Lavelle b.1970
Jakob Bro b.1978

April 12
†Johnny Dodds 1892-1940
†Russ Garcia 1916-2011
Herbie Hancock b.1940
Ryan Kisor b.1973

April 13
†Bud Freeman 1906-91
†Teddy Charles 1928-2012
†Rusty Jones 1932-2015
†Eddie Marshall 1938-2011
Simon Spang-Hanssen b.1955
John Ellis b.1974

April 14
†Shorty Rogers 1924-94
†Gene Ammons 1925-74
†Monty Waters 1938-2008
Steve Davis b.1967

April 15
†Bessie Smith 1894-1937
†Charlie Smith 1927-66
Richard Davis b.1930
Sy Johnson b.1930
†Herb Pomeroy 1930-2007
†Gene Chericco 1935-94

April 16
†Herbie Mann 1930-2003
Sabir Mateen b.1951
Jukka Tolonen b.1952
†Esbjorn Svensson 1964-2008
Junko Onishi b.1967
Landon Knoblock b.1982

April 17
†Chris Barber 1930-2021
Sam Noto b.1930
Warren Chiasson b.1934
Han Bennink b.1942
Buster Williams b.1942
Jan Hammer b.1948
Mark Sherman b.1957
Sam Sadigursky b.1979

April 18
†Tony Mottola 1918-2004
†Leo Parker 1925-62
†Ken Colyer 1928-88
Freddy Hill b.1932
Hal Galper b.1938
Susanna Lindeborg b.1952

April 19
†Tommy Benford 1905-94
†Alex Hill 1906-37
Randy Ingram b.1978

April 20
†Lionel Hampton 1909-2002
Ran Blake b.1935
"Sonny" Brown b.1936
†Beaver Harris 1936-91
†Billy James 1936-2009
†Joe Bonner 1948-2014
Avishai Cohen b.1971
Matt Brewer b.1983

April 21
†Johnny Blowers 1911-2006
†Joe Dixon 1917-98
†Mundell Lowe 1922-2017
Slide Hampton b.1932
†Ian Carr 1933-2009
Alan Skidmore b.1942
†Peter Kowald 1944-2002
Mike Holober b.1957

April 22
†Buzzy Drootin 1910-2000
†Cándido Camero 1921-2020
†Charles Mingus 1922-79
†Tommy Turrentine 1928-97
†Paul Chambers 1935-69
Barry Guy b.1947

April 23
†Jimmie Noone 1895-1944
†Little Benny Harris 1919-75
†Ito Puate 1920-2000
†Bobby Rosengarden 1924-2007
Bunky Green b.1935
Pierre Courbois b.1940
Alan Broadbent b.1947
Narada Michael Walden b.1952
Kendra Shank b.1958
Bryan Carrott b.1959
Chris Lightcap b.1971
Petr Cancura b.1977

April 24
†Rube Bloom 1902-76
†Aaron Bell 1922-2003
†Fatty George 1927-82
†Johnny Griffin 1928-2008
†Frank Strazzeri 1930-2014
†Spanky DeBrest 1937-73
†Joe Henderson 1937-2001
†Colin Walcott 1945-84
Stafford James b.1946
Trudy Silver b.1953

April 25
†Earl Bostic 1913-65
†Ella Fitzgerald 1918-96
†Willis "Gator" Jackson 1932-87
†Harry Miller 1941-83
†Michael Cosmic 1950-2001
Phil Musra 1950
Carl Allen b.1961

April 26
†Dave Tough 1907-48
†Jimmy Giuffre 1921-2008
†Teddy Edwards 1924-2003
†Herman Foster 1928-99
†Bill Byrne 1942-2002
Axel Dörner b.1964

April 27
†Connie Kay 1927-94
†Sal Mosca 1927-2007
†Calvin Newborn 1933-2018
Ruth Price b.1938
†Freddie Waits 1943-89
Scott Robinson b.1959
Martin Wind b.1968

April 28
†Russ Morgan 1904-69
†Blossom Dearie 1926-2009
†Oliver Jackson 1933-94
†John Tchicai 1936-2012
Mickey Tucker b.1941
Willie Colon b.1950

April 29
†Duke Ellington 1899-1974
†Philippe Brun 1908-94
†Toots Thielemans 1922-2016
†Big Jay McNeely 1927-2018
†Ray Barretto 1929-2006
†Andy Simpkins 1932-99
†George Adams 1940-92
†Hugh Hopper 1945-2009
Julius Tolerentino b.1975

April 30
†Sid Weiss 1914-94
†Percy Heath 1923-2005
†Dick Twardzik 1931-55
Abdul Wadud b.1947
Russ Nolan b.1968



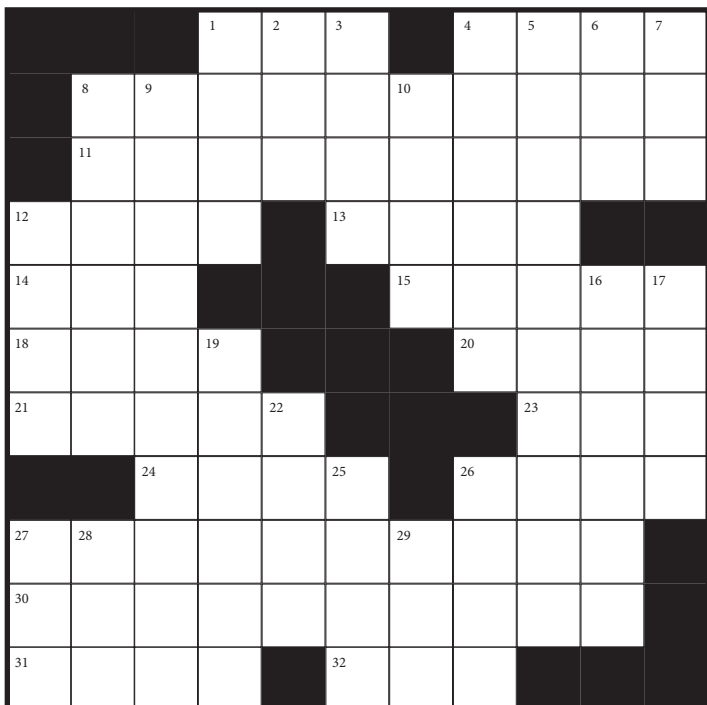
ALAN SKIDMORE
April 21st, 1942

One of the Ss in the famed British saxophone trio S.O.S, tenor/soprano saxophonist and flutist Alan Skidmore, son of fellow tenor Jimmy, was among the U.K.'s first wave of avant garde players, coming out of the country's blues scene and the launch pad that was the bands of Mike Westbrook. After his first albums for Deram and Phillips in the late '60s-early '70s was work with the other S in S.O.S (John Surman), Léon Francioli, Stan Tracey, Graham Collier, Mike Gibbs, Rolf Kühn, Harry Beckett, Soft Machine, Ali Haurand, Chris McGregor, Norma Winstone, Elton Dean, George Gruntz, Charlie Watts and many others in both the jazz and rock worlds. Skidmore's own output since the '80s often has been in tribute to muse John Coltrane. (AH)

CROSSWORD

ACROSS

DOWN



1. Drummer El'Zabar to his friends?
4. Musical line of great imp.
8. This TV host won the 1964 Grammy Award for Best Original Jazz Composition
11. Harmonica tooter?
12. Acknowledge a bad solo
13. Earlier entry in a discography (abbr.)
14. Gene de Paul-Patricia Johnston-Don Raye standard "___ Remember April"
15. British clarinetist Bilk
18. Like ""The artists alone decide what you will hear on their ESP-Disk". (abbr.)
20. Leaders need this info. from their band
21. 1956 Buddy Collette Contemporary album ___ *Many Parts*
23. Traveling musicians are very aware of this org.
24. British saxophonist Bellamy
26. 1955 Sidney Bechet Vogue 45 *Dansons Samedi* ___
27. He banned jazz in China
30. 1978 Takeshi Inomata/Akira Sakata 45 based on the Ziegfeld Follies song
31. Violinist Fred-Henrik or vocalist Tone
32. 1977 Cachao Salsou album that should be number one

1. Irreversible Entanglements saxophonist Neuringer
2. Mack is one
3. 1971-72 Hank Crawford Kudu album ___ *Me Make It Through The Night*
4. William Parker named an album for these prehistoric people of Mexico
5. Woody Shaw legacy?
6. Bassist Allison or Williams
7. '70s Mexican Epic catalogue prefix
8. She is best seen by starlight
9. His 19 Down is the most famous in jazz
10. '70s Bavarian jazz-rock band
12. Slang word thought to be the origin of the term jazz
16. Anthony Montgomery, grandson of Wes, played one of these on *Star Trek: Enterprise*
17. 1974 Buddy Rich Groove Merchant album *The ___ Of '74*
19. Joe Lovano plays through one
22. 1974 Motoharu Yoshizawa Trio album *Inland* ___
25. 1975 Eddie Harris Atlantic album *I ___ Some Money*
26. Not good touring vehicles
27. Musicians should consider getting this deg.
28. Dave Brubeck classic "Blue Rondo ___ Turk"
29. With Forms, Whit Dickey label

By Andrey Henkin

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