



Jazz Is My Lifestyle!
Gunhild Carling Big Band with Strings (s/r)
by Scott Yanow

Sweden-born, Northern California-based Gunhild Carling is a phenomenal performer. A prodigy, she made her recording debut (at age 9) on trombone in 1984 with the Carling Family Hot Five. Since then, she has developed into a major swing soloist, not only on trombone, but also trumpet, as a vocalist in several different styles (including convincing imitations of Billie Holiday and Cab Calloway), and a fairly hot soloist on harmonica, harp, recorder, flute, ukulele, theremin, even bagpipes. Carling has also led her own big band for which she writes all of the music and provides arrangements. In concert, she not only displays those talents but can play four trumpets at once for a chorus, as well as blowing on trumpet while balancing it by facing skyward and accompanying herself with her two hands playing a banjo!

While she can mistakenly be thought of as a bit of a novelty act at times (the same mistake that some detractors made of Rahsaan Roland Kirk), her trumpet and trombone playing in particular cannot be denied. *Jazz Is My Lifestyle!* features her performing eleven originals with a 13-horn big band that includes three family members, a few guests (including Count Basie Orchestra bandleader, trumpeter Scotty Barnhart), and on a few numbers the Prague Strings Chamber Orchestra. Among the many highlights: the joyful title cut (a relative of “When the Saints Go Marching

In”); Carling’s expertise with the plunger mute on her trumpet during “Shaking the Bangkok”; the leader’s warm singing and harp playing on “I Desire You”; hints of Ella Fitzgerald on “You Are the Music”; as well as her trombone high notes during “Chanson” and the Dixieland-ish “Mardi Gras Blues”. In addition to her trumpet and trombone playing, Carling plays harp on four numbers and doubles on flute, recorder, harmonica, ukulele and theremin on one song apiece.

Gunhild Carling can do so much that it will take several more albums to fully display her versatility, but *Jazz Is My Lifestyle!* serves as a perfect introduction to this unique, multi-faceted and talented artist.

For more info visit gunhildcarling.net. Carling is at Birdland through Mar. 2. See Calendar.



Suspended in Time: A Song Cycle
Fred Hersch/Rondi Charleston (Resilience Music Alliance)
by Marilyn Lester

Generally, a song cycle—a thematic collection of songs performed in sequence as a suite—is heavily about the text, the music taking secondary importance. That’s not quite the case with *Suspended in Time: A Song Cycle*. The music, written by pianist-composer Fred Hersch, has consequence. The seven pieces penned for the collection perfectly mirror the narrative mood, and while the story that’s spooled out is compelling, one doesn’t easily sideline the power of Hersch’s playing. That narrative was written by vocalist Rondi Charleston and it’s about

her journey to recover from debilitating long COVID, which has rendered her vocally compromised. In her stead, the songs are performed by Kate McGarry (tracks 1, 2, 3, 5) and Gabrielle Stravelli (tracks 2, 6, 7), who both do an insightful and evocative job of communicating the depth of Charleston’s revelations. The spoken word “Fever Dreams” is Charleston’s only appearance in the cycle and it’s a compelling delivery both vocally and emotionally. The text is a brilliant work—a meditation on one’s relationships with the body and self and time. Yet, it’s not mournful. The album’s closer, “Here We Are”, presents hope in “permission to live again,” the moment dreamed for.

Most of the songs are quiet musical contemplations spanning the events of early 2020 when Charleston was “ground dropped and suspended in thin air” to the end of 2023. In the background, mainly subtly supporting Hersch is the Crosby String Quartet: Bruce Williamson (clarinet), who has a haunting solo in “Sea of Eyes”, the second song in the cycle; Matt Aronoff (bass); Kush Abadey (drums) and Rogerio Boccato (percussion). Their contributions are most notable at the mid-section of the cycle, “Essence of Spring”, a samba that raises the mood and energy of the piece before the remaining songs return to their more placid deliberations. Here, Hersch is able to stretch out at his most jazzy on the release. His other spotlight moment comes in “Patience”, in which he plays a rich orchestral feature.

In its short 29-minute duration, *Suspended in Time: A Song Cycle* has a lot to offer for those willing to appreciate both the exquisite musical and narrative writing—it’s well worth it.

For more info visit resiliencemusic.com. The album release concert is at Joe’s Pub Mar. 30. Hersch is also at Smoke Mar. 12-16. See Calendar.

ON SCREEN



The Girls in the Band
Judy Chaikin (Artist Tribe/One Step Productions)
by Paul Gaita

Judy Chaikin’s award-winning documentary *The Girls in the Band* (originally released in 2013) is bookended by two takes on the legendary “A Great Day in Harlem” photograph. The original 1958 version by Art Kane opens the film; 58 musicians with just two women: Marian McPartland and Mary Lou Williams. The film closes with a 2008 image, taken by Chaikin at the same East 126th Street location, populated by nearly all women (Dr. Billy Taylor, an exception, is there). The journey between those photographs is the subject of *The Girls in the Band*, and it’s told with considerable affection and admiration for its durable participants.

The road for *The Girls in the Band* (available to view on numerous streaming platforms) begins in the Swing Era, when women, including saxophonists Roz Cron and Peggy Gilbert and trumpeters Billie Rogers and Clara Bryant, found that their love for the instruments could actually

lead to a career as a jazz musician. Many of the great all-female orchestras are profiled here via energetic clips, with the International Sweethearts of Rhythm serving as a nucleus for both the highs and lows experienced by women in jazz. The Sweethearts group demonstrated that women could swing hard, but it also showed that they needed to swing harder than men to be taken seriously (being taken seriously was unfortunately often not the end result). The multiracial makeup of the International Sweethearts of Rhythm also underscored the danger faced by non-white performers in the Jim Crow South, which was doubled by the fact that they were women.

McPartland and Williams seem to have served as the vanguards for a new attitude toward women in jazz. Though McPartland was still subjected to inane questions about her looks, her talent and determination to be taken seriously as a peer by male musicians inched the needle forward. Williams’ struggles to be acknowledged as an accomplished musician and composer took a toll on her physical and mental health, both well-detailed here. Their efforts were taken up by a host of women players in the ’70s and ’80s, many of whom, including Patrice Rushen, Carla Bley and Geri Allen, helped to pave the way for newer figures such as esperanza spalding and Hiromi (Uehara). They, like their predecessors, are featured in vibrant, kinetic performance clips, all of which underscore the notion that the cause of women jazz performers is one that requires both honor, as this film does, and continued commitment.

For more info visit thegirlsintheband.com

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