

Ashes to Gold
Avishai Cohen (ECM)
by Jeff Cebulski

The trumpeter and bandleader Avishai Cohen was challenged in every creative way by the tragic events in Israel that began on October 7, 2023: “I could not write anything. I couldn’t touch the trumpet.” Convinced by his pianist Yonathan Avishai that they needed to play music, Cohen, newly motivated, composed the bulk of his suite *Ashes to Gold* in a week’s time, adding sections to it during a subsequent tour. What emerged was a composition unlike what Cohen and his quartet—Avishai (piano), Barak Mori (bass) and Ziv Ravitz (drums)—have done before, in that the music is tightly produced and rehearsed with little to no room for improvisation. The title references the Japanese *kintsugi* ceramic repair art, which recreates a broken item from its fragments, using gold to attach them. In this case, Cohen is the one fragmented and music is the gold.

The five-part suite has the elegiac tone of Cohen’s *Into the Silence* (ECM, 2015) but with an implied dramatic intensity that makes the two added tracks (a Ravel work and a piece written by Cohen’s daughter Amalia) a refreshment, part of the “gold” Cohen was aiming for. The dramatic element is most intense in Part I, with

Cohen playing flute in creating a pastoral atmosphere that would be ripped apart by violence. Avishai’s chiming piano passage (almost like funeral peals) leads to the drummer’s pounding interruption of the peace. Mori bows a portentous line, while Ravitz’ drums serve as a military cadence, as Cohen (back on trumpet) tells the anguished story. Eventually, he returns on flute, but with a droll and poignant bowed bass and that piano chime. Parts 2 through 5 represent the leader’s attempt to find meaning after the onslaught. The mood never approaches anger but contemplates loss. His trumpet wails and wonders while lingering battles, represented by Ravitz’ background throbbing and thumping remain. The bassist plays a dignified elegy in front of Cohen’s most lyrical statement, honoring the lost. A chamber interlude precedes Avishai’s flowing piano intro to the final portion, suggesting that life goes on. Cohen plays an echoed passage that proclaims rather than laments, while Ravitz pulses, emphasizing movement over passivity.

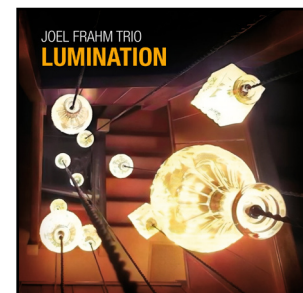
At the end, Cohen’s *Ashes to Gold* rises above the fray, and, with Ravel’s *Adagio assai* and Cohen’s daughter’s lovely “The Seventh” added, proposes that the dignity of music and a new generation can lift a moribund situation into a purposeful future while holding close a profound memory.

For more info visit ecmrecords.com. The album release concert is at National Sawdust Mar. 29. Avishai Cohen is also at Appel Room Mar. 14-15 (with Anat Cohen). See Calendar.

memorable country tune with fluid third scale degree starts “Delusion”, showcasing Ginyard’s rock-solid bass line. At the breakdown, the sounds of tambourine and distorted guitar frame descending classical motives from the leader, heightening the witchery of the tune. A two-string guitar bend heightens the tension before the recapitulation of the haunting melody and a low piano stinger at the end. The beautiful ballad “Ashé” has gentle Floyd Cramer-like turns and guitar/voice melody that sets a great mood to close out the album. Parks then takes his time with a melancholic solo egged on by Kim’s soulful stirrings on brushes.

Aaron Parks and his enigmatic group are changing the sound of small group jazz, and your album collection should be begging for what might just be considered a trailblazing record.

For more info visit bluenote.com. Parks is at Village Vanguard Mar. 18-23. See Calendar.

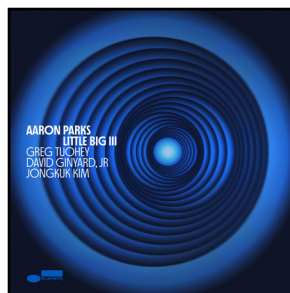


Lumination
Joel Frahm Trio (Anzic)
by Tom Greenland

Lumination, Joel Frahm Trio’s sophomore release on Anzic, is a worthy successor to the group’s *The Bright Side* (2021), each chordless tenor saxophone trio recordings, with Dan Loomis (bass) and Ernesto Cervini (drums); both albums also highlight the quietly charismatic collective chemistry of its participants. Neither blowing date nor artistic manifesto, *Lumination* is more like a peek into the long-term (going on ten years) working relationship of this team. Each member contributes to the writing—seven tunes by Frahm, two by Cervini, one by Loomis—and they enjoy considerable freedom in the spare format, where group discussions frequently break into dialogues and no one needs to raise his voice to be heard.

Frahm is a superb player, possessed of tremendous creativity, range and thematic continuity—someone who, for all his ability, never succumbs to virtuosic display, exaggeration or melodrama—making even his most ear-opening statements with a certain degree of relaxed reserve. Obviously influenced by the muscular swagger of bebop, he yet retains an element of Midwestern cool. Loomis is similarly melodic, working cohesive motifs into his solos and counterpoint into his accompaniment, employing a distinctive technique to attack his notes, as if his hands are bouncing off the strings, sounding something like the “gnn” and “dmm” bass strokes of a conga drummer. Cervini, when he’s not adding bricks to shore up the musical masonry, is troweling mortar into its cracks: connecting, filling, solidifying.

Album tracks run short, emphasizing song form rather than extended solos. Cervini’s “The Nurse Is In” (reminiscent of Sonny Rollins’ “Pent-Up House”), Cervini’s “Loo Lee” and Frahm’s quirky but catchy “Loomie Nation” and “Catch 22” are all well penned, post-bop themes. “Disco Nern 1” and “False Spring” dig deep grooves; others vary: “Kern You Dig It?” (a contrafact of Jerome Kern’s “All the Things You Are”) swings easily; “Na Estrada” floats moodily; “Lament” dirges along ominously. “Vesper Flights” alludes to, but doesn’t give over to, the ecstatic impulses of John Coltrane’s mid-period modal waltz workouts. Frahm’s improvisations, consistently excellent, are especially compelling on the gorgeous “Moonface



Little Big III
Aaron Parks (Blue Note)
by Brian Charette

Pianist Aaron Parks’ third release for Blue Note, the raw, futuristic *Little Big III* features the stellar Greg Tuohey (guitar), David Ginyard, Jr. (bass) and Jongkuk Kim (drums), who together create sounds that are relaxed within minimal and spare, spacious playing.

“Flyways”, which offers a lonely Lydian Melody, features Kim’s hypnotic beat that is held together by the leader’s rhythmic chords, while Tuohey’s guitar delay adds to the dream-like atmosphere. Bassist Ginyard never leaves the pocket and provides a groove with an occasional well-placed slide or fill. Parks, who stretches in bursts, trades brilliant lines with the guitarist as synth sounds float atop to add another layer. The quartet team works the throttle perfectly without ever losing control. On the intro to “Locked Down”, the drummer’s snare is tuned down and compressed for the dark indie beat, while Parks’ low bass piano notes support Tuohey’s floaty guitar as Kim’s ride cymbal gives a breath of optimism to the swirling dense chords. The leader has a magical lyrical sense and his improvisations always contain twisty edges and engaging resolutions, while the guitarist has a keen talent for comping as he utilizes controlled washes that rush in, then recede and fade.

The off-beat piano of “Little Beginnings” gets a shake from the triplet feel of Ginyard and Kim, the latter offers some impressive percussive sounds and original beats. The synth solo is punchy but passes in a flash leaving the listener wanting more, as Tuohey takes the lead with a bluesy tone, while Parks’ subtle modulation wheel shifts add expression. The guitarist opens “The Machines” and cues the entrance of the drummer’s intricate and effects-manipulated break beat. A

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