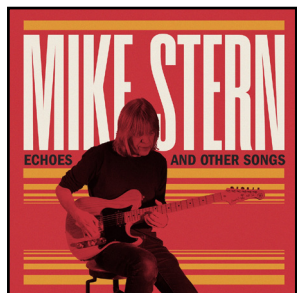


Album opener, "Prologue: Invention #1", finds Baker setting a drone in the background as the trumpeter plays some eerie notes, distorting his sound. "Rhapsody", the most successful of the electronic pieces, features a Hedonia synthesizer-created rhythmic figure, which is taken up by the other musicians. Vilaseca's voice is utilized as part of the ensemble and creates an ominous background, particularly during Pelt's solo. The music switches to the perhaps more familiar ground of acoustic post-bop with "Afrofuturism" and the relatively straight-ahead "13/14". In addition to the leader, Baker and Mendelenko prove to be inventive and colorful soloists within the tradition. The atmospheric "Dreamcatcher" creates a waltz pattern that is played in spots by vibraphone, guitar and synthesizer, Spears soloing over the ensemble and Pelt inventing melodies that fit well within the vamp. "Michelle" (no relation to The Beatles tune) is a medium-tempo ballad with a complex melody that sets a haunting mood. The trumpeter displays a particularly attractive tone on this piece, as well as the warm ballad feature "Fair Weather".

Woven concludes with a funky groove and more intentionally distorted trumpet on "Invention #2/Black Conscience" and the up-tempo "Labyrinth", which gives Pelt, Mendelenko and Baker their final heated solos. The sum of the album is a bit of a mixed bag, and while the trumpet distortions can be a bit disconcerting, *Woven's* bright moments make it worth more than a listen.

For more info visit jazzdepot.com. Pelt is at Smoke Mar. 27-30. See Calendar.



Echoes and Other Songs
Mike Stern (Mack Avenue)
by Tom Greenland

Guitarist Mike Stern's latest recording, *Echoes and Other Songs* (his first on Mack Avenue) is arguably one of his best: tuneful, tasteful, diverse, shredding. His all-star supporting cast includes Chris Potter and Bob Franceschini (saxophones), Randy Brecker (trumpet), the late Jim Beard (keyboards) who also produced, Christian McBride and Richard Bona (bass), Antonio Sanchez and Dennis Chambers (drums), Arto Tunçboyacıan (percussion) and Leni Stern (ngoni).

The leader's new compositions are one factor elevating the project. "Connections" is a catchy ditty with a funky world-beat vibe, qualities shared with "I Hope So" and "Curtis", the latter two featuring Bona's wordless vocals with overdubbed vocal harmonies. "Echoes", "Space Bar" and "Crumbles" portray a spookier, Goth-rock ethos; "Gospel Song" and "Climate" are comparatively pastoral, while the long-limbed Phrygian melody of "Where's Leo?" could be a Middle Eastern update of Stern's "Chromazone". The brilliantly byzantine "Could Be" is a contrafact based on "It Could Happen to You" with an opening motif reminiscent of Thelonious Monk's "Epistrophe".

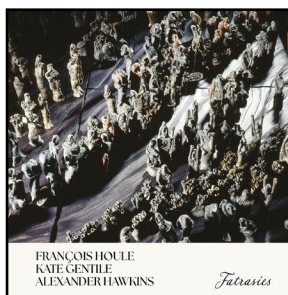
An additional elevating factor in this release is its impeccable musicianship. Stern's playing is both fiery and graceful throughout, often toggling between thorny chromatic sequences and lyrical blues phraseology with supple ornaments, always preserving a melodic through-line, as exemplified by his solos on "Connections" and "Echoes" (particularly

the second half), while his more delicate side emerges on "I Hope So", "Climate" and "Could Be". Some of the album's most memorable moments come at the end of "Where's Leo?", "Climate" and "Could Be", where Stern and Potter trade short, scintillating passages, Potter delivering an especially fine solo on the latter track.

For his recent five-night stand at Birdland last month, Stern assembled a similar, more condensed A-team of accompanists from the record: Brecker (trumpet), Leni Stern (ngoni, guitar) and Dennis Chambers (drums), plus Darryl Jones (electric bass). The second set of the fourth night (Feb. 7) confirmed that the album's elevating factors were no fluke. Watching Stern play using a new arm posture—right wrist arched, fingers crooked back at the large knuckle, forearm dangling, pick glued to thumb and index finger—confirmed that he's been forced to adapt since suffering severe nerve damage to his arms in a 2016 falling injury; one was struck by the speed, accuracy and finesse he achieves in spite of the obstacles.

The set opened with Leni Stern singing her song "Like a Thief", setting the mood on ngoni, later on switching to electric Stratocaster guitar, contributing rhythm parts and spikey solos with a fat, clean tone. Mike Stern came on strong during the second selection, "Connections", stepping to the edge of the stage and playing a mind-blowing solo that was equally cerebral and visceral, his dangling right arm somehow hitting all the right notes with the right rhythmic drive, returning for a second, equally burning solo at the end. On "Echoes" and elsewhere, he displayed fine rhythm chops, strumming funky chicken scratches or comping in smooth chains of ethereal chords, holding the pulse against Chambers' complex cross-rhythms. Brecker served as his melodic foil, running his trumpet through a series of signal processors to add variety, accomplishing a flamboyant climax on "Wishing Well". Stern's beautiful chord passages on "Gospel Song" were followed by quicksilver runs, fingers barely touching the strings as his flights took off. On "Tipitina's", the finale, Chambers unleashed his full powers, playing uncanny 7-beat phrases over the band's 4/4 groove, following these with a series of sonic earthquakes and their aftershocks.

For more info visit mackavenue.com. Stern is at Drom Mar. 1. See Calendar.



Fatrasies
François Houle, Kate Gentile, Alexander Hawkins
(Les Disques VICTO)
by Bill Meyer

The fatrasie is a poetic form first devised in the 13th century. The syllables per line, number of lines and rhyming structure are all rigorously prescribed, but the words are illogical. While each of this album's five tracks takes its title from such a poem, it's a counter-intuitive title for the trio's music, which is open in form, but is unfailingly cohesive.

Fatrasies documents Canadian François Houle (clarinet), Englishman Alexander Hawkins (piano) and American Kate Gentile (drums) in concert at the 2023 International Festival of Musique Actuelle in Victoriaville, Quebec. It was not their first encounter: Hawkins and Houle have worked together in various ensembles for over a decade, and Gentile joined them

for a couple of different concerts at another Canadian festival in Vancouver in 2022, including this trio's first-ever concert. That encounter must have satisfied someone enough to plan a return engagement, and if it was anything like the music heard on this recording, one can understand why—because they sound absolutely great together.

All three musicians are composers as well as improvisers, and structural priorities as well as moment-to-moment attunement shape their contributions. The music is scrupulously balanced, even when the changes come quickly and unpredictably. And the performance shows a lot of range, opening with a spare and pensive introduction, with Gentile's sparse cymbal and woodblock accents and Hawkins' prepared piano subdividing Houle's winding lines, and closing on a note of airy complexity, with each player contributing parts that seem to simultaneously complete the music and jostle its course.

While Gentile and Hawkins haven't played together much, they're well-matched in their ability to pack a lot of action into tight spaces, particularly during the high-energy passages in the second piece, "Bel Homme Sans Tête" ("Handsome Headless Man"). Houle's harsher, sometimes electronically distorted blowing makes sense in those moments, but he also contributes via contrast, particularly when he blows slower lines using both a Bb and a bass clarinet simultaneously. So, perhaps the titles are a playful way to discharge an obligation, not some signal of artistic intent.

The music, which combines chamber music attunement with continuous, instant invention, says all that really needs to be said.

For more info visit victo.qc.ca. Kate Gentile is at The Stone at The New School Mar. 26-29. See Calendar.



INTERPRETATIONS
SEASON 35 2025

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WITH SPECIAL GUEST ROBERT DICK

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\$20: General \$15: Members, Students, Seniors.

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