

Jubilation

William Hooker (Orgmusic)

A Time Within: Live at the New York Jazz Museum

William Hooker (Valley of Search)

The Ancients

The Ancients (Eremite)

by Brad Cohan

William Hooker's motto is "Drum Power" and those two words sum up the ethos the drummer, composer and improviser has sworn by over the course of his pioneering five-decade-plus run. Since *...Is Eternal Life* (Reality Unity Concepts), his leader debut recorded 50 years ago, Hooker has conveyed messages of power through his intense drumming in the emotional, physical and expressive senses. This stunning recent trifecta of releases, one of which was recorded in 1977 and the other two in 2023, is a testament to his vision.

Jubilation is an emphatic statement of purpose, a joyous recording that finds the eternally youthful drummer's force, fast approaching 80-years-old, playing with his trademark vim and vigor. Supported by a remarkable group made up of Matt Lavelle (trumpet), Sarah Manning (alto), On Davis (guitar) and Adam Lane (bass), each feeds off the bandleader's thirst for sonic euphoria and soul-searching thoughtfulness on a set featuring both life-affirming solos and collaborative performances. Impeccably recorded live at Roulette in 2023, each of the seven pieces brings the very title of the record to boisterous light. Undoubtedly, Hooker is the catalyst here, manifested by the solo drum clinic showcased on "The Stare". Who but Hooker opens an album with a seven-minute-long show of percussive strength ostensibly meant to lift up and empower with a shot of joy? The vibes Hooker spreads prove infectious from there as Lane takes his own starring turn on the dizzily melodic investigation "Linking", as does Davis on the cosmic shredding exercise, "The Villages". Those solo endeavors are the sublime buildup to the entire group joining forces on the remaining four pieces, which are on another level of pure exultation.

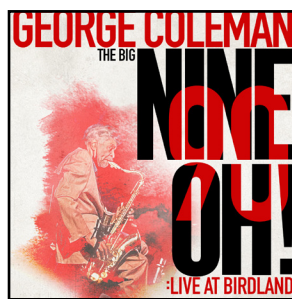
Hooker's journey to *Jubilation* can be traced some 46 years prior with the incredible discovery of *A Time Within: Live at the New York Jazz Museum*, an album recorded live but previously unreleased. Hooker, with David Ware (tenor) and Alan Braufman (alto), comprise a downtown fire-music group for the ages, and this live document is a golden loft-jazz scene era discovery (although it took place at a then-midtown venue). Dubbed the William Hooker Reality

Trio, this raw and primal recording of three on-the-rise powerhouses—each with their own singularly explosive and exploratory voices—is as *real* as it gets. Spread over eight movements, Ware and Braufman summon the spirits with their soulful, bluesy and earth-scorching conversational din while Hooker directs the spiritual traffic as the cymbal-obliterating ringleader and its wailing guiding light.

It's a revelation to listen to *A Time Within: Live at the New York Jazz Museum* then the eponymous debut of The Ancients back-to-back. Sure, nearly 50 years separates the two sets, but the collaborative trio of Hooker, William Parker (bass) and the young Isaiah Collier (tenor) share in a similarly-minded belief that free music is a healing force of the universe. And *The Ancients* does just that over four long-form improvised sets recorded live in 2023 (at 2220 Arts & Archives in Los Angeles and at The Chapel in San Francisco). Collier shows he's a more-than-worthy torchbearer of the late giants Albert Ayler, Charles Gayle and Ware, blaring out a bluesy maelstrom that teems with helter-skelter lines and heartrending subtlety. Meanwhile the Parker/Hooker rhythm section is steadfast in building foundational grooves and rhythms that give space for Collier to gloriously unload.

These three essential albums are proof positive of Hooker's unparalleled "Drum Power."

For more info visit orgmusic.com, valleyofsearch.com and eremite.com. Hooker is at Clemente Soto Velez Cultural Center Mar. 1 (part of OutMusic Festival), Artists Space Books Mar. 4 and Ibeam Brooklyn Mar. 18. See Calendar.



The Big Nine Oh! Live at Birdland

George Coleman (Key of B)

by Ken Dryden

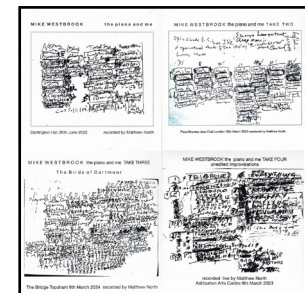
Although tenor saxophonist George Coleman turns 90 this month (Mar. 8), his big sound certainly seems more youthful than his years, and seemingly effortless in this live set at Birdland (recorded just this past January).

The longtime NYC-based Memphis native recruited a new band and premiered it on this date, with Steve Myerson (piano), Leo Larratt (guitar), John Webber (bass) and Kevin Congleton (drums), giving all of them plenty of room to blow in each of the extended numbers. It is clear that Coleman is enjoying interacting with his much younger colleagues, frequently returning to play during the latter half of their solos. "Blues Inside Out" is an intense workout as the leader and the members of his band take turns in the spotlight, each building upon the theme. Coleman introduces the decades-old standard "Never Let Me Go" with an abstract solo that reaches altissimo range before settling into a relaxed, soulful groove as the full band makes its entrance.

As with many older saxophone virtuosos who have preceded him, Coleman masters the use of space in his solo, allowing the music to breathe, something many younger players take years (if ever) to learn. His soulful touch in Freddie Hubbard's infectious jazz waltz "Up Jumped Spring" has the effect of a gritty vocalist, while the deliberate rendition of the blues "Parker's Mood" brings out the saxophonist's Memphis roots (even briefly simulating a harmonica with a fluttering vamp). Larratt's superb feature reveals a potential virtuoso in the making; his playing incorporates the obvious influence of many guitar

greats. The intensity of Myerson's piano playing invites comparison to Coleman's good friend and long-time pianist of choice, the late Harold Mabern. Signing off with a furious take of the old warhorse "Cherokee", the rhythm team of Webber and Congleton provide the glue that holds everything together with their strong support (both also contribute potent solos), while the saxophonist seems like he barely breaks a sweat as he weaves around his rhythm section's frenetic support. It's clear the band is enjoying every minute.

For more info visit georgecoleman.com. Coleman's 90th birthday album release concert is at Dizzy's Club Mar. 13-14. See Calendar.



the piano and me

Mike Westbrook (s/r)

by Pierre Giroux

In an era when the term "jazz piano virtuoso" often conjures up images of dazzling technical displays, Mike Westbrook (who turns 89 this month) takes an entirely different path with *the piano and me*. The initial 2023 digital release was recorded live at Dartington Hall, a medieval great hall in Devon, England on June 26, 2022. That album, the first in a set of four, has been followed by three more, available as downloads and each recorded at various locations in the UK in 2023-24. (Under the imprimatur of Westbrook Records Special Edition, the recordings can be downloaded as a set or individually.) The complete collection is not about the flamboyant showmanship of the jazz tradition but rather something equally magical: the invention of new sonic rituals. Westbrook's performances here explore timbre, space and time—a journey where the listener navigates an aural world with patience and curiosity.

Across 32 tracks and 82 song titles, Westbrook draws inspiration from his original compositions and those influenced by jazz legends such as Duke Ellington, Charles Mingus and Thelonious Monk, alongside pieces from the Great American Songbook and popular songs by Lennon and McCartney. By resisting categorization and drawing from these varied influences, he distills the entirety of his work into its fundamental essence: the piano and the present moment. Yet, within this simplicity lies a world of depth and complexity. Westbrook navigates these soundscapes through improvisation, crafting something fleeting yet profound.

Some composers and songs are foundational, as one would expect in any musical anthology. One presumes that each composition's melody and harmonic underpinnings provide the texture, musical lines and dynamics on which Westbrook constructs his improvisations from the inside out (Monk's "Jackie-ing" and "Round Midnight" fall into this category). The angularity of his compositional style, the layering of notes and recurring motifs, provide him with the freedom to abandon conventional expectations of the composition's interpretation. By contrast is the tune "Sweet Kentucky Ham" by the ironic composer, singer and pianist Dave Frishberg. In this rendition, Westbrook captures the down-home blues underpinnings as the number unfolds with its quirky tempo. Hoagy Carmichael wrote the music for the well-liked ballad "Skylark", which has been consistently included in Westbrook's repertoire. His interpretation here is driven as much by what is



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