

STRATA-EAST

THE LEGACY CONTINUES

BY MARC MEDWIN

“That hyphen is as important as the whole name,” trumpeter-composer and label co-founder Charles Tolliver says, referring to the minuscule but significant symbol bifurcating the name Strata-East. The label is currently on a reissue campaign, overseen by him and his son Ched, in partnership with Mack Avenue Records, which begins this month. “Ted Plair and I,” Tolliver remembers of the man responsible for much of the label’s visual art and for its logo, “worked on that hyphen to get it just right.” Named both for the Detroit collective that inspired it and the New York City culture so crucial to its conception, Strata-East continues to embody the forces of tradition, community and independence that have guided its aesthetic path toward the legacy via a new series of master-tape-to-disc vinyl reissues. Now, long-time audiophiles and new listeners alike will have the opportunity to experience each package as a whole, beautifully reproduced and in the best possible sound. New liner notes recontextualize and celebrate each album as the micro-historical miracle it has proven to be.

Conversation with the Tollivers clarifies abundantly that Strata-East has been a going concern since its 1971 conception. “The label was started to last,” muses Charles. “As long as I was going to be alive, it was going to go on forever.” Ched agrees: “The sustainability of the label was really given wings by our fans; it’s taken on a life of its own because of the

connoisseurs, those who really love the music.” He is extremely excited to be curating the vinyl series, which is pressed at Record Technologies Inc. and mastered by Kevin Gray of Coherent Audio. “It’s indicative of what was started when my father and Stanley (Cowell) began this whole journey. They embodied true artistic freedom and a DIY independence, conveyed through the medium of the time, which was vinyl. So, for us there’s a sense of cultural grounding, going back to the label’s roots.” For those preferring digital, the Tollivers are quick to point out that high-resolution audio will be available for most catalog reissues, as it is now for *The Legacy Begins*, a superb new anthology (tracks chosen by Ched), spanning the label’s first decade, its most active period to date.

Strata-East’s music needs little introduction, having become as iconic as the genres birthing it, but its historical context is paramount. The musical and artistic freedom offered to Strata-East’s musicians at that time was unparalleled, and as Charles remembers, “We began with that idea as a mantra. If you deviate from that mantra, you fail.” The cultural roots referenced by Ched run deep and wide, and the music on the first four catalog reissues mirrors prevalent shades of Black consciousness in sociopolitical intersection. We hear the funky electric guitar-driven middle section to the title track of Charlie Rouse’s *Two Is One* (1974) in joyous tandem with the piece’s metric trans-genre complexities, an approach Syd Schwartz’ notes trace back to what he calls Monk’s holistic view of jazz. Annotating Pharoah Sanders’ *Izipho Zam (My Gifts)* (1969), which drops as a “Record Store Day” exclusive (Apr. 12), Harmony Holiday observes of the album’s timbral iconoclasm that those “responding to the upheaval of their era in

earnest, needed music that matched their energy without genuflecting to any one message—sounds and cries that would endure as such, and transcend their present crisis without dismissing it or denying its urgency.” The titular piece’s forceful ebbing and flowing toward sonically inclusive liberation confounds time and space while still embracing post-Coltrane modality, Sonny Sharrock’s razor-sharp guitar ultimately at the music’s center. But Holiday’s sentiment could just as easily be applied to a sweeping solo statement like Cowell’s *Musa—Ancestral Streams* (1973). Jazz writer Nate Chinen aptly titles his new notes “Solo But Not Solitary,” and astutely highlights the juxtaposition of the album’s formalist classical tendencies in “Emil Danenberg” (which ends the album’s A side) with the irresistible groove and sway of “Maimoun” (the first track of Side B), traditions imbuing but never enslaving Cowell’s inclusive vision and staggering pianism.

One sonically-charged moment can bring the label’s entire oeuvre into focus, as exemplified by Music Inc.’s *Live at Slugs*, both volumes now combined. As is so often observed, the quartet was incendiary on that May 1970 evening, but languid brilliance suffuses their balladry. Annotator Marcus J. Moore foregrounds temporal suspensions in bassist Cecil McBee’s exquisite “Felicite”, and to hear Tolliver’s vibrato illuminate a pitch with Cowell’s gently wise accompaniment, all in refurbished sonics, is nothing short of breathtaking. Charles observes now that a carefully placed ballad is paramount to a well-formed set. “This was a quartet assembled for burning purposes,” he laughs, describing drummer Jimmy Hopps’ fire, “but the audience also

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 30)



Capra Black
Billy Harper



Mutima
Cecil McBee



Live at Slugs' Volume I & II
Music Inc.



Izipho Zam (My Gifts)
Pharoah Sanders



Musa—Ancestral Streams
Stanley Cowell

VOXNEWS

PORTRAITS & DEDICATIONS

BY TESSA SOUTER

Nonagenarian, **Sheila Jordan**, surely wins the prize for the longest singing career of all time. Not only is she invariably on tour (case in point, she will be in Germany the end of the month), she has just, at 96, released her 23rd album, *Portrait Now* (Dot Time), a riff on the title of her 1962 Blue Note debut, *Portrait of Sheila*. What has always made Jordan special is her incredible authenticity and how every note is chosen absolutely in the moment to express the emotion and intent of the lyric. Jordan is at Jazz Museum in Harlem (Apr. 10). If you missed Chilean jazz singer **Claudia Acuña**’s recent debut at Carnegie Hall’s Zankel Hall, grab your chance to catch her in the intimate setting of Bar Lunático (Apr. 10). Speaking of Carnegie, don’t miss multiple GRAMMY-winner, 24-year-old **Samara Joy**’s debut at Stern Auditorium/Perelman Hall (Apr. 30). She’s even more incredible live than recorded.

Of this Jazz Appreciation Month’s absolute bevy of tribute concert activity on tap, April offers jazz

vocal fans an embarrassment of riches...**Kurt Elling** celebrates Weather Report at SOPAC (Apr. 3), as part of a tour paying tribute to the group’s musical impact and cultural legacy. **Stacey Kent** and **Danilo Caymmi** (son of Dorival and brother of Dori) present *A Tribute to Tom Jobim* at The Town Hall (Apr. 12). **Deanna Kirk** is at Pangea (Apr. 5) in tribute to Jacques Brel and Michel Legrand. **Gillian Margot** performs *For Love of Carmen*, a dedication to Carmen McRae, the day after her 105th birthday, at Dizzy’s Club (Apr. 9). Also at Dizzy’s (Apr. 10), vocalist **Aubrey Johnson** will celebrate the release of *Lives of the Saints: Portraits in Song With Words by David Hadju* (Sunnyside). **Tammy McCann** presents an Ellington/Strayhorn program of *Duke and Stray Together Again* at Clement’s Place (Apr. 10) in Newark, NJ, as well as at Dizzy’s Club (Apr. 11-13), with the addition of special guest, vibraphonist Joe Locke. Singer-poet **Tai Allen** at Joe’s Pub (Apr. 1) presents *Inspired by Gil Scott-Heron*, examining Scott-Heron’s work, along with other poet-singers (e.g. Oscar Brown Jr., Bob Dylan and Mos Def). Composer and pianist Wayne Horvitz presents Collective Music Ensemble and Electric Circus, incorporating his friend and mentor Butch Morris’ conduction technique and featuring singer **Shara Lunon**, at Roulette (Apr. 16).

Other April highlights...Pianist David Haney’s *New York Stories* at Joe’s Pub (Apr. 20), featuring **Judi Silvano**. **N’Kenge** at The Django (Apr. 4) with the Jason Marshall Quartet. **Michelle Lordi** leading

a faculty septet at Princeton University Jazz Festival (Apr. 12). The all-women Latin jazz band, **Cocomama** at the new Bronx Music Hall (Apr. 17), part of the Nuevas Voces Series. Brazilian pianist-vocalist **Eliane Elias** at Birdland (Apr. 1-5), followed by **Emily Braden** (Apr. 13), **Nicole Henry** (Apr. 14) and Canadian **David Marino** (Apr. 28), who will be singing the French Songbook under Billy Stritch’s musical direction. **Hilary Kole** downstairs at the Birdland Theater (Apr. 8), followed by **Allan Harris** (Apr. 18-20), performing *The Poetry of Jazz*.

Singer-songwriter **Becca Stevens** (Apr. 10) is definitely going to be a “must-hear” at Public Records’ Sound Room, which is outfitted with a custom quadrophonic sound system that fuses vintage hi-fi speakers with commercial-grade subwoofers. At Dizzy’s Club (Apr. 24), vocalists **Hannah Gill** and **Charles Turner** explore the pastoral side of the Great American Songbook. **Roberta Gambarini** will be the special guest of Paquito D’Rivera at JALC’s Rose Theater (Apr. 18-19). Saxophonist Emilio Modeste and vocalist-composer **Natasha Agrama** present their new project *INSTANT ALTER* at Roulette (Apr. 2). Ever-adventurous vocalist-composer **Fay Victor** will be at The Stone at The New School (Apr. 30 - May 3). Chicagoan pianist-vocalist **Alexis Lombre**, whose sound is slightly reminiscent of Erykah Badu, has a string of NYC gigs in April: Blank Forms (Apr. 3), BRIC (Apr. 4), Close Up (Apr. 8), Drom (Apr. 11) and Roulette (Apr. 18).