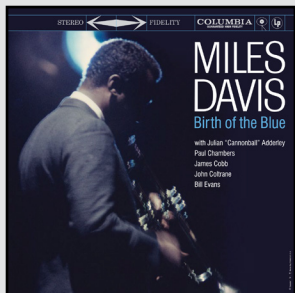


DROP THE NEEDLE



Birth of the Blue
Miles Davis
(Columbia-Analogue Productions)
by Jason Gross

Few albums loom larger in jazz than Miles Davis' ground-breaking 1959 album *Kind of Blue*, one of the greatest (and greatest-selling) jazz albums of all time. Davis (whose centennial celebration is next May) had been experimenting with modal music on 1958's *Milestones*, and the legendary sextet here carries over from those sessions: Miles (trumpet), John Coltrane (tenor), Julian "Cannonball" Adderley (alto), Bill Evans (piano), Paul Chambers (bass) and Jimmy Cobb (drums). Released late last year, *Birth of the Blue* pays homage to the *Kind of Blue* recording session, with three ballads and a Davis original remastered from the original tapes and released on 180-gram vinyl (the package also includes an exquisite, high-quality

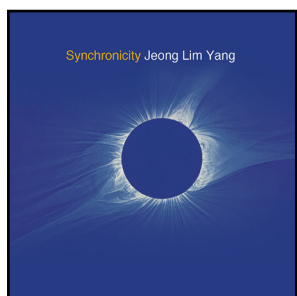
gatefold jacket plus liner notes by Ashley Kahn). Although the four tracks were scattered among Miles compilations for decades (e.g. 1958 *Miles*, released in 1974; '58 *Miles Featuring Stella By Starlight; Jazz Track*, as well as the first four tracks to the *Kind of Blue 50th Anniversary Collector's Edition*), this recreation of their original setting evokes an appreciation of them as their own entity.

"On Green Dolphin Street" starts akin to its origins as a melancholy big-band movie theme, then gets a bouncy lift from the leader, followed by joyous soaring extensive solos from Coltrane, followed by Adderley. Here and throughout the high fidelity of this release, it is the immediately and audibly noticeable sonic clarity and presence of Chambers' melodically dancing and deep bass lines that prove to be one of *Birth of the Blue's* greatest accomplishments. One can just listen to this classic music orbiting his quintessential contributions, which are brought to the fore in the caring treatment of these mixes. Davis' "Fran-Dance" (named for his soon-to-be wife, Frances Taylor) borrows heavily from the melody of the adorable love song "Put Your Little Foot Right Out" but slows down the pace considerably, letting the leader and Adderley elegantly, gracefully stretch out before Coltrane brings it to a more bluesy, downcast place, the trumpeter bringing the tune home in a sweet, hopeful manner. "Stella By Starlight" (with celluloid origins in 1944's *The Uninvited*) had already been covered by Charlie

Parker, Chet Baker and Bud Powell among others. Here, the tenor saxophonist's dazzling solo ascends beautifully but the song is taken to an earthbound reality by Evans' more tempered, reflective solo, the sum total showing the stylistic and musical range of this incredible ensemble. Cole Porter's "Love for Sale" clocks in at almost 12 minutes, played upbeat, with Davis' approach leading to the alto saxophonist's playful swing (Adderley had played his own version months earlier for his *Somethin' Else* Blue Note album that featured Miles), handing off to Coltrane's more measured but still dexterous aural gymnastics and leading to the pianist's uncharacteristically playful dynamics before the trumpeter's briefly graceful reprise (note: this session documents Evans' record debut with Miles).

This historic session may lack the command and mastery of *Kind of Blue*: it's generally more upbeat and less contemplative. But *Birth of the Blue* is still a wonderful archival release, one of last year's best even if all the music had been separately available on various other albums and collections. It is gathered here as if an intended album, which—as it turns out—is it.

For more info visit store.acousticsounds.com. Miles Davis tributes are at The Cutting Room May 18 (with Joe Magnarelli) and Smoke May 28-31 (with Eddie Henderson). See Calendar.



Synchronicity
Jeong Lim Yang (Sunnyside)
by Brad Cohan

South Korea-born, Brooklyn-based bassist, composer, improviser and songwriter Jeong Lim Yang has been a prolific force and key staple of NYC's avant garde for more than a decade as a leader, collaborator and in-demand side player. Her first two standout efforts as bandleader, 2017's *Déjà Vu* and 2022's *Zodiac Suite: Reassured* (both released by Fresh Sound) revealed a distinct versatility, particularly an affinity for radiating disparate sensibilities of sound. The former, her debut, made up of all originals, was deceptively simple, yet is oh-so-mellifluous contemporary jazz; on the latter, she gave an exuberant modernist reinterpretation of Mary Lou Williams' 1945 masterwork. What makes her an exceptional leader is the understated command, chilled-out rhythmic flow and feverish tension she maps out. Yang may serve up an expansive repertoire but she isn't a flashy, font-and-center-type player; instead, space is given for bandmates to shine while the bassist lays out a turbulent foundation of her own that can be described as dazzling subtlety.

Synchronicity is a fitting title for Yang, who credits Carl Jung "for a lifetime of inspiration" and who adheres to the philosophy of "coming together of inner and outer events in a way that cannot be explained by cause and effect and that is meaningful to the observer," which looms large in her approach. Her limber group—Mat Maneri (viola), Jacob Sacks (piano) and Randy Peterson (drums)—didn't have much of a musical history prior to this recording but the outcome lives up to the album

name. Beginning with the set's title track, the empathic interplay, along with the shadowy ECM-style aesthetics, instantly whisks the listener into a hypnotized state. The title track is dizzily knotted and woozy yet its fluidity stuns. Propelled by Sacks' serpentine lines and the ethereal beauty of Maneri's viola cries, its six minutes bends the mind from every possible angle. The following "Ordinary Waltz" isn't exactly a waltz or ordinary at all; the violist's melodic phrases, which approach a Frisellian rustic twang, pulls at the heartstrings. "Stimmung" showcases the leader's multidimensional command of the bass, providing a tour de force of abstract bendings, groovy walks and tuneful probings.

The thoroughly intoxicating *Synchronicity* builds on Yang's explorative nature and affirms her upward trajectory of a star still on the rise.

For more info visit sunnysiderecords.com. Yang is at New York Public Library for the Performing Arts May 12 (as leader) and Downtown Music Gallery May 13 (with Ras Moshe). See Calendar.



In the Shadow of a Mad King
Mark Dresser (Tzadik)
by Bill Meyer

Versatile, innovative and technically beyond reproach, Mark Dresser is one of the great bassists of jazz and improvised music and a devoted solo performer. Prior to this release, his most recent was the paradigm-shifting *Tines of Change* (Pyroclastic), made using an instrument fitted with tines that can be bowed and plucked to extend sounds beyond the already diffuse

limits of virtuosity. Dresser's driving force, taught to him by Bertrand Turetzky, is that "Talent is not enough. Being a good bass player is not enough—you have to be an artist." While there's plenty of spectacular playing on *In the Shadow of a Mad King*, it's also an expression of Dresser's perspective on being a citizen of the United States and a human being on earth. It is part of that lineage of solo albums, but also stands apart from it. It includes three solos that were recorded in between the two sessions that generated *Tines of Change* and one lengthy duet with poet Jerome Rothenberg.

"Invocation For Lelio" introduces that dialogic quality at the outset. Recorded in December 2020, it is a sonic well wish to Sicilian bassist Lelio Giannetto, who was resisting an ultimately fatal case of COVID on the same day that Dresser was in the studio. A low-pitched, plucked sequence of notes confronts high, bowed pitches whose bends impart a sense of fragility. These exchanges fuse into a complex blues that synthesize the celebration of shared potentialities and mourns common vulnerabilities. Then the dialogue shifts on the title track to an exchange between Rothenberg's painfully prescient depiction of the 45th/47th president's manifold malevolence and Dresser's dramatically amplifying responses. The contrast between the poet's parched voice and Dresser's radiant vibrations strikes a constantly adjusting balance between absence and abundance, exhaustion and renewal, horror and hope. "Tineacious" is a return to *Tines of Change*, but this time, plucked and stroked sounds establish one axis while the purity of wood and the complexity of metallic distortion erect another to create a multidimensional expression of endurance and flux. The final piece, "Nonce", refers to its nine-bar form, but what makes it captivating is the way that structure gives way to flights of unfettered invention across a broad sonic spectrum.

Collectively, the four pieces on this recording present Dresser as a man in dialogue with his instrument, humanity and the times in which he lives.

For more info visit tzadik.com. Dresser is at Roulette's 2025 Gala honoring Anthony Braxton May 8, and at Mayday Space May 10 (presented by Soup & Sound). See Calendar.