

ARCHEOPHONE

REVIVING EARLY JAZZ IN A DIGITAL AGE

BY JASON GROSS

Well-known labels such as Blue Note, Verve and Prestige already do a sterling job of excavating archived musical gems, but for some of the earliest jazz recordings ever made, there's one particular label that's excelled at bringing that music to life again. For over a quarter century, Archeophone Records has been a primary destination for reviving amazing musical history from the late 19th and early 20th centuries—music that's been rarely heard otherwise.

The label was created in the late '90s by Meagan Hennessey and Richard Martin, a married couple who were Illinois grad students at the time. Immersed in literature, history, culture and the *Billboard* pop charts, they shared a frustration over the beginnings of the recording era not being represented in the modern age. As Martin explains, "The recording industry has been around for about 135 years and the first four decades are routinely ignored." Armed with absolutely zero experience in running a label, the pair forged ahead regardless. Using labels including Yazoo, Jazz Oracle and Timeless as role models, Martin and Hennessey utilized cleaner audio from records and superior writing/research for inclusion in their releases, which are mostly done in CD format.

At the start of the label, technological means weren't within their grasp beyond declipping—removing pops and click sounds from the original source material, which were 78rpm records and wax cylinders. But around 2010, Martin began using iZotope's Rx software, which specializes in background noise removal and audio cleanup, as well as the ability to handle problems with older recordings' pitch variation (wow and flutter), all of which made the release process easier and more thorough in presenting superior audio quality. With 89 releases in their catalog to date, Archeophone boasts an impressive range of recordings, starting with 2001's *Real Ragtime (Disc Recordings From Its Heyday)*.

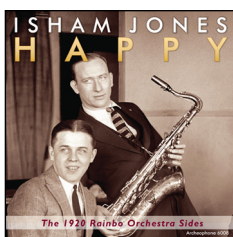
Along with some of the early and now mostly-forgotten stars of the era, such as Bert Williams and Billy Murray and singer-actress-comedienne Sophie Tucker, the label has also put out early sidemen performances, including Bix Beiderbecke with The Wolverines and Louis Armstrong as part of King Oliver's band, heard on the recent *Centennial* boxed set. Archeophone has also issued collections such as a three-CD set of early gospel music: 2016's *Waxing The Gospel (Mass Evangelism & The Phonograph 1890-1900)*, a compilation recreating old minstrel shows, an album of pre-radio comedy and sketches and even an album of "indecent" music (*Actionable Offenses*)—which forced artists to use aliases or forego being credited at all due to the profane nature of the material. Of particular pride to Hennessey and Martin are the Tucker, Oliver and gospel releases, particularly since choosing a

project to invest in depends on a title's marketability.

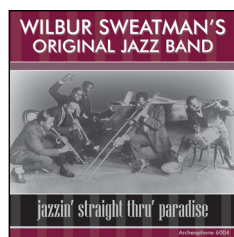
Note that Archeophone's music is not available online. Hennessey and Martin explored streaming but decided the platform's monetary return wasn't worth the effort. They're not happy with the digital world as there's no real money in it. Additionally, their digital-only multi-volume *Edison Blue Amberol Records Domestic Popular Series* elicited push-back from their customer base. "The old guys got rid of their turntables and have their CDs now," Martin explains. "They're happy with them and they don't do downloads." The label has done some vinyl releases, however, including vocal group The Unique Quartet and fiddler Louis Vassier, which Martin prizes as one of the rarest of the rare, looking to spotlight this kind of material and "give it its own place of prominence."

To understand the label's extensive process of bringing archived material to life, Martin details a July 2023 release, *The Moaninest Moan of Them All: The Jazz Saxophone of Loren McMurray (1920-1922)*, which chronicles a Kansas City player who died at 25 and who amazed his peers of the time with this bold, unique style. "This was brought to us by our regular collaborator, Colin Hancock (a trumpeter)," Martin says. "He was telling us about this guy who was unknown and not really appreciated for the contributions he made to the evolution of the jazz saxophone." Hancock had a track listing and thoughts

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Happy
Isham Jones



Jazzin' Straight Thru' Paradise
Wilbur Sweatman's Original Jazz Band



Centennial
King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band



The Moaninest Moan of Them All
Loren McMurray



Ain't Gonna Settle Down
Mary Stafford & Edith Wilson

VOXNEWS

EAST MEETS WEST

BY TESSA SOUTER

This month VOXNews celebrates Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month (the theme of which this year is "A Legacy of Leadership and Resilience") by acknowledging the contributions of Asian Americans to jazz.

Korean American pianist Eugenia Choe enlisted the gorgeous voice of Berlin-based Korean vocalist, **Song Yi Jeon**—a protégé of Dianne Reeves in the Rolex mentoring program—to join her and vibraphonist Yuhan Su in the studio for her new recording *So We Speak* (Sunnyside). Written through the lens of an imaginary girl named Margie, the album explores the themes of vulnerability, resilience and strength. Filipino vocalist **Mon David**, who left behind a successful career as a pop singer in the Philippines to pursue jazz in the U.S., has a new album *D+N+A: Continuum* (Dash Hoffman Records)—a beautiful co-production with pianist Josh Nelson, as well as L.A.-based guitarist Larry Koonse. It's a truly heartfelt Mark Murphy-esque mix of originals and standards sung in English, Portuguese and his own native Pampango. A fascinating meld of Korean, Japanese, Persian and Western musicians, PAN Project Ensemble's new album, *Borderless Flows* (Neuma) is an entirely improvised meditative kaleidoscope of sounds featuring Korean, Chinese and Japanese instruments and the goosebump-inducing vocals of **Jessika Kenney** and **Saeyeon Jeong**. South Korean jazz vocalist **Sunny Kim** (voice, electronics) is featured on

Canadian cellist Peggy Lee and guitarist Cole Schmidt's album *Forever Stories Of: Moving Parties* (Earshift Music), along with **Lisen Rylander Löve** (tenor, electronics, voice) and **Erika Angell** (voice, electronics). *ECHO* (Sunnyside) is Brooklyn-based **Emi Makabe's** tribute to her Japanese heritage and her father who passed away three years ago. The album includes special guests Bill Frisell (guitar), Jason Moran (piano) and Meshell Ndegeocello (MC) and gets a pre-release concert at Bar Bayeux (May 10).

IN OTHER NEWS...**Gabrielle Stravelli** will bring "Ella Fitzgerald & Oscar Peterson: Standards by Jazz Legends" to Merkin Hall with Willerm Delisfort (May 19). **Verena McBee** celebrates her third album, *Bird(S)wing* at Chelsea Table + Stage (May 2). Mexican jazz vocalist **Magos Herrera** performs at Carnegie Hall's Resnick Education Wing (May 4). Portuguese singer-composer **Sara Serpa** is at BAMcafé (May 4) as part of Long Play Festival. **Marianne Solivan** appears at The Django (May 23): listen for her latest release, *Break's Over* (Imani), featuring legendary bassist Buster Williams. **Teri Roiger** explores her bass-voice duo, with husband John Menegon, on Thursdays at Flute Bar (May 8, 15, 22). Don't miss Lakecia Benjamin featuring pyrotechnic guest vocalist **Jazzmeia Horn** at 92NY (May 10). **Eric Comstock** and **Barbara Fasano** celebrate their 20-year partnership in life and music and the release of their new album, *Painting the Town* (Human Child) at Birdland (May 5). Also at Birdland, catch jazz trombonist, GRAMMY-nominated composer-arranger-vocalist **Pete McGuinness** with his orchestra (May 25), followed the next night by the gorgeous baritone of **Richard Cortez** paying tribute to "Sinatra with Style: Hits and Rare Gems" (May 26). The Blue Note presents: the spectacular **Lisa Fischer**

(May 11) with the Orrin Evans Trio; **José James'** (May 19-22) album release concert of 1978: *Revenge of the Dragon* (Rainbow Blonde), and guitarist Fabrizio Sotti (May 26) who celebrates his 50th birthday with special guests, including legendary jazz vocalist **Cassandra Wilson**. Vocalist **Madeleine Peyroux** has two nights at City Winery (May 23-24) and is part of the James Moody 100th birthday celebration at Sony Hall (May 27). **Champion Fulton's** new album, *At Home* (Turtle Bay), is a first-time duo collaboration with Swedish saxophonist-clarinetist **Klas Lindquist**, and features a collection of standards; Fulton is at The Django (May 22), Mezzrow (May 23-24) and Jersey City Jazz Fest (May 27). California-based **Judy Wexler** makes two rare NY appearances: at Pangea (May 14) and Nyack's Maureen's Jazz Cellar (May 16), performing songs from her latest release, *No Wonder* (Jewel City Jazz)—her first album focused entirely on the Great American Songbook. Seventeen-year-old **Paloma Chesky** previews her forthcoming debut album, *Memory* (Audiophile Society) at Drom (May 16). The mostly standards **Gillian Margot** and **Geoffrey Keezer** (MarKeez) is the vocalist's fourth release and her first vocal-piano duo album with pianist (and husband) Keezer. The album release concert is at Deer Head Inn (May 3).

Other new releases to keep your eyes and ears out for this month...**Susan Hinkson's** debut *Just in Time* (Windfall). **Kandace Springs'** *Lady in Satin* (SRP) reimagines Billie Holiday's seminal 1958 album, complete with a full orchestra—the 60-piece Portuguese ensemble Orquestra Clássica de Espinho. Multifaceted Chilean vocalist-guitarist **Camila Meza's** *Portal* (GroundUP) features guest spots from fellow vocalists **Gretchen Parlato** and **Becca Stevens**.

(BERGAMO CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12)

In the sold-out, magnificent Donizetti Theatre, the highlander of Italian jazz, charismatic trumpeter **Enrico Rava** presented his Fearless Five band with Matteo Paggi (trombone), Francesco Diodati (guitar), Francesco Ponticelli (bass) and Evita Polidoro (drums). Two brilliant female drummers on stage in a few hours was a very welcome sight. The adoring audience welcomed Rava's successful selection of originals performed by musicians several decades his junior, with Polidoro's crackling sound, the gutbucket trombone of Paggi, Ponticelli keeping the momentum and Diodati opening up space with electronic effects. The group following, the seasoned **The Cookers** – with Eddie Henderson and David Weiss (trumpets), Azar Lawrence and Donald Harrison (saxophones) and the monumental rhythm section of George Cables (piano), Cecil McBee (bass) and Billy Hart (drums) – presented a program of bandmember originals. The rhythm trio's solid foundation showed great poise, invention and stamina, bolstering the frontline's featured soloing throughout the group's set.

The Sunday morning closing day of the festival opened brilliantly. Bassist **Barry Guy**, a leading figure of European music, presented one of his more current duo collaborations, which features a recent entry on the European stage in Spanish pianist **Jordina Millà**. Last year, the two released their highly regarded and recommended album, *Live in Munich* (ECM). The hour-long live set of playing felt like five minutes, as time evaporated within their mesmerizing improvisations. They produced free-flowing, breath-taking invention, instruments reimagined into sound machines with unexpected though rewarding and thrilling results, soft and humorous, affectionate and sharp: all sounds can be music, but not all that's sold as "music" has sound. Yet another venue in the old town, the Sala Piatti, dedicated to a famous cello player and created in the building owned by the charitable institution of the Bergamo church (est. 1265) was the scene of the afternoon concert. Where Béla Bartók and Ferruccio Busoni played, the piano duet of **Tania Giannouli** (Greece) and **Nik Bärtsch** (Switzerland) proved yet another example of the range of international collaborations heard in the festival. The two explored all possible permutations of ostinatos, reinventing the piano or, rather, going back to its original percussive nature.

At the beautifully restored Teatro Sociale in the old town and in front of an enthusiastic audience, the **Stick Men** with drummers Tony Levin, Markus Reuter and Pat Mastelotto, celebrated the history of prog rock, starting with King Crimson. Politics weighed in during the last night at the Teatro Donizetti. Rage and noise are commonly part of guitarist-composer **Marc Ribot**'s aesthetic, and the general situation prompted him to be openly political closing the set, with his deconstructed version of the Italian resistance song "Bella Ciao". But during the whole set the twin guitars of Ribot and Ava Mendoza, with Sebastian Steinberg (bass) and Chad Taylor (drums) unleashed a barrage of sounds bordering on white noise, seething with rage at times, indeed hard to bear. At the opposite end of the sonic spectrum, the festival's closing act was a superb set by vocalist **Dianne Reeves**, Brazil-inflected for the occasion, thanks to Romero Lubambo (guitar) and a superstar band that included John Beasley (piano), Reuben Rogers (bass) and the crisp, measured lines of Terreon Gully (drums). From the opening, breathtaking "What's New", Reeves offered one gorgeous song after the other, mostly on the ballad side, until the final improvised peroration on "All Blues" that crowned the evening with another political statement, an appeal for peace and humanism.

A resounding artistic and popular success, with halls filled to capacity, this year's edition of the Bergamo Jazz Festival displayed its strong roots while

promoting a forward-looking approach. And speaking of looking forward, Bergamo Jazz Festival will also present a summer extension this year.

For more info visit teatrodonizetti.it/en/

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Demuru (voice) and **Cristiano Calcagnile** (drums, percussion) invoked a wooly mix of rhythmic textures and phantasmagoric vocals. Calcagnile used and then discarded an arsenal of sound devices, suddenly blasting a syncopated beat. Demuru's delivery ran the gamut from the childlike to the demonic; the duo's performance was akin to a controlled burn, fiery but still possessing dynamics and restraint. Beginning with a rapid-fire pizzicato exchange, the meeting between **Mary Oliver** (viola) and **Luca Tilli** (cello) was the ideal punctuation to the first night's performances. Arguably the veteran of the festival, Oliver (Nieuw Ensemble, Misha Mengelberg and the ICP Orchestra) displayed her amazing technical skill and savvy on-the-spot awareness and Tilli was more than adept at matching her during this, their first duet performance. Over a flurry of plucked cello double stops, Oliver tore through a line of microtonal playing, a flurry of ideas that somehow evoked both Stuff Smith and La Monte Young.

The second night found the stage encircled with an arrangement of various bells, devices played by the next pair of performers. **Giancarlo Nino Locatelli** (alto clarinet) intoned a languid call-and-response invocation with **Giselda Ranieri** (dance); a two-note motif from Locatelli seemed to prod, coax, even anger, the barefoot Ranieri, as she swirled, ducked, slid and rolled on the floor, then into the corners of the dimly-lit stage and back again. His single-note jabs sent her into ecstatic spasms, the performance resolving into its same meditative beginnings. The most playful, frantic performance was the hyper-conversation between **Liz Allbee** (trumpet) and **Sebi Tramontana** (trombone). Surrounded by various mutes and standing beside a table that included various mouthpieces, the pair barrelled through a Dadaist exchange of slurry arpeggios, chirps and vocalizations that somehow hinted at jazz signifiers and wordless, indigenous humming. Their playing escalated into sonic saturation, when Allbee, seemingly bored by the full range of the trumpet, growled and whistled solely through the horn's mouthpiece. Lit only by otherworldly lavender stage gels, **Violeta Garcia** (cello, electronics, voice) and **Gabriele Mitelli** (piccolo trumpet, electronics) presented a roiling, unrelenting drone of cello feedback and rapid-fire electronics. Garcia held her amplified cello in the air, then lowered it toward the amplifier in some arcane benediction of feedback swells; Mitelli bleated out a barrage of analog synth washes and distorted overtones in conjunction with glitch-beats that would arise and vanish just as quickly. Both in their 20s, the two represent the current wave of improvisational music, one informed by DAWs and laptops as much as any '60s free jazz precedents.

The final performance of the festival by **Camila Nebbia** (tenor) and **Andrea Grossi** (bass) was an object lesson in extended techniques. Out of the gate, Nebbia coaxed near-impossible upper partials from her horn, as Grossi counterpointed with cutting arco lines. Vacillating between a muted and unmuted saxophone bell, the saxophonist unfurled decidedly "outside" lines that somehow landed into arcane melody, while the bassist plucked a furious 7/4 ostinato underneath. For the second piece, the pair toyed with overtones and harmonics to great effect. "I think the proposal of duets was super interesting," remarked Nebbia, following their performance. "It was very fragile in moments, but I love that fragility. And I think it's very interesting,

because I was on both sides, as a performer and being in the crowd. Also, this room sounds wonderful, so I could take cues from the sounds and silence of the audience."

The near-capacity crowd in Casa delle Arti boasted improvised music diehards and, judging by some of the bemused and baffled reactions, curiosity seekers. Yet both nights were met with rousing applause. "We have managed to give a comprehensive vision of what is meant today by improvisation," says Borghi, who considered the 2025 WE INSIST! Festival an unqualified success. "We like to put even distant and contradictory musical worlds side by side, going beyond our tastes. We are satisfied with the result, and usually, not everyone likes everything..."

For more info visit weinsistrecords.com

(LABEL SPOTLIGHT CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11)

on how to secure the material, with other resources like images. "This was the last thing that we thought we'd ever do," Martin adds, "Some unknown guy – how are you going to sell that?" But Archeophone went ahead with the project and it's proved very popular. "People dig it," Martin says. "We put our necks on the line to say 'we think this is an important part of jazz'...It's some of our favorite stuff and it sounds fantastic – and his playing is unbelievable!"

Within Archeophone, Hennessey and Martin created the First Sounds project, which has a small but stunning archive documenting and presenting some of the oldest recordings ever found. This side project, with other long-time collaborators David Giovannoni and Patrick Feaster, has zero institutional support and is accomplished solely with their own resources, which Martin reckons is "one of our proudest achievements." The scrappy label also stays the course via a strong press presence, including recognition from *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, plus the two dozen GRAMMY nominations, including a 2007 win for the soundtrack to the book *Lost Sounds - Blacks And The Birth Of The Recording Industry 1891-1922* and an impressive pair of recent GRAMMY wins for the Oliver Centennial boxed set (Best Historical Album, Best Album Notes). Martin observes, "Sometimes being nominated is enough for us, and some of the titles that didn't even make it that far."

Another major reason that Archeophone continues to thrive and survive is just good business sense. The label is small. "We're the little train that could," Martin explains. "We steer clear of overextending ourselves and that makes all the difference in the world."

For more info visit archeophone.com

