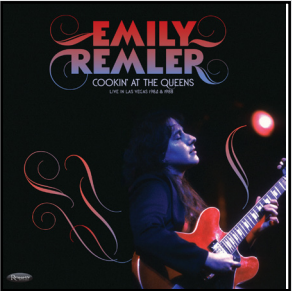


UNEARTHED GEM



*Cookin' at the Queens: Live in Las Vegas
1984 & 1988*

Emily Remler (Resonance)
by Terrell K. Holmes

“I may look like a nice Jewish girl from New Jersey, but inside I’m a 50-year-old, heavy-set Black man with a big thumb, like Wes Montgomery,” said Emily Remler, a then up-and-coming jazz guitarist, in a 1982 *People* magazine profile. Remler would soon establish herself as a singular voice on guitar, refining her skills to become an influential and highly-respected player. Her talent and reputation were still growing when she died in 1990 of heart failure at age 32, while on tour in Australia, her death likely exacerbated by opioid abuse. This month marks her 35-year deathaversary.

Cookin’ at the Queens, two recently discovered recordings of Remler radio concerts from 1984 and 1988, which captured the guitarist at her apex, was released late last year. The 1984 concert features Remler, Cocho Arbe (piano), Carson Smith (bass) and Tom Montgomery (drums). The 1988 show is a trio date with John Pisci (drums) joining Remler and Smith. Both sets are culled from a varied list of standards. Her uptempo take on Bobby Timmons’ “Moanin’” alternates crisp single notes with internal call-and-response. Remler mined every harmonic possibility from “Autumn Leaves” while the rhythm section supports her vigorously. Ballads “Polka Dots and Moonbeams” and “You Don’t Know What Love Is” are played with empathic tenderness, while mighty swing on Tadd Dameron’s “Hot House” features an incendiary solo with frenetic note clusters. Her technique on “Yesterdays” sounds like two guitarists exchanging ideas. Remler explores Brazilian classics with a lovely version of Tom Jobim’s “How Insensitive (Insensatez)” and includes two Luiz Bonfá tunes: “Samba de Orfeu”, with fantastic solos by Remler and Arbe, and “Manha de Carnaval” with the unaccompanied opening both sophisticated and powerful. Remler conquers a hard bop triad of songs written by or associated with Miles Davis: “All Blues”, “Someday My Prince Will Come” and a blistering combination of “So What” and John Coltrane’s “Impressions”. Pat Martino’s tune “Cisco”, from a guitarist she admittedly admired, is played with speed, precision and rhythmic drive. But it was Montgomery who was Remler’s North Star, and she honors him with two of his tunes: the easy going “West Coast Blues” and the strutting “D-Natural Blues”. She builds her solos carefully, with thoughtful harmonies and rhythms ending with pointillistic bursts of color.

Cookin’ at the Queens is an important release that will earn Emily Remler a new generation of fans and delight the ones she has had for decades.

For more info visit resonancerecords.org



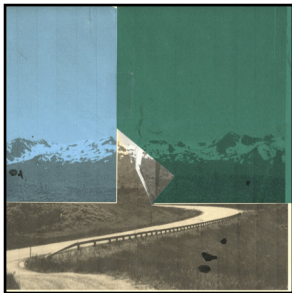
The Inner Senses
Carol Liebowitz/Nick Lyons (SteepleChase Lookout)
by Elijah Shiffer

Of all the legendary jazz musicians who came to prominence in the post-Swing Era 1940s, few have informed such consistently fascinating music as pianist, composer and educator Lennie Tristano. The sound of the Tristano school is immediately recognizable, whether plainly stated or used as a more oblique inspiration. With its unyielding focus on horizontal, linear momentum, this style in its purest form can sometimes be misconstrued as dry or inflexible. In the right hands, however, it can bring an exquisite level of detail to improvisation. *The Inner Senses*, the second duo album by pianist Carol Liebowitz and alto saxophonist Nick Lyons, is a spectacular example.

Tristano’s influence is a constant presence here without being strictly adhered to. It’s evident right from the opening “Hidden Source”, in which Leibowitz hits a polyrhythmic groove reminiscent of his 1955 overdubbing experiment “Turkish Mambo”. Both players studied with one of Tristano’s most prominent disciples, the late pianist Connie Crothers; in fact, a version of Crothers’ “Ontology” is the only written material among the album’s ten tracks. It’s a wide-ranging puzzle of a song, built on the harmonic progression of Cole Porter’s “What Is This Thing Called Love?”. A few of the other tracks, all entirely improvised and based on standard changes through these sources, are often creatively camouflaged; for example, detecting the Jule Styne classic “It’s You or No One” under the surface of “It’s True” takes a bit of an aural stretch. Lyons and Liebowitz both demonstrate a high degree of instrumental facility in all textures, from furiously scrambling runs to diaphanous impressionism.

The saxophonist and pianist are never soloist and accompanist; what makes this album so riveting is the way they improvise around and on top of each other. On “Aurora” they come together in a spontaneous pulse until Lyons veers off at a faster tempo, barely metrically related to Liebowitz’. Each is committed to their respective pace, resulting in a dazzling rhythmic illusion of shifting perspective depending on which player holds the listener’s focus.

For more info visit steeplechase.dk. The album release concert is at Ibeam Brooklyn May 30. See Calendar.



When the Distance is Blue
Macie Stewart (International Anthem)
by Bill Meyer

Multi-instrumentalist Macie Stewart’s second solo album, *When the Distance is Blue* doesn’t sound like anything else she’s recorded before, but if you’ve been following her for a while, you’ve come to expect the unexpected. Readers of this publication are most likely

to know Stewart through her involvement as a violinist and keyboardist in Chicago’s improvised music scene. She’s sustained multi-faceted partnerships with guitarist Steve Marquette, cellist Lia Kohl, violist Whitney Johnson, and was a member of Ken Vandermark’s Marker. But that’s only part of her musical involvement. She’s also played song-oriented material with Kids Are Us and Finom, and arranged and played strings with artists as disparate as James Elkington and SZA. Her earliest memories of performing involve singing with her mom, a professional musician. She was also a theater kid throughout school as well as a student of piano from ages 3 to 19 with the intention of majoring on it in college. But, instead, Stewart got seriously burned out, only returning to piano after being exposed to prepared piano players while on tour with Marker.

Her reconciliation with the piano is just one piece of the record’s puzzle. Another is a dissolution of the proscriptions that can divide free improvisers and other musicians. Most of this album’s eight tracks contain improvisations on variously prepared instruments recorded at a couple of Chicago studios. Stewart has combined them with field recordings of environments that she made on tour, wordless singing and mostly improvised strings played by a quartet that includes Kohl, Johnson and bassist Zach Moore. But while much of the improvising has a searching quality, it’s not about looking for form, or negotiating productive frictions between players. Her piano playing tends towards the patiently melodic, which exposes the distortions and decays created by coins, felt and amplifying hardware; the singing judiciously elaborates upon the tunes. The strings pop microtones out of the soundscape, and the recordings impart a changing sense of place. It all fits together quite snugly, a fact that becomes more surprising when one learns that some of the assembly began as random stacking.

Sometimes solo albums are self-portraits; this one is more like a moving picture that shows a momentary convergence of Stewart’s diverse lines of inquiry.

For more info visit intlanthem.com. The album release concert is at Roulette May 11. See Calendar.



Messages
Jazzmeia Horn (Empress Legacy)
by Jim Motavalli

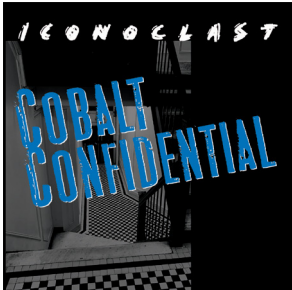
It’s not always a happy occasion when jazz singers decide to jettison the canon in favor of their own songwriting, but it’s heartening to report that Jazzmeia Horn decidedly pulls it off on her fourth album, *Messages* (self-released on her Empress Legacy imprint), which has ten originals plus “You’re Getting to Be a Habit with Me” (Harry Warren, Al Dubin), the album’s sole cover.

It also helps that the vocalist has a gorgeous full voice and knows how to use her wide range, with immaculate phrasing and a bright tone. “Happy Livin’” is a case in point, a bold piano-led statement of mental stability through fierce individuality, with a neatly done introduction and some thrilling high notes: “I’m smart, and very clever/ And I can think for myself in any weather.” The nine-minute “Submit to the Unknown” features Horn scatting in the introduction like Urszula Dudziak and overdubbing over a recitation of Ecclesiasticus 2:4 (not to be confused with Ecclesiastes) that bounces between the left and right speakers. When the song proper kicks in, the tempo climbs, and, with a horn arrangement by

Kris Johnson, we’re taken to a higher plane and a piece of spiritual jazz that could have been performed in the ‘60s when that sub-genre was introduced.

“Destiny” also opens with a recited verse, backed by a lithe flute: “Destiny is knocking at your door/ Will you open?” That’s a good question, and Horn frames it in a way that keeps the listener rapt through its almost seven-and-a-half minute length. “Tip” is upbeat, a call to “participate,” and might well become a jazz standard. On “Voicemail Blues” she literally and winsomely sings one of her outgoing messages and then plays back communication from legendary bassist Reggie Workman and others. The credits on the album are incomplete, since the flute and saxophone player(s) are not listed, but two pianists—Keith Brown and Victor Gould—acquit themselves excellently, and Philadelphia drummer Anwar Marshall deserves special mention. Under-recorded Chicago trumpeter Marquis Hill is heard on “Mysteries of Us”, a don’t-leave song with a long “you’re the only one who understands me” recitation that name-checks Clifford Brown and Sarah Vaughan as “the soundtrack to our romance.” The one standard is taken at a snail’s pace and some very low and very high notes, clearly nodding to Betty Carter. Bassist Eric Wheeler offers a resonant, woody solo. It’s garnish on a great album.

For more info visit artistryofjazzhorn.com. Horn is at 92NY May 10 (with Lakecia Benjamin). See Calendar.



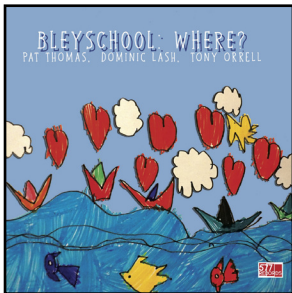
Cobalt Confidential
Iconoclast (Fang)
by John Pietaro

In reviewing Iconoclast’s *Driven to Defiance* (2017), this writer held that the duo was “born of Downtown when that geographic designation meant much more than being simply below 14th Street.” That statement was based on the 1987 birth of Iconoclast, when saxophonist-violinist Julie Joslyn and drummer-keyboardist Leo Ciesa founded it in the East Village, aka Alphabet City, the then underground arts capital and scene of notoriously abandoned buildings, burned-out cars and glass-strewn lots—all firm inspiration for creatives at that time. Yet, even as developers began to transform the Lower East Side into an unaffordable Oz of condos, bistros and bike lanes, some of the city’s radical artists, such as Iconoclast, held ground amid gentrification. Over the decades, Iconoclast has maintained a formidable international touring schedule while releasing a dozen albums that capture the throttling core of free jazz as it walked the lonesome ‘80s Alphabet City. That heritage and current strain are clear right from *Cobalt Confidential’s* opener “Noise of Assumption”. It pairs Ciesa’s effects-rich keyboard and inexhaustible drumming with Joslyn’s bristling alto saxophone, fed through a seeming bank of electronics. This music has a formidable raging beauty all its own and within: the listener can’t help but hear the ghosts of avant garde past.

Both members demonstrate expansive instrumental skill across the 13 selections, thriving as much in the music as the pure sound experience. Joslyn’s gorgeously sad tone on alto, her terse phrasing and imaginatively dark electronic colors, are illustrated well in “Where the Blooming Shadows Roam”. And Ciesa’s four-way independence on the drumkit is unique to his own instrumental magic, with drums always sidled by a keyboard or two. But on “A Phrase of Mine”, the drummer

deconstructs driving march rhythms with only left hand and bass drum while keeping solid time on a ride cymbal under Joslyn’s somber alto melody reminiscent of a Don Cherry folk-inspired piece. “The Spy Upstairs” features Joslyn’s hauntingly amplified violin. Wonderfully cantankerous in a pool of reverb, her lead lines and solo segments are filled with dissonant upbows and accented downbows, unexpected slides and dream-like wandering through a special kind of intrigue and espionage.

For more info visit fangrecords.com. The album release concert is at Michiko Studios May 17. See Calendar.



BleySchool: Where?
Pat Thomas and BleySchool (577 Records)
by Kurt Gottschalk

Pat Thomas is all-consuming and all-conquering. In his youth he was a classical piano student and reggae fan, but seeing Oscar Peterson on television stoked an interest in jazz, and soon enough he was playing professionally before he was 20. His earliest recordings were with Eugene Chadbourne, Lol Coxhill and Tony Oxley, with electronics soon added to his set-up, eventually employing samples and doing his own programming. Thomas is also a remarkable and radical revisionist. His 2008 solo piano record *Plays the Music of Derek Bailey & Thelonious Monk* suggests the breadth of his interests, as does an album of Duke Ellington compositions and, with The Locals, a set of Anthony Braxton works. Little recognized in the States (under-recognized even at home in England), Thomas is gaining notice with the stunning quartet [Ahmed], who set bassist-oudist Ahmed Abdul-Malik’s music in hardcore trance and open-throttle grooves. The quartet recently made its U.S. debut (Mar. 25) to a packed house at Roulette (before heading south to play the Big Ears Festival in Knoxville, TN). Their typical extended, single-piece set—in this case, Abdul-Malik’s “El Haris (Anxious)” —was followed by a surprising but fitting encore of Monk’s “Epistrophy”, a title that refers to poetic repetition, which the band indulges in at length. Abdul-Malik played with Monk so it wasn’t entirely out of step, and maybe was a hint of more to come.

In the trio BleySchool (with Locals bassist Dominic Lash and drummer Tony Orrell), Thomas pays homage to another fine interpreter, Paul Bley. While that pianist does have some composer credits in the books, it’s his contributions to albums by the likes of Ornette Coleman, Annette Peacock, one-time spouse Carla Bley, and the trio with Jimmy Giuffre and Steve Swallow, for which he’s most noted. On *BleySchool: Where?* the group honors their tributee in style and substance, but not with his tunes. The first BleySchool (eponymous) album contained compositions by Ornette, Ellington, Carla Bley and an original tune. This new one repeats that Carla Bley composition (“Ida Lupino”) and adds another (“King Korn”), plus a stellar “Monk’s Mood”, a couple of standards and an additional original. It’s an exciting album from start to finish.

As does [Ahmed], BleySchool often pushes harder than did their namesake, but with respect and eminent musicality. And like Thomas, Bley was a proponent of synthesizers and electronics, something BleySchool hasn’t yet touched on. Maybe they’re saving that for when they get to BleyCollege.

For more info visit 577records.com

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER



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