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Veteran saxophonist Greg Abate (who turns 78 this month), while based in New England, has been visiting New Mexico on a yearly basis for quite some time. While there he always renews his ties with pianist John Rangel, with whom he has collaborated for 16 years. Despite their longtime friendship, however, *Positive Energy* turns out to be their first recording together.

While Abate is skilled on several reed instruments, including flute, he sticks to the alto (his strongest axe) throughout the new album. A superior bop-based player, here he is heard adapting to the modal playing of Rangel, and sounding at his most modern. The quartet, with Terry Burns (bass) and David Post (drums), each who have occasional brief solos, performs six Abate originals, four songs by the pianist plus one standard (“Easy Living”).

The new material, which falls into the modern post-bop mainstream, inspires consistently inventive statements by Abate and Rangel. The album opening title track has the pianist playing a rhythm a little reminiscent of “Seven Steps to Heaven”, while the melody and chord changes are quite original. While one could imagine Thelonious Monk composing Rangel’s dark “Monkism”, he makes no attempt to mimic Monk and instead plays in his own adventurous style. “Lookin’ Ahead” lives up to its title with the leader stretching himself and sounding quite passionate. Some of the other songs include the jazz waltz “Hazy Moon”, “Song for My Brother” (which has some soulful piano), Rangel’s somewhat mournful “Little Bird” and his “Growing All the Time” (a relative of “What Is This Thing Called Love”). The latter, along with “J.A.G.” (based on “When Lights Are Low”), is the most boppish of the originals. “Giving Flight to Imagination” and “Deep Seated Reality” are serious modal numbers that feature the pianist in top form, while the alto saxophonist makes a masterful statement on “Easy Living”.

Greg Abate and John Rangel audibly bring out the best in each other throughout *Positive Energy*.

For more info visit summitrecords.com. Abate is at *Smalls* May 10 and *Jazz Forum* May 11. See *Calendar* and 100 Miles Out.

China Afro Cuba
Gonzalo Rubalcaba/Dongfeng Liu (ZOHO)
by Ken Dryden

Duo piano albums have long been an opportunity for two pianists to both blend and contrast their approach to the instrument. The challenge, however, is not only to anticipate the direction of the other musician but to create unique, intriguing music. Veteran pianist Gonzalo Rubalcaba, a native of Cuba, has been a master

of a wide range of styles over his long career, though best known as a prominent Afro-Cuban and salsa player. Here he joins Dongfeng Liu, born and raised in China, to create a unique blend of traditional Chinese music and jazz. The album title gives the impression that this is strictly “Chinese Music Meets Afro-Cuban Jazz,” but the pianists cover far more stylistic ground beyond that dynamic.

The traditional Chinese song “Jasmine Flower” begins with a whisper in a traditional setting before blossoming into a playful mood, gradually working into a blazing Afro-Cuban romp that signals the pianists are of one mind. Another traditional song, “Kangding Love Song”, takes on a bluesy air with a touch of funk. “The Moon Represents My Heart” is a modern Chinese pop song, written by Taiwan-born Weng Ching-hsi (1936-2012) for the late vocalist Teresa Teng. It is treated as a tender ballad without flourishes. Their interpretation of the traditional Chinese piece “Lofty Mountains and Flowing Waters” initially conveys the imagery of its title with a sense of majesty and drama, though as the tempo builds, it is transformed into a virtuoso Latin arrangement.

The album highlight is the lyrical medley of He Zhanhao’s “The Butterfly Lovers” and the Harold Arlen, E.Y. Harburg standard “Over the Rainbow”, though the Afro-Cuban rhythm here is more subtle. Bassist Scott LaFaro’s “Gloria’s Steps” (originally recorded and published as “Gloria’s Step”) was a staple of the Bill Evans Trio when LaFaro was a member. The piano duo introduces it in a straight-ahead manner, but quickly detours onto a new path that navigates many twists and turns, barely acknowledging its roots. Xian Xinghai’s “Ode to the Yellow River”, a number written during Japan’s invasion of China, initially adds an infectious Afro-Cuban bass line, though the center of the piece incorporates snippets of bop and gospel accents too.

China Afro Cuba succeeds well due to the chemistry and combined vision of Gonzalo Rubalcaba and Dongfeng Liu.

For more info visit zohomusic.com. Liu is at *Queens Public Library* May 3. See *Calendar*.

Songs of Innocence
Patrick Zimmerli (Emergence Music Productions)
by John Pietaro

Crossing boundaries, *Songs of Innocence*, the 14th album of Patrick Zimmerli, is the first on the saxophonist-composer’s own self-released imprint, Emergence Music Productions, and seemingly his first inspired by iconic poet William Blake (1757-1827). Blake was a revolutionary and comrade of Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin and other dissident intellectuals of his day. He embraced simplicity and naivete within poetry while artfully examining harsh and dark elements, particularly in *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1794), a work inspired by children’s literature and nursery rhyme, yet imbedded with aspects of pain and loss. Even a Blake scholar possibly couldn’t identify which Zimmerli works directly speak of Blake’s 23-poem collection, nor does the leader ever cite specifics, so the listener must assume that the inspiration is overall.

There are a few references, however, that are connected to Blake, including “Dreamscape” with its soft melodic phrases and conflicting crashing chords,

under a searching saxophone call on Blake’s “A Dream”:

“Once a dream did weave a shade/O’er my Angel-guarded bed/That an Emmet lost its way/Where on grass methought I lay

Troubled wilder and forlorn/Dark benighted travel-worn/Over many a tangled spray/All heart-broke I heard her say.”

Additionally, the album opener “60 Morningside” appears to be connected to Blake’s “The Echoing Green”:

“The Sun does arise/And make happy the skies/The merry bells ring/To welcome the Spring

The sky-lark and thrush/The birds of the bush/Sing louder around/To the bells’ cheerful sound/While our sports shall be seen/On the Echoing Green.”

One can almost hear sparrows in the uptown trees against pianist Kevin Hays’ repetitive Latin-esque phrasing (recalling Chick Corea), carried gently by Satoshi Takeishi’s soft, rollicking drumset patterns, and the leader’s celebratory Paul Winter-like soprano playing. The pure rhythmicity and major nines paint a vision of early mornings in the park, but the imagery is also relevant to Blake’s somewhat darker “Sunrise”.

For more info visit patrickzimmerli.com. The album release concerts are at *The Falcon* May 15, *Firehouse* 12 May 16 and *Blue Gallery* May 17. See *Calendar* and 100 Miles Out.

Every Now And Then
Cory Weeds Meets Champion Fulton (Cellar Music)
At Home
Champion Fulton & Klas Lindquist (Turtle Bay)
by Marilyn Lester

Pianist-vocalist Champion Fulton has, in a 20-year career, been a leader on nearly as many albums. Her piano style is mainstream jazz and her voice reliably sweet (but not without depth) and attuned to swing; both sides of her artistry are delightfully integrated, working as a well-oiled machine. That dual ability extends to and works particularly well with musical partnerships.

In *Every Now And Then*, the collaboration with Cory Weeds is easy and homey. The two have been playing together for over a decade and have recorded three times previously. Canadian Weeds is not only a saxophonist but owner of the Cellar Music label, and for this outing (Weeds heard exclusively playing alto) the two recorded live in a studio outside Calgary. The result is a satisfying eight-track release, wherein the first cut, “Boss Tutch”, establishes the ease and seeming spontaneity the two create musically. The tune is also a showcase for their respective chops, a dynamic repeated on the Fulton original, the melodic “That’s Not Your Donut”. She is also well-known for her extensive repertoire of standards, which includes hidden gems. In the lesser-known “Carry Me Back to Old Manhattan”, her vocals are charmingly witty in this novelty story song about a city girl having had quite enough of rustic, country life. The album also has its share of blues-based numbers. “Linger in My Arms a Little Longer” is a tune evoking a 1930s roadhouse, while “Every Now and Then” conjures images of couples slow dancing in that establishment. Two uptempo standards also engage: a playful “Too Marvelous for Words” and a swinging “It’s Alright With Me” with phrasing by Fulton that borders on vocalese.

With 40-something recordings to his credit, Swedish saxophonist-clarinetist and composer Klas

Lindquist meshes so perfectly with Fulton’s artistry that the title *At Home* is a telling descriptive—and in fact, the recording was captured in Turtle Bay label founder, Scott Asen’s living room. In ten tracks of standards, the two weave a tapestry of music, playing in and out and over and under each other as well as in spotlight moments, all quite mesmerizing. Lindquist is front and center for a bluesy instrumental, “Don’t Do That to Me” and, with his clarinet playing featured, on “Serenade in Blue”. Yet “Besame Mucho”, a haunting number, offers a missed opportunity: it’s the perfect vehicle for a vocal interpretation, missing from this instrumental rendition, especially since Fulton revealed what she’s capable of in the slow, languorous and extended (seven minutes, 44 seconds) rendition of “The Very Thought of You”. Another stylistic miss is in the torch song, “Someday You’ll Be Sorry”, which is rendered far too cheerfully. A treat, however, is “Tea for Two”, that 1924 ditty with place-holder lyrics never changed, sung here with the hardly ever-heard verse.

Both duo albums are catnip for Fulton fans. Each is an easy listen, perfect for kicking back and simply enjoying.

For more info visit cellarlive.com and turtleybayrecords.com. Fulton is at *The Django* May 22, *Mezzrow* May 23-24 and *Jersey City Jazz Fest* May 27. See *Calendar* and 100 Miles Out.

The Life and Behavior
Fred Frith/Shelley Burgon (Relative Pitch)
by Brad Cohan

The wildly innovative and perennially influential arc of guitarist and composer Fred Frith is the stuff of legend. From the prog rock and improvisatory explorations of Henry Cow to his 1974 six-string touchstone *Guitar Solos*, he moved on to a still-burgeoning discography and continues to birth new sonic languages with each and every recording, proving himself a true original. Frith’s milieu embraces a treasure trove of collaborations, particularly of the duo variety—basically a who’s-who of the avant garde: from John Zorn, Anthony Braxton and John Butcher to Barry Guy, Henry Kaiser and Ikue Mori, to name just a very few.

The Life and Behavior adds Shelley Burgon to that list. A dauntless composer, harpist and sound artist, Burgon brings her own exceptional CV to the table, having played and recorded with Björk, Zeena Parkins and Elliott Sharp, among many other luminaries. This meeting of deeply adventurous minds is an organic kinship, due in large part to Burgon having studied with Frith at Mills College. Recorded in Oakland in 2002 and 2005, this album bears the fruit of their unique partnership, one which articulates a colorful dialogue, rich with warm fingerpicking, jarring dissonance, bucolic strumming and percussive clatter. Most of all, the twelve improvisations that make up the set show the two in seemingly loose and relaxed mode as they sketch captivating minimalist, spellbinding soundscapes.

Album opener “Memory Lane” immediately throws the listener for a loop in quite a good way. The tune is strummy and melodic, glowing like the California sun where this music was recorded. Accessible yet unexpected, it invokes the work of rock band Sonic Youth if they were to jam on acoustic guitar and harp. Despite seven of the dozen pieces recorded in 2002 and the remaining three years later, the flow is seamless—

and the spectrum of sound Frith and Burgon devise can have you guessing who’s playing what. “Skipped a Beat” first screeches and bangs before gorgeous harp stylings swoop in; “Every Word I Say” is akin to a haunted house of eerie, skronky transmissions; “Your Sweet Time” shows the pair in a dissonant twang duel.

The scope of tones and textures that *The Life and Behavior* exudes achieves levels of otherworldliness, all while creating a mood of playful eccentricity. It may be an archival recording, but it’s not to be missed.

For more info visit relativepitchrecords.com. Frith plays solo at *Irondale Center* May 3 (part of *Long Play Festival*), and is at *The Stone at The New School* May 12-14. See *Calendar*.

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