

GLOBE UNITY



Processes
Evan Palmer, Francisco Mela, Hidemi Akaiwa
(Boomslang)
Spaces
Kim Perlak/Francisco Mela (Sacred Black)
Motions, Vol. 2
Francisco Mela/Shinya Lin (577 Records)
by Daniel A. Brown

In addition to this month being LGBTQ+ Pride Month, June is also Caribbean American Heritage Month. And if there's a worthy ambassador for that vibrant and culturally rich region of this planet, it is Cuban drummer-percussionist Francisco Mela. We thus explore three releases featuring the 57-year-old Mela, a player who combines both soulful chops and skills in musical pedagogy, and one who is emblematic of higher-reaching jazz music that crosses genres and concepts with passion and ease.

Led by queer bassist Evan Palmer, who's joined by Mela and pianist Hidemi Akaiwa, the ten-piece

collection of *Processes* is a full-tilt improv session that blends cerebrality and instinct. Initiated by an etude-like setting from Palmer featuring strummed double-stops and chromatic figures, "Ain Gazal" expands outward with the nuanced addition of cymbal inflections from Mela and Akaiwa's pensive atonality, while "Valley" and "Warped" evoke prime FMP free-form playing. Clocking in at 17 minutes, "Years of Struggle" is a worthy album centerpiece, particularly in highlighting the bassist and drummer's conversational back-and-forth, with Akaiwa offering some impressive piano jabs and rolls, holding the roiling piece and interplay between Palmer and Mela together.

Spaces is an intimate and wide-ranging session between Mela and composer-guitarist Kim Perlak, who is also Chair of Berklee College of Music's Guitar Department. The album is comprised of four three-movement suites; the majority, which were originally composed as classical guitar pieces by Perlak, are all works of musical evocations of spaces in the natural world. The textural shimmers of "Lake" drift along via Mela's cymbal-and-gong washes and percussive impressionist strikes, joined with the guitarist's contemplative harmonics and lush chords that seem to hang in midair. "Stream" and "Riverwalk" maintain this subdued and placid mood, while the

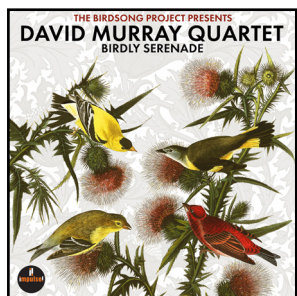
closing improvisational "Squam Suite" accelerates the session with rolling legato lines and unique intervallic choices from Perlak, enhanced by Mela's ongoing and unpredictable rhythmic responses.

The second collection of a 2021 session between Mela Taiwan-born Shinya Lin (piano, prepared piano), *Motions, Vol. 2*, consists of two pieces of free-form playing. The intense and daunting 28 minutes that house "Part III" takes no prisoners. Following a snare-rolling lead-in from the drummer, the performance is a warp-speed dialogue of Lin's restless, fiery chordal clusters and jarring, dissonant piano stabs, with Mela responding through a blast of rolling waves that include drum beats, cymbal crashes and rhythmic change-ups; the pair seemingly challenges one another in sustaining and evolving this unbridled flow of sound. Mela's wordless and indigenous-tinged vocals become the *de facto* anchor of "Part IV", as Lin creates gurgling, balafon-like tones through prepared piano, while her partner ramps up his drumming ideas in a berserk flurry. *Motions, Vol. 2* is a satisfying excursion and highly recommended for fans of frantic free jazz.

For more info visit boomslang-records.com/en, sacredblackrecords.org and 577records.com. Mela is at Vision Festival at Roulette Jun. 6 (with The Fringe). See Calendar.

human voice, while the leader's swinging turn in the spotlight would provoke any audience to stand and sway along.

For more info visit jazzdepot.com. Chestnut is at Birdland Jun. 23 (with Rosena Hill). See Calendar.



Birdly Serenade
David Murray Quartet (Impulse!)
by Elijah Shiffer

Musicians in every genre have found countless ways to be inspired by birdsong. On *Birdly Serenade*, an exquisite new release by master tenor saxophonist-bass clarinetist David Murray, the avian influence is not always obvious, but certainly present as a subtle wildness informing both the composed and improvised elements of this music.

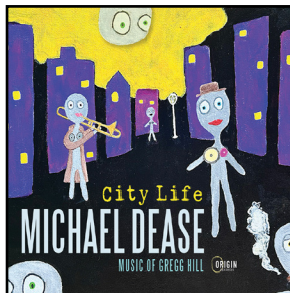
The eight tracks cover a lot of ground, from straight-ahead to free improv. Murray's reverence for swing and bebop is on display throughout in his weathered, vibrato-packed timbre on both instruments, but his mercurial lines often show that his avant garde roots are never far away. Marta Sánchez (piano), Luke Stewart (bass) and Russell Carter (drums) form a tight, exciting rhythm section for the leader to fly over, while two tracks add vocalist Ekep Nkwelle, who soars through lyrics (by Murray's wife, Francesca Cinelli) in which the bird imagery is a bit more direct.

The overall form of this album is very clear, with the most abstract tracks toward the middle between a more straightforward beginning and end. The first entirely improvised track, "Black Bird's Gonna Lite Up the Night", is a jolt of raw energy after the preceding songs' grooves; Murray's blowing is unhinged as a

bobolink and capricious as a catbird. Sánchez leads on "Capistrano Swallow", zooming and murmuring like a busy flock of cliff swallows at their nests, while Stewart's jagged arco gives an impression of these birds' complex calls. On the concluding "Oiseau de Paradis", Cinelli recites a sensual, intricate French poem which includes several technical terms for types of feathers; the detail of the words is reflected in that of the song's chord progression.

The sound quality of *Birdly Serenade* is excellent; it was recorded at the legendary Van Gelder Studio, a fitting choice of location, not only as the birthplace of the Impulse! label but also because the studio's founder, the late Rudy Van Gelder, was a bird enthusiast himself. One suspects he would certainly have appreciated this album.

For more info visit impulserecords.com. The album release concert is at Roulette Jun. 6 (part of Vision Festival). See Calendar.



City Life: Music of Gregg Hill
Michael Dease (Origin)
by George Kanzler

The double-album *City Life: Music of Gregg Hill* is the third recording of Hill compositions that trombonist Michael Dease has released; and although 7 of the 18 compositions are by others, Hill is also a co-producer of the set. For this project, Dease goes way beyond his and fellow Michigander Hill's usual reliance on mid-American musicians. Instead, Dease surrounds himself with bonafide A-list jazz musicians on these New York sessions, consisting of separate trio and quintet discs. The trio disc pairs Dease with Linda May Han

Oh (bass) and Jeff "Tain" Watts (drums), joined on the quintet disc by Nicole Glover (tenor) and Geoffrey Keezer (piano). Additionally, Dease's young (single digit) daughter, Brooklyn, provides wordless, chanted vocals on two versions of "Movie Theme" with the trio.

Although he never employs the arsenal of mutes and plungers common to many jazz trombonists, Dease commands a formidable array of tonal and timbral techniques on his open horn. On the album title track, a trio number, he conjures up two notes (a dyad) with harmonics, and on the same track he also plays a section of his solo on just the trombone mouthpiece. Elsewhere he stutters, slurs, cascades, blares and brays out notes as easily as he summons a lush, burnished Tommy Dorsey tone on ballads. Each disc contains a composition by his trombone idol, J.J. Johnson. The trio track, "Sweet Georgia Gillespie", is pure, uptempo bebop. The quintet track, "Enigma", finds him taking a backseat to Glover's saxophone lead on the ballad, then soloing assertively before joining in the soothing ballad finale. Hill's compositions, brought to vibrant life by his and Dease's inventive arrangements, often subvert convention. Tunes often change up tempos, sometimes even time signatures, or, in the case of the trio's "Catalyst", are deceptive about what they actually are. "Double Bill", a trio track, mixes up meters from bass and drums under a Dease solo incorporating quotes from "Softly, as in a Morning Sunrise"; and the quintet album closer, "Lafayette Square", a nod to New Orleans, is cast in 2/4 time, with the leader mimicking a Big Easy second line trumpet.

The most appealing and captivating aspect of *City Life* is its embrace of that hoary old jazz description: the sound of surprise. These tracks abound in that element of surprise, from the constantly varied ensemble approaches to the shifting combinations such as the tenor saxophone-drums dual solo on "The Classic II" or Keezer's dueling left and right hand lines in numerous solos—and most of all, Dease's constantly changing, shape-shifting approaches to improvising, always avoiding the obvious.

For more info visit originarts.com. The album release concert is at Smalls Jun. 20-21. See Calendar.