



DENNY ZEITLIN
WITH A SONG IN MY HEART
EXPLORING THE MUSIC OF RICHARD RODGERS
SSC 1781 / AVAILABLE 6/6/2025

Denny Zeitlin has an incredible ability to infuse new light into well-known repertory works. The pianist's reinvestigation of the music of Richard Rodgers is particularly illuminating, as the great composer's works seem to beg for thoughtful readings. With a Song In My Heart showcases the brilliance of both men, the creator and the rejuvenator.



GAIA WILMER
RA KALAM BOB MOSES
DANCING WITH ELEPHANTS
SSC 1757 / AVAILABLE 6/20/2025

Gaia Wilmer and Ra Kalam Bob Moses' Dancing with Elephants is an extraordinary and singular work that utilizes the best aspects of both artists. Moses' unique improvisational work is paired with Wilmer's adroit arranging and composing. Utilizing a flexible group of ten musicians, the two were able to assemble a diverse and moving work of art.



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Tenor saxophonist Yoni Kretzmer, bassist John Hébert and drummer Billy Mintz have been working together on the outer fringes of improvised music for some time, but their opening set at Brooklyn's Hart Bar (May 5) marked their first time playing with vibraphonist **Yuhan Su**. Tucked into the back end of the dimly lit Bushwick basement space—whose white plaster walls and low black ceiling and baseboards look like a movie set for a smugglers' hideout—the quartet played with an instantly cohesive brio that overflowed the cloistered space. Mintz was the driver, pushing the others to their limits, but knowing when to lay back or lay out. He could be the loudest or the softest of them, slamming sticks and kicking the bass drum, or delicately tapping tom-tom heads with his fingertips. Hébert showed similar flexibility and sensitivity, switching between leading and supporting roles, working closely with Mintz. Kretzmer and Su's shared affinity for motivic development meant that even their most outward-bound blowing bore elements of linear logic. Kretzmer, who can make his saxophone sound as big as a house, big enough to shake the walls of Jericho, unleashed the full force of his horn during the final ad-hoc hymn, crouching forward or arching backwards and upwards as the spirit so moved him. At times Su's mallets barely touched the metal bars, skimming softly over them like a dragonfly across the surface of a pond; other times they hammered down in rapid rhythmic torrents, meeting and matching Kretzmer's momentum. — *Tom Greenland*



Yuhan Su @Hart Bar

Like his late father Bebo, 83-year-old Cuban pianist-composer **Chucho Valdés** hasn't let time and tide slow him down, showing exceptional vigor during his performance at Queens College's Kupferberg Center (May 8) celebrating 50 years of Irakere, the seminal "cubop" group he cofounded in 1973. Surrounded by younger, highly-skilled musicians—Eddie de Armas Jr., Osvaldo Fleites (trumpets); Luis Beltrán, Carlos Averhoff Jr. (saxophones); José A. Gola (electric bass); Horacio "El Negro" Hernández (drums); Roberto Jr. Vizcaino Torre (congas) and his son Julián (shekere, bongos, batá drums)—Valdés began the concert alone, showing the skill and artistry he's famous for with a stirring introduction to "Conga-Danza", leading the *grupo* through masterful arrangements of "Zanaith", "Lorena's Tango" and "Stella Va a Estallar". The latter (based on "Stella by Starlight") was a dazzlingly difficult flag-waver featuring a kinetic cutting contest between the trumpets and precisely executed, lightning-fast unison lines that earned the band its first standing ovation. The program got even more exciting when rumba-timba vocalist Emilio "El Niño" Frías came onstage in glistening gold attire, his soulful limber singing drawing more dancers into the aisles as the band played "Juana 1600", "Iya", "Por Romper el Coco", "Lo Que Va a Pasar", "Xiomara" and "Bacalao con Pan". It was inspiring to see how some of the eldest fans—following Valdés' onstage—could stand up and boogie with the energy and enthusiasm of a much younger generation. (TG)

In his ongoing homage to pianist, composer and arranger Gil Evans, multi-GRAMMY award-winning **Ryan Truesdell** brought his Gil Evans Project (GEP) to Birdland on what would have been Evans' 113th birthday (May 13) to celebrate their new album release, the eight-track, live-recorded *Shades of Sound*, in a week-long residency. This night, however, was dedicated to Evans' *Out of the Cool* (Impulse!, 1960). What was immediately in your face (in a very good way) was how remarkably skilled and how in the pocket this 14-person ensemble was. Plus, the instrumentation featured axes not typically jazz-oriented, including an array of percussive items, a bassoon and an oboe, as well as plenty of sections where flutes were indicated. Evans was an arranger with super powers and the ability to think way beyond the box. His work was nuanced, multi-textured and complex, interpreted brilliantly by GEP. Opener, "Stratusphunk" (George Russell), bookended by sax section slap tonguing was a pick-me-upper, while dominant percussion, bass and stretched out play revealed Kurt Weill's "Bilbao Song" in a brilliant, haunting interpretation, capturing the essence of Weill's *oeuvre*. Also featured was "La Nevada", which began with a composed piano intro, flying off into a freewheeling wealth of sound giving the impression of free jazz. What became evident in this feast of Evans was the egalitarian nature of his arranging. Even with solo features, no instrument was lost; each revealed a voice in what is essentially a remarkable conversational style. — *Marilyn Lester*



Ryan Truesdell @Birdland

There's a reason it's an honor to proclaim being a graduate of The Juilliard School, so embodied in the **Juilliard Jazz Orchestra**, which gave an impeccable, thrilling performance at Dizzy's Club (May 8). Under the leadership of Maestro Loren Schoenberg, over four nights and eight sets, the 17 musicians (undergrads and graduate students) plus vocalist, paid homage to the music of the Duke Ellington Orchestra (DEO) from the fabled, storied, Jimmie Blanton-Ben Webster era (1940-42); this particular residency, as in years past, coincided with Jazz at Lincoln Center's Essentially Ellington High School Band Competition. The instrumentation in the template of the DEO featured an exception: a vibraphone, an instrument having a revival in modern jazz. Schoenberg, a renowned educator among many other accolades, guided with a light touch, giving band members the pleasure of introducing numbers and providing back stories. The set was chock-full of gems, many probably unfamiliar to those not deep into Ellington: "Portrait of Bert Williams", "Jack the Bear", "Warm Valley", "Conga Brava" and quite a few Billy Strayhorn numbers, including "Johnny Come Lately", "Chelsea Bridge" and "Raincheck". In the realm of the familiar, there was "Concerto for Cootie", later lyricized as "Do Nothing Till You Hear from Me". Of course, there had to be Strayhorn's "Take The 'A' Train" with vocal as originally sung by Betty Roche, and "Flamingo" (Ted Grouya, Edmund Anderson), a big charting hit for the DEO with singer Herb Jeffries. So outstanding were these musicians we could have gone on for hours. (ML)

Flutist-composer **Samantha Kochis** has, in a brief period, carved out a unique place within a new jazz circle, not simply as a musician but as co-founder of the Phonotic collective, whose mission is "building community among experimental and improvising artists of historically marginalized genders (including women, trans and nonbinary people)." Her fearless musical vision was demonstrated on Mother's Day (May 11) at Close Up with Selendis Sebastian Alexander Johnson (vibraphone), Anna Abondolo (bass) and Josh Mathews (drums). Johnson's three-mallet approach, harmonic and melodic (harmolodic), applied improvisationally to this fascinating performance, was enrapturing and when not doubling Kochis' melodic lines, variably in unison, was fully resonant in all directions. This reviewer, also a percussionist, must cite this upstart vibraphonist as one to watch out for. Her skills with metallic shimmers are incendiary, magical. Most of the set comprised Kochis' original material: vexing, modal works including ample free segments, with the others luring every ear into the soundscape. Abondolo's powerfully resonant, contrapuntal lines and Mathews' subtle, flawless whispers harboring the occasional roar, recalled the brief, legendary pairing of Scott LaFaro and Ed Blackwell. Kochis' working quartet utterly thrived during its maiden Close Up voyage, and its sonic liberation spoke loudly to the inherent human rights issues within. The inclusion of a not often played Billy Strayhorn composition ("A Flower Is a Lovesome Thing") offered further clarification. — *John Pietaro*



Samantha Kochis

It's unthinkable that the US premiere of *Escalator Over the Hill* took 54 years, finally occurring at The New School Tishman Auditorium (May 2). Composer Carla Bley and poet Paul Haines' work was completed for JCOA Records in 1971, as President Nixon raged war on American peace and liberation movements and bombed Vietnam and Cambodia. The New School's Studio Orchestra and Vocal Ensemble, conducted by Keller Coker and Aubrey Johnson, championed this herculean task. The work opened dirge-like before transforming into a jazz waltz with Bishesh Paudel's raging trombone solo that immediately spoke the language of the late great Roswell Rudd (one of the original recording's trombonists). Other standout soloists included Pau Jorba Bonastre (alto), Alan Acosta (soprano), Sean Hong Wei (tenor) and Aaron Mead (baritone) in for the album's saxophone section of Dewey Redman, Jimmy Lyons, Gato Barbieri and Chris Woods. Jonathan Telsin, Maayan Shulak and Austin Simmons (trumpets) covered Don Cherry and Michael Mantler; Steve Cardenas and Tianxiao Wang (guitars) took on John McLaughlin and Sam Brown's roles; Zachary Kirsinae and Julian Silva (basses) split Charlie Haden and Jack Bruce; Yali Shimoni's (drums) melodic subtleties recalled Paul Motian; Maxwell Holmes, Noah Johnson and Arturo O'Farrill (keyboards) well represented Bley and Don Preston. Though this "jazz opera" has no libretto, it flowed artfully. If *Escalator*... doesn't move to Carnegie Hall, the injustice will be unforgiveable. (JP)

Nestled within this year's Long Play Festival—that thrilling panoply of adventurous new music pitched to the omnivorous listener that bursts across venues throughout Downtown Brooklyn and beyond—were several gifts of performances free and open to the public, among them the duo of **Caroline Davis** and **Wendy Eisenberg** at BRIC's Stoop (May 3). With songs from their magical pairing on last year's *Accept When* (Astral Spirits), their easy intimacy and palpable joy in playing with one another transformed the expansive venue into what felt at times like a living room hang, a mystical séance and a site of open-hearted free exploration. Doubling each other's vocals, their gentle, sonorous voices melded as one, evoking a lush idyll. Eisenberg wove a matrix of guitar patterns while Davis interlaced burbling synth fractals. On "How Sensitive", Davis' alto saxophone locked in with the guitarist for a harmolodic workout. While the two musicians are virtuosos on their respective instruments, their songwriting feels like its own secret language, an outsider's invention of the form. During the performance of their recording's title track, a haunted inquiry into the existence of ghosts that had them chanting "synchronicity" as they embodied that word's very meaning in their natural dynamic, Davis sneezed and Eisenberg issued a "bless you" without missing a beat. Closing with "Concrete", the two stifled laughter, a shared inside joke, as they sang about "a street at the top of the charts," an ironic invocation for two artists so blissfully self-contained in a rarified universe of their own making. — *Ariella Stok*



Caroline Davis and Wendy Eisenberg @BRIC Stoop

Billed as a Buddhist Healing Ceremony, tubaist **Ben Stapp** presented a lecture and concert of original compositions based on traditional Tibetan Chöd music, fused with modern jazz and classical, as part of Park Slope Public Library's Folk Ambassadors series (May 6). Wearing an orange tunic and wooden beads, Stapp had prepared the program under the tutelage of former monk, Dr. Chok Tenzin Monlam. He'd begun studying Chöd, a radical method for cutting through ego fixation and accepting the undesirable, to help him unlock music's healing power while coping with a relative's illness. Following a Monlam-led meditation, Stapp conducted a crack ensemble of Mazz Swift (violin), Sara Schoenbeck (bassoon), Haruna Fukazawa (flute), Justin Wood (clarinet), Christopher Hoffman (cello) and John O'Brien (drums). Over a wending flute melody, anchored by droning strings, the leader narrated our arrival "at the scary place" followed by a galloping tune for "calling the spirits." As Monlam and his daughter chanted and clanged bells, Stapp exclaimed of the imagined characters enacting his score, "they don't want to stop dancing!" Summoned to clap along, different rhythmic interpretations emerged and just as a feeling of transcendence began to take hold (defying the fluorescent lights and institutional décor), a librarian vetoed instructions to throw handfuls of rice that had been distributed (to bestow blessing onto "all sentient beings"), complaining it "would attract rats" — mooring us back down to earth. (AS)

WHAT'S NEWS

The annual **Arts for Art's** (AFA) Vision Festival celebrates the coming together of Freedom and Jazz (FreeJazz). As AFA/ Vision founder Patricia Nicholson says, "Holding onto the legacy of freedom and its struggle, we the organizers and the artists aim to inspire and empower resistance...through music, dance, poetry and art...to lend our strength and stand up to those who would destroy what was good in America." Opening night of the festival (at Roulette, Jun. 2-7) honors Art Ensemble of Chicago multi-instrumentalist Roscoe Mitchell with a "Lifetime of Achievement" award, and on the penultimate day there will be a unique conference (The Heart to Resist: Art & Activism), which will precede the musical festivities that evening and include Sula Spirit Janet Evans, Marc Ribot, Amirtha Kidambi, Devin Waldman, Elijah J. Thomas, Nicholson and moderator William Parker. For more info visit artsforart.org/vision.

Thousands upon thousands of arts organizations (including the above-mentioned Arts for Art), as well as musicians, artists and creatives throughout the country have been affected by the termination of federally-funded grants, which "no longer serve the interests of the United States," according to a form letter sent to grant recipients notifying them of the canceled funding. As we well know, the arts are not a luxury for a select few, but a cultural and quality of life necessity for everyone. Elected officials need to hear loud and clear from their constituents about the all-important value of federal funding for the arts. During previous efforts to eliminate or reduce funding, bipartisan support from Congress prevailed—that support needs immediate reinforcement to reverse these decisions to withdraw funding from necessary, if not essential, organizations, not the least of these being the National Endowment for the Arts, the largest arts funder in the country. For more info visit arts.gov/grants.

The **Jazz Journalists Association** (JJA) announced the 46 winners of their 30th annual Jazz Awards. Included were Marshall Allen, Patricia Brennan, George Coleman, Isaiah Collier, Kahil El'Zabar, Mary Halvorson, Val Jeanty, Charles Lloyd, Myra Melford, Nicole Mitchell, Linda May Han Oh, Tomeka Reid and local "Jazz Hero" awardees: WBGO host Sheila Anderson and Jazz Foundation of America Executive Director Joe Petrucelli. TNYCJR contributing photographer Luciano Rossetti took home the award for the Lona Foote-Bob Parent Award for Career Achievement in Photography, while TNYCJR was happily nominated for the 19th time in our 23-year existence for Jazz Publication/Website of the Year. We congratulate and thank all the winners, fellow nominees, and all the musicians and jazz industry folks, including the JJA, who helped make 2024 such a memorable year musically. For more info visit jjazzawards.org.

The **Barry Harris Institute of Jazz** Summer Intensive at The New School starts this month (Jun. 23-27), culminating on the final day with a concert at Ernst C. Stiefel Hall (55 W. 13th St.). The event is intended for jazz students, educators, professionals, enthusiasts and anyone interested in exploring the unique pedagogical ideas of the late, legendary pianist, composer and educator Barry Harris (1929-2021). Workshop sessions include such instructors as Michael Weiss, David Glasser, Steve Ash, Howard Rees and Richard Clements. For more info visit barryharrisinstituteofjazz.org.

Drummer-percussionist **Susie Ibarra** recently was awarded the 2025 Pulitzer Prize in Music for her *Sky Islands*. Created as a musical tribute to the rich yet fragile ecosystems inspired by the distinct rainforest habitats of Luzon, Philippines, the work features her eight-piece Extended Filipino Talking Gong Ensemble, featuring Claire Chase (flute), Alex Peh (piano) and Levy Lorenzo (percussion). For more info visit susieibarra.com.

The 2025 Instant Award in Improvised Music (IAIM) was bestowed on trumpeter-cometist **Bobby Bradford** and pianist **Marilyn Crispell**, each of whom received an unrestricted award of \$50K. Past recipients of the IAIM have included Peter Brötzmann, Satoko Fujii, Milford Graves, Mats Gustafsson, Joe McPhee, Ikue Mori, Sam Newsome, Evan Parker, Alexander von Schlippenbach, Henry Threadgill and Nate Wooley. Crispell will accept her award the same day she is scheduled to perform at this year's JazzFest Berlin (Nov. 1). The IAIM is underwritten by an anonymous patron of the arts.

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