



**Jazz at Berlin Philharmonic XVII:
Gnawa World Blues**
Majid Bekkas, Nguyễn Lê, Hamid Drake (ACT)
Lhasa
Pasquale Mirra/Hamid Drake (Parco Della Musica)
Cosmic Waves
**Albert Beger, Ziv Taubenfeld, Shay Hazan,
Hamid Drake (NoBusiness)**
by Bill Meyer

This August drummer-percussionist Hamid Drake turns 70, but he shows no signs of looking back. Although strongly associated with Chicago, where he was raised, he’s currently based in Italy and these three recently released recordings reflect his connections with musicians based in Europe as well as around the Mediterranean. Taken together, they display the breadth of his rhythmic acumen: no matter who he plays with, he can meet them where they’re at stylistically, energize the action and then introduce an idea that seamlessly moves the music somewhere else.

Jazz at Berlin Philharmonic XVII: Gnawa World Blues is the most international project of the three, but also the one that is closest to Drake’s roots. While he grew up under the same multi-unit roof as the storied saxophonist Fred Anderson, the youthful Drake didn’t just play jazz (there was plenty of funk, rock, blues, reggae, Gambian griot music, even a stint with Chicago Irish songsters the Dooley Brothers). Moroccan Majid Bekkas (oud, guembri) and Franco-Vietnamese Nguyễn Lê (guitar) bring some range of their own to this

release. The former has stirred jazz and blues into his Gnawan roots (and previously appeared with Drake and German saxophonist Peter Brötzmann at Jazzfest Berlin), while the latter has an extensive background in electric jazz and pop, including tributes to Pink Floyd and Jimi Hendrix. This music feels like it was conceived for world music festival stages; both string players get plenty of room to shred, the stylistic combinations are cleanly joined, and the effects-laden guitar sometimes casts a too-sparkly sheen. Drake delivers precisely what is required throughout, from delicate kalimba filigree on the spacy travelogue “Ascending Dragon” to wall-to-wall bashing on “Purple Haze”.

Lhasa is a duo with Italian vibraphonist Pasquale Mirra, a member of Drake’s European Alice Coltrane tribute project. Recorded in concert in Rome, it is simultaneously much looser and yet more focused than the above album. The program is split between jointly-conceived originals and themes by Don Cherry and Sun Ra that get stretched, diffused and reconstituted with a winning sense of play; the two players sound joyously in sync, although it’s clear that Drake’s hands are on the steering wheel. Most of the album’s pieces are near twenty minutes in length, and that duration, plus the transparent instrumentation make it easy to hear how his constant shifts in tempo, emphasis and ornamentation guide the music over time. On “Love In Outer Space/Brown Rice”, for example, he gradually morphs a Curtis Mayfield-worthy groove into a dancing, Ed Blackwell-style breakdown, and then rockets to the finish with gentle but undeniable insistence.

Cosmic Waves hits hard out of the gate, with a sandblasting first salvo from Albert Beger (tenor) and Ziv Taubenfeld (bass clarinet) cleaving through Drake and Shay Hazan’s (bass) collapsing field of rhythm. Then the drums turn up the heat and the whole combo steams ahead. The web of connections between the players contributes to a strong rapport, so that even though the credits suggest that the music is completely improvised, the scrimmages resolve into solemn, cohesive melodies. Of the three recordings on review here, *Cosmic Waves* is the most intense, hewing exclusively to a free-jazz aesthetic. But within its chosen zone, there’s plenty of variety, much of it coming from Taubenfeld and Beger’s ability to resolve contrasting attacks with solemn joint statements.

For more info visit actmusic.com, auditorium.com and nobusinessrecords.com. Drake is at Roulette Jun. 4 and 7 (part of Vision Festival), and David Rubinstein Atrium Jun. 13 (part of Jazztopad Festival). See Calendar.



The Salerno Concert
Bob Mover/Walter Davis Jr. (Reel to Real)
by Ken Dryden

Septuagenarian alto saxophonist Bob Mover and pianist Walter Davis Jr. worked together over a period of several years prior to Davis’ untimely death in 1990 at age 57 (this month marks his 35-year deathaversary), and Mover appeared on one European album by the pianist (*Illumination*, 1988). Yet both record labels and New York venues consistently overlooked them.

This previously unknown recording from 1989, *The Salerno Concert* (made at Le Botteghe in Salerno, Italy) doesn’t seem to be professionally made, due to the over-modulation of both artists’ instruments and the

somewhat distant sound of the piano, but it captures the essence of their incredible chemistry together. The set list includes a healthy mix of jazz favorites and standards, kicking off with a fiery exploration of Gigi Gryce’s under-appreciated gem “Nica’s Tempo”. Mover’s lightning-like runs and imaginative lines in “Star Eyes” provoke laughter from the pianist at one point, while Davis’ insertion of numerous twists to its theme seems effortless. The pianist introduces “Donna Lee” by playing its harmonic source (“Indiana”) before Mover makes his entrance, as the saxophonist displays his lyricism extrapolating on its theme in new ways, followed by Davis’ quote-filled solo that must have had everyone wearing a broad grin.

The extended performances showcase the duo’s total mastery of ballads and effective utilization of space. “You Don’t Know What Love Is” is a masterclass in telling a story without lyrics, as Mover’s expressive, bittersweet alto is beautifully supported by the pianist’s creative backing, while his featured solo combines a bit of brief pyrotechnics without distracting from the mood of the piece. “All the Things You Are” starts with a bit of humor as they play Dizzy Gillespie’s trademark introduction to this Jerome Kern, Oscar Hammerstein II work, then continue the fun by adding a hilarious tango-flavored detour into “How Are Things in Glocca Morra” by another classic writing team, Burton Lane and E.Y. Harburg. Mover’s free-spirited playing and Davis’ jaunty piano with additional whimsical quotes make this medley a highlight of the date, as they segue into a brief rendition of Kenny Dorham’s “Lotus Blossom” (not to be confused with the Billy Strayhorn composition) to wrap the track. Their explosive run through “Salt Peanuts” left the audience wanting more, so they responded with a daredevil setting of Charlie Parker’s demanding bop classic “Bird Feathers”.

For more info visit cellarlive.com



Armageddon Flower
Ivo Perelman/Matthew Shipp String Trio
(TAO Forms)
by Ken Waxman

Despite its quasi-apocalyptic album title, the group improvisation on *Armageddon Flower* doesn’t reference world destruction following a good vs. evil battle, but instead posits the flowering of hope in these agitated times. While dramatic and discordant, the program also contains instances of cooperation, since the group combines two ensembles that have each flourished for nearly three decades. One is the duo of Ivo Perelman (tenor) and Matthew Shipp (piano), the other the Shipp String Trio with William Parker (bass) and Mat Maneri (viola). Because of the cross-fertilization of creative music, none are strangers to one another. Besides the saxophonist’s 46 album partnership with the pianist, Perelman has often worked with the bassist and violist.

And just as Perelman is no traditional saxophonist, the trio is anything but a conventional string group. Beside the atypical configuration, the piano and strings aren’t there to sweeten or accompany the saxophone’s lead. All players function as full partners, with group improvising the aim. Both antiphonic and aleatoric, the sound depends on distinctive statements from each—although the saxophonist has the edge—with

prompt presentations, responses or elaboration from the others, most prominently the violist and pianist. Within frequently decisive introductions and sequence amplifications with arco buzzes and pizzicato strums, the bassist is more a prompter than a principal.

The album encompasses a variant of tension-release with the saxophonist’s whiny split tones, inflating honks, terse bites and droning scoops often operating in tandem with processional piano resolves and concentrated string pressure, although players often exchange roles as the four expositions evolve. Skilled in communicating emotion and invention through multiphonics and note squalling, interludes of Perelman’s lyricism are also present, with the reed-calming reflecting balladic piano sequences or regularized string glissandi. Feral stress isn’t limited to the saxophonist though, as keyboard chiming, terse viola grinds and crushing double bass pumps are occasionally expressed, usually (as on “Tree of Life”) an aural circle dance where all the musicians participate.

A singular but striking blend, *Armageddon Flower* shows that controlled dissidence can be as balanced, if not as harmonious, as expected timbres when expressed by practiced improvisers.

For more info visit aumfidelity.com. The album release concert is at Roulette Jun. 5 (part of Vision Festival). See Calendar.



La Fleur de Cayenne
**Paquito D’Rivera &
Madrid-New York Connection Band (Sunnyside)**
by Andrew Schinder

Latin legend, reed player and NEA Jazz Master Paquito D’Rivera has long been associated with his homeland of Cuba, from which he expatriated in 1980. He has made a career blending classic Cuban sounds with more traditional, straight-ahead American jazz and international classical harmonies. His sonically diverse yet thematically consistent *oeuvre* has also made him one of modern jazz’ most beloved figures as he continues to challenge himself musically and melodically, even as he approaches his ninth decade.

D’Rivera’s connections with his ancestral home do not end at the borders of his adopted one in the US. For several decades, he has been collaborating with a group of Cuban expatriates living in Spain, playing with them whenever making the trip himself overseas. Hooking up with Colombian vibraphonist Sebastián Laverde, the group has named itself the Madrid-New York Connection Band and has here recorded its first album, *La Fleur de Cayenne*. Despite the recording of the album in Madrid and most of the band in Spanish residence, the recording is Latin through-and-through. Eschewing flamenco and jota for tango and Afro-Cuban rhythms, D’Rivera and the band create a zippy, energetic journey throughout the Caribbean and Central and South America. The leader’s woodwind mastery is in full effect, particularly his skills on the clarinet, which is pure pleasure here.

The album opening title track finds D’Rivera generously showcasing Laverde’s skills, as he does again on “Vals Venezolano”, the latter on which the vibraphonist and the brilliant pianist Pepe Rivero join the leader to create a dynamic, bouncing showpiece. The group offers interpretations of two songs by iconic Cuban composer-pianist Ernesto Lecuona (both

arranged by D’Rivera), which highlights the versatility of the ensemble as they weave back and forth between the classical and more jazz-like elements of each composition. The album delightfully closes with Ennio Morricone’s “Cinema Paradiso” (from the Oscar-winning 1988 Italian film), bringing *La Fleur de Cayenne* to a strong emotional climax that recalls the film’s ending montage: paying tribute to the power of love.

For more info visit sunnysiderecords.com. D’Rivera is at 92NY Jun. 5. See Calendar.



Survival of the Fittest
Jordan VanHemert (Origin)
by Fred Bouchard

The laconic Japanese adage “Fall seven times, stand up eight” underpins a subtext behind the title of Jordan VanHemert’s fifth leader date, *Survival of the Fittest*. A hearty, adept, good-humored tenor saxophonist, the 30ish Korean-born Michigander here re-assembles, with trombonist-producer Michael Dease, the sextet of their slightly elder peers that, in last year’s *Deep In The Soil* (Topic), first examined the resilience, self-reliance and uplifting sustenance we may all find in music. The veterans reunite genially: Helen Sung (piano), Rodney Whitaker (bass) and Lewis Nash (drums), with lively spots for Terell Stafford (trumpet, flugelhorn). The studio vibe is cheerful and focused and the positive, firmly pro-bop outcome assured between a relaxed, confident opener “Here and Now” and the rousing title closer, with all flags flying.

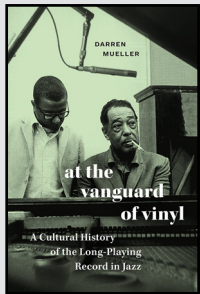
VanHemert, director of jazz studies at Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, OK, writes often in active response to emotional reactions. He sublimates outrage at racist-fueled murder with an elegiac ballad that Stafford fills with a yearning sweetness. He assuages the sting of scapegoating with a defiant swinger. VanHemert also pens an affectionate tribute to a jazz great, and a wide-eyed contemplation of the moon. But the date reaches well beyond originals. “Milyang Arirang” revisits an historic, tragic Korean folk-tune as a frankly cheerful waltz; “Mo’s Blues”, a Basie-style jammer composed by one of Dease’s precocious students, drummer Wyatt Harris, elicits rousing choruses from all hands.

Among central duologues that afford welcome textural interludes for the leader’s cheerful playing with rhythm team members, two draw on hope-imbued anthems: Duke Ellington’s “Come Sunday” is a searching prayer-meet with the orotund Whitaker, while Sigmund Romberg’s “Softly, as in a Morning Sunrise” ignites a roaring campfire of tenor and drums. Sung’s limpid, glowing lyricism becalming “Sea of Tranquillity”, sets off VanHemert’s mellow musings, surprising flourishes and a dreamy, rock-a-bye conclusion. A favorite track for saxophone and rhythm follows its wise counsel: “Tread Lightly” wherein Nash delivers a master class in brushwork artistry, his feathery filigree and “think-you-can-lick-it?” wit filling stop-time theme and solo breaks—a playful, wink-wink nod to the emblematic genius of Thad Jones.

For more info visit originarts.com. The album release concert is at Dada Bar Jun. 19 and Clement’s Place Jun. 20. See Calendar and 100 Miles Out.

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IN PRINT



**At the Vanguard of Vinyl:
A Cultural History of the Long-Playing
Record in Jazz**
Darren Mueller
(Duke University Press)
by Terrell K. Holmes

The advent of long-playing twelve-inch records in 1948 changed the recording industry, with a significant impact on jazz, affecting the nature and trajectory of the genre in the studio and on the bandstand. In *At the Vanguard of Vinyl: A Cultural History of the Long-Playing Record in Jazz*, author Darren Mueller uses specific recordings and record labels to examine the role of jazz in the evolution of the LP. While this new technology made jazz more popular and profitable, it also exposed the racism and segregation prevalent in the music business and in America at large.

Mueller cites Louis Armstrong’s and Buck Clayton’s versions of “The Huckle-Buck” to show how the LP changed jazz recording. The three-minute limit of 78rpm records constrained creativity, but with about twenty-two minutes to a side, LPs allowed musicians to expand their ideas and stretch out on improvisations, as well as record live. Taking a look at the live album *Ellington at Newport* (Columbia, 1956), Mueller reveals how producer George Avakian added deft cuts, crowd noise and enhanced audio to the album. Speaking to deception, decades later, Avakian explained the changes were done to compensate for errors, such as Paul Gonsalves playing into the wrong microphone during his epic 27-chorus saxophone solo on “Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue”.

Another such “deception” involved Dizzy Gillespie’s role as a cultural ambassador, with *World Statesman* (Norgran, 1956) and *Dizzy in Greece* (Verve, 1957) each touted as recorded while on tour with an interracial band (chosen to convey American racial harmony). The two albums were actually recorded stateside, engineered to sound live. *The Cannonball Adderley Quintet in San Francisco* (Riverside, 1959) was a true live album, with Adderley embracing Black vernacular, which Mueller views as an early Afro-modernistic sensibility. In the final chapter Mueller discusses the editing techniques used by Charles Mingus, with the album *Mingus Ah Um* (Columbia, 1959) at the center. Mingus’ recording experience, coupled with a cantankerous personality, empowered his decision-making about his music and the expression of his indomitable Black aesthetic.

The volume is exhaustively researched by an author of intelligence and passion who provides illuminating moments and invaluable information. However, some salient points are smothered by minutiae and there is some repetition of information. Yet, in sum total, *At the Vanguard of Vinyl* is a worthy read.

For more info visit dukeupress.edu