

DROP THE NEEDLE



Blues for Smoke
Jaki Byard (Candid)
by Duck Baker

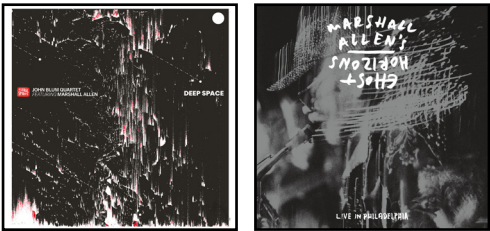
Blues for Smoke represents the earliest recording under the name of pianist Jaki Byard (1922-1999), yet it remained unissued for decades, as did many other Candid titles that were recorded during the brief period between the label’s founding in 1960 and going dormant a couple of years later. Candid has since been recently rejuvenated with new recordings, as well as LP reissues of its catalogue, and such is the case here: the all-analog session was remastered from the original tapes by legendary engineer Bernie Grundman and pressed on 180g vinyl.

Listeners should not expect *Blues for Smoke* to focus on the kind of cutting-edge jazz that the late Byard (born 103 years ago this month) was playing around this time with artists he recorded with, such as Charles Mingus and Eric Dolphy (who were also signed to Candid). There are wild moments to be sure, but these occur during pieces that begin in a much different vein: “Jaki’s Blues”, for instance, which starts out as a rollicking stride blues theme, albeit one on which a couple of chords are definitely what pianist James P. Johnson would have called “modernistic.” Within 20 seconds, however, Byard has launched himself towards the harmonic stratosphere, without ever abandoning the 12-bar format. He gleefully bounces almost violently between these stylistic extremes throughout this jam-packed, two-minute foray.

Commentators have noted Byard’s eclecticism since he first attracted critical attention in the early ‘60s. Indeed, the way he shifted into real Harlem stride or rich Billy Strayhorn-esque harmonies is impossible to miss, and something Mingus often showcased. But with Byard this style is often more a matter of juxtaposition than of synthesis, a method that sets him apart from other jazz pianists. Consider the cases of Thelonious Monk, Herbie Nichols, Lennie Tristano, Bud Powell, Randy Weston and Cecil Taylor, all born within five years of Byard. Except for Nichols, they all arguably evolved one approach and stuck to that, since they could be endlessly creative within their stylistic worlds. Nichols had an entirely different approach when playing with more traditional leaders (and even on his earliest recordings as a leader), but his style could also be more elastic than the others named above. This focus, however, was a matter of synthesizing, not juxtaposing, older and more modern ideas. Interestingly, a couple of the best tracks here, “Aluminum Baby” and the brilliant “Diane’s Melody” are somewhat evocative of Nichols, though Byard takes the latter into areas neither Nichols nor anyone this side of Olivier Messiaen would go. As Byard fans know, both of these pieces would get many more recordings in years to come, but fewer realize that they had been premiered in the ‘50s by Bostonians in trumpeter Herb Pomeroy and alto saxophonist Charlie Mariano. Byard was known in Boston (even as a saxophonist) for a decade before New York had really heard him.

Blues for Smoke is a must for Jaki Byard fans, especially those who want to focus on the way he reworked stride and blues/boogie-woogie, but for those who want an introduction to this unique piano great, his Prestige records are the place to start.

For more info visit candidrecords.shop.musictoday.com



Deep Space
John Blum Quartet (feat. Marshall Allen)
(Astral Spirits)
Live In Philadelphia
Marshall Allen Ghost Horizons
(ArsNova Workshop/Otherly Love)
by Patrick Romanowski

Marshall Allen is, of course, the recently-turned 101-year-old leader of the Sun Ra Arkestra, having joined in 1957 and taken over the band after Ra’s immediate successor, John Gilmore, who passed away in 1995.

Released in honor of Allen’s 100th birthday last year, pianist John Blum Quartet’s *Deep Space* is a blistering voyage into the outer reaches of the contemporary avant garde. By adding Allen to the Blum trio, the piano heavyweight’s compositions surge with explosive energy and virtuosic exploration. Perhaps not so widely-known to many, Blum has a presence in NYC’s downtown scene (having recorded with the likes of trombonist Steve Swell, the late drummer Sunny Murray plus a few records under his own name), and is highly regarded for his percussive, yet melodically-oriented style. The album features Allen (alto, EVI), alongside Blum, Elliott Levin (tenor, flute) and Chad Taylor (drums). The centenarian plays with extraordinary vigor and masterful creativity. The album opening title track features Allen’s use of the extraterrestrial sounding EVI (Electronic Valve Instrument) which sets a fluttering, roving atmosphere, a kind of wandering membrane that blips and echoes at the celestial pitch and threshold of every vast improvisational climb. Blum’s command is captivating and intense. Mercurial and marvelous in equal measure, and at times reminiscent of the great Cecil Taylor, he propels the music with fearsome volleys of staccato notes and fists full of bold chords. On “Electromagnetism” and “Gravity Well”, Levin’s flute playing punctures the enveloping plasma of sound like a steel dart, while Taylor’s drums drive a fierce, punching rhythmic undercurrent. “The Aether” is a mammoth and convex journey that closes out the set with a luminous bang. *Deep Space* is a wild ride—one well worth checking out.

Marshall Allen’s Ghost Horizons’ *Live in Philadelphia* is a fantastic, celebratory testament to the indefatigable creative genius of the saxophonist and composer whose 101st birthday on May 25 coincided with the release. Recorded in Philadelphia, where Allen has lived in the Germantown neighborhood at the Arkestral Institute Of Sun Ra since 1968, the album is comprised of 16 tracks, gathered from a concert series which began in 2022, organized by the ArsNova Workshop at the Solar Myth venue. As evidenced, Allen continues to perform live with awe-inspiring energy and profound creative fluidity. Along with original Arkestra guitarist DMHotep, the feel of the performances harken back to some of the key rhythmic essences and vivid musical galaxies within the Arkestra canon, while the tracks are saturated with a fresh, pulsating vibe that inhabits some of the earlier musical realms of Allen’s signature ‘50s work with Ra. The result is a superbly hip re-imagining of those cosmic dimensions in a more expansive contemporary mode, with Allen at the helm as a celestial bridge and a spiritual touchstone to the Arkestra for a new generation. The tracks oscillate between roaring and wide-open, hard-swinging numbers, with longer meditations interspersed with spiritual passages, poetry and vocal riffs. Sonorous interplanetary sound

explorations are ignited with lucid Motorik doses of cool driving Can-esque feels—all of which are deeply elating. In keeping with the ever-evolving ensemble spirit of the Arkestra, the stellar line up of musicians represents a wide range of voices from across the contemporary musical spectrum including Immanuel Wilkins, James Brandon Lewis, Elliott Levin, Brian Marsella, William Parker, Eric Revis, Luke Stewart, Chad Taylor, Tcheseer Holmes, Mikel Patrick Avery, Tara Middleton and Michael Ray, plus the Ade Ilu Lukumi Batá Ensemble and the experimental noise outfit Wolf Eyes. Ra referred to Philadelphia as “death’s headquarters” but Marshall Allen’s enduring genius is a divine light that continues to burn miraculously bright in defiance of any earthly leviathan. What an honor to behold.

For more info visit astralspiritsrecords.com and arsnovaworkshop.bandcamp.com. Allen’s Ghost Horizons album release concert is at Public Records Jun. 6. Allen with Sun Ra Arkestra is at Issue Project Room Jun. 11 (part of MATA Festival) and Pioneer Works Jun. 20. See Calendar.



Chicago to New York
Eric Alexander (Cellar Music)
by Ken Dryden

Saxophonist Eric Alexander is a Chicago native who made his recording debut with organist Charles Earland, soon after moving to New York to study at William Paterson University. There he was mentored by high-energy pianist Harold Mabern (1936-2019), resulting in the pair becoming frequent collaborators. Over his extensive discography, which includes many albums with the all-star co-operative One For All, Alexander has ultimately proven himself as one who isn’t overly influenced by any of his predecessors, though his playing is well-grounded on the foundation of great recordings of the past.

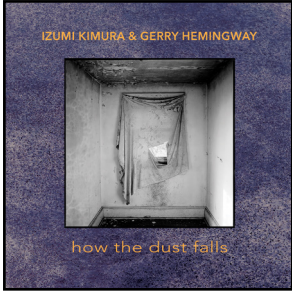
This top-drawer session, *Chicago to New York*, features another New York-based musician and frequent Alexander collaborator, pianist Mike LeDonne, with Chicago players Dennis Carroll (bass) and George Fludas (drums). Right out of the gate, the leader establishes his chops on soprano with an intense interpretation of Mongo Santamaria’s “Afro Blue” (often conflated with John Coltrane, as on the saxophonist’s *Afro Blue Impressions*), punctuated by LeDonne’s Mabern-like attack on piano. The leader remains on the straight horn for Coltrane’s infrequently performed “Wise One”, ceding the spotlight to LeDonne, whose serpentine solo sets up Alexander’s enchanting performance on the soprano.

Alexander returns to tenor, his main horn, for a punchy, soulful rendition of the standard “This Is Always”, fueled by the swinging rhythm section. Another standard not heard very often these days is “Only the Lonely”, where the subtle work of Carroll and Fludas support the leader’s warm, vocal-like tenor playing. This miniature masterpiece features his spacious phrasing, indicating that he most likely took the sage musical advice of Lester Young, Ben Webster and Dexter Gordon to know a ballad’s lyrics. The quartet’s rendition of Gene Ammons’ soulful blues “Hittin’ the Jug” suggests the closing number of a late set, where the musicians have given their all and are ready to head home. Perhaps the biggest surprise in the album is the extended workout of the chestnut

“The Lamp Is Low”, which Alexander tackles at a brisk tempo, skirting around its theme, teasing the listener as to whether or not he will reveal it. The standard “Angel Eyes” has long been a favorite for both vocalists and instrumentalists and the quartet’s setting has a swaying bossa nova undercurrent backing the saxophonist’s flights, with LeDonne’s brilliant solo showing a McCoy Tyner influence in his rapid fire runs.

Beautifully recorded at Van Gelder Studio, Eric Alexander has added a valuable chapter to his already formidable discography.

For more info visit cellarmusicgroup.com. Alexander is at Smoke Jun. 25-29 (with Eric Scott Reed). See Calendar.



How The Dust Falls
Izumi Kimura/Gerry Hemingway (Auricle)
by John Sharpe

Swiss resident, American drummer Gerry Hemingway’s line “we are millions of things” offers a suitable entry point into the nuanced, multifaceted world of *How The Dust Falls*, his second duo outing with Ireland-based Japanese pianist Izumi Kimura. Rather than aligning with the growing lineage of piano/drum duets, the album unfolds as a dialogue between two percussive voices, shaped in part by Kimura’s unconventional pianism, which privileges sound and attack over harmony and melody. Her use of prepared piano techniques emphasizes the instrument’s physicality, while Hemingway broadens the palette yet further with marimba, vibraphone, cymbals, drums and even vocals on one track.

The partnership between the two traces its roots to a speculative invitation from the pianist, having witnessed the drummer’s mastery of free improvisation, which culminated in a trio completed by bassist Barry Guy. The rapport nurtured within that configuration also spills into this arena, now distilled into a remarkably determined focus, exemplified by the album opener “Waterspear”. This cut is the longest of the 14 jointly credited tracks, wherein they establish a patient and deliberate build. Over spaced, weighted chords, Hemingway incrementally ramps up to a dynamic, roiling cascade. Though Kimura gradually elaborates her motif, her steadfast approach anchors the piece’s progression.

Throughout the set, the roles remain balanced, undercutting the common trope of piano dominance. The pair tackle a diversity of gambits, often avoiding conventional development or resolution, instead creating contained sonic environments. “Third Story” sets tone colors from clanking piano and resonant metal within a lurching rhythmic flow, while “Dock Driftings” unveils music box timbres through plinking piano lines and woody marimba. With its modulating minimalist mutations and drums sparkling like steel pans, “Entrainments I” sounds like something imagined by rhythmically-oriented composer Steve Reich. Conversely, the slowly decaying reverberations and sudden swells of “Stillness” suggest traffic looming out of a fog.

Capping their multiplicity of ideas is the duo’s reconsideration of Blind Willie Johnson’s “Dark Was the Night”, here titled “The Waiting Place”. Kimura’s blues-tinged phrases intertwine with Hemingway’s reflective lyrics, subtly nodding to themes of displacement. It is an aching performance, which, in tandem with the

remainder of the program, accentuates the pairing’s unique take on contrast and cohesion, signposting a vast creative horizon ahead.

For more info visit auriclerecords.bandcamp.com. Hemingway is at Roulette Jun. 7 (part of Vision Festival) and Solar Myth Jun. 12. See Calendar and 100 Miles Out.



The American Dream Today
Joris Teepe (Planet Arts)
by Jeff Cebulski

An entrenched NYC presence, Dutch-American bassist Joris Teepe recently released his 22nd album, *The American Dream Today*, including two “suites” composed a dozen years apart, which coalesce into a wry commentary on American life while lifting up American stylistic forms.

The music is rendered by a sextet comfortable with the bassist’s original material, including stellar work from pianist Leo Genovese, while Teepe provides his typical sturdy and expressive bass lines throughout. The five “movements” that open the album were written as *The Hague Suite* in 2010 for a Dutch jazz festival. “Shoeshine” communicates a swinging, optimistic idea of city life, with a softly Hispanic texture amidst the Ellingtonian arrangement. The tune’s brightness is quickly dissipated on “Fake News”, where dissonant chords communicate something awry. “The American Dream” follows, another swinging engagement with Ian Cleaver (trumpet), Marc Mommaas (saxophone) and Adam Kolker (clarinet, flute) creating a Charlie Parker-ish big band ambience through which the bassist operates before Genovese adds a rousing solo. “Dutch Painting ‘Landscape with Clouds’” receives an ironic military-like beat from drummer Matt Wilson and marching music accompaniment from Cleaver and Kolker (flute) before the final movement, “My Car Is Bigger Than Yours”, which begins with a lilting melody that leads to a rollicking R&B section with the band’s choral recitation of the song title. One can imagine the Europeans’ befuddled reaction.

The second set, the *BIM Suite*, was composed in 2022 for the Dutch Musicians Union’s 50th anniversary. The contemporary motifs signified suggest an extension of Teepe’s vision represented in *The Hague Suite*. “The One Percent” is a quirky blues, featuring elastic and off-key electric bass over Genovese’s keyboard. The off-kilter sentiment continues on “Polarization”, a pastiche of Middle Eastern tone and modal expression. A horn-driven dramatic display, “Music Is the Answer”, features Mommaas and Genovese on frenetic solos. “Today’s Dream” is, true to its title, dream-like and sedate, as Kolker’s bass clarinet suggests low expectations while maintaining a sense of dignity. And the finale, “The Deadline”, returns the ensemble and listener to the hectic pace of city existence.

Spending over 30 years in his second country certainly qualifies Joris Teepe as an adopted artist and keen observer. On *The American Dream Today*, he and his friends represent our native music and the times with verve and wit.

For more info visit joristeepe.com. Teepe is at Clement’s Place Jun. 13 and Smalls Jun. 17 (both with Steve Johns Quintet), The Django Jun. 14 (with Ron Jackson) and Hastings on Jazz Jun. 15 (with David Janeway). See Calendar and 100 Miles Out.

Silvano Monasterios
Venezulan Novel
The River
featuring Troy Roberts,
Nestor Torres and Luisito Quintero.

"It is a bold and ambitious work, teeming with light, shadow and many curves amidship. It uses well-drawn ensemble motifs to underscore enchanting solos by the ensemble's several expressive voices."

★★★★★

-Jack Bowers, All About Jazz

"It's an album that speaks to the heart with a music steeped in cultural specificity but universally resonant. In Monasterios's hands, the river does not divide; it connects."

-Nolan DeBuke, The Jazz Word

"It is the kind of work one might liken to a novel, one that holds you captive until the break of dawn, so vivid are the images it conjures."

-Thierry De Clemensat, Paris-Move

-Appearing Live-
Silvano Monasterios Trio
06.25 25
Mezzrow | NYC, NY
7:00 PM & 8:30 PM

silvanomonasterios.com