



Frice

Bobby Bradford, Frode Gjerstad, William Roper, Alex Cline (Fundacja Słuchaj)

Solace Angles

Karl Evangelista Quintet (feat. Bobby Bradford & William Roper) (Asian Improv)

by Bill Meyer

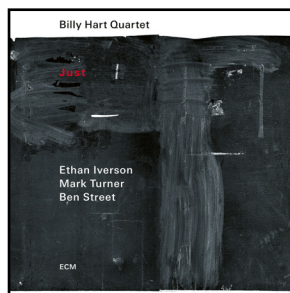
These two recordings, *Frice* and *Solace Angles*, are part of a network of association and inspiration that spans decades and links improvisers of generations and geographical locations. At the core of this web are cornetist Bobby Bradford (who turns 91 this month) and tuba player William Roper, a pair of Los Angelenos who encounter visitors from distant places on both records.

Bradford is one of the few surviving practitioners of the first wave of musicians to push jazz past bebop in the '50s. He has worked most notably with Ornette Coleman, John Carter and John Stevens, but also with thousands of students during his six-plus decades as an educator. Roper describes himself as a freelance tuba player, which means he'll play whatever is required when he's on the clock. But if you had to categorize his more personal, creative work, his combinations of sound, song and movement qualify as performance art. The duo has performed under the names Purple Gums and CuZns; sadly, another commonality that Bradford and Roper share is that they both lost their Altadena homes in the Eaton Fire early this year.

On *Frice* (recorded in 2022), the duo are joined by LA-based drummer Alex Cline and Norwegian reeds player Frode Gjerstad. Gjerstad is a first-generation Norwegian improviser who first played with Bradford in 1986. Here his clarinet initiates the action, snaking low and stealthily around Cline's stark, meterless crashes, its tone becoming more splintered and complex as it goes. The ensemble may number four, but its collective concept is orchestral, with each player consciously contributing to a structure that is cohesive, kinetic and atonal. But like the proverbial elephant in the room, this music cannot be described in its entirety from any given moment. During a brief section of "Divalproex Haze" they fall into an overtly swinging cadence, only to slow and branch into a thicket of mystery from which issues Roper's low, moaning voice. He and Bradford also briefly layer fragments of remembered song on "Lajabless", opening the way for a more atomized final exchange that resolves into a brief charge into a thorny give and take between the winds.

On *Solace Angles*, Roper and Bradford are joined by nominal leader Karl Evangelista (guitar), as well as Rei Scampavia (keyboards) and Robert Lopez (drums), all members of the Bay Area jazz-rock combo Grex. Once more, the method is improvisation open enough to admit elements of song and story, as well as sounds most often heard in other genres. On "Panorama City", spacy synth textures, aluminum-toned guitar blooms, blue horn phrases and mercurially shifting beats lay out a view as diverse and interwoven as Los Angeles itself. And Roper's tall tale of bad family holiday memories links to harder racial traumas, while stumbling through a neon-lit soundscape on "Charlie Brown". While the sounds come more from Grex' side of town, the music unfolds on Bradford and Roper's terms.

For more info visit sluchaj.bandcamp.com and asianimprov.org. Evangelista and Bradford are at Solar Myth Jul. 18. See 100 Miles Out.



Just
Billy Hart Quartet (ECM)
by Andrew Schinder

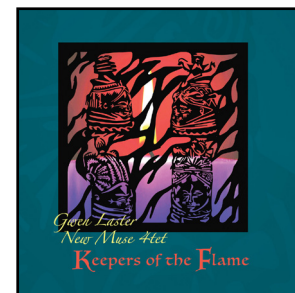
Octogenarian drumming legend Billy Hart has evolved from serving as a pioneer in jazz fusion and mid-period free jazz to settling in comfortably as a mainstay of both the New York and international jazz scenes. He first gained fame exploring some of the deepest, funkier corners of the music, but since fusion's '70s heyday, Hart has somewhat moved away from funk, concentrating on the post-bop tradition. Having recorded both under his own name and also extensively with some of jazz' most popular and successful groups (e.g. Pharoah Sanders, Herbie Hancock, Miles Davis, Stan Getz, Charles Lloyd, et al.), in 2022 he was recognized as a National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Master.

Hart formed his namesake quartet in 2003, and has been active and busy ever since, with Ethan Iverson (piano), Mark Turner (tenor) and Ben Street (bass), a combo that's been playing together for close to two and a half decades with an ease that would be expected: the group has over the years melded together into a seamless unit. Calling the group the "Billy Hart Quartet" is almost a misnomer. Even if jazz tradition dictates that small combos have a leader—Hart generously cedes control to the collective as a whole.

The Quartet released its latest album earlier this year, simply titled *Just*. The songs present a baseline level of accessibility, and for the most part are fundamentally straight ahead, but as a nod to his past, Hart allows for periodic detours to the realm of the moody or experimental. The offerings are quite well-structured, less a series of passed-around improvised solos and more well-arranged compositions. These are *songs*, not *jams*. "Showdown" kicks off the album beautifully, with Turner's lovely dulcet saxophone softly, but strongly, leading the track with Iverson providing background accompaniment. The pianist is showcased often and contributes one of the album's most exciting tracks, the crackling and bluesy "South Hampton". "Layla Joy" is a ballad in the true sense of the term: slow and contemplative, yes, but it most importantly tells a story through music. Turner's brooding "Bo Brussels" is a brilliantly edgy call-back to Hart's free jazz roots.

On none of these tracks does Billy Hart exhibit the showy, flashy drumming that one might expect from a legendary drummer-percussionist-bandleader. He's certainly still capable of such dynamism, but at this stage in his life and career, or at least for this project, there is simply no need; Hart has nothing to prove, and serving as a critical component in a seamless, well-oiled quartet is a much worthier cause.

For more info visit ecmrecords.com. The album release concert is at Village Vanguard Jul. 8-13. See Calendar.



Keepers of the Flame
Gwen Laster New Muse 4tet (Muffymarie)
by John Pietaro

The heritage of jazz violin encompasses a century's palette, from Joe Venuti, Stéphane Grappelli and Stuff Smith to Leroy Jenkins, Jean-Luc Ponty and Regina Carter. Long before big bands employed string sections, noted violinists braved early jazz within acoustic recordings. Turns out the bow-shredding wasn't for naught, and generations of string players—largely violinists but forward-thinking violists and cellists too—swallowed their classical training whole while salivating jazz creativity. And the further in time the jazz-string concept ventured, the avant garde cast a modern classical/free jazz fusion no other instrument group could brave.

Gwen Laster has been honing this singular artform over decades with Butch Morris, Karl Berger, Wadada Leo Smith, Aretha Franklin, Anthony Braxton, We Free Strings and the Sun Ra Arkestra. But her compositions and stoic determination demanded Laster lead ensembles, all of which culminate in the New Muse 4tet. *Keepers of the Flame's* current 4tet severs categories before mystically luring the ear through darkened, unexpected forays. Laster's sister in music, the fiery composer-violist Melanie Dyer is a staple, but this edition additionally includes both Oakland cellist Teddy Rankin-Parker, who tours with expansive rockers Primus as well as the International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE), and celebrated percussionist-composer-producer Andrew Drury, a decade-long mentee of former Ornette Coleman drummer, Ed Blackwell. The group's overall magic splinters and then coalesces into (to paraphrase Nina Simone) a film score for a film not yet made. Each selection is lengthy, sonically adventurous and melodic