



Standards Vol. 2
Yotam Silberstein (JoJo)
by Ken Dryden

Since immigrating to the US from Israel in 2005, guitarist Yotam Silberstein has built a reputation as a gifted improviser with a fluid style that emphasizes the rich melodies of his repertoire. He has played and recorded with a wide array of artists, including jazz greats in saxophonists Charles McPherson, Jimmy Heath and James Moody as well as pianist Monty Alexander, in addition to his own recordings.

For this trio session, *Standards Vol. 2*, with John Patitucci (bass) and Billy Hart (drums), Silberstein's main focus is interpreting a number of intimate ballads, many of which were composed long before his birth and few of which are performed by jazz musicians today. John Benson Brooks' "Just as Though You Were Here", though one of the composer's most familiar tunes, has only been recorded sporadically by jazz artists. "Blue Gardenia" is likely the best-known composition of Lester Lee, and the guitarist's cool setting of it allows for plenty of interplay with his rhythm section, while his playing is mostly laid back. Silberstein's subtle treatment, with Patitucci's spacious bass lines and Hart's whispering brushes, is soft spoken yet delivers

its message perfectly. The pace of the album picks up with the guest appearance of now-nonagenarian tenor saxophonist George Coleman in Sonny Rollins' "Tenor Madness", in which the trio takes a back seat to give the horn player plenty of room to blow his short but rapid-fire riffs. Once Silberstein comes to the forefront, he shows off his bop chops without overplaying, with the bassist and drummer laying a brisk foundation. Gerhard Winkler's "Answer Me, My Love" is a hidden gem, mostly heard on vocal easy listening records, such as those by Nat King Cole. The guitarist's interpretation of this overlooked tune here is masterful, embellishing its lyricism. Silberstein also uses the Middle Eastern oud instrument for an exotic setting of Victor Young's "Delilah", overdubbing a bit of guitar in the background, then adding a guitar solo, creating a unique sound that is as enchanting as was this historical, bewitching woman. His swinging rendition of "Wrap Your Troubles in Dreams" is a breezy affair, guaranteed to get listeners' feet tapping.

Standards Vol. 2 is best heard without distractions, with good company and quiet conversation.

For more info visit jojorecords.com. Silberstein is at The Django Jul. 2, and at Birdland Theater Jul. 9 (part of Frank Vignola's "Guitar Nights"). See Calendar.



Purposing the Air
Ingrid Laubrock (Pyroclastic)
by Kurt Gottschalk

In the ever-shrinking buffer zone of what have been posed as opposing forces between improvisation and composition, the nightclub and the concert hall—two traditions that each seem to have increasingly less to do with current practices separating these boundaries—the art song largely remains a holdout for the uptown crowd. Few from the jazz tradition (Roscoe Mitchell comes to mind) have really approached the expression in miniature that Charles Ives, Erik Satie, Franz Schubert, and Clara and Robert Schumann practiced so ably.

Saxophonist Ingrid Laubrock—herself from the homeland of the Schumanns—has made quite an impression in recent years as a composer of the formal order: see in particular 2018's *Contemporary Chaos Practices – Two Works for Orchestra and Soloists* and 2020's *Dreamt Twice, Twice Dreamt – Music for Chamber Orchestra and Small Ensemble*, both released by Intakt. Neither release, however, has trod such risky ground as the nearly naked art song, with its stripped-down complexity and sophisticated simplicity in arrangement and duration. *Purposing the Air* does just that, to remarkable results.

This double-album (also available as a download) is comprised of four books of 15 songs each, all settings of text from Erica Hunt's longform *Mood Librarian—a poem in koan*, although the arrangement might more properly be four suites, or a suite in four parts. But the compositions read (to these ears) as 60 connected, abstract miniatures, performed by four fine singers paired with talented accompanists, although not the composer. *Purposing the Air* is the first album Laubrock has written on which she doesn't play. The songs—rarely more than three minutes, occasionally less than one—are delivered by Fay Victor, with cellist Mariel Roberts; Sara Serpa with her Intimate Strangers pianist, Matt Mitchell; Theo Bleckmann

with longtime collaborator, guitarist Ben Monder; and Rachel Calloway with violinist Ari Streisfeld, who work together as Duo Cortona. The latter's set was the first composed and falls closest to the art song tradition, but it is the last presented on the recording. The Bleckmann book is the most surprising, if only because of Monder's controlled overdrive. Serpa and Victor, with their duet partners, give beautifully warm renditions, which might be the most satisfying of the four. But the book, the collection, is Laubrock's, and it's outstanding in any field.

For more info visit pyroclasticrecords.com. Laubrock is at Ibeam Brooklyn Jul. 18 (part of Wide Open Works/WOW Summer Festival). See Calendar.



incognito ergo sum
David Bixler Trio Incognito (s/r)
by Rachel Smith

When the father of philosophy, Frenchman René Descartes declared "Cogito, ergo sum" (I think, therefore I am) in 1637, he simplified the abstract concept of existence in a simple statement. Similarly, saxophonist David Bixler with *incognito ergo sum*—more or less "I am unknown (or hidden)"—offers a play on words and concept in the second album from his Trio Incognito. The group—with Dan Loomis (bass) and Fabio Rojas (drums)—came together during the pandemic and the album's 14 selections possess an off-kilter quality (as evidenced in the title of the third track "Liminal Space") that takes the listener out of everyday life. Loomis' bass playing is particularly subtle, as he produces a sound that is not quite grounded, while Bixler's saxophone playing floats in a sort of enveloping ether.

The strangeness of this world, sketched by the leader's twelve original compositions is not disturbing, but rather, attractive. He manages to write a world that sounds new and experimental without pushing his instrument too far. The star of the release is unquestionably the purity of Bixler's tone. The melodies are mostly unornamented and easy to follow. That simplicity allows his saxophone playing to accomplish a paradox: his approach pierces straight to the heart, while also feeling just out of reach. The arrangements support this effect, with Loomis' bass lines and Rojas' drumming audibly soft even during solos, which are notably few, in keeping with the "incognito" ethos. While an album with such a concept risks becoming monotonous, *incognito ergo sum* is impressive in its melodic variety. The natural incorporation of Irish folk music on "Johnny Cope" (which was originally a traditional Scottish folk song) was a special treat; Irish music and jazz also come together in Bixler's live performances with his wife, violinist and Irish fiddler Heather Bixler, as well as with Arturo O'Farrill and the Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra.

incognito ergo sum is The Music—capital T, capital M. The musicians are virtuosos on their respective instruments, and the band shares a mission with the album serving its vision. But even more than that basic fact, Bixler's new release gets to the heart of what The Music is: something higher than us, but something we can feel deeply nonetheless.

For more info visit davidbixler.com. The album release concert is at Drom Jul. 24. See Calendar.

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