

OK
Snakeoil (Screwgun)
Poiësis
Masayo Koketsu, Nava Dunkelman, Tim Berne
(Relative Pitch)
 by John Sharpe

Belying his veteran status, saxophonist Tim Berne remains a restless innovator who continues to challenge himself and his collaborators. He leads from the front, not only shaping his own bands with exacting vision, but also pitching his singular sound against the currents of younger improvisers. His alto saxophone playing—alternately cool, bittersweet and sizzling—offers one of the most expressive voices on the scene, one which is still looking forward, still discovering, still playing as if everything depends on it.

For over a decade, Snakeoil has been Berne's principal music laboratory. Across six previous releases, the band has proven adept at navigating his thorny charts, whether evoking chamber abstraction or hard-driving intricacy; but *OK*, an unissued live set from the outfit's first European tour in 2013, might be the most thrilling document yet, bristling with energy and invention. While much of the repertoire is familiar from contemporaneous releases, this archival release features two otherwise unrecorded pieces and expands "Static" from eight minutes in its studio incarnation to a 37-minute tour-de-force. Form and freedom

collide in glorious contradiction, with each member pushing the music further while staying tethered to Berne's compositional core. Critical to the unit's range are Ches Smith (clanking vibes, drums) and Matt Mitchell's instrumental command (piano), which allows him to serve simultaneously as anchor, foil and wild card, plus Oscar Noriega (clarinets) who provides an essential counterweight to Berne—his warmth and purity offsetting the leader's acerbic edge, yet just as capable of ignition, especially fiery on "Incidentals Contract". The leader's writing has always aimed for density without clutter, and Berne's Snakeoil quartet achieves a startling fullness—every line interlocks, recurs and evolves. Nonetheless, there is still room for a rare cover: a spikily impressionistic reading of Paul Motian's elegiac "Psalm", a cooling breeze after the feverish intensity that precedes it.

Poiësis captures Berne in freewheeling interaction with percussionist Nava Dunkelman and Japanese fellow alto saxophonist Masayo Koketsu. For a first-time encounter, the trio exhibits remarkable cohesion. Berne adapts his language to the situation but remains recognizably himself, deploying a soured lyricism, a caustic full tone, and a predilection for linear narrative flow, alongside timely forays towards the extremes to match Koketsu's experimental leanings. While happy with keypad popping, sudden blurts and multiphonic cries, Koketsu operates with a lighter tone and often more fragmented phrasing, but she is not beyond a blue-tinged melody either. As a result it is not always obvious who is playing what. But their conversational agility, willingness to search out common ground and mutual responsiveness are key to this album's success. Dunkelman's distinctive approach—as likely to co-opt metallic shimmer, bell-like resonance and castanet-like clicks as trap-set orthodoxy—engenders both propulsion and contrast, accentuating yet further the date's unique character. Across seven concise, largely high-octane improvisations, episodes of fierce horn interplay are punctuated by textural lulls and subtle recalibrations, maintaining momentum without monotony. The result is a tightly-woven dialogue rooted in free jazz, but enriched by a shared sensitivity to sound, space and surprise.

For more info visit screwgunrecords.bandcamp.com and relativepitchrecords.bandcamp.com. Berne is at Lowlands Aug. 5, 12. See Calendar.

one who quickly adapted and added to the music. The five selections heard on *Live at the Jazz Standard* all appeared on the then-recent studio release, but these intense, often extended interpretations captivate the audience as they reveal new facets.

The original "Waiting for Solitude" is constantly shifting its focus, with Oh's virtuosic extended solo and DeJohnette's nimble percussion complementing Colligan's composition and dramatic piano playing. The drummer sets up "Song for the Tarahumera" with a fiery solo and when the full trio enters, this post-bop vehicle is in full flight, as the pianist's darting lines interweave with Oh's pulsating bass lines and DeJohnette's rhythms to create pure magic. "Her Majesty" is dedicated to Colligan's wife, pianist Kerry Politzer. His introspective solo leads into a lively Latin-tinged theme that commands full attention, giving the bassist ample solo space as well. "Liam's Lament" (written by Colligan for his young son) is introduced by an unaccompanied Oh, with the leader entering on melodica to create a wistful mood along with DeJohnette's skillful percussive effects, conveying a boy seemingly focused in solitary thought. Colligan returns to piano for "If the Mountain Was Smooth, You Couldn't Climb It", which conveys its message of hope without a lyric and concludes the set on a high note.

It seems impossible that this trio was a one-off date due to the chemistry of its members, and it's fortunate for us as listeners that Colligan rediscovered the decade-long hidden recording.

For more info visit whirlwindrecordings.com. Colligan is at Dizzy's Club Aug. 27. See Calendar.



Split Decision
Eric Alexander & Vincent Herring (Smoke Sessions)
 by Scott Yanow

Tenor saxophonist Eric Alexander and alto saxophonist Vincent Herring have been mutual admirers and frequent collaborators for the past 20 years. Counting *Split Decision*, they have appeared together on at least a dozen recordings, which include two Japanese releases (Kizuna and *Live At Smoke*), a pair of albums by pianists Harold Mabern (*Mabern Plays Mabern* and *Mabern Plays Coltrane*) and Mike LeDonne (*That Feelin'* and *Wonderful*), drummer Joris Dudli's *Boundaries Expanded*, as well as major soloists on two albums by The Heavy Hitters sextet, plus Herring's *In the Spirit of Coltrane* and *Cannonball*. And as co-leaders, the two have recorded *The Battle-Live At Smoke* (2005), *Friendly Fire* (2011)... and now, *Split Decision*.

If one thinks of this quintet date with LeDonne (piano), John Webber (bass) and Lewis Nash (drums) as being a saxophone "battle," then the title of *Split Decision* fits. But in reality, this album is very much a cooperative, rather than competitive, meeting. Alexander and Herring have both been so consistent throughout their careers, playing modern hard bop with fire and passion, that as long as they are at the top of their game, their music is going to be magical. That is the case with this, their latest recorded meeting, starting right off with "Pharoah's Dance" (trombonist Steve Turre's tribute to both Pharoah Sanders and McCoy Tyner); LeDonne's playing here is very reminiscent of Tyner's. The quintet is at its best on "Strollin'" (one of Horace Silver's memorable melodies) and Hank



Live at the Jazz Standard
George Colligan (Whirlwind)
 by Ken Dryden

One of the most intriguing pianists of his generation, George Colligan spent his early career based in NYC, though he left eventually to join the faculty at Portland State University. This live set from the late, lamented venue, Jazz Standard, was recorded in 2014, a gig that Colligan stumbled across on his computer during a quarantine for a COVID infection he contracted in 2021. While based in New York, he developed a working relationship with Jack DeJohnette, playing in his group over several years. The drummer returned the favor by recording for Colligan with bassist Larry Grenadier on *The Endless Mysteries* (Origin), which focused on the pianist's compositions. As Grenadier was unable to make this Jazz Standard club date, the leader recruited bassist Linda May Han Oh, an inspired choice and



Mobley's "A Peck a Sec", an uptempo run through on rhythm changes. "My Romance" is a feature for Alexander; the two saxophonists and LeDonne shine on another Mobley composition, the minor-toned soul jazz blues "Soft Impressions". The joyful set concludes with the relatively brief cooker "Mo's Theme". Suffice it to say, it all works well on this predictably excellent encounter.

For more info visit smokesessionsrecords.bandcamp.com. The album release concert is at Smoke Aug. 13-17. See Calendar.



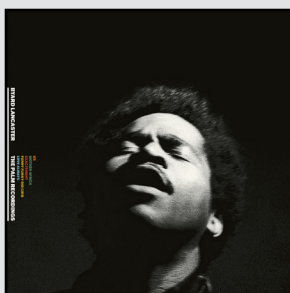
Blue Bossa in the Bronx: Live From the Blue Morocco
Kenny Dorham (Resonance)
by Duck Baker

The late trumpeter Kenny Dorham's recording career began 80 years ago, and for most of those years, jazz writers and musicians have been lamenting the degree to which he is underrated. It's as true now as ever, and will probably only get worse in the future. Even Fats Navarro, who was arguably the greatest of all bebop trumpeters, seems largely forgotten at this point. But while Navarro did not survive the age of bop, Dorham continued to grow as a musician, only to remain overshadowed during the hard bop era, first by Miles Davis and Clifford Brown, then by Lee Morgan and Freddie Hubbard. To some extent this results from an overemphasis by listeners on instrumental technique, but the idea that Dorham didn't have chops-a-plenty is nonsensical, as a listen to his crisp delivery on the double time passages as heard herein, a previously unreleased 1967 live recording, shows. More importantly, he had his own way of doing things, and the ability to really create spontaneous melody.

Blue Bossa In The Bronx, more than two years after his last studio date as leader (the brilliant *Trompeta Toccata* on Blue Note) and five years before his 1972 death, stands as a worthy coda to a great recording career, which we commemorate this month, one year after the trumpeter's centennial. Here Dorham is joined by Sonny Red (alto), Cedar Walton (piano), Paul Chambers (bass) and Denis Charles (drums). The Virgin Islands native Charles was known for his association with free jazz figures, but his deep Caribbean roots were always evident. It is certainly interesting to hear his take on bop accenting here in Charlie Parker's "Confirmation". Chambers and Walton had both recorded with Dorham several times previously, and they are in fine form, both as soloists and accompanists. The only other recorded encounter of Dorham with Red was from the Half Note (also with Walton) in early 1966. Listeners who know that record should know that this new release is better in every way. Red is an interesting, if somewhat inconsistent soloist, with a personal tone and original ideas. But it is Dorham who really grabs the attention. He may have lost his Blue Note contract but he had lost nothing else. The flow of ideas and personal sense of phrasing were as finely-tuned as ever, and this amazingly clear recording captures his burnished tone nicely, with four of the album's seven selections pushing past the 13-minute mark—including "Blue Bossa", "Bag's Groove" [sic], "Blue Friday" and the aforementioned "Confirmation".

For more info visit resonancerecords.org

BOXED SET



The Complete Palm Recordings 1973-1974
Byard Lancaster (Palm-Souffle Continu)
by Bill Meyer

The association of Byard Lancaster (1942-2012) with the Paris-based label PALM (Productions Artistiques Littéraires et Musicales) was brief, but significant. Between Nov. 1973 and Dec. 1974, the multi-instrumentalist (whose 83rd birthday and 13-year deathaversary fall on this month of August) recorded four albums, here released as *The Complete Palm Recordings*, which showcased a musical conception that spanned, in the artist's words, "from *A Love Supreme* to *Sex Machine*." This dynamic wasn't a matter of an established commercial entity betting resources on a commercial property, but of one independent musical figure collaborating with another, Parisian musician-producer-engineer Jef Gilson, to make a cohesive artistic statement.

Free jazz, which was never pecunious, had hit a commercial wall by the mid '70s. In New York, where Lancaster had worked with drummer Sunny Murray and saxophonist-bass clarinetist Marzette Watts, and in his home town of Philadelphia, gigs were scarce and scarcely compensatory. He had already tried self-production with Dogtown Records before leaving Philadelphia in the fall of 1973, hoping to find better opportunities in Paris, where he had previously played with Murray. But while the city had been a center of political and musical revolutionary action then, in 1973 it was going through its own recession-induced doldrums. Nonetheless, Gilson chose this time to start his label, PALM, with the intent to only make records that were artistically necessary; he produced, recorded and played on many of its releases—and he and Lancaster quickly hatched a plan: they would present not only the saxophonist's freer playing, which had already been presented on records with Murray, Watts, Burton Greene and Bill Dixon, among others, but the greater breadth of his interests.

The PALM studio was a repurposed movie theater. Gilson first recorded Lancaster there on Nov. 24, 1973. That session yielded *Us*, an unusually configured LP + 45 rpm single whose contents established the project's stylistic boundaries. Lancaster, playing flute, alto (his main instruments) and tenor saxophones, was accompanied by Malagasy Sylvain Marc (electric bass) and American Steve McCall (drums). The album contains three dynamic, contrasting performances, each of which demonstrates Lancaster's combination of strong historical/structural logic and emotional presence. "Mc Call All" begins with a propulsive drum solo, which establishes an energy level and sense of space that the trio sustains throughout. The leader joins in with piercing alto cries, then brings things down a notch, concentrating on quick, darting phrases. McCall does yeoman's work, simultaneously setting the pace with elastic rhythms and echoing Murray's pure-sound cymbal playing. The oddity of Marc's burping tone diminishes as he establishes a presence that is both conversational and driving. Lancaster switches to flute for "Flore", waxing alternately solemn and raw while McCall's slow rolls

underscore the music's dignity. The session closes with "John", an unaccompanied tenor piece that explores choppy phrases and emphatic cries in the horn's altissimo registers. The accompanying single, while recorded with the same personnel on the same day, sounds quite different. On the album title track and "Just Test", Lancaster is deep in the electric bassist's pocket, asserting an affiliation to funk.

By the end of 1974, PALM had issued three Lancaster titles co-credited to Lancaster and the other participants. Each elaborated upon some aspect of *Us*. In February, he led a quintet comprising Jean-François Catoire (bass), Jonathan Dickinson (drums), Keno Speller (percussion) and the youthful Texan, Clint Jackson II (trumpet), whom Gilson found busking on the streets of Paris. The two side-long tracks they recorded for *Mother Africa* reveal Gilson's shaping influence. Catoire's bass is unusually high in the mix for a jazz record made in 1974, and some of the ensemble's studio banter made it onto the recording. These interventions confer a sense that you're hearing something that was consciously made, not merely played, while still acknowledging the freedom of the playing. Jackson is great throughout, and Lancaster complements him astutely when not soloing. The album can be heard as the saxophonist's take on John Coltrane's West Coast adventures from 1965 and Pharoah Sanders' long-form, percussion-heavy work.

While Lancaster shares credit for the double album *Exactement* with Speller, it's a mostly solitary affair. Speller appears on a pair of flute-conga duets that distill the previous album's African dreaming to a loping, celebratory essence. For the other six tracks, Lancaster switches between soprano and alto saxophones, flute, bass clarinet and piano. By the mid '70s, solo horn albums were still pretty thin on the ground (asides from Anthony Braxton, Roscoe Mitchell, Evan Parker, Steve Lacy and Lee Konitz), but it's the focus and individuality of each instrumental statement here, not their novelty, that compels. On "Sweet Evil Miss", Kisianga fairly bathes in piano resonance, inhabiting a space midway between Alice Coltrane and Charlemagne Palestine. Lancaster's pointed flute phrases on "Virginia" articulate complicated shifts in mood and attack. His electronically doubled alto manages to sound spacy, but not particularly Sun R-related on "Dr. Oliver Lancaster". Both the bass clarinet showcase "Palm Sunday" and the darting soprano feature on "Providence Baptist Church" invoke early personal memories. *Exactement* is a strong statement of individual ability and spiritual intent.

PALM's advertisements at the end of 1974 promised the release of a full-band R&B record in the new year, but *Funny Funky Rib Crib* didn't turn up for another five, by which time Gilson had sold PALM. It opens with "Just Test", the B-side of the *Us* 7", but the rest of the record splits into two modes. "Dogtown" and "Rib Crib" (the latter which appears in two 9+ minute renditions) are punchy vamps that affirm Lancaster's devotion to James Brown. When the performances frame a soloist, it's galvanizing, but overlong passages of monochromatic riffing test patience. On two other tunes, he croons to mixed effect with competent delivery, but nowhere near as distinguished as his instrumental work: the best thing one can say about his lyrics is that they are sincere. Perhaps if he had stayed in Paris a bit longer, Lancaster could have come up with additional material in this vein and addressed such shortcomings. As it stands, *Funny Funky Rib Crib* unfortunately ends a great run on a flat note.

For more info visit soufflecontinuerecords.com