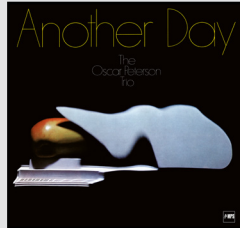


DROP THE NEEDLE



hello Herbie (with Herb Ellis) (MPS)



Another Day (MPS)

Oscar Peterson Trio
by Andrew Schinder

Piano hall-of-famer Oscar Peterson would have turned 100 this year, and just in time for his centennial, the seminal jazz label MPS has remastered and reissued two releases that he recorded at the label's southwest Germany recording studio in the Black Forest. *hello Herbie (with Herb Ellis)* and *Another Day*, recorded in 1969 and 1970, respectively, are not necessarily among the most renowned entries in his vast discography. However, both offer pleasures Peterson dependably delivers—virtuosic piano playing, uptempo moods and blissfulness. The pianist is a famously criticized figure in jazz for playing too many notes, making him effectively an enemy of subtlety. He's also been called out for being all technique, no artfulness. Some of this criticism may be warranted, but for the most part these approaches

are stylistic features, not bugs. Peterson was never a particularly forward-thinking musician, and he was never going to lead academics on a quest for subtext. But so what? Try to be in a bad mood after listening to an Oscar Peterson record. It's impossible. Both these albums serve as perfect examples of this phenomenon.

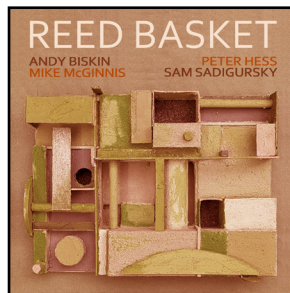
hello Herbie reunited Peterson with longtime guitarist Herb Ellis who, along with legendary bassist Ray Brown, comprised one of the pianist's most famous trios. This album represents the pianist and guitarist's first "official" reuniting, over a decade later, after Ellis' 1958 departure. The then-current Peterson trio, with Sam Jones (bass) and Bobby Durham (drums), perform as a quartet with the addition of Ellis, and the group presents a number of joyously energetic offerings that beautifully showcase the piano/guitar interplay. The interpretation of the standard "Exactly Like You" is almost casual in its skillfulness, Ellis ripping through extended solos with ease and nimbleness. "Hamp's Blues" takes the explosiveness down a few notches, with the rhythm section of Jones and Durham given space to shine behind Ellis' and Peterson's subtle riffing. "Blues for H.G." is a banger that straight-up swings and leaves no room for doubt as to the group's proficiency or its chemistry.

Peterson was a master improviser, and his genius

is again on full display on *Another Day*, which swaps out the above album's rhythm section for George ("Jiri") Mraz (bass) and Ray Price (drums). Here, the focus is purely on pianistic virtuosity. The leader's performance is characteristically flashy, showy and enchanting. His original "Blues for Martha" opens the album by bombarding the listener with ivory explosiveness, signaling that one should look elsewhere if seeking a more delicate experience. The music segues into an arrangement of the English folk song/holiday mainstay "Greensleeves", which may seem like an odd choice at first, but allows Peterson plenty of room to play with the structure of a familiar tune. Mraz and Price's rhythmic interplay is the star of the group's Tropicalia-tinged take of "All the Things You Are" (Hammerstein, Kern), providing a groovy backdrop to the pianist's improvised arpeggios.

Neither album may feature Peterson's most famous trios, so they aren't necessarily the places to start for a Peterson newbie per se but, nevertheless, even an intermediate Peterson-ologist should certainly seek these out. MPS' remastered vinyl reissues truly look and, on 180g vinyl, sound amazing.

For more info visit mps-music.com. Oscar Peterson Centennial celebrations are at Birdland Aug. 12-16 and Birdland Theater Aug. 16-18. See Calendar.



Reed Basket
Andy Biskin Reed Basket (Andoor Music)
by Ken Waxman

An essay in clarinet curiosity, Andy Biskin's musical basket is filled with sounds from five types of clarinets played by Biskin and three other top New York reedists whose skills encompass jazz, new music, pop and ethnic sounds. Resourceful. Biskin, who composed half the 13 titles and arranged all, is part of many ensembles. He is also a filmmaker, and was a former assistant to folklorist Alan Lomax. His *16 Tons: Songs from the Alan Lomax Collection* (2018) reinterpreted familiar folk songs for improvisers and this session extends that Postmodernist idea even further.

Besides Biskin's alternately rhapsodic, rhythmic and quirky originals, he, Peter Hess, Sam Sadigursky and Mike McGinnis use their reed combinations to recast tunes as diverse as classic jazz standards—such as Jelly Roll Morton's "Wolverine Blues" and Pee Wee Russell's "Wailin' DA Blues"—with Lou Reed's "Walk on the Wild Side", Lerner and Loewe's "Camelot" and Franz Schubert's "Moment Musicaux #3". The last is particularly noteworthy because the combination of soprano clarinet lyricism and a bass clarinet continuum turn the Austrian composer's piece into a near klezmer romp, albeit one that could feature Russell as soloist. Interestingly, "Wailin' DA Blues", a Russell showpiece, is similarly transformed: from a bedrock of interlocking blues riffs, overlapping individual solos of piercing squeals and twittery flutters, later combining to squirm into a multi-vibrated finale. In

reverse, "Walk on the Wild Side" is modified from rock anthem to an expressive ballad with clarion reeds propelling the theme, decorated with gentle trills that even replicate the original doo-de-do choruses.

Biskin's compositions are correspondingly diverse, ranging from the pastel tone poem of "Yasmina" to the near-dissonant "So Forth". The former confirms that softness and syncopation aren't antagonists, with heartfelt glissandi and tremolo line circling the group's moderated forward motion. The latter, featuring four bass clarinets, wallows through basement-level interlocking interchanges with a few altissimo squeaks and mid-range trills added to a four-part unison resolution.

Firmly in the tradition of other multi-reed ensembles like ROVA and the Clarinet Choir, Reed Basket defines an individual direction mostly through Biskin's out-of-the-ordinary formulations.

For more info visit andybiskin.bandcamp.com. The album release concert is at Barbès Aug. 31. See Calendar.

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