



Outpost of Dreams
Norma Winstone/Kit Downes (ECM)
by Ken Dryden

English vocalist Norma Winstone (who celebrates her 84th birthday this month) has had a long, productive career, although North American jazz fans have had only sporadic access to her albums, since few of them, excepting her near two-decade-long recording relationship with ECM, have been widely distributed outside of Europe. Winstone was 81 at the time of recording her latest ECM release, *Outpost of Dreams*, with English pianist Kit Downes, who proves to be a perfect match for the expressive singer. His lush chords are more than accompaniment—they are a collaboration with this gifted singer. And though her voice has deepened a little over many decades, she retains a rich, captivating tone with expressive diction and the ability to bring out the emotions of each song.

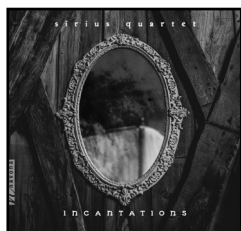
Five of the ten numbers feature music composed by Downes with lyrics by Winstone. “El” is a magical opening track, blending her poetry with his sensitive, majestic piano. “Fly The Wind” was written by the late English pianist John Taylor, Winstone’s former husband and musical partner. This breezy vehicle showcases her soaring, spacious lyric and a bit of playful scatting. Her mysterious lyric to guitarist Ralph Towner’s “Beneath an Evening Sky” proves haunting, leaving the listener guessing if the union ended by death or departure. “Out of The Dancing Sea” is a work by Scottish fiddler Aidan O’Rourke and Winstone. She showcases her still strong upper vocal range and her lyrics are a perfect fit. “The Steppe”, another collaboration with Downes, opens with a wordless introduction and Winstone once again stuns with the range of emotion. “Nocturne” is the most abstract of the duo’s collaborations, with the pianist’s dissonant chords providing inspiration for an equally adventurous vocal. The centuries old song “Black Is the Colour [sic]” has been recorded many times by jazz vocalists, though this dramatic, powerful interpretation takes more than its fair share of successful risks. The duo’s “In Search of Sleep”, with Winstone’s spoken words, is a marriage of a pensive theme with many twists, and the feeling of suffering a night of insomnia, with a fitting, abrupt conclusion.

Outpost of Dreams is an essential addition to Norma Winstone’s discography, although the rather brief 41-minute length of this rewarding duo meeting leaves the listener wanting more.

For more info visit ecmrecords.com



Free Fall
Fung Chern Hwei’s Fungal Bloom (Adhyâropa)
Incantations
Sirius Quartet (s/r)
by Elijah Shiffer



Though stylistic versatility may not be as much of a necessity on the violin than some other instruments, there are still many violinists who seem at ease in a vast variety of contexts. On two recent releases, Fung Chern

Hwei shows that he is very much this kind of player, as each album showcases him in a completely different, equally exciting ensemble.

Free Fall is the debut of the Fungal Bloom trio, featuring Fung alongside Shawn Lovato (bass) and Colin Hinton (drums). It’s a well-named album, full of intense yet playful free improvisation with a wide-open sound. The chordless trio setting means that each instrument takes up a very well-defined niche in the sonic space, but the three players are clearly listening closely to each other. Of the eight tracks, the title track is surprisingly one of the few with a well-defined theme and solos—though these are no less free than the rest of the album. There’s plenty of melody in everyone’s improvising, even Hinton’s; this is especially true of “Yellow Cow” and “Headless Chicken” with their folk-song simplicity. “Flakes” is a bit more textural; the interplay of violin and bass bowing is one of the album’s most fascinating moments. The leader switches to viola for the final track, Anaïs Mitchell’s “We Raise Our Cups” from the Broadway musical *Hadestown* (in whose band Fung also plays); it’s a refreshing dose of tonality and groove after all the abstraction.

The Sirius Quartet finds Fung among like-minded string players—Gregor Huebner (violin), Sunjay Jayaram (viola), Jeremy Harman (cello)—and proves equally adept at ensemble playing, improvising and composing. The quartet’s latest album, *Incantations*, features pieces by each member (three by Harman and two by each of the others), which are united by several common threads, regardless of the composer. Many share a similar form, combining intricately-arranged rhythmic themes with open-ended solo sections to create a unique sound that is equal parts jazz and minimalism. Fung’s compositions stand out for their dramatic, yet gradual shifts of tempo and mood. The album pays tribute to ancestors of all kinds, from individual mentors to historically marginalized peoples, including the most powerful track, which is Huebner’s “Chant Pour l’Île Gorée”, named for an island off Africa’s westernmost point (infamous for its significance to the transatlantic slave trade). This piece begins with a monumental litany of call-and-response on a single ornamented pitch, before breaking into a somber lament of a theme, which fits its subject perfectly.

For more info visit adhyaroparecords.com and siriusquartet.com. Fung Chern Hwei is at Owl Music Parlor Sep. 14 (with Michael Bates Acrobat). See Calendar.



Live at Vic's
Nicole Zuraitis and Friends (La Reserve)
by Jim Motavalli

“Hello Las Vegas! We’re so happy to be here at Vic’s,” Nicole Zuraitis begins her double album, *Live at Vic’s*, and with that, launches into an atypical song for a jazz vocalist—Preston “Red” Foster’s “Got My Mojo Working”. That she makes this blues work, with the addition of scat, is a sign of her versatility. Zuraitis is possessed of a powerful, full-bodied vocal instrument and she employs it across a wide spectrum. Featuring the two-time GRAMMY-winner’s working group—Idan Morim (guitar), Samuel Weber (bass) and Dan Pugach (drums) along with guests: trumpeter Keyon Harrold (who brings the house down on “Mojo”), organist Rachel Eckroth and veteran studio musician, saxophonist Tom Scott (who also co-produced)—the

live session is a relaxed one, giving plenty of solo time to the assembled crew.

With “The Nearness of You” (Carmichael, Washington) she’s back in the songbook, but takes it at a faster tempo than usual. Weber quotes “Twisted” in his exemplary solo, and Morim is in a swinging groove, with Zuraitis scatting to his strings. The leader’s “All Stars Lead to You” is in the pop realm, with Scott taking on the role he played regularly as a member of the L.A. Express with Joni Mitchell, but here with a longer than usual solo. Eckroth and Harrold are fiery, at length, all contributing to this 11+ minute track. The much-recorded “Pure Imagination” (Newley, Bricusse) is treated with subdued respect by the singer. “That’s the quietest Las Vegas has ever been!” she declares at the end. Her dramatic version of Dolly Parton’s “Jolene” is a show-stopper, taking liberal license with the original arrangement and wringing every ounce of emotion from the desperate story. The drumming of Pugach, veering through country, jazz, even military rhythms, deserves special credit, as does Harrold’s impassioned trumpet performance in a long instrumental break.

A version of Stevie Nicks’ “Rhiannon” sticks closer to the original. But Jimmy Webb’s “Wichita Lineman”, with some bright playing from Morim, sounds like it was always supposed to be jazz in her hands. Zuraitis’ “Middle C”, which she wrote with Billy Seidman, declares she likes her man like she likes her notes, “not too high and not too low.” It’s a future songbook standard, reminiscent of the originals that Canadian singer Caity Gyorgy is writing now. Ditto the artist’s insanely catchy “The Coffee Song”, which is largely backed by Weber’s bass playing. Zuraitis initially essays Thelonious Monk’s “Round Midnight” with just piano backing (before Harrold and Eckroth eventually come in) and it’s great—she could make a whole album this way. The release’s penultimate tune is a challenge: it’s

RECOMMENDED NEW RELEASES

- Lucian Ban, John Surman, Mat Maneri – *The Athenaeum Concert* (Sunnyside)
- Patricia Brennan – *Of The Near and Far* (Pyroclastic)
- Peter Brötzmann, Jason Adasiewicz, Steve Noble, John Edwards – *The Quartet: Cafe Oto, London (Feb. 10 & 11, 2023)* (Otoroku)
- Eric Ineke JazzXpress (feat. Tineke Postma) – *Swing Street: Plays The Music of Cannonball Adderley* (Timeless)
- Anat Fort – *The Dreamworld of Paul Motian* (Sunnyside)
- Hinode Tapes & Hiroki Chiba – *ITA* (Instant Classic)
- I Hold The Lion’s Paw – *Potentially Interesting Jazz Music* (Earshift Music)
- Sheila Jordan – *Portrait Now* (Dot Time)
- Peter Knight – *TL; DR* (*Too Long; Didn’t Read*) (Earshift Music)
- Branford Marsalis Quartet – *Belonging* (Blue Note)
- Eric McPherson – *Double Bass Quartet - Live* (Giant Step Arts)
- The Necks – *Disquiet* (Northern Spy)
- Kristen Noguès/John Surman – *Diriaou* (Souffle Continu)
- Linda May Han Oh – *Strange Heavens* (Biophilia)
- Scheen Jazzorkester & Fredrik Ljungkvist – *FRAMAT!* (Grong)
- Smooth Elevator (Will Bernard, Danilo Gallo, Giole Pagliaccia) – *Moving Target* (Losen)
- Mark Solborg Tungemål – *:Confluencia* (ILK Music)
- Dwight Trible – *Nocturnal Romance – Noir* (Katalyst Entertainment)
- Webber/Morris Big Band – *Unseparate* (Out Of Your Head)
- Cory Weeds – *Meets Jerry Weldon* (Cellar Music)

the vocalist's take on the traditional "See-Line Woman" (aka "Sea Lion Woman"), a song closely associated with Nina Simone. Her solution: to take it very uptempo as more an outsider observation than an inside view.

On the whole, *Live at Vic's* is an energized program, its 17 songs showing the many facets of Zuraitis, one of jazz' better singers today.

For more info visit lareserverecords.com. The album release concert is at Drom Sep. 25. See Calendar.



Alloy
Dave Douglas (Greenleaf Music)
by Jeff Cebulski

For Dave Douglas, the ever-inventive trumpeter and director of the Festival of New Trumpet (FONT) Music, his love of "trumpets blending" led to a first three-trumpet ensemble in 2003. A new version, with Douglas, David Adewumi and Alexandra Ridout, has recorded the just-released *Alloy*, a scintillating survey of jazz styles, harmonically augmented by vibraphonist Patricia Brennan, where the three trumpets manage to signify themselves without overwhelming the other members, like fine New Orleans interplay. As Douglas has said, "It doesn't have to be a high note competition."

The unified result sometimes calls to mind the music of The Westerlies in its chamber-like arrangements. But Douglas' penchant for box-of-chocolate jazz compositions distances *Alloy* from mere comparisons; the music travels from quasi-classical to bop to modal abstraction to spiritual blues, sometimes in the same tune. The ensemble passes the test on "The Illusion of Control", a great title for a collective improvisation by musicians who bathe in synchronicity; the group's keen rapport creates implied structure as Douglas leads and the others follow like mind-readers. The trumpet-leader's affinity for spiritual and other folk tropes shows up here. "Announcement: Vigilance" (the album opener) is led by reverberating horns and vibe sheen, out of which a hymn-like melody emerges before a snare rap from drummer Rudy Royston pronounces a blues statement, with appropriate slurring from Douglas and steady support from bassist Kate Pass. On "Fields", the horns trade single-note expressions that slide into more elongated phrases, almost like Appalachian *a capella* spirituals. Brennan's church-chime addition heralds a gospel-swing interlude that evolves into

a tongue-speaking cacophony. "Standing Watch" bookends the album with another choral pronouncement, this time similar to a funeral stoll where each player has a final word.

On the modal title cut, Douglas' cup-muted pronouncement opens a spirited trade-off with Ridout, followed by a solo passage from each that swings over lovely vibraphone comping. Adewumi then carries on as a lead-in to Royston's solo display. In "The Antidote", chamber themes are eschewed and replaced by solid bop. Douglas, accompanied by a walking line, sets the tone and pace with a fanciful swinging intro that is answered in kind by Ridout as the arrangement settles into a solo/chorus/solo pattern. Adewumi breaks the rhythmic cycle with a deep blues passage bolstered by Pass and Brennan's tandem support, leading to the latter's solo.

On *Alloy*, the chromatic harmony proves that Dave Douglas' instincts are keen, as he and his friends celebrate "trumpets blending" in a show of unification over competition and division.

For more info visit greenleafmusic.com. The album release concert is at The Jazz Gallery Sep. 5-6 (part of FONT Music). See Calendar.



Technically Acceptable
Ethan Iverson (Blue Note)
by Andrew Schinder

Pianist Ethan Iverson is also one of modern music's foremost authors, curators and intellectuals. His long-running blog, *Do the Math*, now morphed into Iverson's Substack, *Transitional Technology*, is one of the finest out there and offers valuable jazz insights and information. In addition to having collaborated with frequent bandmate Billy Hart on the drumming legend's just-published autobiography, *Oceans of Time*, Iverson recently released his new album, *Technically Acceptable*. Borrowing from jazz and classical idioms, and utilizing two different sets of accompanying musicians—Thomas Morgan (bass) and Kush Abadey (drums) or Simón Willson (bass) and Vinnie Sperrazza (drums)—the results of the two piano trios taken together are, probably, inevitably, somewhat inconsistent. The highs nevertheless outweigh any lows, resulting in an ultimately successful collection that is certainly much more than its winking title suggests.

Album opener "Conundrum", which Iverson suggests could be the theme song to a game show, is a bright, cheerful ditty, showcasing his virtuosity, but like a flash it ends, clocking in at a mere minute and a half. The bluesy title track with the Morgan/Abadey tandem is a highlight, with a delightfully head-bobbing walking bass line and the pianist having a blast filling in the gaps. With the Willson/Sperrazza trio, the leader plays with time signatures on the more serious (but still interesting) "It's Fine to Decline", which leans into Iverson's avant garde tendencies, even though it ultimately remains grounded in the blues tradition. Two familiar covers provide a climax to this trio portion of the album, starting with the Latin-tinged "Killing Me Softly With His Song", which is perfectly pleasant, but on a program that often leans into intellectualism and complexity, feels out of place (ultimately, this interpretation can't compare to the iconic Roberta Flack or Fugees versions). Conversely, the cover of Thelonious Monk's "'Round Midnight" is stunning. Multi-instrumentalist Rob Schwimmer joins the trio and owns the track on theremin, mimicking an operatic human voice that imbues new emotional depth to a well-wrung standard.



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