



Gullah Roots
Etienne Charles (Culture Shock)
by George Kanzler

Etienne Charles acts as leader-composer, trumpeter, percussionist and musical anthropologist on the new *Gullah Roots*, his exploration and musical expression of the connections between the Gullah Geechee culture of Atlantic coastal South Carolina and Georgia, the Caribbean and Africa. Charles, a native of Trinidad & Tobago, became interested in the Gullah (called Geechee in Georgia), descendants of slaves brought to America to grow sea isle cotton, and their unique culture, preserved and practiced on the islands and shores of the Atlantic coast, after visiting Charleston and meeting drummer Quentin Baxter. Baxter had brought his Gullah heritage to the GRAMMY-winning band he co-founded, Ranky Tanky. On *Gullah Roots*, Charles incorporates Gullah percussionists and shout singers into his music, described in the liner notes as each track offering “a history lesson with musical expressions to evoke pain and joy, emotions Gullah scholars said can exist together.” Anchoring the album is Charles’ superb core sextet: Godwin Louis (alto), Alex Wintz (guitar), Christian Sands (piano), Russell Hall (bass) and Harvel Nakundi (drums).

Charles’ music makes connections from Gullah to the Caribbean and African roots in a rhythmic exploration on the opening, title track. Following tracks delve into resistance to enslavement. “Bilali” is an homage to Islam, energized by rapid-fire trading of fours by trumpet and alto. The two-part “Watch Night” evokes the Gullah ritual, with a vocal chorus, begun with the Emancipation Proclamation, the first part slow and solemn, the second jubilant, with Nola-like second-line rhythms and chants of “freedom day.” The leader’s anthropological inquiries even revealed a connection between his Trinidadian home and the Gullah, reflected in “Merikans”. Gullah were repatriated to Trinidad from the US by the British after fighting on their side in the War of 1812, rendered musically on “Gullypsso Jazz”. Charles creates a somber, panoramic dirge morphing into a more triumphant, yet serious paean to victory on the two-part “Igbo Landing”, commemorating the mass suicide of slaves in Georgia. The album ends with the most familiar example of the Gullah language, the Black spiritual “Kumbaya”, propelled by polyrhythmic

drums, dialoguing shout choruses and spirited trumpet and alto saxophone solos by Charles and Louis.

For more info visit etiennecharles.com. Charles is at Dizzy’s Club Sep. 25-28. See Calendar.



Further Ahead (Live in Finland 1964-1969)
Bill Evans (Elemental Music)
by Andrew Schinder

Record Store Day (RSD) is not without its controversies, but many can agree that the “holiday” has resulted in the release of a treasure trove of unreleased recordings, artifacts and historical curiosities across multiple genres – some of which are essential, and some of which should have probably stayed buried. Bill Evans fans have been treated to numerous examples of the former. The last RSD saw the release of the latest concert discoveries featuring the piano master, who passed away 45 years ago this month. Entitled *Further Ahead*, the collection showcases three concerts staged during the pianist’s numerous trips to Scandinavia in the ‘60s. The sound is excellent; given the time periods they are truly impressive feats of sound engineering.

Recorded at three different venues in Finland, the compilation finds Evans working with three different trios: Chuck Israels (bass) and Larry Bunker (drums) in Helsinki in August 1964; Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen (bass) and Alan Dawson (drums) at the Helsinki Jazz Festival in November 1965 (with alto saxophone legend Lee Konitz appearing on a lovely version of “My Melancholy Baby”); Eddie Gomez (bass) and Marty Morrell (drums) at the University of Tampere in October 1969. Of course, none of these combos measure up to the iconic trio of Evans, Scott LaFaro (bass) and Paul Motian (drums) from earlier in the decade. Nevertheless, the recordings here show Evans settling into a nice workman-like groove following LaFaro’s 1961 death in a car crash, as well as Evans’ ongoing battle with his own demons. While the mid-late ‘60s were not Evans at his prime, these concerts show him at his most stable.

The collection fascinates by offering different versions of several songs performed, giving listeners a glimpse into Evans’ thought process and the divergent interpretations of standards this singular artist could

create. “Autumn Leaves”, famously recorded by Evans in the late ‘50s, is given such treatment. In both versions he gives way to stunning bass solos by his respective sidemen, but while the pianist on the 1964 version is contemplative and deliberate, in 1969 he is wilder, almost reckless. The two interpretations of Miles Davis’ “Nardis”, an Evans standard, are the album’s highlights: the 1964 version is loose, fun and swift, while the 1969 version is an extended tour-de-force where the trio is initially fairly solemn, before concluding the concert with an exhilarating burst of energy.

For more info visit elemental-music.com



The Dreamworld of Paul Motian
Anat Fort (Sunnyside)
by Ken Dryden

Paul Motian was a respected drummer, bandleader, sideman and composer, though he is best known for freeing drummers from strictly timekeeping roles in small groups, something he pioneered as a member of the Bill Evans Trio. Israeli pianist Anat Fort was long fascinated with Motian’s approach to playing and his compositions, and after moving to the US in the mid ‘90s, she worked with bassist Ed Schuller (who had worked with Motian), which in turn led to an introduction and her invitation to the veteran drummer to appear on her 2007 album *A Long Story* (ECM). They continued to play together off and on until the drummer’s death a few years later in 2011. As Fort planned a tribute album of Motian’s compositions, she explored his vast songbook and included several unrecorded works. Her band here includes three veterans: Steve Cardenas (guitar and Motian band alum for over a dozen years), Gary Wang (bass) and Matt Wilson (drums), giving several of the songs a different perspective, since Motian infrequently included piano on his own albums.

This is the debut recording of “Dreamworld”, a spacious interactive work for piano, bass and guitar that reflects its title. The Ornette Coleman-like air of “Mumbo Jumbo” is abstract and features the full quartet, with Fort’s meandering solo interacting with the independence of the rhythm section. The brooding “Yallah” utilizes a repeated riff as the root of its theme, with a pacing rhythm suggesting someone lost in thought at a difficult time. The interactive “Riff Raff” is another free-spirited work that briefly shifts into a turbulent maelstrom, and ends far too soon, sounding as if it could be used as a set’s end sign-off. “Tacho” is a bit unusual, as the leader switches to the role of narrator to share the story of Motian’s friend who had worked at a circus. The low-key music and Fort’s emotionless delivery fits the narrative perfectly (a second take of the song features her alone at the piano, minus the words). “Umh Hum” is another example of the drummer’s previously unrecorded work. The light-hearted song has engaging interplay between the pianist and guitarist, before turning it over to Wilson’s nimble drum breaks.

Anat Fort’s exploration of the infrequently (if not ever) performed compositions of her dedicatee and past collaborator, Paul Motian, should encourage other artists to dig into his compositional treasure trove.

For more info visit sunnysiderecords.com. The album release concert is at Smalls Sep. 3. See Calendar.



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