



Oh Snap
Cécile McLorin Salvant (Nonesuch)
by Andrew Schinder

Vocalist Cécile McLorin Salvant has established herself as one of the preeminent interpreters of the jazz songbook, winning accolades for her rich, gorgeous interpretations of standards. But within the past few years, she also has evolved from her beginnings as a straight-ahead jazz singer to more of an iconoclast, embracing her French and Haitian heritage and offering a sometimes challenging but always fascinating output. Following 2023's spectacular French language concept album *Mélusine*, Salvant has returned with *Oh Snap*, which continues her evolution beyond vocalist to songwriter. And outside of a few callbacks, the album continues her minimizing of the conventional jazz genre. Recorded over the course of several years and often incorporating eclectic electronic instrumentation, Salvant has crafted a profoundly personal, exciting statement in this release, which stands poised to expand her always-growing fanbase beyond jazz and high-art circles.

Album opener, "I Am a Volcano", might probably chase away anyone looking for Salvant's next Gershwin cover. It's a deeply weird indie pop song, and it's the album's thematic opening salvo. She enlists her frequent collaborator, celebrated pianist Sullivan Fortner, to play not jazz piano but extra synths. With lyrics referencing Salvant "destroying everything," the song could even act as an "F-you" to the jazz tradition, even though it's catchy and delightful. And then, surprisingly, almost shockingly, the vocalist swings back to that jazz tradition with her "Anything but Now", reminiscent of Broadway tunes from the Golden Age. The song is an uptempo swinger with Fortner back on piano, right within Salvant's wheelhouse. She doesn't sit still for long, however, enlisting fellow vocalists June McDoom and Kate Davis, along with guitarist Evan Wright, for another detour with the gorgeous folk song "Take This Stone". The song's chorus features striking harmonization by the three singers, as Salvant shows the same mastery of the folk idiom as she has over the years with jazz (and blues).

Salvant largely settles in with the opener's indie pop vibes for the remainder of the album, with the

occasional seesaw back to straight-ahead jazz. She takes over the synths herself on the thumping title track, accompanied by pulsating percussion from Keita Ogawa and Weedie Braimah. "Eureka" is hauntingly beautiful, with soft synths ultimately rising into a mid-tempo dance beat. "A Frog Jumps In" concludes *Oh Snap* on a primarily instrumental note, with Fortner's melancholy, ominous synths leaving the listener in a trance-like head space, far away from anything remotely close to Cole Porter or Irving Berlin.

For more info visit nonesuch.com. Salvant is at David Geffen Hall's Wu Tsai Theater Sep. 25 (with the New York Philharmonic). See Calendar.



Go To Your North
Jason Moran/Trondheim Jazz Orchestra/
Ole Morten Vågan (Yes)
by John Sharpe

Pianist Jason Moran is the latest high-profile partner to join the Trondheim Jazz Orchestra, adding to a long list that includes Chick Corea, Joshua Redman, Cory Smythe and Anna Webber. Like previous projects, *Go To Your North* showcases the outfit's modular design: a rotating cast of Scandinavian improvisers configured to suit each collaboration.

Here, the 13-strong band interprets ten works from across Moran's output—stretching from 2001's *Black Stars* to 2021's *The Sound Will Tell You*—in new arrangements by bassist and artistic director Ole Morten Vågan. Far from a traditional big band date, Vågan's charts refashion the format into something more elastic and exploratory, often allowing the full group to collapse into pockets of jagged improvisation, minimalist detail and adventurous soloing. Two of the longer cuts bookend the program, and like all the pieces, each covers a wide range of territories. Opener, "Foot Under Foot", pivots between tightly voiced flourishes and wayward excursions from Mette Rasmussen's alto and Eivind Lønning's reverberant trumpet, while the closer "Wind" serves as a slow-burn coda, building from quiet reflection to a stormy post-Coltrane squall, courtesy of tenor saxophonist Jonas Kullhammar, and back again.

Between times Vågan rings the changes. "Spoken in Two" begins as an introspective ballad before morphing into boppish swing, complete with incisive horn punctuations and shifting rhythmic gears. Jaki Byard's "Out Front" starts with staccato hip-hop-inflected beats, launching a sparky piano outpouring, gradually engulfed by crisscrossing horns, before dissolving into glitchy textures and electronic susurrations. Vågan applies these post-production elements sparingly, but effectively elsewhere too, particularly on "Ringing My Phone" and "Skitter In", where digital atmospheres frame sharp group interaction. Though never overpowering, Moran's piano is often prominent. He slips seamlessly between roles: his ringing chords, tumbling atonal runs and moments of delicate lyricism variously buttressing the ensembles or adorning their architecture. Vocalist Sofia Jernberg contributes one of the album's most striking aspects. Her remarkable voice is threaded through the horn lines, creating an otherworldly dimension to the orchestration, while her hymn-like ascent on Brahms' "Intermezzo Op.118 No.2", in tandem with Moran's reverent phrasing, offers a moment of stark beauty.

A collaborative reimagining, the album honors the breadth of Moran's writing while prying it open to reveal new, volatile possibilities.

For more info visit yesrecords.bigcartel.com. Moran is at The Stone at The New School Sep. 24 (with Caroline Davis). See Calendar.



Prog vs Fusion: A War of the Ages
Ed Palermo Big Band (Sky Cat)
by John Pietaro

Ed Palermo, who's led his groundbreaking big band since 1977, even when not so fashionable, has tirelessly produced artful mashups of the most unique sort. Initially garnering acclaim with forays into Frank Zappa's repertoire, Palermo's own creative satire may ironically be responsible for his place on the jazz fringe; and that might be called criminal.

His latest album, *Prog vs Fusion: A War of the Ages* is no joke, even when spectacularly tongue-in-cheek. For instance, John McLaughlin's "Resolution" includes Bruce McDaniel's warning, "They've unleashed the mellotron!". Yet the flawless arrangements of such acutely complex songs, armed with outstanding soloists, enlivens what might be viewed as overly technical music. Palermo's theatrics have never effaced his impeccable ear and direction, or the band's soaring woodwinds, biting brass and rhythm section, which swings with as much conviction as it rocks and grooves. A special note goes to the rollicking, melodic drumming of Ray Marchica, Paul Adamy's flowing fretless basslines and the intricate keyboards of Bob Quaranta and Ted Kooshian. The 19-piece ensemble, too numerous to fully name, boasts tenor saxophone soloists Ben Kono and Bill Straub exploding on "Mystic Knight of the Sea" and "On the Milky Way Express", as well as burning guitarists McDaniel and Mike Keneally, and Katie Jacoby, whose violin conjures David Cross wonderfully, eerily.

Prog vs Fusion is the tumultuous roller-coaster ride its title implies. Palermo's arrangements fuse (there, I've said it) the Mahavishnu Orchestra and Emerson, Lake & Palmer (ELP) with Steely Dan, Tony Williams Lifetime, King Crimson, early Return to Forever, Yes, Soundgarden, Zappa and beyond. Expect the unexpected: Zappa's "G-Spot Tornado" melding Chick Corea's "Spain", McLaughlin's "Resolution" and Olatunji's "Jingo" (the latter recalling Santana's cover via searing guitar). But wait! Resounding plainly is Juan Tizol's "Caravan". Listen, too, for Soundgarden jammed into Steely Dan's "Bodhisattva". The material being what it is, though, Palermo does keep the inventive medleys to a minimum, instead, casting reconstructions, expansive or brief, of Yes' "The Fish" and "Long Distance Runaround" (Phil Chester's soprano saxophone replacing Jon Anderson's vocal), Wayne Shorter's "On the Milky Way Express", ELP's "Tarkus" and King Crimson's "Vroom", among others. "Pictures of a City", another King Crimson selection, features the throaty, gripping vocals of McDaniel, rivaling anything of Greg Lake or John Wetton. Album closer, "21st Century Schizoid Man" (classic King Crimson), threaded with discordant, *allegro* ensemble sections, is a testament of this band's power.

For more info visit palermobigband.com. The album release concert is at Iridium Sep. 29. See Calendar.

