



In the Beginning
Something Blue (Posi-Tone)
Unbound Inner
Willie Morris (Posi-Tone)
Pivot Point
Behn Gillece (Posi-Tone)
 by Scott Yanow

The Posi-Tone label was founded in 1995 by producer Marc Free. 30 years and hundreds of releases later, the company is still run by Free and engineer Nick O'Toole, with the emphasis being on forward-looking modern hard bop.

While the members of Something Blue are mostly not household names, talent-wise this can be considered an all-star group. On *In the Beginning*, the third release since 2018 by a group with the Something Blue name (the personnel has changed a bit with each album), the nine songs are all superior obscurities that were recorded previously by others on earlier Posi-Tone releases. This group consists of Diego Rivera (tenor), Langston Hughes II (alto), Altin Sencalar (trombone), Art Hirahara (piano), Boris Kozlov (bass) and Rudy Royston (drums). Willie Morris (tenor) is added on two songs: the melancholy ballad "Undercurrent" and the driving "Sun Sound". This is a noteworthy set of high-quality modern mainstream jazz played by top-notch improvisers who are not short on energy, inspiration or creative ideas. Such tunes as the uptempo swinger "Lookout", "Dream for Donte" and "This One's for You" (a feature for Sencalar) are deserving of a revival.

CLAUDE DIALLO *Alone Finally*

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Recorded live at the Weserburg Museum during the 2024 Jazzahead Clubnight Festival in Bremen, Germany, "Alone Finally!!!" follows much of the same pattern of Claude's previous releases, drawing on his 'Traveling' experiences in New York (Take 5, Night and Day), Japan (Sayo, Nam & An), South America (Foz do Iguaçu) and more. He even offers an impromptu free improvisation to a sound exhibit at the museum.

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Tenor-saxophonist Willie Morris' quintet on *Unbound Inner* perform seven of the leader's originals, including the infectious and affectionately-titled "The Folks Who Live Down the Hill", two by pianist Jon Davis and a rather brief tenor-vibes (Behn Gillece) duet version of Herbie Hancock's "Tell Me a Bedroom Story". There are times when the set inevitably sounds a bit like a '60s Blue Note album that teams together Wayne Shorter and Bobby Hutcherson, but the musical personalities of Morris (who switches to soprano on "Dialect") and Gillece generally shine through. Among the highlights are a thoughtful tenor-piano duet ("Flyover Country"), the exciting interplay between Morris and Gillece on the free boppish "Patterned", a hyper "How to Get Away with Murder", the gloomy ballad "Charade" and the unpredictable swinging blues "What's Expected", Kozlov and Royston again holding down the fort, respectively on bass and drums.

Behn Gillece's *Pivot Piece* consists of four of the vibraphonist's originals, two by Davis (whose concise solos consistently uplift this session), one from Morris (a welcome second version of "What's Expected") and a spirited rendition of Herbie Hancock's "Toys". The session shares the exact same personnel as the above *Unbound Inner*, with the exception of drummer Jason Tiemann sitting in for Royston on half of the album's selections. Despite the change in leadership, the music does not differ that much from Morris' album, although this one gets the edge due to slightly stronger originals. Of the more memorable performances: "Haymaker" is a no-changes swinger that sounds like something Ornette Coleman might have enjoyed playing, "Beyond the Veil" (one of two numbers with Morris on soprano) is a thoughtful ballad, Davis' "Just for Fun" (based on "Bernie's Tune") succeeds at living up to its title, while the pianist's "Changes Over Time" gives the group an opportunity to stretch out on a blues in 5/4 time.

Throughout each album the stimulating bass playing of Kozlov is not to be overlooked nor underestimated; he clearly inspires lead voices. Posi-Tone's rich catalog contains many gems, these three worthy releases included.

For more info visit posi-tone.com. Altin Sencalar and the Posi-Tone Allstars with Willie Morris, Behn Gillece, Boris Kozlov, et al. are at Our Lady of Consolation Church (Wayne, NJ) Oct. 26. Kozlov is at Marriott Vacation Club Oct. 6, 13 (with Russ Nolan), Michiko Studios Oct. 12 (with Lew Tabackin), Smalls Oct. 14 (with Arcoiris Sandoval), Ornithology Jazz Club Oct. 21 (with Dave Kikoski) and Klavierhaus Oct. 24 (with Jill McCarron). Gillece is at Smalls Oct. 29. See Calendar and 100 Miles Out.



BloodLines
Rico Jones (Giant Step Arts)
 by Jim Motavalli

The 30-minute, five-movement title track of this spiritual jazz album, "BloodLines: Suite of the Eternal and Omnipotent Spirit", is, quite clearly, chasing John Coltrane circa *A Love Supreme*. Jones, a Harlem-based tenor player who wrote all the music for *BloodLines*, his leader debut, has Coltrane's huge saxophone sound down but eschews the massed choirs of a Kamasi Washington for a tight quartet: Jones (tenor), Max Light (guitar), Joe Martin (bass) and Nasheet Waits (drums). In the studio the suite would probably have been

pared down a bit, but this album was recorded live and loose at Brooklyn's Ornithology Jazz Club. The opening suite lives up to its name, with distinct segments, including an opening "Invocation", but it also gets off the Trane, so to speak, for more of a personal musical statement from Jones. The saxophonist takes intense flurries and inventive, gnarly flights of his own, while Light's agile guitar playing reveals itself to be a tight partner throughout, chording behind the saxophonist and serving as a McCoy Tyner-like foil. Additionally, each Martin and Waits have solid solos around the tranquil sections. A highlight is the bassist's swinging lead lines, as the quartet builds towards the suite's spirited conclusion.

Following the fifth and final movement are four more tracks, starting with "Judgement and Absolution", which opens with the guitar trio before Jones' big tenor statement announces the tune's compelling theme. The group performance then builds into an impressive ascending arc before coming gently back down to earth. "Across Time" brings a little funk element to the session, via Waits' initial backbeat, encouraging an entertaining workout for the saxophonist's more straight-ahead playing chops. "The Voice of God Shines Bright" has a gorgeous opening, straight out of Coltrane disciple and bandmate, tenor saxophonist Pharoah Sanders. The piece builds, recedes, then builds again, in typical Sanders form. Jones is in full cry here, and the music is lovely, meditative and reminiscent of the best in spiritual jazz. The same is true of this album as a whole.

For more info visit giantsteparts.org. Jones is at Smalls Oct. 7. See Calendar.



It's Magic
Stella Cole (Decca)
 by Ken Dryden

Stella Cole sounds like a seasoned, accomplished vocalist who has long been performing, yet she is just 26. Cole grew up watching a wide array of classic Hollywood musicals that were filled with magical melodies and creative lyrics, singing along with them from an early age, while also enjoying her family's collection of soundtrack recordings. But while studying at Northwestern University, she double-majored in theater and international relations, not music. The rich-voiced alto first gained attention through her pandemic videos, attracting a surprising following for an as-yet-unsigned artist. Her move to NYC and meeting with veteran producer Matt Pierson would then launch her career.

It's Magic is Cole's third collaboration with the in-demand pianist, arranger and orchestrator Alan Broadbent, known for his work with Natalie Cole, Diana Krall, Shirley Horn, Sheila Jordan and Linda Ronstadt, to name a few. Her expressive voice is buoyed by Broadbent's lush, inventive string arrangements, which embellish and interact with the singer, while the pianist is subtle in his accompaniment. Cole has appeared at various jazz clubs but does not consider herself to be "jazz" singer, even though she uses some of the devices of the greats through her inflections on certain words and a natural sense of timing that makes it seem as if each composer and lyricist was looking over her shoulder.

Aside from "Alfie", the songs heard on this album

date from the '40s and '50s, though none of them have been recorded so often that they have become clichéd. One of Cole's greatest strengths is paying attention to each lyric, bringing out its message, instead of giving lip service to it, as far too many singers have and tend to do. Her rendition of "It's Magic", an overlooked gem by Jule Styne and Sammy Cahn, proves captivating, as she conveys the image of a young woman who has found her soul mate. The singer's tenderness comes to the forefront in the wistful "Alfie", an early hit for Burt Bacharach and Hal David. The string section is reduced to a string quartet on several tracks, including her touching, heartfelt interpretation of the Jimmy Van Heusen, Johnny Burke ballad "Imagination" and equally passionate take of "Stairway to the Stars" (Frank Signorelli, Matty Malneck, Mitchell Parish).

Stella Cole is clearly a rising vocal star to watch and the sky seems to be the limit for her, given the songs she chooses and the musicians accompanying her.

For more info visit shop.deccarecordsus.com. The album release concert is at Sony Hall Oct. 2-3 and Caramoor (Katonah, NY) Oct. 17. See Calendar and 100 Miles Out.



Onilu
Onilu (Joe Chambers, Kevin Diehl, Chad Taylor)
(Eremite)
by Pierre Crépon

The now venerable Eremite does not release music at random. Known for the services it started rendering to the free jazz scene in the mid '90s, the label has in recent years escaped easy labeling, even if its roots are still in evidence. This is also true of the thematic *Onilu*, an eight-track, three-drummer project initiated by Philadelphian Kevin Diehl. Diehl is among the few musicians still claiming (non-bankable) drum great Sunny Murray as a mentor, but the album doesn't sound anything like the great avant garde waves that washed upon 1960s shores. The senior member of the Onilu trio is Joe Chambers, whose drumming (and vibraphone playing) started appearing on classic Blue Note albums in the mid '60s; he is also a surviving member of Max Roach's all-percussion group M'Boom, a forebear that fortifies the groundwork of Onilu. As a young musician, Diehl witnessed the NYC loft scene of the following decade, and the ensemble's youngest member, Chad Taylor, is a founder of the quarter-century-old Chicago Underground collective.

What strikes the listener first is the openness of the trio's sound. Unlike many historical (and often short-lived) percussion-only projects, there is no frantic attempt at filling the space left open by the absence of traditional ensemble members. Every sound is precisely struck and precisely situated. The musicians sift through a large variety of percussion instruments—trap sets, vibraphone, marimba, various Afro-Cuban percussions, thumb piano—but in an organized and most often melodic manner. The materiality of the percussion—metals, woods, skins—beautifully shines through on this excellent studio recording (instrument details are also usefully provided).

Although the drummers could obviously play as fast as their predecessors often opted to do on percussion-centric recordings, an unusual calmness permeates the music. Soon, the album turns into an uncanny stillness above which the grooves and repeating patterns seem to rise and float, not in a haze of sound but with great

clarity. Except for a Hutcherson cut and a tune included on a 1970s Nonesuch Explorer LP, the album's numbers are all originals. The short forms used are a strong point of this session: they are more reminiscent of the relaxed freedom found in some modern electronic music than of traditional jazz forms. The record's longest track, "A Meta Onilu" (almost seven-and-a-half minutes), takes things one step further, showing development possibilities for the project. *Onilu* stimulatingly shows what can be done *today*, in terms of autonomous, small ensemble percussion music.

For more info visit eremite.com. The album release concert is at Roulette Oct. 2. See Calendar.



Deathblow
Amanda Monaco's Deathblow (Genevieve)
by JR Simon

Guitarist and composer Amanda Monaco returns after 16 years with *Deathblow*, the second release from her quartet, with Michaël Attias (alto, baritone), Sean Conly (bass) and Satoshi Takeishi (percussion). After this hiatus from their first album, the group sounds anything but nostalgic. This is a band intent on pushing forward. Monaco's playing and writing are, as usual, inventive and daring. She's not afraid to take risks, and it's clear she's having fun doing it. Her music is intellectual without being stuffy. Throughout the album, the leader sets down looping, off-kilter lines that serve as anchors, with the rest of the band stretching and colliding around them. The result is music that feels adventurous yet accessible. Even in the album's freest moments, there's always a motif or riff nearby to grab onto.

Album opener "Aw Gee, Thanks" sets the stage, beginning with sparse individual voices that ultimately layer on top of each other. "Submarine Nuke Officer" is funky and slinky with effective guitar effects that support and play off Attias' swaggering alto solo. "Ya!" takes a simple theme and spins it around, with Takeishi's propulsive beat daring the others to deconstruct it in ever more inventive ways. "Four People" feels like exactly that: four friends in spirited conversation, talking over one another interrupting and finishing each other's thoughts. The band shifts gears on "J. Walter Hawkes Will Save the Day", and leans into a harder, rock edge. The guitar-and-drum exchanges are raw and crackling, punctuated by a short, catchy riff that bookends the track. "A Nespresso Moment" cools the tempo but not the tension. It begins with noirish suspense and builds toward a standout, self-harmonizing bass solo, before dissolving into Takeishi's signature textural artistry. A bonus track, "Excrementalizing", offers each member extended space. Bowed bass, restrained guitar, breathy sax that sounds almost double-reedy at times, and a final percussive crescendo before the quartet reunites for one last statement.

Playful, unpredictable and brimming with personality, *Deathblow* rewards listeners who like their jazz exploratory but never adrift. Monaco's fearless approach and the band's collective chemistry make this album as fun as it is irreverent and thought-provoking.

For more info visit amandamonaco.com. The album release concert is at Michiko Studios Oct. 11. Monaco is also at The Django Oct. 22. See Calendar.

ON SCREEN



Sugarcane
Julian Brave NoiseCat and Emily Kassie
(National Geographic Documentary Films)
by Paul Gaita

A profoundly sad and maddening documentary about sanctioned abuse, 2024's *Sugarcane* (scored by bassist and multi-instrumentalist and Abenaki First Nation at Odanak member Mali Obomsawin) concerns the multi-generational abuse of Canadian Indigenous children by members of the Catholic Church, which sought to eradicate their heritage through removing them from their homes and indoctrinating them in a residential school in British Columbia. Beyond outright infanticide, and in this new environment, they then destroyed their childhoods through systematic sexual abuse. The horror lasted for generations, and continued to torment survivors until finally a 2022 investigation into unmarked graves revealed the scope of the abuse. The film, by writer-activist Julian Brave NoiseCat (an enrolled member of the Canim Lake Band Tsq'secen of the Secwepemc Nation) and filmmaker-journalist Emily Kassie, looks at the lasting impact of the abuse and attempts by survivors to surmount it, especially Brave NoiseCat's father, artist Ed Archie Brave NoiseCat; the late former Williams Lake First Nation chief Rick Gilbert, who makes his case at the Vatican; and William Lake members who lead the investigation into the deaths, including Chief Willie Sellars and Charlene Belleau. Their arcs in the film are painful, paring away decades of not only violence and terror but also neglect on the part of anyone to whom they spoke about the abuse.

Mali Obomsawin's score is minimal but exceptionally effective. Too often, documentaries use music to drive home emotion when the subject matter or images lacks weight. Here, the material is steeped in sorrow, and Obomsawin wisely leans back, allowing the silence to be filled with ambient keyboards, woodwinds and strings, as well as tightly-coiled bass and guitar lines by her frequent collaborators, Magdalena Abrego and Matt Arcara. Their work touches gently, at various times, into areas of drone, Americana, and a pensive, stately, roots-fueled jazz that often echoes the sprawling quiet of the Charlie Haden/Pat Metheny collaboration, *Beyond the Missouri Sky*. The lack of wall-to-wall score is a blessing to the film, allowing both subject and audience the space to speak and hear and process without cinematic manipulation. Obomsawin's music is mournful without being maudlin; elegiac without being overwrought. Most of all, it's steeped in respect: for the survivors bringing this story to light, the filmmakers for committing it to history, and for the audiences for finally caring enough to see and hear it.

For more info visit sugarcanefilm.com. Mali Obomsawin performs the live score to *Sugarcane* at Roulette Oct. 30 (presented by World Music Institute). See Calendar.