

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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://sugarcanefilm.com). Mali Obomsawin performs the live score to *Sugarcane* at Roulette Oct. 30 (presented by World Music Institute). See Calendar.