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Transition[s]

Phil Haynes/Ben Monder (Corner Store Jazz)
by Ken Waxman

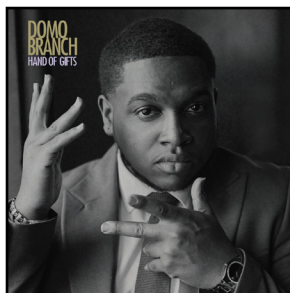
At first glance *Transition[s]* may seem like a strange duo session by veteran improvisers from dissimilar sectors of the jazz world. But this is actually a long-anticipated reunion between drummer-percussionist Phil Haynes and guitarist Ben Monder, who a quarter century ago frequently played together. One thorny touchstone was John Coltrane's "Transition" (hence the title), though that tune isn't included here. Monder, known for his work with The Bad Plus, Theo Bleckmann and even David Bowie, comfortably fits into all-extemporized contexts. Meanwhile Haynes, whose experience encompasses recordings with Paul Smoker, Herb Robertson and many others, is equally at home on these 13 selections, part of an ongoing series of albums from the drummer on the Corner Store Jazz label.

Dual excitement is conspicuous on the tune "Untitled Ones" where the guitarist manages to both exhibit his usual lyricism as well as jarring squeaky stops and shaking whines that intersect with the drummer's near-reed tone-like scratch across a cymbal. Similarly the title tune is a speedy excursion where Monder's perfectly-shaped fuzztones attain a pseudo-grunge flange at the same time Haynes outputs a near-perfect hard bop beat.

More outré impulses are given a workout by Haynes on tracks such as "Openings" and "Beyond". Slippery and menacing themes highlighting the percussionist's bell tree shakes, wood pops and lug-loosening stops move his partner's flat-line expositions to blurred fingering and throbbing amp echoes. Monder's expected melodic side is given a workout on "Too Easily", a contrafact of "I Fall in Love Too Easily". But even here the gentling exposition includes tougher strums that would be avoided in a conventional version.

It would seem that a 25-year hiatus hasn't lessened the skills or unity between these players. And they amply display both here. If any criticism exists it's that a few solo forays by Haynes are so brief that they finish before proper elaboration. Perhaps that could be rectified in a subsequent reunion.

For more info visit cornerstorejazz.com. Monder is at Smalls Oct. 9 (with Jerome Sabbagh) and Close Up Oct. 10 (with Tony Malaby). See Calendar.



Hand of Gifts

Domo Branch (Albina Music Trust)
by Terrell K. Holmes

Hand of Gifts, the new album by drummer Domo Branch, epitomizes straight-ahead jazz at its best. Branch, with Abdias Armenteros (saxophones), Tyler Henderson (piano) and Russell Hall (bass), shows off a mastery of various styles within the jazz idiom, playing

with both sophistication and soul.

"Harlem Nights" suitably sets the tone for the album, with its vigorous Latin beat that puts it in El Barrio as much as Sugar Hill. Armenteros' spirited soprano playing ignites the tune, followed by Henderson's sparkling, harmonically deft solo, while Branch's fierce polyrhythms stoke the fire. On "Our Man Bogle" (a slick blues in the style of John Coltrane's "Mr. Syms"), Armenteros whips off frenetic clusters of notes on soprano, playing with complexity as well as passion, spiraling, ascending, descending, going off mic, shrieking, then coming to rest. The band visits the archives of the Lee Morgan library for "Big Moves", a head-bobbing boogaloo. With Armenteros' pitch-perfect tenor in the lead, everyone eases back and lets the funky groove take the wheel. The saxophonist's reflective tenor work, with Hall's melancholy pizzicato and Branch's dramatic use of cymbals and mallets, highlights the rainy day ballad "A Letter to Peanut". Everyone swings as if their lives are at stake on the hard-bop archetype title track, from Henderson, who builds on clever avian triads during his fiery solo to Branch's thrashing, which threatens to burst speakers. The style and tone of Armenteros' barrel-chested tenor brings Dexter Gordon to mind. He doesn't insert quotes during solos but there's a winking playfulness in his repeated figures.

The leader shows off his formidable drumming skills on the brief but robust "Drum Solo", bringing to mind the line from rapper Jay-Z's "Public Service Announcement": "Allow me to re-introduce myself...." The piano-less "Blues for the World" has a different kind of classic feeling. Studio chatter is left in at the beginning, along with a false start and some quick warmup notes (think *Relaxin' with the Miles Davis Quintet*). The music that follows sounds improvised, and the banter and laughter continues during the tune. Perhaps that was Branch's intention all along, to underscore the album's reverential embrace of classic jazz tropes. In any case, the band is having fun making great music. The muscular waltz "A Memory" closes the album, propelled by Branch's thundering drums, Armenteros' colorful soprano performance, Hall's forceful pizzicato and Henderson's embroidery.

Hand of Gifts places Domo Branch and his exceptional quartet among the best ensembles on today's jazz scene.

For more info visit albinamusictrust.com. The album release concert is at Close Up Oct. 30. See Calendar.

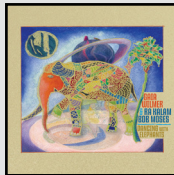


Live-Action

Nate Smith (Waterbaby Music-naïve)
by Tom Greenland

On *Live-Action*, drummer-composer-producer Nate Smith continues his quest for a signature sound, drawing on pop, hip-hop, neo-soul, funk and jazz. It's an anthology album, each of the ten tracks having a different roster of musicians, each with a slightly different stylistic thrust. The overall sound is unified by Smith's keyboard-based backdrops, combining synths and electric piano to provide the basslines and somewhat unusual harmonic progressions of his pieces. Another unifying factor is his powerful rhythmic pocket, an approach stemming from J Dilla's non-quantized drum machine-produced studio beats as interpreted by live human drummers. Like

GLOBE UNITY



El Viejo Caminante

Dino Saluzzi (ECM)

Dancing with Elephants

Gaia Wilmer and Ra Kalam Bob Moses (Sunnyside)

Lucía

Lucía (La Reserve)

by Daniel A. Brown

In honor of National Hispanic Heritage Month, we explore three recent releases by two jazz elders and an emerging musician. While painting Hispanic and Latin music with a big brush overlooks the details, this month's offerings all display nuanced, passionate and harmonically rich music: the full palette of the crucial contributions of Hispanic and Latino musicians to the wider world of jazz.

A legendary musical ambassador of Argentina, nonagenarian bandoneón player Dino Saluzzi has enjoyed a notable career (especially collaborations with Charlie Haden and Enrico Rava). On the 12-song release, *El Viejo Caminante*, Saluzzi is joined by his son José Maria Saluzzi (classical guitar) and Jacob Young

(electric and acoustic guitars) for a set of atmospheric performances. Opener "La Ciudad De Los Aires Buenos" is a minor-key ballad with Saluzzi senior playing gentle counterpoint to the guitarists' slow serpentine arpeggios. Like the best leaders, he is also a sensitive accompanist and collaborator: the ethereal "Tiempos De Ausencias" and "Mi Hijo Y Yo" are object lessons in give-and-take group improvisation. Standards "Some Day My Prince Will Come" and "My One and Only Love" are lovingly reimagined with tango-tinged approaches.

For the 11-track *Dancing with Elephants*, Brazil-born saxophonist Gaia Wilmer is joined by septuagenarian percussionist-conceptualist Ra Kalam Bob Moses, who initially cut his teeth in the burgeoning, mid '60s pre-fusion jazz-rock scene. Utilizing prerecorded percussion "beds" by Moses inspired Wilmer to compose a set of inventive works for ensemble playing. The pair surrender to the mysteries of mystical jazz and 21st-century technology with the help of a truly empathetic band: Yulia Musayelyan (flute), Song Yi Jeon (vocals), Leandro Pellegrino (guitar), Leo Genovese (keyboards) and saxophonists Gustavo D'Amico, Daniele Germani, George Garzone and Neta Raanan. The opening title track approximates the lumbering march of jungle titans, a river of percussion-guided wailing horns and Yi Jeon's wordless vocals, Genovese anchoring the whirlpool of sound with thick, meaty chord strikes.

"Whales Part to Play" is a freewheeling improv-style excursion of Moses' restless percussion with syrupy lines from the horns. The kalimba-and-flute fantasy of "Jellyfish Lake" approximates '70s Don Cherry and third stream music. Album closer "Chase Machine" is a farewell swirl of unison playing and darting horn lines, and vocals atop a syncopated rhythm.

The eponymous debut from 23-year-old, Mexico-born vocalist Lucía layers together Latin and Mexican roots, jazz and pop into a worthy, straightforward collection. Fittingly, she is joined by a cadre of international players: Puerto Rican David Sánchez (tenor), Venezuelan Edward Simon (piano), American Larry Grenadier (bass) and Mexican Antonio Sánchez (drums). Opener, "What a Difference a Day Makes" — a song originally penned in 1934 as a Spanish bolero by María Grever entitled, "Cuando vuelva a tu lado (When I Return to Your Side)" — moves from somber ballad to a sizzling jazz workout. Oscar Levant and Edward Heyman's "Blame It On My Youth" maintains its aching balladry, while Kurt Weill's "Speak Low" and Maria Teresa Lara's standard, "Veracruz", are more uptempo offerings. *Lucía* is an ideal soundtrack for fans of laid back, Latin-inspired jazz.

For more info visit ecmrecords.com, sunnysiderecords.com and lareserverecords.com. Wilmer is at Dizzy's Club Oct. 9-12. See Calendar.

Questlove and Chris Dave, Smith has developed the ability to play ahead of, behind, outside and around a rock-steady, metronomic pulse, resulting in a slippery but solid beat, redefining what it means to "swing" in contemporary improvisation. Missing from many tracks is the musician-to-musician interaction characteristic of jazz projects; the dense but tastefully transparent layering of keyboards tends to function like sonic wallpaper, and while song sections transition in interesting ways, melodies aren't always memorable.

For jazz fans, the most interesting tracks might be: "Now", an introductory vignette featuring Josh Johnson's in-and-out alto saxophone; "Undeclared", enlivened by Marquis Hill's thorny trumpet solo, though it's somewhat buried by his mute and heavy echo effect; "Magic Dance", an afro-beat romp where guitarist Lionel Loueke and bassist Michael League provide running commentary; and "Last Sight", also featuring Johnson, his horn almost unrecognizable due to sound processing. "Mother and Son", a collective composition by Smith, Hill and bassist Ben Williams, boasts a moody Middle Eastern theme, a firm but fluid drum-bass lock-up, augmented by a string quartet (arranged by Smith) that warms up the sonic palette. Equally interactive are the ultra-funky "Cough Drop", with Kiefer (keyboards) and CARRTOONS (bass), plus "Juke Joint", with DJ Harrison (keyboards) and Charlie Hunter (guitar, bass). Vocalist Lalah Hathaway gives an adventurous interpretation of the Pointer Sisters' "Automatic", overdubbing her vocals with tasteful harmonies and counterpoint, adding neo-soulful scats and melismatic ornaments. The women's vocal quartet sajé adds its smooth blend to "Big Fish", a deceptively tricky arrangement with 11-beat phrases.

Jazz fans or not, listeners will appreciate the immediacy of Smith's musicianship. Recording live, with only a few takes per part (including overdubs) on analog equipment, without cutting and pasting, without loops or sequences, Smith makes his rhythmic presence felt as only a master beatmaker can.

For more info visit waterbabymusic.bandcamp.com. The album release concert is at Sony Hall Oct. 12. See Calendar.



PIVOT

Mats Gustafsson, Ken Vandermark, Tomeka Reid, Chad Taylor (Silkheart)

by Patrick Romanowski

Convening in Chicago for a record date at Electrical Audio, this top-tier quartet featuring Mats Gustafsson (baritone, tenor, flutes), Ken Vandermark (tenor, Bb and bass clarinets), Tomeka Reid (cello) and Chad Taylor (drums) is a full-bore depth charge of raw sentient power and explosive beauty. The resulting *PIVOT* is an excellent addition to the Stockholm-based Silkheart catalog. Its title, both apt and operative, offers the creative freedom and invention of a group accelerating and shifting into frenzied collisions of multilayered acoustic territories, and combusting at sonic vanishing points. The four musicians also simultaneously do a careful job of nestling into gentler spaces when quiet moments arrive in the peripheral.

Gustafsson and Vandermark share in articulating the heavy ballistics on the front end, while Reid's scintillating work and Taylor's seamless grooves supply a sound balance between structure and improvisation. Album opener, "The Sensation of Sliding", enters, at 30 seconds in, with a somber and mellow tone that abruptly hits like a tornado stripping away a ceiling. Cataclysmic horns roar and wail as a delirious bleed of rhythm blasts before gearing down. "Blowing Out from Chicago" serves as a hard-stamped postcard from Vandermark's home turf—a right-sized love letter from the city—sinuous, hard swinging, elegantly brutal. (At one point during a solo, listen for the line from Joe Maneri's peak moment on "Paniots Nine".) Reid's precise cello work is nimble and sawing, and a series of staccato notes bring

to mind the unforgettable climactic passages of Bernard Herrmann's classic *Psycho* film score.

"Pivot Duos" (1-6) is a series of duets, placed in the center of the album and featuring various personnel configurations. Each number possesses a fascinating symmetry, seeking out the form of its designated drop-in scenario within the improvised life span of a few allotted minutes. The album contains a total of fourteen tracks, with a handful of them inspired by the writings of Danish poet and novelist, Inger Christensen. Along with cover art from Stanley Whitney and liner notes from John Corbett, all the bases are covered. In many ways this album is a great representation of the close-knit, collaborative spirit that continues to be one of the defining characteristics of Chicago's avant garde scene. As a point of entry into this music, *PIVOT* is an excellent place to start.

For more info visit silkheart.bandcamp.com. Tomeka Reid curates and plays at The Stone at The New School Oct. 1-4, and is at Public Records Oct. 5 (with Ches Smith) and Solar Myth (Philadelphia, PA) Oct. 17-18 (with Artifacts Trio). See Calendar and 100 Miles Out.

