



LUCIAN BAN / MAT MANERI
JOHN SURMAN
THE ATHENAEUM CONCERT
THE BELA BARTOK FIELD RECORDINGS

SSC 1767 LP / AVAILABLE 9/5/2025
(180 grams vinyl LP)



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For this double release, long time collaborators pianist Lucian Ban and violist Mat Maneri alongside legendary woodwind master John Surman further explore the folk music of Transylvania collected by Béla Bartók more than a hundred years ago. For the past five years the trio has deepened the spirit of their music while touring, as can be heard on their new recordings, **Cantica Profana** (CD) and **The Athenaeum Concert** (vinyl LP only).



Sunnyside

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Brad Mehldau and Christian McBride first jammed at Augie’s (now Smoke) in 1989. More than 35 years later, the pianist and bassist jammed as a duo for a week at Blue Note. By the second night (Sep. 3), both seemed to embrace the pared down format, where each and every musical detail stands out in sharp relief. Their second set started with a sensitive reading of Richard Rodgers’ “My Heart Stood Still”, McBride peppering walking lines with slaps and chords, wobbling his head in time. Here and throughout, he and Mehldau traded solos, then 16- or 8-bar fragments, often shortening these down to four or even two bars. John Coltrane’s rhythmically and harmonically complex “Satellite” proved putty in their hands. On Jimmy Van Heusen’s “Here’s That Rainy Day”, the pianist seemed to fall into a trance, effortlessly executing brilliant musical gambits. McBride’s charismatic flourishes came to the fore on Thelonious Monk’s “Think of One”, sweat pooling in the creases of his forehead. On Roberta Flack’s hit of Charles Fox’s “Killing Me Softly with His Song”, Mehldau’s solo was a paradigm of elegant architectonics, McBride catching and complementing every nuance with equal brilliance. The tempo accelerated for Cole Porter’s “In the Still of the Night”, the bassist shredding through the form, sweat now gathering atop his head with the concentrated effort. For a cool-down finale, Jimmy McHugh’s “Where Are You?” was taken at ballad tempo, McBride bowing the theme, Mehldau erecting yet another elegant edifice of improvised architecture. — Tom Greenland



Christian McBride @Blue Note

To hear piano giant Bill Charlap play, be it in concert halls or clubs, is a special experience. But catching him at the Village Vanguard (Sep. 9) is a gift. It’s in this small club that Charlap is pumped up by the intimacy that allows for close communication with his audience. The two-week residency of his trio was a tryout of sorts for new directions. In place was Kenny Washington, long-tenured in the drum chair, but new at the bass was David Wong, a young player of ability and experience (he was the Heath Brothers bassist after Percy’s 2005 passing) who’s easing into his role, intently concentrating on the leader’s cues and playing. Charlap himself is taking a turn in his musical approach; he’s become much freer and fearless, allowing a bounteous increase in an already full measure of creativity. At the head of the set, a boppish Vernon Duke number, “Not a Care in the World” revealed an artist who’s simply become “more of” – literally more animated at the keys and varied in aural dynamics, often inserting a hard, angular statement or simply repeating a single note, or favoring glissandi. Making the most of 88 keys, there most likely was not one missed. A master of standards, and the son of composer Moose Charlap and singer Sandy Stewart, Charlap knows the lyrics and phrases like a vocalist. Consequently, gems such as “I Can’t Get Started (With You)” (Vernon Duke again) take on bright, new life. The leader also perfectly paces his sets with well-tempered tempi. Maybe most of all, Charlap was having fun, as were we. — Marilyn Lester



Bill Charlap @Village Vanguard

Jake Rosenkalt Guitar Quartet’s Dada Bar gig (Sep. 10) in Ridgewood, Queens, paired Paul Bollenback and Steve Cardenas, backed by bassist John Webber and the drummer-leader. The considerable artistry and skill of the two guitarists generated an atmosphere of mutual respect. The mood was informal, guys calling out song titles, vetoing less familiar titles in favor of one everybody knew, or close enough (“Aw jeez, I haven’t played that in ages, but let’s go for it!”). Charlie Parker’s “Cheryl” opened, Bollenback layering clever harmony under Cardenas’ melody, both soloing and trading sections with Webber. On Arthur Altman’s “All or Nothing at All”, Cardenas’ spiky but sweet tone floated odd-shaped phrases over bar lines, Bollenback plying a deep, rounded sound, warming to his solo until notes flew fast and furious. During Kurt Weill’s “Speak Low” and Duke Ellington’s “In a Sentimental Mood”, the pair tried out some of their tastiest chords and hippest melodic figures, watching for the other’s response, goading each other into even more outrageous chance-taking. The second set began with the guitarists accompanying Henry Mancini’s “Moon River” (heard over the venue speakers), segueing into Dizzy Gillespie’s “Con Alma”. Fats Waller’s “Jitterbug Waltz” featured Bollenback’s soulful slide playing. Bronislaw Kaper’s “Invitation” pointed up Cardenas’ imaginative intervallic permutations. By evening’s end, the guitarists’ rapport and repartee had grown simultaneously more cohesive and less predictable, their laughter louder and more frequent in shared delight of each other’s audacious ingenuity. (TG)

The irony of Hilary Gardner and The Lonesome Pines at Mezzrow (Sep. 7) was that the affable leader wondered out loud why her country and western band was appearing in a jazz club. But the Pines are really a fusion band of folk-western-country music, residing never far from the jazz ethos. And it’s doubtful that cowboy star Gene Autry wrote and sang “Under Fiesta Stars” with a Latin beat. Gardner is also a bona fide, having co-founded the vocal trio Duchess in 2013. The Pines: Justin Poindexter (guitar, backup vocals), Sasha Papernik (accordion acting as a sometime B3 sub), Matt Aronoff (bass) and Aaron Thurston (drums), revealed themselves to be jazzers at heart. This group was well-oiled, harmonized beautifully and generally played jazz-based phrasing and chords in the pocket: city cowhands who gleefully tongue-in-cheek swung Johnny Mercer’s “I’m an Old Cowhand (From the Rio Grande)”. Gardner, in delightful narrative, was also quick to point out that many of these novelty songs were not only written for films, but were sung by jazz vocalists such as Ella Fitzgerald, Bing Crosby (who, like Nat Cole, departed from jazz for the more lucrative ground of pop) and Frank Sinatra. A highlight of the set was the very jazzy companion to Marty Robbins’ story song “El Paso”, his “Feleena (From El Paso)” telling the story of the “Mexican girl.” This superb and fun set penultimately ended with an all-out swinger of “Mamas Don’t Let Your Babies Grow Up to Be Cowboys”. (JP)

For many Downtown musicians, the place woodwinds specialist Michael Moss holds within jazz extends well beyond the bell of his horns. Coming of age in the ‘60s, Moss was a witness to Coltrane’s musical and spiritual expansion and the visions of liberation unique to that time. As a saxophonist with numerous doubles, as well as composer, conceptualist and producer, he was heard with many free jazz veterans. The Westbeth Center hosted a project (Sep. 5) that Moss planned for years, initially sidelined by the COVID-19 lock-down: *Roots and Shoots*. With the further passage of time, and losses incurred, this all-star ensemble and its retrospective “new thing” served a much greater role than initially conceived. Joining him was celebrated percussionist Warren Smith (now 91), playing vibraphone, and another historic figure, drummer Jackson Krall, whose 20+ years with Cecil Taylor resonates loudly. Very. While pianist Alexis Marcelo and bassist Adam Lane are of later vintage, these two master musicians have vital histories of their own. Opening the concert with Eric Dolphy’s moving “Left Alone”, the leader’s flute rang over vibraphone, piano and cymbals. Coltrane’s “Afro Blue” and “Equinox” (Lane a Paganini of the bass) flanked Bill Evans’ “T.T.T. (Twelve Tone Tune)”, all cranking overdrive. The latter (Evans’ attempt to write Schoenberg) was played in every manner, including retrograde and expansion by immediate composition. The band also took on two Moss originals, closing with the necessary radical strains of his “March On”. Here’s where today’s *avant* becomes the *garde* of tomorrow. — John Pietaro



Michael Moss @Westbeth Center

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As part of Festival of New Trumpet (FONT) Music at The New School’s Lang Hall (Sep. 9), Taylor Ho Bynum staged a workshop of *Index*, a Bill Dixon project that serves as a compendium of his ideas about improvisation. Dixon (1925-2010) spent his career rebuking fixed instrumental identities and hierarchies of Western scoring. His latter works stripped back notation until it became more an environment than a score: collective sound over virtuoso display. This was Dixon’s Black Creative Music, designed to shift agency toward the performers to discover the music as they made it. *Index*, commissioned by the Vision Festival in 2000 but never realized to Dixon’s satisfaction, embodies that aim: an alphabet of sections designed to be interpreted collectively. Bynum, Dixon’s close collaborator in his final decade, led an ensemble of trumpets, reeds, pianos, four basses and drums—an instrumentation he said would have pleased Dixon. He cued notes slowly, letting the ensemble establish its own identity. Each pass brought riskier choices, timbres blooming assertively. Soon, the sound was unmistakably Dixonian: minimal material yielding maximal nuance. The session doubled as oral history. Stephen Haynes (who also played), Ken Filiano and others recalled Dixon’s demands and urgencies. Bynum passed along Dixon’s late instruction to him: “Play something you’ve never played before, and that only you can do.” In advance of Dixon’s centennial this month, the experience felt transformative: a transmission of methods, values and responsibility. — Ariella Stok



Taylor Ho Bynum @The New School’s Lang Hall

ALAN NAHIGIAN

Our jazz universe, with its inborn push forward and out, has enjoyed a visceral study of its own rich past. For vocalist Michael Arenella, a NYC transplant from Georgia, the mission is two-fold. Most frequently dressed in full 1930s attire fronting the Dreamland Orchestra, Arenella’s secret identity is that of mid-century bossa nova crooner, leading a combo, doubling on trombone. In this guise he commandeered Winnie’s Jazz Bar (Sep. 6), rolling out the bossas, ballads and sambas, which left the crowd vibrating. In the lobby of Midtown’s Refinery Hotel, the ensemble’s capture of ‘50s to ‘60s Jobim and company cast visions of days past. Arenella’s vocals, terse but smooth, genteel, carrying a natural swing, immediately brought Chet Baker to mind. The leader’s bari-tenor range was as comfortable in ballad territory as uptempo dance numbers, heard most effectively in a hip bossa nova arrangement of “Fly Me to the Moon”, enlivened by drummer Jordan Young’s cross-stick rim shots and Dan Weisselberg’s galloping bass. Of special note was bossa staple “The Girl from Ipanema” with Arenella singing in both Portuguese and English (the only missing ingredient was Stan Getz’ iconic tenor). However, the set also included many lesser-known works, rollicking traditionals heard in their original tongue. Throughout, guitarist John Merrill provided the necessary jolt across nylon strings, offering a thicket of accompaniment while also acting as primary soloist. Whether spinning back several decades or a century, Arenella well-provided the time travel as well as the retro cocktail of your imagination. (JP)

Beneath a canopy of trees tucked behind Brooklyn’s now car-free Stanton Street, drummer William Hooker opened Arts for Art’s (AFA) six-weekend InGardens Festival (the 17-year experiment in making improvised music in a public space) at The Children’s Magical Garden (Sep. 6), a collectively tended plot, which brought the festival’s premise to life as an oasis where music, poetry and dance replace traffic, and offers a vision of community built around sound. Hooker’s quartet—Ayumi Ishito (tenor), David First (guitar), Jair-Rôhm Parker Wells (electric bass)—played music that resisted consensus but moved as a unit. Ishito began with a ballad of patient clarity. As the lather built, the drummer switched from brushes to mallets. First, in a flash of Notekillers energy, skronked furiously, head rolling in wide circles. Wells probed, pushing the music outward. With arms outstretched like semaphores, the drummer-conductor cleared room for Ishito’s tone to stand against his mallet thunder. As First sustained an e-bowed guitar drone, Hooker rose from the kit, sermonizing: “Now it’s time to understand the forces we’re feeling.” Ishito’s closing soliloquy subsumed into dense ensemble fire as the sky dimmed. AFA founder Patricia Nicholson Parker then introduced trombonist Steve Swell’s trio—unplugged, in case of rain. Her benediction: “The important thing is we are together.” Then the skies opened. The downpour cancelled the rest of the program, but the music prevailed as reclamation, as temporary commons and as fleeting assertion of possibility. (AS)

WHAT’S NEWS

Last month CNN honored **JAZZ HOUSE KIDS’** (JHK) founder Melissa Walker as a “Champion for Change,” an honor which celebrates nonprofit leaders, social entrepreneurs and activists whose works address challenges such as inequality, health, environment, education, community justice and culture. Walker (whose husband is bassist and JHK Artistic Director Christian McBride) founded the Montclair, NJ-based nonprofit 23 years ago, in which time it has worked with 50,000+ young people aged 8-18, helping to create avenues of access, learning, career development and community building. Also, in JHK-related news, JHK alumnus Esteban Castro was announced as one of the two 2026 **Larry J. Bell Young Jazz Artist Awardees** (the other being Jersey City resident Tyler Bullock). The inaugural award, presented by The Gilmore (Kalamazoo, MI) comes with a \$25K stipend to further each pianist’s musical career and educational development, as well as solo recital performances, as part of The Gilmore’s 2026 Piano Festival. Director of The Gilmore’s Jazz Awards is Seth Abramson (formerly the founding Artistic Director of NYC’s long-lamented Jazz Standard). Pianist Bill Charlap honored the winners with a virtual award presentation to Castro and Bullock. For more info visit jazzhousekids.org and thegilmore.org.

The **Jazz Foundation of America’s** 100th livestream at the National Jazz Museum in Harlem takes place this month (Oct. 9). Featured will be a special NYC tenor saxophonist double-bill: the Patience Higgins Quartet and Bill Saxton’s Harlem All-Stars (the latter performed at the very first livestream concert on Jan. 20, 2022). All livestreams are also live in-concert events open to the public. For more info visit jazzfoundation.org and jmih.org.

Trumpeter **Hugh Ragin** recently received the inaugural Center for African & African American Studies (CAAAS) Artist-in-Residence Award from University of Colorado-Boulder. Founded by CAAAS Director Reiland Rabaka, the annual award is considered for those whose “work draws from, and contributes to, the dynamic artistic traditions and majestic aesthetic cultures of Africa and the African diaspora.” The Award includes a \$5K stipend and a performance at the Center’s annual Kwanzaa Celebration (Dec. 2025) and Black History Month Celebration (Feb. 2026). Ragin is one of the foremost trumpeters of the last 45 years, from his first recordings in the late ‘70s as a member of Wadada Leo Smith’s Creative Orchestra, to his frequent collaborations since with Anthony Braxton, John Lindberg, David Murray, Roscoe Mitchell and the Art Ensemble of Chicago. For more info visit colorado.edu/center/caaas.

Many may not realize that **Keith Jarrett’s** legendary 1975 Köln performance at Cologne’s Opera House nearly didn’t happen. The pianist almost dropped out after finding out the Bösendorfer Imperial Grand piano he was promised was nowhere to be found. The recently-released movie **KÖLN 75**, based on this true story, opens (Oct. 17) at Manhattan’s IFC Center, following how the concert was conceived and orchestrated by the efforts of Vera Brandes (played by German actress Mala Emde), a teenage up-and-coming concert promoter. Jarrett (played by actor John Magaro) would go on to play a one-hour, entirely improvised concert, which has become jazz history’s best-selling solo album. For more info visit ifccenter.com.

The world’s leading music-discovery and record-collecting platform, **Discogs**, has announced the launch of “Dis/Connect,” a global day to unplug from digital distractions and to reconnect with the joy of listening to music. Participants are encouraged to rediscover their personal record collections, play albums from start to finish, and/or curate a vibe inspired by mood, genre or decade, creating space for real-world connection and honoring music in its purest form. Music lovers around the world are invited to silence the scroll, skip the stream and give their undivided and full attention to the ritual of listening to records. Mark your calendars: Oct. 18. For more info visit discogs.com.

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