



Weekend at Smalls
David Kikoski Trio (Cellar Music)
by Scott Yanow

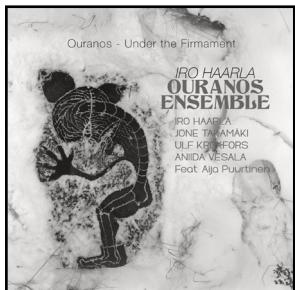
David Kikoski is easy to take for granted. The pianist has been remarkably consistent ever since his first recordings in the early to mid '80s, including with former longtime employer, drummer Roy Haynes. Since that time, he has long had his own sound and chord voicings, pushing the modern mainstream of jazz ahead while always swinging. Though he may not win magazine polls, musicians well know all about his inventive playing and have kept him busy.

For his 21st album as a leader, Kikoski and his trio—Joe Martin (bass) and Billy Hart (drums)—expand to a quartet with the addition of the apparently ageless trumpeter, Randy Brecker, with whom Kikoski recorded one of his first sideman dates (Brecker's 1986 album, *In The Idiom*). It is difficult to believe that Brecker was 78 at the time of this 2024 Kikoski recording, for he plays with the power, range, enthusiasm and creativity of someone half his age; one can say the same about Hart (83), while Kikoski (63) and Martin (54) were the youngsters of the group.

Weekend at Smalls consists of four originals by the leader, two by Brecker, plus Thelonious Monk's "Straight, No Chaser". Although it is not obvious during its complex melody, the pianist's "Winney's Garden" utilizes the same chord changes as "Sweet Georgia Brown". Brecker takes the first of his series of powerful solos while Kikoski displays plenty of originality in his chord voicings. Next is the gloomy medium-tempo "Shadow", which has dense piano harmonies, fiery trumpet and assertive drums. The eccentric "There's a Mingus a Monk Us", the lyrical ballad "Presage" and the above-mentioned Monk standard (which finds Kikoski sounding closer to McCoy Tyner than Thelonious) follow. The passionate "Moontide" and the occasionally intense "Cecilia" (an original the pianist wrote for saxophonist Ralph Moore, his onetime Haynes bandmate) conclude this enjoyable outing.

As has always been true, one cannot go wrong in acquiring a recording that features David Kikoski, and *Weekend at Smalls* is no exception.

For more info visit cellarlive.com. Kikoski is at Le Cheile Nov. 8 (part of Washington Heights Jazz Festival, with the Mark Sherman/Mike Clark Quartet) and Zinc Bar Nov. 25 (with Danton Boller). See Calendar.



Ouranos: Under the Firmament
Iro Haarla Ouranos Ensemble (Willa Silva)
by Andrew Schinder

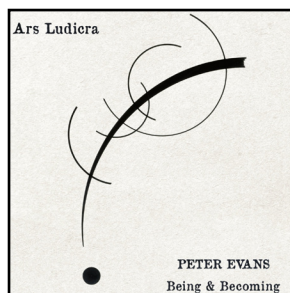
Classically-trained, veteran Finnish pianist Iro Haarla (who next November will celebrate septuagenarian status) has created a gorgeous, striking tribute to the

heavens and beyond with her recent album *Under the Firmament*. The "firmament" is, in the Hebrew Bible, the celestial spherical expanse above the Earth, fashioned during the planet's creation, which ultimately led to the development of land beneath. Ouranos means "firmament" in Greek. It is the perfect choice for the collaboration heard on the album, as the group journeys through varying moods and spheres in painting an aural atmospheric landscape.

Joined by husband Ulf Krokfors (bass), Jone Takamäki (tenor, hocchiku flute, toppophone, Persian ney) and Anniida Vesala (drums, kalimba, percussion), Haarla honors her classical, chamber music roots while staying true to the jazz idiom (even if much of the record strays from the four traditional walls of the genre). The album is certainly moody and on the quieter side, without ever being boring. It is, rather, transporting, and—unlike too many other albums that attempt to drive the listener into a trance—the music is diverse, holding one's interest as the musicians' collected influences and instruments represent different corners of the globe. Birds also figure prominently, appropriately enough on the opening track, "On High with Birds of Passage". Takamäki's flute tones evoke the sweeping passage of the heavenly creatures before the pianist brings the listener back down to land. Krokfors and Vesala eventually emerge with a cutting, driving rhythm, conveying a haunting ambiance that implies that things aren't as innocently beautiful as they seem; perhaps under the firmament, life is complicated and, at times, frightful.

Haarla and Krokfors spend much of the album engaging in an unconventional duet, not precisely rhythm and melody, but more of a back-and-forth, as in "Circulation"—a chemistry perhaps reflecting their off-album relationship. The album turns positively quirky with "Lost Satellite", with the leader largely receding in favor of Vesala's kalimba (and the instrument's somewhat jarringly unique sound) and Krokfors' arco performance. The results are disquieting, but ultimately exhilarating. Vocalist Aija Puurtinen appears on three of the album's nine tracks, and her voice provides a bit of a release from the stimulation of the instrumentation. On the album-closing title tune, the vocalist surprisingly delivers a beautiful, straight-up ballad, accomplishing the goal of ultimately taking the listener back down to Earth, under the firmament.

For more info visit irohaarla.net/ouranos-ensemble



Ars Ludicra
Peter Evans Being & Becoming (More Is More)
by Kurt Gottschalk

What's exciting about Peter Evans' *Being & Becoming* is the mass and velocity in the engineering. Not in the sense of the recording (which was laid down at the legendary Van Gelder Studio and is bright and present) but in the meticulous structuring of Evans' composing. The new *Ars Ludicra*, released on the trumpeter's own More Is More label, also represents a credo: Evans has long-chased intensity, and he seems to keep discovering more about what "more is more" can mean.

The album is a fast half hour, five tracks of the finest craftsmanship. Joel Ross' clockwork vibraphone kicks off the opening "Malibu" against what could be a high-speed techno rhythm executed by drummer Michael Shekwoaga Ode and bassist Nick Jozwiak, but isn't,

although electronics will emerge soon enough. Evans' trumpet enters at a shockingly slow tempo and laces the beats together. The rhythm section falls into a more familiar sort of multiplicity and Evans steps up with a revelrous solo. "Pulsar" floats into unexpected fusion territory, although not without losing momentum, and bounces back with trumpet bleats like a skipping CD. A percussive loop and near-repetitions on the vibraphone fill out the illusion even before being overtaken by electronics (Evans, Ross and Jozwiak play synthesizers along with their primary instruments). The late, lamented Hank's Saloon—a beloved Brooklyn country punk dive—is paid proper tribute in the simply titled "Hank's". The trumpeter and vibraphonist double their way through a sinewy theme before a remarkable breakdown and wind-down. It's a cheerful jaunt and if there's a party tune to be found here, this is it. "My Sorrow Is Luminous" is an unexpected cover of a short, sad, embittered song by the Russian folk-punk singer Yanka Dyagileva, who died in 1991 at the age of 24. Evans drops the vocals and stretches the song from its original 75 seconds to a haunting seven-and-a-quarter minutes, dividing and stretching the circling melody line into uneven arcs. The downward turn continues with "Images", a jittery ballad that takes on a ghostly presence with the addition of Alice Teyssier's flute.

On the original recording of "My Sorrow Is Luminous", Dyagileva sings (in Russian) "I keep repeating ten times and over and over again"—and then she sings it again. The lyric goes on, but the line seems an apt descriptor of Evans' aesthetic: over and over and more is more.

For more info visit peterevanstrumpet.com. Evans is at Sisters Nov. 4 (with Ron Stabinsky) and Close Up Nov. 19 (with Dan Weiss). See Calendar.

RECOMMENDED NEW RELEASES

- Nat Adderley Jr. — *Took So Long* (NAJ)
- Lena Bloch/Kyoko Kitamura — *Marina* (Fresh Sound)
- Jakob Bro, Wadada Leo Smith, Marcus Gilmore — *Murasaki* (Loveland Music)
- Amir ElSaffar New Quartet — *Live at Pierre Boulez Saal* (Maqam)
- Peter Evans Being & Becoming — *Ars Ludicra* (More Is More)
- For Living Lovers (Brandon Ross/Stomu Takeishi) — *Natural Name* (Sunnyside)
- Girls in Airports (feat. Halvcirkel) — *Imaginal* (Mawimusic)
- Muriel Grossman — *Breakthrough* (RR Gems)
- Masabumi Kikuchi — *Hanamichi: The Final Studio Recording Vol. II* (Red Hook)
- Thomas Morgan — *Around You Is A Forest* (Loveland Music)
- Eva Novoa — *Novoa/Carter/Mela Trio, Vol. 2: Freedom Suite* (577 Records)
- John O'Gallagher — *Ancestral* (Whirlwind)
- Positive Knowledge (Oluyemi Thomas, Ijeoma Thomas, Rob Wallace) — *Point* (Nonessential)
- Federico Reuben, Mark Hanslip, Dominic Lash, Paul Hession — *Quartetics* (Bead)
- Ursel Schliet — *Creeks and Stars* (Acheulian Handaxe)
- John Scofield/Dave Holland — *Memories of Home* (ECM)
- Dayna Stephens — *Monk'd* (Contagious Music)
- Louis Stewart/Brian Dunning — *Alone Together* (Livia)
- Luís Vicente, John Dikeman, William Parker, Hamid Drake — *No Kings!* (JACC)
- WDR Big Band, John Goldsby, Bob Mintzer — *Big Band Bass* (Bass Lion Publishing)