

CALLIGRAM

WE KNOW IT WHEN WE SEE IT
BY JEFF CEBULSKI

Nearly three years into their shared record label vision, Calligram co-founders Geof Bradfield and Chad McCullough retain their initial enthusiasm, even if the task of maintaining a label has complicated their respective playing and teaching careers. “Chad and I are way too busy with our own careers,” explains Bradfield, who is a noted Chicago saxophonist, composer and professor at Northern Illinois University. “Fortunately we have compatible skill sets. Chad [does] the graphic design for the label. I do things like keeping the media, radio, mailing lists intact, reaching out to critics, answering emails and taxes at the end of the year, all the fun stuff, right?” McCullough, a trumpeter who teaches at DePaul University, adds, “You *could* do it all yourself, and then you would have the pressure of putting out enough records to make a living, and the quality would go down. What makes it possible for me is that we can work together pretty seamlessly.”

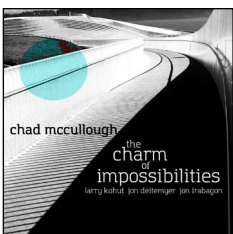
What they also share is a vision for placing a spotlight on the Chicago jazz community and creating a platform for the plethora of talented musicians that inhabit the Windy City, including themselves. Says Bradfield, “That’s really why we started it. We’re all involved with projects with various people who then put their record out on their own, or they might take it to another small label almost always outside of Chicago. Why shouldn’t we do this in-house and connect all these things that are already related anyway?” Since that decision, Calligram has released 24 albums featuring Chicago-based artists and a few outsiders that attracted the founders’ interest. How do they determine the “like-minded” artists? Says Bradfield: “It’s like what that senator said about pornography: we know it when we see it! Sometimes we listen and say, this doesn’t really fit in with the rest of the things in our catalog. Sometimes we get submissions out of left field relative to our existing releases. We’re interested in people who are thinking – thinking broadly or fascinated by a lot of different music.” A lot of the past year’s releases have either or both co-founders as players and have been pretty closely aligned with the label’s esthetic, which includes friends and members of their shared community. Such an example, on which

both Bradfield and McCullough appear, is the two-flugelhorn sextet found on *Arc and Edge*, by flugelhornist James Davis’ group Beveled.

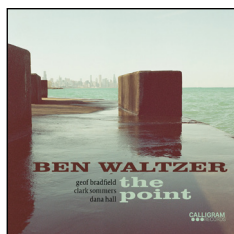
Highpoints for the still-young label additionally include last year’s *Colossal Abundance* (by Bradfield), which displays the saxophonist’s penchant for themes based on his interest on things Southern: the African Diaspora, African rhythms, blues and roots music, performed by an all-star band (Greg Ward-alto, Anna Webber-flute and tenor, Russ Johnson-trumpet, Scott Hesse-guitar and the dynamic “house” rhythm duo of Clark Sommers-bass and Dana Hall-drums). Two other stellar albums from the label include *Reveal* (from the label’s first-year of operations), a unique progressive quartet led by trumpeter Johnson with violinist Mark Feldman, and Chicago drummer-percussionist Juan Pastor’s *Memorias*, which is the label’s first Latin-based album.

For 2025, three of the label’s eight releases also feature out-of-the-country artists. In 2019, McCullough sat in with a band at a café in Macedonia, an experience that led to the acclaimed quartet album, *Transverse*.

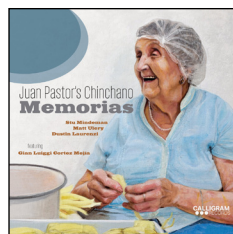
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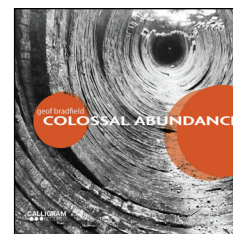
The Charm of Impossibilities
Chad McCullough



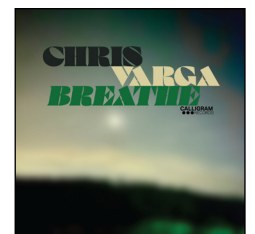
The Point
Ben Waltzer



Memorias
Juan Pastor's Chinchano



Colossal Abundance
Geof Bradfield



Breathe
Chris Varga

VOXNEWS

HAPPY HOLLY-DAYS

BY TESSA SOUTER

Perhaps no city is more synonymous with Christmas than New York. The season begins with the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade, continues with the lighting of the Rockefeller Center Christmas tree in early December—overlooking its iconic outdoor skating rink—and culminates on New Year’s Eve, when the ball drops in Times Square. Saks Fifth Avenue, Bergdorf Goodman and Macy’s department stores all compete for the most elaborate holiday window displays, while whole neighborhoods in Queens and Brooklyn transform into winter wonderlands, with front yards filled with glowing reindeer and entire houses ablaze with lights from top to bottom.

And then there’s New York jazz, for which the city is arguably even more famous. Put the two together and you get Mel Tormé’s “The Christmas Song” (composed during a heatwave in LA) and “White Christmas”, written (also in LA) by New Yorker Irving Berlin as a kind of love letter to home. Even if these songs weren’t born in the city, they are forever linked to it in the public imagination. Nat “King” Cole recorded “The Christmas Song” three times—twice in Hollywood—but his best-known version was recorded at NYC’s Capitol Studios in 1961. And countless holiday movies, from *Miracle on 34th Street* and *It Happened on 5th Avenue* to *When Harry Met Sally*, feature classic seasonal songs, further cementing the association. No wonder NYC’s Christmas jazz offerings are always stellar.

If you want full-on Christmas, look no further than Birdland: “Christmas with **Champion Fulton**” (Dec. 23–27); “A Swinging Birdland Christmas” (Dec. 21–22) with **Jim Caruso**, **Billy Stritch** and **Klea Blackhurst**; and/

or the irrepressible **Gabrielle Stravelli** (Dec. 6, 13, 20). **Johnny O’Neal**, who is also always a good time, will be at Zinc Bar (Dec. 24). **Marilyn Maye**’s New Year’s Eve extravaganza returns to Birdland Theater (Dec. 31), while **Jazzmeia Horn** rings in the New Year at Smoke (Dec. 31).

An annual holiday tradition since 1985 is singer-composer-arranger-producer (and nine-time GRAMMY nominee) **Anne Phillips**’ “Bending Towards the Light: A Jazz Nativity”, at St. Paul and St. Andrews Church on Manhattan’s Upper West Side (Dec. 22). It’s the traditional Christmas story told through jazz, and over the years has featured such luminaries as Dave Brubeck, Lionel Hampton and Tito Puente as kings and shepherds. This year’s Three Kings are Paquito D’Rivera, Maurice Chestnut and (Queen) Ingrid Jensen.

More on the Christmas front: the nonprofit series Jazz at the Ballroom presents two festive holiday shows in support of the new album *Swinging in the Holidays*, featuring **Champion Fulton**, **Benny Benack III** and others. Catch the live performances at the Two River Theater in Red Bank, NJ (Dec. 20), and at 54 Below (Dec. 21) with **Champion Fulton**, **Wyatt Michael** and **Olivia Chindamo**. Vocalist **Vicki Burns**—who wowed audiences with her recent Halloween show at The Green Room 42—celebrates the release of her EP *Almost Christmas* at Mezzrow (Dec. 7)—the title track being a brand new addition to the Christmas canon with Roger Schore’s gorgeous lyrics added to “Almost Christmas” (Eddie Higgins) and “Christmas Time is Here” (Vince Guaraldi, Lee Mendelson). Vocalist-composer **Marcus Goldhaber** proudly joins the long tradition of Jewish songwriters contributing to the timeless Christmas songbook with his new original, “I Can’t Wait for Christmas”—a piece very much in the spirit of classics such as “I’ll Be Home for Christmas” and “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas”.

But if Christmas leaves you cold, there are plenty of alternative and non-holiday-themed shows on offer.

The acclaimed vocal group **The New York Voices**—Peter Eldridge, Kim Nazarian, Darmon Meader and Lauren Kinhan—are, after 38 years together, “hanging up the microphones” to pursue solo endeavors. Still great friends, their musical rapport remains exceptional, so don’t miss what may be their final tri-state performances as part of their “Grand Finale Tour”: Ramapo College in Mahwah, NJ (Dec. 13) and Birdland Theater (Dec. 19–21).

Also at Birdland Theater, rising star **Ashley Pezzotti** (Dec. 24–28) brings standards and originals in the spirit of Ella and Sarah. **Jane Monheit**—raised on the Great American Songbook—returns to Birdland (Dec. 9–13). Her career took off when she became first runner-up at the 1998 Thelonious Monk International Jazz Vocal Competition, and she has toured nearly nonstop since. Audiophile favorite, UK-based South Orange native **Stacey Kent** appears at Birdland (Dec. 16–20). Expect her signature mix of American and French standards, Brazilian music and original compositions, presented in an intimate trio setting along with her husband, saxophonist Jim Tomlinson, and New York pianist Art Hiramara.

SEE YOU THERE... **Anaïs Maviel** and The Rhythm Method’s *listen to the rain* album release is at The Blanc (Dec. 13); **Sara Serpa**’s *End of Something* album release show (a duo with pianist Matt Mitchell) is at Firehouse 12 (Dec. 5) and Close Up (Dec. 8); also at Close Up, **Lucy Wijnands** and **Tyreek McDole** (Dec. 17), and **Vanisha Gould** with Emmanuel Michael (Dec. 22). **Sarah King** is at Zinc Bar (Dec. 3). The highly imaginative **Hilary Gardner** and The Lonesome Pines “trail songs” project is at Birdland Theater (Dec. 7). **Mary Foster Conklin**, as part of a special encore performance of “Mirrors Revisited 50th Anniversary” at Urban Stages (Dec. 11), will be singing from a unique catalog of dark art songs first recorded by **Peggy Lee** in 1975 after her GRAMMY win for “Is That All There Is?”.