



Out Late
Eric Scott Reed (Smoke Sessions)
by Scott Yanow

Pianist Eric Scott Reed has been quite consistent throughout his productive career. He's been performing and recording for over 35 years, spurred by his intersection with Wynton Marsalis in 1986, first touring and then joining the trumpeter's septet. On *Out Late*, he's in his usual top form and has assembled an impressive all-star quintet: Nicholas Payton (trumpet), Eric Alexander (tenor), Peter Washington (bass) and Joe Farnsworth (drums). The album consists of seven of the pianist's originals and is essentially modern, swinging, forward-looking hard bop.

The close interplay between the trumpeter and tenor saxophonist works so well throughout this set that it is surprising to realize that they evidently have only recorded together on two other occasions: guitarist Mark Eli's *A Minor Scramble* (1996) and on half of Alexander's *Summit Meeting* (2001). The two horn players blend together particularly well on the opening "Glow" and echo and inspire each other in their tradeoffs during "Out Late". Clearly they should work together more often! The rhythm section is as tight as one would expect from these masterful players. Reed's solos are inventive, swinging and sometimes a bit playful, as heard on the medium-tempo strut "Shadoboxing". His playing is also showcased on the uptempo trio number "They". His writing throughout is very much in the hard bop tradition, even with the title cut's theme hinting at Ornette Coleman in spots. Particularly impressive is that his pieces largely utilize original chord changes that challenge and inspire each soloist. Of Reed's originals, "The Weirdos" has the most memorable theme. "All'umfrs" is highlighted by Alexander's especially strong tenor playing, and "Delightful Daddy" serves as the album's joyful uptempo closer.

For more info visit smokesessionsrecords.com. Reed is at Smoke Dec. 28-30 (part of "Countdown 2026 Coltrane Festival"). See Calendar.



Points in Time
John Yao and His 17 Piece Instrument
(See Tao Recordings)
by George Kanzler

Points in Time is John Yao's second big band album, arriving a decade after his first, *Flip-Flop*, also credited to his 17 Piece Instrument, an enterprise which burned him out on writing for a big band. His group, Triceratops followed, a quintet with three horns, bass and drums, sans chord instruments.

Subsequently he released two albums (in 2019 and 2022), and the third track on this, his new album *Points in Time*, is "Triceratops Blues", an expansion of a tune

from that group's debut album, *How We Do*. Here, the theme is expanded and developed, first by a trombone choir, brass and reeds joining to enforce the rising, pulsing tempo. Soloists Billy Drewes (alto) and Max Seigel (bass trombone) engage in a dialogue, trading short solos, the trombone from deep nether regions, alto in a low register too, fading to a walking bass solo from Robert Sabin, giving way to horn section shout choruses. A short Andy Watson drum feature ushers in an intense finale from massed horns playing wild and free. That track is one of six on the album that are developments and expansions of tunes the leader wrote for small groups. The other two tracks are his big band arrangements of Herbie Hancock's "Finger Painting" and "Upside", an update of a big band chart he wrote in 2020, commissioned by an award-winning high school jazz band in Canton, MI.

In the decade since *Flip-Flop*, Yao has progressed immeasurably as a big band composer-arranger, displaying an assured command of musical modes from swing and driving riffs, to complex harmonies, timbres and orchestral colors. "Not Even Close", a tribute to Thad Jones (Yao subs regularly in the Jones and Mel Lewis-founded Vanguard Jazz Orchestra of today), is replete with some of Jones' signature section interactions. "The Other Way" finds him in the 12-tone universe, with shifting times in and out of two, three and four. And "Early Morning Walk" conjures rhapsodic moods from orchestral colors. Those last two mentioned tracks also feature Yao's only trombone solos: both are memorable, rich and sonorous.

Yao is not only a laudable composer-arranger, but also a trombonist with a deeply resonant, original voice.

For more info visit johnyao.com. Yao is at Roulette Dec. 18 (with Webber-Morris Big Band). He is also at Morgan School (Clinton, CT) Dec. 14 (with Joe McCarthy's NY Afro-Bop Alliance Big Band). See Calendar and 100 Miles Out.



Angel Falls
Sylvie Courvoisier/Wadada Leo Smith (Intakt)
Ki
Natsuki Tamura/Satoko Fujii (Libra)
by Ken Waxman



While improvised piano-trumpet duets date from Louis Armstrong-Earl Hines' seminal "Weatherbird" (1928), balancing the four valves and 88 keys has always been a delicate challenge. Still, the 21st century iterations here could be linked to abstract paintings. American trumpeter and visual artist Wadada Leo Smith and Swiss pianist Sylvie Courvoisier's *Angel Falls* is a subtle version of abstract expressionists' splashes of color canvases, whereas Japanese pianist Satoko Fujii and trumpeter Natsuki Tamura's *Ki* is more like a monochrome painting wherein close scrutiny discerns musical nuances.

Courvoisier and Smith are experienced duo performers. Smith, whose career dates from the late '60s, has partnered with pianists as different as John Tilbury and Vijay Iyer. Almost three decades younger, Courvoisier's duet partners have included Ned Rothenberg and Mark Feldman, but never a trumpeter until now. The two were together in larger ensembles though, one of which was a quartet with Fujii and Tamura. *Ki* is the tenth duo the other two have recorded and while Tamura frequently plays with Fujii, she has also recorded duos with players from Otomo Yoshihide to Joe Fonda.

Maintaining a painterly straight line, Courvoisier and Smith's *Angel Falls* appends numerous squirts of

improvisational tincture with extended techniques such as twanging the piano's inner strings and brassy trumpet triplets, half valve slurs and protracted flutters. Occasionally, as on "Sonic Utterance", bright brass pitches and delicate key glissandi are emphasized. Most selections are rougher and more intense. The title track evolves as additional reverb from string strums meet breezy brass slurs that inflate to full-force romanticism before fragmenting into trumpet squeaks and stinging keyboard clips. In contrast, the probing aural brush strokes that shape "Line Through Time" extend wavering trumpet bites and piano key probes with gouache-like effects that widen into full keyboard emphasis and smeared brass notes. Reflecting and completing the overall design, Smith's open horn brass portamento and Courvoisier's thematic key-and-string decorations on the final "Kairos" reflect similar sketching from the introductory "Olo'Upnea and Lightning".

If jagged lightning defines much of *Angel Falls*, then *Ki* is more a light rain. Minimalist in conception, the simple musical geomatic shapes drawn by Tamura, who composed seven of the eight tracks, aren't static, however. Although overall, Fujii's touch is more serene and reflective than Courvoisier's and Tamura's solos more fully rounded and horizontal than Smith's, digressions include pointillist textures and half-valve squeaks from the trumpeter as well as the pianist's dips into pedal point emphasis and jagged key slashes. Experience means that tracks such as "Kusunoki" include moderated antiphonic connections, with key strokes carefully outlined alongside portamento echoes that then combine into trumpet grace notes and restful piano comping. Others like "Arakashi" and "Icho" reflect dispassionate lyricism that moves duets closer to delicate brush painting than abstract art's scattershot washes. Yet even those tunes that emphasize widening

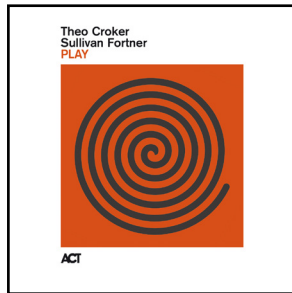
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- Ted Brown Quartet — *Just You Just Me* (New Artists)
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- Wycliffe Gordon — *Holiday Fun!* (Arbors)
- Lisa Hilton — *Extended Daydream* (Ruby Slippers Prod.)
- Dan Kinzelman/Stefano Costanzo — *Infinite Ramp* (Hora)
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- Makaya McCraven — *Off The Record* (International Anthem)
- Roscoe Mitchell/Michele Rabbia — *In 2* (Rogue Art)
- Thelonious Monk — *Bremen 1965* (Sunnyside)
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- Dave Rempis, Jason Adasiewicz, Chris Corsano — *Dial Up* (Aerophonic)
- Thomas Strønen — *Off Stillness* (ECM)
- Luis Vicente/Vasco Trilla — *Ghost Strata* (Cipsela)
- Johannes Wallmann — *Not Tired* (Shifting Paradigm)

keyboard sweeps and low pitch tremors, plus wallowing immersive trumpet breaths, encompass relaxed linear evolution.

Like broad visual art awareness, the individual and distinct ways each duo illustrates its program demands respect and recognition.

For more info visit librarecords.com and intaktrec.ch. The Courvoisier/Smith Angel Falls album release concert is at Roulette Dec. 7. Courvoisier is also at Roulette Dec. 1 (with Patricia Brennan) and The Stone at The New School Dec. 11 (with Ikue Mori). See Calendar.



Play
Theo Croker/Sullivan Fortner (ACT Music)
by Andrew Schinder

Play, the first co-leader album between contemporary jazz stars Theo Croker (trumpet) and Sullivan Fortner (piano), has been a long time coming considering that they have been friends who have worked together for decades. Though Fortner has made frequent appearances on Croker projects, it is not until now they have ever shared the spotlight equally on any studio recording.

Given the recent output of both artists, a listener's initial experience with *Play* could frankly seem a little disarming or jarring. Croker's last few studio albums are fun, genre-bending experiences that blend traditional jazz with hip-hop, R&B and electronic sounds. Fortner has generally leaned into his New Orleans roots, mastering the classically straight-ahead jazz idiom while also serving as accompanist to superstar vocalist Cécile McLorin Salvant. With this new album, however, none of these predilections apply. The recording arrived after the two musicians initially collaborated on a session featuring interpretations of modern jazz standards, but then promptly scrapped the recordings as they were dissatisfied with the project. Instead, they took a hard left and re-entered the studio the next day with basically no plan, barely an outline and not a rehearsal. They just played. And the results teem with immediacy.

The selections consist of mostly soft, meditative duets that straddle the line between jazz and chamber music. Despite their beauty and general stillness, however, the tracks are direct, even agitated, conveying a thematic urgency while at the same time hypnotizing the listener with their entrancing atmosphere. Opening track, "A Prayer for Peace", promptly announces the album's mission. The only tune with a modicum of pre-composing, it proves to be a soulfully unhurried meditation. "We Laugh Because We Must" is—ironically, given its fairly depressing title—more up-tempo, with Fortner playing around with varying scales while Croker fills in the gaps. The segue into "The Space Within" continues these melodic themes, with the trumpeter's tones sounding positively haunting. As the album progresses, the mood does seem to create an optimistic shift, as if to offer the listener a respite from the darkness. "As We Are", a gorgeous ballad, is one of the more fully-formed (and longest) pieces. Croker and Fortner shine with exquisite harmony, in contrast to the earlier disquietude, and with more than a shimmer of hope.

For more info visit actmusic.com/en/. Fortner plays solo at Baruch Performing Arts Center Dec. 12. See Calendar.



Ones & Twos: Expanded Edition
Gerald Clayton (Blue Note)
by Pierre Giroux

Pianist and composer Gerald Clayton has long been regarded as one of the most inventive artists on the Blue Note roster, ever since his debut for the label on trumpeter Ambrose Akinmusire's *When The Heart Emerges Glistening* (2011). He has since recorded on numerous occasions for Blue Note with Charles Lloyd and his leader debut for the label was *Happening: Live at the Village Vanguard* (2020).

This musician honors the jazz idiom's history while exploring new ways to expand its vocabulary. With *Ones & Twos: Expanded Edition*, technically Clayton's fourth album for Blue Note, he revisits an earlier recording experiment, also released this year, this time fully bringing his original concept to life, a bold exploration of sound layering inspired by turntablism. The original release of *Ones & Twos* featured twelve standalone tracks performed by a talented lineup including Joel Ross (vibraphone), Elena Pinderhughes (flute), Marquis Hill (trumpet) and Kendrick Scott (drums). Now, with this *Expanded Edition*, two unreleased tracks join these compositions and stand on their own as distinct, intimate dialogues, each marked by the leader's graceful touch and his ensemble's refined interplay. Pieces such as "Angels Speak" and "Cinnamon Sugar" unfold with quiet grace, their melodic beauty anchored by a flexible rhythmic core. Ross' shimmering vibraphone colors and Pinderhughes' airy flute phrases add layers of luminosity, while Scott's drums pulse with understated urgency. All the remaining separate tracks, including the two previously unreleased compositions "Glass Half Warm" and "Glass Half Cool", maintain a consistent harmonic approach and musical curiosity that exemplify Clayton's adventurous spirit.

Yet, it is on the second of the double disc release, featuring the combined, overlaid tracks, that Clayton's artistic vision becomes fully clear. The seven paired performances ("Angels Speak-Lovingly", "Cinnamon Sugar-Rush", "Sacrifice Culture-For Peace", "How Much Love-More Always", "Court M-Space Seas", "Glass Half Warm-Glass Half Cool" and "Just Above-Endless Tubes") blend into a soundscape that challenges ideas of form and interaction. Each pairing demonstrates how Clayton's concept of duality works in practice: melody and counter-melody, pulse and suspension, clarity and abstraction. The first pairing opens the sequence, with the various instrumental lines intertwining with tender harmonic reflections, creating a sense of introspective grace. The subsequent pairing injects rhythmic vitality, its playful swing transforming into a quicker, almost bubbly pulse that provides a foundation for Clayton's piano phrasing to remain lyrical and centered. As the pairings unfold, what might have seemed an intellectual conceit becomes a vibrant, unexpectedly cohesive listening experience. The overlay technique transforms the compositions into a new sonic landscape, an aural collage where harmonies blur, rhythms intertwine and melodies seem to converse over time.

The *Expanded Edition*, including the combined tracks, affirms Clayton's dedication to innovation rooted in musical integrity.

For more info visit bluenote.com. Clayton is at The Jazz Gallery Dec. 17-20. See Calendar.

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