



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 Elf'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 slurps 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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- Eishan Ensemble – *Northern Rhapsody* (ACEL Prod.)
- Flyways (Mara Rosenbloom, Anaïs Maviel, Jordyn Davis) – *Mutualism* (Daily Music)
- Funkwrench Blues – *Mischief in the Musitorium* (Need To Know Music)
- Daniele Germani, Elias Meister, Billy Mintz – *Conference of the Birds, Vol. 2* (Lyonhill)
- Wycliffe Gordon – *Holiday Fun!* (Arbors)
- Lisa Hilton – *Extended Daydream* (Ruby Slippers Prod.)
- Dan Kinzelman/Stefano Costanzo – *Infinite Ramp* (HORA)
- Mike Majkowski – *Tide* (s/r)
- Makaya McCraven – *Off The Record* (International Anthem)
- Roscoe Mitchell/Michele Rabbia – *In 2* (RogueArt)
- Thelonious Monk – *Bremen 1965* (Sunnyside)
- Moor Mother (feat. Nicole Mitchell & Nduduzo Makhathini) – *One for Archie* (Enjoy Jazz)
- Zhengtao Pan – *Mirror Floating on the Water* (Outside In Music)
- Ivo Perelman/Nate Wooley – *Polarity 4* (Burning Ambulance Music)
- Loren Schoenberg and His Jazz Orchestra – *So Many Memories* (Turtle Bay)
- Dave Rempis, Jason Adasiewicz, Chris Corsano – *Dial Up* (Aerophonic)
- Thomas Strønen – *Off Stillness* (ECM)
- Luís Vicente/Vasco Trilla – *Ghost Strata* (Cipsela)
- Johannes Wallmann – *Not Tired* (Shifting Paradigm)