

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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