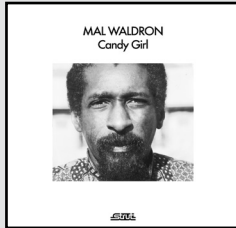
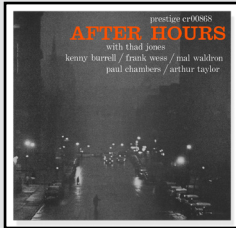


DROP THE NEEDLE



After Hours

Thad Jones, Frank Wess, Kenny Burrell,
Mal Waldron, Paul Chambers, Art Taylor
(Prestige-Craft Recordings)

Candy Girl

Mal Waldron (Calumet-Strut)

by Andrew Schinder

With the celebration of piano legend Mal Waldron's centennial this year, it's appropriate to examine the catalog of a master (who passed away in 2002, 23 years ago this month at age 77). His somewhat enigmatic body of work oftentimes keeps him just outside the pantheon of truly iconic figures, though these two LP reissues showcase the pianist's prowess and in two contradictory styles, in two different eras of his career.

Originally released in 1957, *After Hours* (recently reissued on 180g vinyl) has Waldron contributing to an all-star sextet led by trumpeter

Thad Jones and featuring Frank Wess (flute, tenor), Kenny Burrell (guitar), Paul Chambers (bass) and Art Taylor (drums). The pianist was at a creative peak during this period, releasing a string of classic albums as a leader and working as a consistent member of groups led by Charles Mingus and Jackie McLean, as well as serving as Billie Holiday's last accompanist. Despite his distinctive pianism, this session is not a prime example of his playing skill per se. Rather, the album finds him in workhorse mode: he composed all four tracks and, with a few notable exceptions, largely cedes the spotlight to his bandmates. Guitarist Burrell, in particular, is glorious, and gives this session its unique quality among so many horn-driven post-bop recordings. In addition, Wess' giddy flute on opener "Steamin'" is full of blissful energy, and Jones provides a clinic on the bluesy "Blue Jelly" and the swinging banger "Count One". Nevertheless, Waldron generally still gives himself a consistent, fundamental foundation to the compositions, which generously allows his groupmates to take off.

In 1963, Waldron famously suffered the dual misfortunes of a nervous breakdown and heroin overdose, following which he relocated to Europe, leaving the temptations of New York. There, he began to expand his playing style, largely losing the

structure that defined his '50s output (while retaining his famous angularity), and becoming freer and more progressive. In 1975, he found himself playing with the seminal Afrobeat/funk outfit The Lafayette Afro Rock Band and the result, *Candy Girl* (lost until 2016) is finally receiving a full-fledged reissue. This album is basically the opposite of the classic, swinging post-bop *After Hours*. It is dank, funky and dirty. Good golly, *Candy Girl* slaps! Waldron here shows none of the control or discipline he demonstrated on the other album. He owns the electric piano here and displays exhilarating chemistry with the Lafayettes. The lead riff on opener "Home Again" is instantly intoxicating and never lets up (the reissue includes a bonus version of the song that, in a welcome addition, is twice as long at over 10 minutes). The group even manages to take the groove up a notch with the next selection, "Red Match Box", which features the masterful rhythm section of Lafayette Hudson (bass) and Donny Donable (drums). With the title track, Waldron mellows out a bit, delivering a stunning soul jazz performance that hints at his struggles with, and ultimate conquering of, his demons.

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Unseparate

Webber/Morris Big Band (Out Of Your Head)

by Bill Meyer

Unseparate is the second album that the Webber/Morris Big Band has made in its ten-year existence. That may not seem a lot, but when you consider the cost of getting nineteen people together, and the fact that the band's lifespan encompasses COVID-19 pandemic time when you could not have so many people blowing horns and breathing air in the same room, the miracle is that it exists at all. That achievement is made all the more remarkable when you consider that the band plays challenging original material composed by its two leaders, a pair of Canadian ex-patriate saxophonists and composers who are explicitly committed to doing something new in a format whose heyday passed three quarters of a century ago.

One challenge to the form is Anna Webber's interest in just intonation (JI), a tuning system based on whole numbers that can result in sounds that are gloriously resonant, but that often lures practitioners into making music that showcases the system's psycho-acoustic effects. Webber is no more interested in conforming to JI rules than big band ones. The four-part "Just Intonation Etudes for Big Band", a COVID-19 era creation that kicks off this album, begins with a richly-textured armada of long tones that feels like a friendly introduction of one system to another. Pleasantries accomplished, the suite proceeds through passages of strident, staccato rhythms and breath-paced sound-bursts, all spiked with expressive solo turns that grow organically out of the rich orchestrations. Fans of both JI and big

band music will find themselves on fascinatingly unfamiliar ground throughout.

Angela Morris' compositions may not traffic in alternate tunings, but they're just as rewardingly challenging. "Habitual" uses some familiar big band sonorities to usher the listener into a sequence of linked sonic scenarios—a winding piano foray, flutes lightly raining on a sinuous baritone sax line (Lisa Parrott), a jagged but locked-in stack of rhythms (Yuhan Su-vibraphone, Marta Sánchez-piano, Adam Hopkins-bass, Jeff Davis-drums)—so contrasting that they seem to mock the piece's name. "Mist/Missed" likewise uses passages of growling, sliding percussive textures, intricately efflorescent woodwind charts (including Charlotte Greve, Jay Rattman, Adam Schneit and Parrott), starkly rocking brass (trumpeters Jake Henry, Kenny Warren, Nolan Tsang and Ryan Easter; trombonists Zekkereya El-magharbel, Jen Baker, Tim Vaughn, Reginald Chapman) and drum exchanges to suggest a sequence of changing states without resorting to programmatic convention.

Diverse and endlessly imaginative in its deployment of familiar tools to new ends, *Unseparate* is a deeply rewarding accomplishment.

For more info visit outofyourheadrecords.com. The album release concert is at Roulette Dec. 18. See Calendar.



Reflection Of Another Self Milena Casado (Candid)

by Sophia Valera Heinecke

A stunning debut from trumpeter, flugelhornist and composer Milena Casado, *Reflection Of Another Self*

is easy in its confidence, as the leader amplifies the difficulties and triumphs of showing compassion, knowing oneself and holding boundaries. Searching, perplexing piano lines, shoulder to shoulder with Casado's energizing trumpet, offer a unified sensibility created by a core band comprising Lex Korten (piano), Kanoa Mendenhall (bass) and Jongkuk Kim (drums).

Vocals orient us towards the importance of change, repeating the word, asking "who am I?" Casado's trumpet playing is, at times, beautifully breathy and human, and across the album, melodic lines are assigned to surprising guest players including Brandee Younger (harp), Nicole Mitchell (flute), Kris Davis (piano) and Meshell Ndegeocello (bass). Flute, electronic wind instrument (EWI) and trumpet all have moments when they hold resonant melody and duet in unison with vocalizations. "Yet I Can See" brings with it a smoothness but doesn't fall into easy listening tropes; it escalates to an almost carnivalesque place and exemplifies the expert balance this album strikes. Always pleasing but never complacent, there is a parallel moment with escalating piano phrases and spoken word samples on "Resilience", contrasted by a gorgeous solo from the leader, de-escalating into quiet affirmations.

Across the album, Morgan Guerin (EWI) and sound artist Val Jeanty give polyvocality to technology, speaking to the feeling of this time. The electronics do not overcomplicate but rather bring us into awareness of the dialogue between the present and future; samples using the human voice add embellishment. The orchestration and musical inclinations across the album brim with organic flow, answering the urgency of present day with compositions that feel both personal and universal. Though it may not be improvised, what flows underneath feels like a deep knowing and trust in the unknown and what has already been articulated. Standout features blend beautifully, particularly between Younger and Mitchell on "Lidia y Los Libros" and Ndegeocello closing the album with "Self Love".

Reflections Of Another Self is beautifully informed by the ecosystem cultivated by Casado's peers, the