

# OTHERLY LOVE

CONNEX' FOR THE COMMUNITY

BY BRAD COHAN

Many record labels are associated and musically identifiable with where they've laid their hats down. Here on the East Coast, for example, AUM Fidelity is a quintessential New York imprint through and through, documenting the East Village avant garde jazz movement spearheaded by the likes of William Parker and Matthew Shipp. On the other side of the country, the International Anthem label has quickly established itself as the nexus for the exploding underground improvised music and jazz scene that has taken LA by storm. Now, there is the rapid-fire rise of the Otherly Love label, launched in late 2023, with its ever-growing catalog that already counts nearly twenty recordings—but it doesn't ascribe to similar logic. The music the label has released thus far is widely disparate, in the literal and aesthetical sense. Those sensibilities mirror the vast and indelible footprint that label co-founder Stephen Buono has left on each stop of his journey: he's formed invaluable bonds as an ardent music scene supporter and ubiquitous community-driven sparkplug. Buono has made his presence felt in his

native Philadelphia, as well as NYC and Chicago, and for the last several years, in his current homebase of LA where he operates his flourishing record label with co-chief and childhood friend, Matthew Pierce. It wasn't a difficult decision to start Otherly Love: they both were floored when records they heard failed to garner enough attention for a label to release them. So why not start a label themselves?

Buono's staunchly DIY ethos, his indefatigable belief in the music and the musicians who create it, and crucially all the aforementioned places he has lived and where he's made an enduring mark, is fully realized by way of his label. "Place is important to me," says Buono when asked what drives his label. "One of my favorite writers is Wendell Berry [poet, novelist and more] and he always talks about the importance of place. I think for me, I don't really think that way but I live that way." In surveying Otherly Love's catalog, the picture Buono paints as place being one of his label's catalysts is manifest. It's akin to an autobiographical connect-the-dots puzzle of where Buono has been and all the connections he's made. That's what helps set this label apart from the label pack. Cases in point: two outstanding albums that have found their way on many "Best-of 2025" lists: Chad Taylor's *Smoke Shifter* and Marshall Allen's *Ghost Horizons' Live in Philadelphia* represent the City of Brotherly Love; Valebol, an

adventurous electronic-pop duo whose self-titled recording was released in 2024, hail from Chicago; from LA there is *Water Map*, by guitarist Dustin Wong and composer Gregory Uhlmann.

Of course, the label has its serious NYC lineage and vibes, evidenced by Ches Smith's *Clone Row* (another 2025 best-of candidate), the improvising quartet History Dog's *Root Systems*, the just-released *Echoes of Breakage* by Nomon (the sister duo of percussionists Shayna and Nava Dunkelman) and multi-instrumentalist extraordinaire Kenny Wollesen's avant-everything project, *LATRALA*. It's not lost on Buono that his label is a bit more New York-centric. After all, his time there shaped him—but so have all the other places he's been. "If you asked me in 2001 when I was at Tonic watching [John Zorn's] Masada for the 90th time, I would have thought my label would just be like Lower East Side music, and I'm not just Lower East Side so I'm glad it's gone all over the place." While Buono cites Pi Recordings, the original Blue Note and Impulse! as inspirational to Otherly Love's vision, there isn't any denying the influence of others: punk rock, specifically SST Records, the pioneering independent label run by hardcore giants Black Flag, as well as bands such as the Minutemen (whose guitarist and singer, D. Boon,

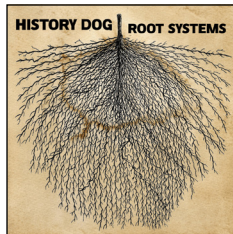
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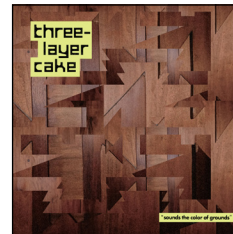
*Smoke Shifter*  
Chad Taylor Quintet



*Clone Row*  
Ches Smith



*Root Systems*  
History Dog



*Sounds the Color of Grounds*  
Three-Layer Cake



*LATRALA*  
Kenny Wollesen

## VOXNEWS

# GRAMMY NEWS

+ MORE

BY TESSA SOUTER

Congratulations to all the Best Jazz Vocal Album 2026 GRAMMY nominees—**Samara Joy** for *Portrait* (Verve) and also a Best Jazz Performance nomination for "Peace of Mind/Dreams Come True"; powerhouse vocalist and composer **Nicole Zuraitis** for her double album *Live at Vic's Las Vegas* (La Reserve), which also received a Best Jazz Performance nomination for "All Stars Lead To You". Catch her at Barretto at Fasano (Jan. 10) and Drom (Jan. 11). Composer and vocalist (and first-time GRAMMY nominee), **Michael Mayo** shines on his sophomore album *Fly* (Mack Avenue), offering soothing vocals on soulful originals and fresh arrangements of standards—including "Four", which also earned a Best Jazz Performance nod. **Christie Dashiell** is nominated for her collaboration with Terri Lyne Carrington, *We Insist 2025!* (Candid), a reimagining of the 1960 Max Roach–Abbey Lincoln masterpiece. **Dee Dee Bridgewater's** album with Bill Charlap, *Elemental* (DDB/Mack Avenue), is a masterclass in duo interplay, featuring her always-original takes on a selection of standards. Catch the two at Birdland (Jan. 6–10).

Speaking of piano-vocal duos, listen for **Richard Cortez'** heart-meltingly gorgeous baritone and authenticity, beautifully supported by rising-star pianist Esteban Castro (winner of the Larry J. Bell Young Jazz

Artist Award) on their duo album *Standards in Orbit* (La Reserve)—a fabulous showcase for them both. In more piano-vocal magic, jazz singer and songwriter **Kristen Lee Sergeant's** beautiful single "No Room at the Inn" manages to be political, clever and moving all at once, gorgeously accompanied by her simpatico pianist Jeb Patton.

Also up for GRAMMYS (in the Best Large Jazz Ensemble Album category) are veteran UK singer **Norma Winstone**, featured on *Some Days Are Better: The Lost Scores* (Greenleaf Music) by the Kenny Wheeler Legacy, featuring The Royal Academy of Music Jazz Orchestra and Frost Jazz Orchestra; and **Deborah Silver** and the Count Basie Band for *Basie Rocks!* (Green Hill Productions), with big-band takes on a selection of pop songs, including "Paint It Black", "Bennie and the Jets", "Tainted Love" (with Kurt Elling) and "Every Breath You Take". In the Best Traditional Pop Vocal Performance category, Icelandic singer-songwriter **Laufey's** *A Matter Of Time* (Vingolf) is a revelation. A classically-trained musician who cites Ella and Chet Baker as major influences, her originals—a sophisticated blend of pop, jazz, bossa and classical—has introduced a generation of teens to jazz. Also nominated in that category is Canadian jazz singer **Laila Biali**, whose album *Wintersongs* (Empress Music Group)—"a love letter to winter"—was composed in a cabin surrounded by the snow-capped Canadian Rockies during a writing retreat. The incredible improvisational vocalist **Kokayi** is featured on Ambrose Akinmusire's GRAMMY-nominated *honey from a winter stone* (Nonesuch) in the Best Alternative Jazz Category. And in the Best Latin Jazz category, *The Original Influencers: Dizzy, Chano & Chico* by Arturo O'Farrill & the Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra, features vocalists **Daymé Arocena** and **Melvis Santa**. *Blues Blood* (Blue Note), by saxophonist

Immanuel Wilkins, features vocalists **June McDoom, Ganavya, Yaw Agyeman** and special guest **Cécile McLorin Salvant**. A multimedia exploration of ancestral legacies and the bloodlines that bind us, each voice illuminates a different facet of heritage.

SEE YOU THERE...At The Laurie Beechman Theatre (Jan. 31), **Martin Bonventre** celebrates his debut recording, *Swingin' in a New Dimension* (Splendido Productions), with his full recording band, including multifaceted pianist Jason Yeager and seasoned pros. British jazz vocal star **Emma Smith**, recent runner-up in the Sarah Vaughan International Jazz Vocal Competition, will perform six sets over three nights at Birdland Theater (Jan. 23–25). **Stella Cole** appears at Birdland (Jan. 11). The incredible **Lisa Fischer**, star of the documentary *20 Feet from Stardom*, appears at Birdland Theater (Jan. 20–24), featuring the Orrin Evans Trio, and **Naama** will be at Birdland Theater (Jan. 24) for the early set. At Jazz Museum in Harlem (Jan. 8) and Mezzrow (Jan. 9–10), catch **Vanessa Rubin** (Jan. 9–10). Also at Mezzrow: **Kavita Shah** in duo with François Moutin (Jan. 11), **Andrea Wolper** (Jan. 18), celebrating a milestone birthday, **Marianne Solivan** (Jan. 20), **JD Walter** (Jan. 22), and **Johnny O'Neal** (Jan. 30–31). At Joe's Pub, jazz singer and songwriter **Elizabeth Bougerol** of The Hot Sardines performs her solo show (Jan. 9) for the early set; singer and composer **Gabrielle Cavassa**, 2021 winner of the Sarah Vaughan Competition, and recently signed to Blue Note, performs with the Christian Sands Trio (Jan. 9) on the late set. **Ourida** welcomes in the New Year at Barbès (Jan. 2), and BLCK Madonna will open for Claude McKnight and Take 6 at the Jazz Club at Aman (Jan.9).

\*Tessa Souter celebrates Erik Satie at Soapbox Gallery Jan. 11. See Calendar.

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about jazz, and all about the drums. I got to meet a lot of musicians. I got to meet a lot of African American musicians, and they shared with me what was going on. I started to find out about the “other America” at a young age.

**NYCJR:** How did you make the transition from sort of the more straight-ahead, post-bop jazz into the jazz-funk stylings of Headhunters?

**CLARK:** It was easy. In high school I was trying to be like Max Roach, Roy Haynes and Philly Joe Jones. But the girls I was dating liked James Brown. It sounded kind of like jazz to me, but I can play the beats right away. My jazz chops were right there, so I didn’t have to even woodshed these beats. I could hear them and play them. I already liked that tight Roy Haynes snare sound, so I had the pop when I played the backbeat. From traveling around with my dad, I knew about the shuffle and the blues. They had a huge effect on me. I was a natural for this type of thing. I could play the funk straight off. [Bassist] Paul Jackson was my best friend, and he introduced me to Herbie. When I auditioned with Herbie, I tried to play kind of like Elvin [Jones] and Tony [Williams]. I wanted him to know that I could do it, and Herbie says, “We’re not doing that. We’re not doing that, man.” I wanted to show Herbie I could play jazz. I didn’t care about playing funk with him. But then Herbie said, “Play that wild funk Paul tells me about.” And I did, and Herbie hired me right then.

**NYCJR:** You’ve made it a point to distinguish jazz from other genres that may seem somewhat jazz-adjacent, like blues, funk or soul. When you were with Headhunters, did you see yourself within the jazz idiom?

**CLARK:** Paul and I played jazz together. We weren’t trying to play funk. But Herbie was trying to play funky music. So I would use all kinds of jazz language to fashion a beat together. The marketing people now call it “jazz-funk,” but I wasn’t thinking of it. And when playing with Herbie, there was no time to think. He just takes off.

**NYCJR:** How did you make the transition from Headhunters back to more straight-ahead jazz?

**CLARK:** I was losing my mind not playing jazz. I’d come home from a Headhunters tour, and I would just play, like, a little trio in some little joint for \$100, and I would be in heaven. My wife was like, “Look how happy you are.” So I started interjecting myself back into the world as a jazz artist.

**NYCJR:** You still play with The Headhunters [post-Hancock, the group added a “The” prefix], and you still continue to record and tour with original Headhunters percussionist Bill Summers. What is your continuing relationship like with The Headhunters and Summers?

**CLARK:** I love Bill. Bill Summers is one of my closest friends. We’ve just celebrated our 52nd anniversary of playing together. When we play together, we’re like one guy. We read each other, we don’t even have to speak about it. It’s great. And regarding Headhunters—it’s part of the reason I’m a known drummer. I don’t want to completely turn my back on that. The Headhunters is a real high-level experience.

**NYCJR:** You’ve had a lot of recent success in jazz, including ongoing collaborations with pianist Michael Wolff and others. How do these projects fit within your post-Headhunters career?

**CLARK:** Michael and I have been playing on and off for years. When I moved to New York, Michael and I put a band together and we played a million \$100 New York jazz gigs, which was great training. And we hung out all the time, and we wrote music, and tried stuff. We played weird and we played real straight. Michael could play the blues, so I like him. We put together the Wolff & Clark Expedition, made some records and did some gigs. We’ve been doing that on and off. He and I have never stopped playing together. I’m just trying to keep all the balls in the air. I’m not a political guy, so it’s got to be the music.

**NYCJR:** I would be remiss if I didn’t ask about Vince Guaraldi and *Peanuts*.

**CLARK:** I feel great about it. Vince Guaraldi was a dear friend. He was a crazy cat. He had a bad temper, but he was a good dude. And his real thing was, he was like a Wynton Kelly swinger. He could swing and bring the blues really out of pocket. I didn’t even know about the *Peanuts* thing when I was playing with it. This is weird. I was just working, I was a young guy. We just played tunes. We played snippets. He didn’t tell us what it was for or anything. Eventually we found out it was for Charlie Brown!

*For more info visit [mikeclarkdrums.com](http://mikeclarkdrums.com). The Mike Clark Quintet will be at Smalls Jan. 16-17. See Calendar.*

**Recommended Listening:**

- Herbie Hancock—*Thrust* (Columbia, 1974)
- The Headhunters—*Survival of the Fittest* (Arista, 1975)
- Jack Walrath—*Revenge of the Fat People* (Stash, 1981)
- Mike Clark & Paul Jackson—*The Funk Stops Here* (Tiptoe-Enja, 1991)
- Mike Clark—*Blueprints of Jazz Vol. 1* (Talking House, 2006)
- Mike Clark—*Itai Doshin* (Wide Hive, 2024)

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While as Rivera says “Newton was extremely personally sociable, constantly hosting people at his apartment, giving children free music lessons, and buying rounds of drinks for everyone at any bar he walked into,” that didn’t stop him from publicly stating his opinions. He also never compromised when it came to race relations. There are stories of him confronting noisy patrons. The late jazz writer, critic and historian, Nat Hentoff, recalled a Boston incident when after paying back a debt to a photographer, the photog used a common expression of the day, commenting, “That’s mighty white of you.” Newton replied: “No, that’s mighty Black of me.” Newton was often in Boston during that time since his fellow Communist girlfriend, and later wife, lived in the city.

It was during the ’30s and ’40s that Newton recorded most often. A few sessions were under his name; on some he backed singers (Holiday, Stella Brooks); others were led by established swing stars such as Buster Bailey or Pete Brown; plus he was on the famous Port of Harlem Jazzmen 1939 sessions with Sidney Bechet, Big Sid Catlett, Albert Ammons and others. By the late ’40s, his musical gigs became more sporadic and his last known recording was in 1951. Having relocated back to New York, physical ailments such as a recurring back problem and an earlier botched tonsillectomy added to his worries.

In 1948, a fire destroyed his apartment, clothes and instruments. Benefits organized in his name eventually allowed him to buy another trumpet, but by that time Newton had become an alcoholic. He died of acute gastritis at the age of 48 in 1954. Trumpeter-cornetist Ruby Braff was one of the few players who cited him as an influence. Yet, there is a puzzle: as a self-described

progressive, why didn’t Newton try to play the progressive jazz of the day, such as bop? The answer may be in Rivera’s assessment: “In the 1940s, jazz compartmentalized into bebop, traditional and rhythm and blues.” Ever the individualist, instead, according to Rivera, “Frankie Newton created a concept and worked to perfect it.”

*For more info visit [hotclubnny.org](http://hotclubnny.org)*

**Recommended Listening:**

- Frankie Newton—*The Frankie Newton Collection 1929-1946* (Acrobat Music, 1929-46)
- Frankie Newton—*At The Onyx Club* (Tax, 1937)
- Teddy Hill—*And His NBC Orchestra* (RCA Bluebird, 1937)
- Frankie Newton—*The Chronological: 1937-1939* (Classics, 1937-39)
- The Port of Harlem Jazzmen—*The Complete Recordings* (Mosaic, 1939)
- James P. Johnson’s New York Orchestra—*New York Jazz* (Asch, 1944)

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tragically died in a car crash in 1985), all of which had an effect on him. “I would say without D. Boon and the Minutemen, this label wouldn’t exist—just like D. Boon was the spirit of the Minutemen, I feel like the Minutemen are the spirit of the label.”

Fittingly, Mike Watt, the legendary bassist of the Minutemen and pride of San Pedro, CA, has made his way on to Otherly Love as part of Three-Layer Cake, a collaborative trio featuring New York’s very own: drummer Mike Pride and guitarist-banjoist Brandon Seabrook. Released last year and recorded fully remotely without anyone being in the same room together, *Sounds the Color of Grounds* fused the ethos of punk and wild funk rhythms with salvos of spoken-word (or as Watt calls it, “spiel”). Aside from the recording being a singularly trippy listen, at the heart of it is the crucial element that is Buono and his label’s *raison d’etre*: forging community. “Mike Pride and Brandon Seabrook, they were guests on my *The Watt From Pedro Show* [Watt’s long-running podcast wherein he interviews musicians],” Watt explains about how he met his Three-Layer Cake bandmates, who were suggested by Buono to appear on his show. “Collaboratin’ with people. Art being a fabric that can connec’ [the unique Watt-speak for ‘connection’] humans in a non-fascist way. You can collab’ and then just not talk about it, do somethin’ about it.” Watt continues. “It’s like the old days, where this guy meets this guy who knows this guy. You get a connec’ and music is the common thread. That’s how Stevie Buono is!”

Chad Taylor wholeheartedly agrees with Watt’s assessments on the concept of connection with Otherly Love. “What I love about Stephen is that he is a connector in the truest sense. I’ve worked with many people in the music industry who attempt to connect people but Stephen goes above and beyond. What sets Stephen apart is that not only does he know many musicians but he also has a deep understanding behind their music, their aesthetics, concepts and motivations.”

*For more info visit [otherlylove.net](http://otherlylove.net). Otherly Love artists performing this month include Brandon Seabrook at The Jazz Gallery Jan. 9 (part of Pyroclastic’s “A Winter Festival”), Close Up Jan. 15 (as leader) and Jan. 25 (with Nick Dunston). Mike Pride is at Roulette Jan. 24 (part of “Improv Nights 2026: A Tribute to Derek Bailey”). Ches Smith is at The Stone at The New School Jan. 7-10 and 14-17, Solar Myth (Philadelphia, PA) Jan. 13, The Jazz Gallery Jan. 23 (with Anna Webber) and Bar Bayeux Jan. 31 (with Stephan Crump). Marshall Allen and Chad Taylor are at Solar Myth (Philadelphia, PA) Jan. 3. See Calendar and 100 Miles Out.*