

OTHERLY LOVE

CONNEC' 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,

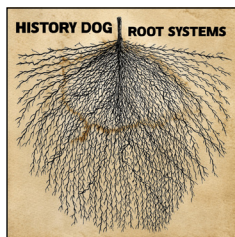
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Smoke Shifter
Chad Taylor Quintet



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 reimaging 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.