

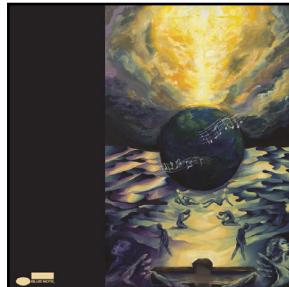


Cat & The Hounds
Colin Hancock's Jazz Hounds
(featuring Catherine Russell) (Turtle Bay)
by Rachel Smith

Listening to *Cat & The Hounds* is like watching your favorite black-and-white movie in color. This album—pure 1920s jazz and blues, in all its playful glory—is the culmination of tenor saxophonist, cornetist and bandleader Colin Hancock's roles as a musician, scholar of classic jazz and producer. The pleasure and playfulness from yesteryear is combined with the crystal-clear audio clarity of modern-day recording equipment, bringing the lines, themes and motifs of this music—now a full century old—closer to the 21st century listener than they were ever before.

Hancock assembled a group of musicians who know their hot jazz and blues: Evan Christopher (clarinet, soprano, alto), Dion Tucker (trombone), Kerry Lewis (tuba), Jerron Paxton (banjo, guitar, harmonica, vocals), Jon Thomas (piano) and Ahmad Johnson (drums); Nighthawks frontman Vince Giordano (bass sax) also joins for two tunes. But what gives this album its ear-catching oomph is the addition of vocalist Catherine Russell, who absolutely embodies the spirit of this classic repertoire. Each of the chosen tunes, which range from the fairly well-known "Cake Walkin' Babies from Home" to the more obscure "Goin' Crazy with the Blues", are given a fresh treatment. One of the album's missions is to spotlight Black and personal histories, which is clear from the start in "Panama Limited Blues". First recorded by Panama-born Luis Russell (father of Catherine), who played piano on the 1926 recording, the song's title refers to the migration of many musicians from New Orleans to Chicago via the Illinois Central train line. Paxton makes his mark on musically imitating the sound of a moving train with a delightful harmonica opening. The referential theme of 1920s technology also runs throughout the album, from emulating the train to the telephone. "Elevator Papa, Switchboard Mama" is an album highlight: Russell and Paxton engage in a rhythmic tongue-and-cheek dialogue, of the old Hollywood sort, backed by the playful wah-wah sounds of Hancock's cornet. Paxton also proves to be a true comedian—his low register and slight growls and wails deliver the inflections, at just the right time.

For more info visit turtlerecords.com. Catherine Russell is at Birdland Feb. 10-14 and Hunter College Feb. 24. See Calendar.



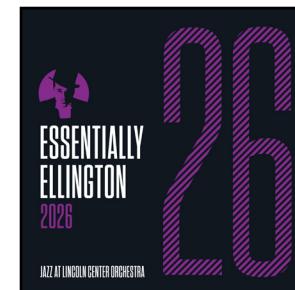
Gospel Music
Joel Ross (Blue Note)
by Tom Greenland

Joel Ross' *Gospel Music*, his fifth release on Blue Note, is a remarkable addition to his already remarkable

discography. Wearing his faith on his sleeve, so to speak, just as he bears a cross tattoo on his right forearm, the vibraphonist brings his spirituality into full focus, investing the music with both the calm comfort of firm belief and the intelligence and determination necessary to survive in these troubling times. Working with his Good Vibes sextet, a close-knit ensemble/extended family comprised of Josh Johnson (alto), Maria Grand (tenor), Jeremy Corren (piano), Kanoa Mendenhall (bass) and Jeremy Dutton (drums), Ross has the full support he needs to fly freely. His complex compositions, with flowing melodies phrased in rolling syncopations over subtly shifting harmonies and additive rhythmic cycles, could easily become cumbersome, yet sound fresh and facile in the sextet's capable (and well-rehearsed) hands. Listening to tracks including "Wisdom Is Eternal", "Trinity", "Protoevangelium", "The Shadowlands" and "Nevertheless" reveal swirling undercurrents beneath calm surfaces. Melodies are often delegated to the two saxophones, harmonies to the keyboard, so Ross can lead or follow, act or react, as the spirit moves him. While tracks such as "The Shadowlands" have a democratic allocation of solos, with short statements traded among members, others such as "Hostile" and "Nevertheless" feature the leader on extended, breathtaking flights, his warm tone panned across the stereo channels (low notes left, high notes right), his forward-leaning pulse creating a sense of immediacy. Johnson and Grand blend their graceful, cool-toned horns in unisons, harmonies and counterpoint, seamlessly integrated within the collective framework, as Dutton's chattery drums raise the emotional pitch. The latter half of the album hews a bit closer to the traditional and contemporary gospel music of the Chicago scene that Ross grew up in, with cameos by vocalists Laura Bibbs, Andy Louis and Ekep Nkwelle—the latter, prodded by Ross' quietly ecstatic accompaniment, offering a tender but tough interpretation of Betty King Jackson's "Calvary". The closing track, "Now and Forevermore", a tone poem layered with vibraphone, celeste, mellotron, harp (Brandee Younger) and electronics (Austin White) serves as a cautiously optimistic conclusion to this soul-searching project.

Such evangelical music is meant to soothe and uplift, to sensitize and educate, but Ross' readings give the old lessons a new ring, ultimately transcending any genre associations in his quest to connect with higher powers and loving truths.

For more info visit bluenote.com. The album release concert is at Village Vanguard Feb. 10-15. Ross is also at The Falcon (Marlboro, NY) Feb. 22 (with James Francies). See Calendar and 100 Miles Out.



Essentially Ellington 2026
Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with
Wynton Marsalis (Blue Engine)
by George Kanzler

Since 1995, the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra (JLCO) has hosted the Essentially Ellington High School Band Competition, a nation-wide enterprise. The *Essentially Ellington 2026* album is a reference recording of nine tracks of eligible tunes for bands who will be participating in the 31st annual competition this May. As such, they join the 166 tracks released

last year as *Essentially Ellington: The JLCO Recordings, 1999-2025* (Blue Engine).

This year's album features, as music director and leader, trombonist and longtime JLCO member, Chris Crenshaw. Along with a majority of Duke Ellington Orchestra charts, other big band arrangers are also included. Melba Liston (1926-1999) is represented on four tracks: two are classical themes by Edvard Grieg and Claude Debussy, arranged for Dizzy Gillespie's groundbreaking bebop big band; plus her chart on "The Gypsy" (from a Quincy Jones big band that featured Phil Woods' alto) and her own "Late Date" (for the Art Blakey Big Band). The Ellington selections include: "Daybreak Express", one of Duke's singular "train tunes," with its scintillating excursion in accelerating locomotion from the '30s, and "Portrait of Wellman Braud", from 1970's *New Orleans Suite*. "Flamingo", a Billy Strayhorn-arranged pop song and a charting hit in 1941 with vocalist Herb Jeffries, features Tyreek McDole (winner of the Outstanding Vocalist award at the 2018 Essentially Ellington Competition, and also winner of the 2023 Sarah Vaughan International Jazz Vocal Competition), who perfectly captures Jeffries' romantic style.

In reviving charts from the vast Ellington book, JLCO not only keeps them alive, but also reveals new facets of pieces of historical value. Here, revelations come on two numbers associated with star tenor saxophonists, Al Sears and Paul Gonsalves. After World War II, Ellington embraced the earthy, rhythm 'n blues style of wailing, honking "Big" Al Sears, featuring his coruscating sound on 1947's *Liberian Suite* "Dance #1". In this interpretation, the orchestra brings out other facets of the piece, especially the chiaroscuro tones of the extended semi-rubato opening. In 1956, with the popularity

R E C O M M E N D E D N E W R E L E A S E S

- ⚡ [Ahmed]—*Sama'a (Audition)* (Otoroku)
- Sakina Abdou/Bill Nace—*Rinse Cycle (Open Mouth)*
- Eddie Allen's Push—*Rhythm People (Origin)*
- Catalyst—*Perception* (Muse-Craft Recordings)
- Either/Orchestra—*Éthiopiques 32: Nalbandian L'Ethiopian (The Ethiopian)* (Buda Musique)
- Marty Ehrlich/Julius Hemphill—*Circle the Heart (Relative Pitch)*
- Gregory Groover Jr.—*Old Knew (Criss Cross)*
- Corcoran Holt—*Freedom of Art* (Holthouse Music)
- William Hooker—*Convergence: Live in China* (ORGmusic)
- Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis—*Essentially Ellington 2026* (Blue Engine)
- Christopher McBride & The Whole Proof—*The Hang, The Hustle, The Path* (s/r)
- Ife Ogunjobi—*Tell Them I'm Here* (Davido Music Worldwide)
- Jeremy Pelt—*Our COMMUNITY Will Not Be Erased* (HighNote)
- Sam Rivers—*A New Conception* (Blue Note Tone Poet)
- Joel Ross—*Gospel Music* (Blue Note)
- Brandon Sanders—*Lasting Impression* (Savant)
- Pat Thomas—*HIKMAH* (TAO Forms)
- Anthony Tidd Quite Sane—*To Kill A Child of Troubled Times* (Atelier Harlem)
- Charles Tyler Ensemble—*Voyage From Jericho* (AK-BA - Frederiksberg)
- Zahili Zamora—*Overcoming* (s/r)