

Fire
Stephen Grew (Discus Music)
 by Ken Waxman

Little known in North America, Stephen Grew (who turns 56 this month) is a veteran UK pianist who often works with fellow improvisers such as saxophonists Evan Parker and Trevor Watts, and as part of the electronic quartet Grutronic. On his own he turns out highly-inventive and crystalline solo piano sessions, like *Fire*, the third album he's made for Discus Music during the past couple of years.

Recorded in the airy interior of Lancaster University's Great Hall, the three tracks are completely improvised, with no electronic attachments. But Grew is no minimalist aesthete nor heedless pounder. He may ease into the expositions with carefully-chosen single notes or intermittent pauses, but once up to speed he blends extended sequences of lively and energetic keyboard expansions with subtle pivots into briefer counterpoint that often focus on strumming internal piano strings for acrid or rumbling pedal point patterns or melodic transformation. While at points his playing may sound as if he's nimbly exposing sounds from all 88 keys at once, he manages to maintain precise narratives. Plus, Grew almost never prolongs the expected. During the penultimate elaborations of "Fire 2" he exposes a beautiful lyric passage of caressed keyboard notes, only to follow this almost immediately with chiming and scrapping inner string projections. He also seesaws between formal patterning from higher notes that sound almost notated, with syncopated swing emanating from the pressurized lower notes. During the expositions of all three extended improvisations, he occasionally suggests that his repeated note consolidation will soon turn into a standard melody only to abandon that suggestion and scoot into free-floating extemporizations. And while preferred tempos throughout are galloping prestissimo, waves of vibrating soundboard pressure evolve at a slower pace. On the final "Fire 3" he confirms his multi-faceted approach by assembling a delicate, suspended single note melody and inserting it in between speedier and speedier syncopated keyboard pressure on one side and stopped key and string cadences on the other.

Solo work has always measured the skill and talent of a pianist. The ever-burning but carefully-arranged *Fire* shows Grew's mastery of each.

For more info visit discus-music.org



Ye Olde 2: At the End of Time
Jacob Garchik (Yestereve)
 by Brad Cohan

To follow the wildly inventive career of trombonist, composer and pillar of the Brooklyn avant garde jazz scene, Jacob Garchik, is to know his mind is constantly

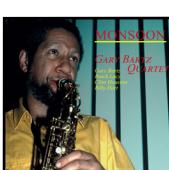
churning, dissecting, conceptualizing and obsessing then ultimately putting that gushing fire hydrant of ideas and themes into singularly eclectic musical forms. As a leader and co-leader, Garchik has delved into gospel music, big band reimaginings, Mexican brass bacchanals, Balkan brass music and contemporary classical. *Ye Olde*'s 2015 debut was centered around the wacky concept of mythical superheroes on a mission in medieval Brooklyn with a doomy prog-rock wallop. In the sequel, *Ye Olde 2: At the End of Time*, a metal-meets-jazz-meets-prog-meets-rock troupe, it's not the music that will raise eyebrows, but the concept behind it. Garchik is working in overdrive.

In this iteration, the *Ye Olde* characters have returned but fast-forwarded billions of years into the future, time traveling through space to stare down and battle resurrected versions of themselves. As the album credits note, "All music composed by Jacob Garchik in the year 100,000,002,023." The original "characters" in this sequel are the triple guitar threat of Brandon Seabrook, Mary Halvorson and Jonathan Goldberger with drummer Vinnie Sperrazza (dubbed *Ye Olde*), while new members Ava Mendoza, Sean Moran and Miles Okazaki and drummer Josh Dion (called *Simulacrus*) have joined the fray as "battle adversaries."

Over tracks one through six, eight and nine, "*Ye Olde*"—rhythmically led by Garchik's trombone—dominates the field with slaying abandon. The time signature-laden precision of album opener "One Can Only Go Up" is next level, but this is clearly Halvorson's time to shine. Her blistering soloing throughout is arguably the heaviest, loudest and most gonzo guitar work she's ever let loose with. On the following Melvins-like dirge "Transcending Time", Seabrook, ever the fret-hopping maniac, does his best to match Halvorson's fury. The music gets downright trippy on the space-rock of "Dyson Spheres". *Simulacrus*, in a lone starring turn, lands a big blow to *Ye Olde* with the rollicking jazz funk of "Omega Point". Finally, the two groups go head-to-head on the fittingly titled "*Ye Olde* vs *Simulacrus*", a cosmic ripper which invokes the trebly punk-funk of the Minutemen.

Despite the confounding conceptual hijinks, *Ye Olde 2: At the End of Time* is a low-end rumbling, guitar shredding adventure that's loads of fun.

For more info visit jacobgarchik.com. Garchik is at Barbès Jan. 3 (with Banda de los Muertos) and Jan. 5 at Close Up (with Jacob Sacks). See Calendar.



Multidirectional
Billy Hart (Smoke Sessions)
Stargazer
Armen Donelian (with Eddie Gomez, Billy Hart)
(Atlas-Sunnyside)
Monsoon
Gary Bartz Quartet (SteepleChase)
 by Fred Bouchard

Drummer, teacher and DC native Billy "Jabali" Hart has garnered an unusually self-effacing recording career: with barely a dozen albums as leader, he's racked up easily 600 as sideman. After R&B stints with Otis Redding, reunion dates mounted with DC giants such as saxophonist Buck Hill and pianist-vocalist Shirley Horn. Once in New York, Hart notably played with a plethora of major A-listers, including Wes Montgomery, Pharoah Sanders, Herbie Hancock, Stan Getz, Wayne Shorter, Marian McPartland and Miles Davis—all by 1977. His long-awaited leader debut that year (*Enhance*, Horizon) proved a gem.

Almost a half-century after that first album as leader, Hart's latest release, *Multidirectional*, finds

the drummer, unbowed at 85, imparting wisdom, empathy, craft, humor and modesty that suffuse his seven-decade career. Twenty-two years of subtle, intensely lyrical quartet work—with Ethan Iverson (piano), Mark Turner (tenor) and Ben Street (bass)—culminates in a typically understated, lucid live *Smoke* session (recorded at the Upper West Side club on the venue's in-house label). The title signals motion and 360° awareness; saxophonist Dewey Redman (who appeared on *Enhance*) enlightens: "Corner culture enjoys the vantage of seeing in all directions—nice thing is the sound is never the same." Iverson (who also co-authored Hart's newly-released autobiography, *Oceans of Time*) commands his sustained wry melodicism on a reimagined "Giant Steps", a jaunty "Sonnet for Stevie" and pointillistic, agitated "Amethyst" (composed by Hart, it's also the title track to the drummer's 1993 album). Turner bends lines like a glassblower, Hart gives tit-for-tat and Street balances all on his fingertips. Throughout this relaxed, elegant set, the leader inverts Thelonious Monk's old dictum to "make the drummer sound good" and shines light everywhere he touches his kit.

While in his early 40s, Hart accompanied Armen Donelian on the pianist's 1981 debut, a trio recording recently (and finally) reissued by his career-long label Sunnyside (originally released on Atlas). *Stargazer* is much enlivened by the drummer, as to be expected, as well as by veteran bassist Eddie Gomez. The mysteriously seductive music leisurely explores mysteries of behavioral synchronization with fraternal elan. From exuberant samba "Love's Endless Spin" to cozy set-wrap improv "Free at Last", vivid originals unite the pianist's noble style with Gomez' buzzy bee-lines and Hart's pat-on-the-back brush strokes into a singularly poised, companionable experience.

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

- Joe Alterman/Mocean Worker—*Keep The Line Open (MOWO!)*
- Rafiq Bhatia—*Environments* (ANTI-Records)
- Isaiah Collier/Tim Regis—*Live in the Listening Room* (The Vinyl Factory)
- Erez Dessel—*All Fake No Reject* (Corbett vs. Dempsey)
- Hamid Drake/Pat Thomas—*A Mountain Sees a Mountain* (Old Heaven Books)
- Liz Draper—*Meno* (Liatris)
- Ensemble Ensemble—*Live at Atelier du Plateau* (BMC Records)
- Bill Evans—*Haunted Heart: The Legendary Riverside Studio Recordings* (Craft Recordings)
- Al Foster—*Live at Smoke* (Smoke Sessions)
- Andrew Hadro—*ArchMusic* (PARMA/Ravello)
- Haeun Joo—*Just Gravity* (577 Records)
- Peter Knight—*For a Moment the Sky Knew My Name* (ROOM40)
- Ledisi—*for Dinah* (Candid)
- Mark Pringle—*New Customers* (Boomslang)
- Tomeka Reid—*dance! skip! hop!* (Out Of Your Head)
- Craig Taborn, Tomeka Reid, Ches Smith—*Dream Archives* (ECM)
- Carolyn Trowbridge—*Found Memories* (s/r)
- Various Artists—*The Bottle Tapes* (Corbett vs. Dempsey)
- Jordan Williams—*playing by ear* (Red)
- Lester Young—*Lester Leaps In: Live at Birdland 1951-1952* (Liberation Hall)

A half-dozen years later, in 1988, Hart recorded with Baltimore native and contemporary Gary Bartz (both Hart and Bartz were born in 1940) for the alto saxophonist's *Monsoon*, reissued for the first time by Nils Winther's durable SteepleChase (Hart was virtually the label's house drummer). The drummer's dry, firm rim-ticks, key tom-tom rolls, and one-off accents fuel proceedings, and his sly ear perks up 4s 'n 2s with Bartz' pro-Bird lyric duende. Fleshed with Clint Houston's resonant bass and Butch Lacy's piano, this date fairly sings.

For more info visit smokesessionsrecords.com, sunnysiderecords.com and steeplechase.dk. The Jazz Legacies Fellows All-Stars concert, featuring Billy Hart (plus George Coleman, Roscoe Mitchell, Julian Priester, Bertha Hope, Tom Harrell, Reggie Workman and others) is at Rose Theater Jan. 8 (part of Unity Jazz Festival). Hart is also at Close Up Jan. 10 (with Carmen Quill) and Dizzy's Club Jan. 14 (with Yotam Silberstein). See Calendar.



New Monuments: *Live in Vilnius*
Amirtha Kidambi Elder Ones (Fernflower)
by Bill Meyer

The third album by Amirtha Kidambi's Elder Ones, *New Monuments*, was released in early 2024. Its appearance signaled both changes in the Elder Ones camp and the commencement of a period of intense activity. For each of this project's recordings, the combo has had different line-ups, but its core members remained: Kidambi (vocals, harmonium, synth), Matt Nelson (soprano), Jason Nazary (drums, synth), Lester St. Louis (cello) and Eva Lawitts (bass). That album's four tracks represented an advance in the group's sound, adding a potent charge of electronic processing to open-ended compositions that synthesize free jazz, protest song-craft and a long tradition of Indian vocal artistry. Kidambi's words articulate a well-read, no-holds-barred opposition of colonial and fascist practices around the globe, and the album's title prescribes an antidote to the institutional celebration of oppressors: it's time to build some new monuments for the people who have always been under the boot.

New Monuments: Live in Vilnius (released late last year) repeats the original album's song list and its performances document what became of its music after the band had hit the road. Once more, the line-up changed: Lawitts yielded her chair to St. Louis and the group's cello component, and tenor saxophonist Alfredo Colon joined. St. Louis is more of a bass fundamentalist than his predecessors, and holds down linear rhythms that are alternately reinforced by Nazary's backbeats and buffeted by his rhythmic countercurrents. The excision of cello, which tended to double the harmonium, lightens the music's acoustic textures and opens up additional space for electronics, which are more tactile and present than before. But the biggest difference is the room given over to improvisation. Every track is between two and ten minutes longer than its original edition. Colon's presence is felt more in his solos and embellishments behind Kidambi's voice than in ensemble passages, and drums, voice and soprano all get more room to stretch. In the main, this is a good thing; Elder Ones sounds best when the instrumental intensity keeps building or, paradoxically, when a spacy interlude temporarily dispels the song's guardrails.

This release will probably be recognized as a punctuation mark on the Elder Ones timeline. At the same time as its release, the band, line-up intact, has introduced a new and even harder-hitting set of tunes. The struggle continues.

For more info visit fernflower.art. Kidambi's Elder Ones is at Union Pool Jan. 10 (part of Winter Jazzfest). See Calendar.



7 Shades of Melancholia (featuring Ingrid Jensen)
Mehmet Ali Sanlikol (DÜNYA)
by Daniel A. Brown

The latest from GRAMMY-nominated, Turkish pianist-composer Mehmet Ali Sanlikol, *7 Shades of Melancholia* (featuring Ingrid Jensen), deepens Sanlikol's ongoing explorations and successful mergers of jazz, traditional Turkish music, inventive classical and prog-rock. Using piano, voice and his patent-pending digital microtonal piano (Renaissance 17, or R17), Sanlikol leads a skilled and empathic band—Jensen (trumpet), Lihi Haruvi-Means (soprano, sopranino), James Heazlewood-Dale (bass) and George Lernis (drums, gongs)—through seven distinct compositions.

Album opener, "A Children's Song", highlights the leader's gentle piano lyricism and cascading arpeggios. "One Melancholic Montuno" is a potent duet between Sanlikol's impressionistic piano lines and the plaintive, tender playing of Jensen. Microtonal keyboard-shimmering timbres and mournful vocals invoke deep mystery within "Şeddi Araban Şarkı". Unison horn lines, vocals and keyboard, prodded along by the rhythm section's sizzling accompaniment, all propel the swirling "Hüseyini Jam" into ecstatic delirium. Lernis and Heazlewood-Dale take the reins on the lilting waltz of "Nikriz Semai", while Sanlikol offers an effective blend of traditional vocal melodies and deft scat singing. The closer, "My Blues", plays like a musical farewell and departure, the horn lines of Haruvi-Means and Jensen containing the same mournful mood that Kenny Wheeler so perfected.

Sanlikol has explained that the "melancholia" (or "hüzün" in his native Turkish) of the album's title refers to a thread of cultural history originating in clashes with Greece dating back to the Byzantine-Seljuk wars (1046-1243). This emotional aesthetic permeates Turkish music, literature and films. In many ways, Sanlikol is emblematic of a fully-integrated 21st-century jazz musician: he holds a doctorate from the New England Conservatory, studied jazz at Berklee College of Music and has a certain passion, understanding and evident reverence for traditional Turkish forms and idioms. Arguably, Sanlikol is a kindred spirit and spiritual offspring of peripatetic jazz icon Don Cherry.

The compositions and collective playing of *7 Shades of Melancholia* result in an unpredictable and winning listen. In lesser hands, the music could have degraded into heritage-as-pastiche. But Sanlikol and his band use traditional Turkish song forms, unique instrumentation—including of course the brass of Jensen (who celebrates her 60th birthday this month)—plus restraint to create something altogether vital and fresh.

For more info visit dunyainc.org. Ingrid Jensen is at The Jazz Gallery Jan. 17 (with Ryan Keberle's All Ears Orchestra). See Calendar.

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