



In 2
Roscoe Mitchell/Michele Rabbia (RogueArt)
by Kurt Gottschalk

At 85, Roscoe Mitchell remains seemingly tireless in his quest for new collaborations and new explorations of the saxophone. His playing is, as ever, utterly distinctive, in overblowing and underblowing, multiphonics and spaciousness, recognizable phrases and discrete syllables. He's a patient player capable of explosive outbursts. His fine 2021 album *Dots / Pieces for Percussion and Woodwinds* was far from his first unaccompanied recording, but it was a revelatory one. Recording at home, Mitchell had the luxury of time and the benefit of multi-tracking, crafting 19 miniatures of percussion and saxophone in a bright mix of happenstance and intentionality, like the interplay of birds and windchimes. He doesn't work with themes so much as shapes and little events.

The new *In 2* seems a logical progression from *Dots*, bringing the structures into a twosome. His partner for the 2024 studio session is Michele Rabbia, whose discography includes work with pianist Stefano Battaglia, bassist Bruno Chevillon and fellow percussionist Ingar Zach. Rabbia is a fine partner for Mitchell, a sensitive and inventive player, but the two

only seem so much like a duo. Mitchell again makes use of multi-tracking (or some truly remarkable double-horning, but that seems unlikely) and with his own percussion in tow, the seven tracks (which range from 90 seconds to eleven minutes in length) often sound more like a trio, but even more so like another series of events. There's rarely much to hang on to for listeners wanting themes and repetition, but it's a stunning and dynamic album waiting for those willing to let it unfold. As remarkable a soloist as Mitchell is (and he is), he thrives on collaboration. In Rabbia, he has a partner every bit as given to spontaneity and discovery as he is.

For more info visit roguart.com. Mitchell is with The Jazz Legacies Fellows All-Stars (featuring George Coleman, Julian Priester, Bertha Hope, Tom Harrell, Reggie Workman, Billy Hart and others) at Rose Theater Jan. 8 (part of Unity Jazz Festival). See Calendar.



Dacha
Sonya Belaya (Ropeadope)
by Brad Cohan

Russian-American artist and polymath Sonya Belaya, a composer, pianist, vocalist and multi-

instrumentalist, works in wildly eclectic fields, from a residency at Roulette to the Broadway pit for *Illinoise* to work as an improviser in Alaara and a collaborator of rock-oriented acts Half Waif and Algiers. Those experiences—and crucially, family upbringing, personal trauma, tragic loss, childhood recollections and resilience—is at the heart of the sprawling *Dacha*. Its six-song cycle is a therapeutic exercise in gut-wrenching emotion and naked vulnerability: a document and diary of life-changing events.

Belaya is not only a gifted storyteller, but *Dacha* proves to also be a testament to their prowess as a bandleader. The topnotch ensemble of Ledah Finck (violin), Wesley Hornpetrie (cello), DoYeon Kim (gayageum), Kalia Vandever (trombone), Chris Williams (trumpet), Nick Dunston (bass) and Stephen Boegehold (drums), helps bring ambient chamber music and classical contemporary compositions to sonic heights where color, density and melodicism form its foundation. The wealth of unfolding layers in Belaya's textural vocabulary demands repeated listens. Despite the heavy themes that underline the album (written in the wake of the Ukraine/Russia war and the losses of Belaya's grandparents and their mother's disappearance), the six nuanced pieces, accentuated by the leader's dreamlike voice, unfurl with a patience that feels weightless and deeply meditative. That synthesis is evidenced in the lush "Deda" and "In The Garden", in which slow-building drone and psychedelic abstraction ultimately morph into passages of folk-tinged beauty courtesy of Kim's plucking. Belaya also proves virtuosic in shifting course into melodic piano refrains as heard on "Future Living"; the quiet/loud aesthetic and odd time signatures it utilizes contains multitudes, yet flows freely as patterns mutate, form and take shape over eleven-plus minutes.

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While *Dacha* draws from self-reflection and tragedy, the vibe at Joe's Pub at the album release show late last year (Nov. 5) was joyous. It was the night before New York State Assembly member, Zohran Mamdani, won the New York City mayoral election, a hotly-run contest that Belaya acknowledged to the audience. From there, they possessed the stage with commanding presence: perched at the piano, acing abilities as a chanteuse, playing accordion and delving into the origins of the songs with heartfelt candor. Singing angelically in what the vocalist called "Runglish" (a mix of Russian and English), Belaya played selections from the album, including a catchy tune from a Russian pop artist, as well as traditional protest folk music, propelled by Kim's spectral gayageum performance. On record or live, Belaya is a powerful force.

For more info visit ropeadope.com. Belaya is at The Jazz Gallery Jan. 6. See Calendar.



Lullaby for the Lost
Donny McCaslin (Edition)
by Tom Greenland

Donny McCaslin continues to push the boundaries of creative improvised music with *Lullaby for the Lost*. Working with Jason Lindner (keyboards, sound design), Ben Monder (guitar), Tim Lefebvre (bass) and drummers Zach Danziger, Nate Wood or Mark Guiliana, he's developed a hybrid approach utilizing densely-layered yet lucid, electronic soundscapes; broad, sweeping, lyrical themes tinged with darkness; and edgy, insistent rhythmic schemes nodding to heavy metal, underground punk, disco and even old-time rock 'n roll. The project's production values are stellar, the coalescent sound of operatic intensity, the leader's warm tenor tone the eye of an industrialized electronic storm.

McCaslin composed all tracks (excepting two he co-composed), his distinctive themes a key factor in the music's crossover appeal, but what really lifts this music is its collective texture. The drummer, most often Danziger, gives each track its motive force. Lefebvre adds compelling, highly-creative basslines and pushy, overdubbed guitar parts. His line on "Celestial" manages to convert a 3+3+3+3+4 rhythmic formula into a danceable groove. Monder adds simmering passion to "Wasteland", "Stately", "Blond Crush", "Mercy" and the title track, featuring his distorted visceral cries. Lindner's keyboards are central to the sound: moody parts and pads on "Solace"; jagged synth on "Celestial" that stabs like a sharp sword; warping, wobbling chords on "Tokyo Game Show", the latter a catchy cut that would work well in a movie's motorcycle chase scene. His mixological machinations on "Mercy" evoke a whole other sound world.

All of these sonics could become a bit mechanized, a bit industrial, but is saved from the specter of artificial intelligencia by McCaslin's humanizing horn. At times his tenor tone is wrapped in wet reverberation, a voice calling from afar, but more often it's clean and clear, upfront, speaking with passion, subtlety, intelligence. On "Solace" his phrasing is relaxed, almost offhand, laced with telling nuances, precociously chromatic. On "Stately" he shows similar chromatic slippage, stringing complex concepts into long, smooth, cogent sequences. On "Blond Crush" he trades short

sections with Lindner, seeming to laugh through his saxophone in the heat of their exchange. On "Tokyo Game Show" he's prickly, almost skronky, his ideas circling and whirling upwards like ping pong balls caught in a geyser.

McCaslin's music reflects our times, when human voices cry to be heard over the din of economic and political manipulations and the encroaching competition of smart machines. Thankfully his voice is loud and clear.

For more info visit editionrecords.com. McCaslin is at The Cutting Room Jan. 8-11 (part of "The Sound and Vision of David Bowie" tribute). See Calendar.



Polarity 4
Ivo Perelman/Nate Wooley
(Burning Ambulance Music)
by Mike Shanley

There lies a distinct possibility that tenor saxophonist Ivo Perelman is recording a new album at this very moment. The Brazil-born improviser has released over 125 albums as a leader, collaborator and soloist, all of them created spontaneously. Keeping abreast of his output can be daunting, but even a casual examination of this phenomena indicates the fresh perspective he brings to each session. Perelman can surely excel at vicious, reed-shredding free improvisation, but never falls back on oft-used techniques to fill up space. He also tempers the wildness with moments of delicacy. Many of these qualities could also be attributed to trumpeter Nate Wooley, who performs in myriad settings, straddling loose and structured work. *Polarity 4*, as the title implies, finds the duo back in the studio for their fourth round of duets.

There's a twist to opener "One" (the first of nine numerically-titled tracks); this cut marks the first time Perelman has ever used overdubs, resulting in a four-way conversation. Rather than sounding busy, the additional horns bring out the listening skills in both players. Quick blends of harmonies flow into vibrations of clashing pitches, as different voices fade into the background or come forward. After a muted trumpet gets answered by an open-bell counterpart, Wooley seems to sneak in a quote from Bronislaw Kaper's "On Green Dolphin Street" to see who's paying attention. The remainder of the album is marked by a profound utilization of space. Neither player moves in a rush, often utilizing gentle drones as much as, if not more than, fast explosions. "Six", at nearly 15 minutes the longest track by a longshot, begins slowly as each player seems to ruminate; Perelman even displays a low register tone, connecting back to presumably a Ben Webster influence. Wooley tests his chops by diving to the absolute bottom of his horn's register, immediately smearing back up into the altissimo range. Anyone looking for gravelly, raucous interactions will be satisfied with the penultimate track, "Eight". But the more measured conversations throughout the album sound equally rewarding.

For more info visit burningambulancemusic.com. Nate Wooley is at Roulette Jan. 15 (with Ryan Sawyer Shaker Ensemble) and Jan. 23 (part of "Improv Nights: A Tribute to Derek Bailey"). See Calendar.

(ALBUM REVIEWS CONTINUED ON PAGE 28)

ON DVD



MAELSTRÖM for Improvisers
Christian Pouget (Films Utöpik)
by Stuart Broomer

Christian Pouget has been profoundly involved with jazz and improvised music for several years, both as a writer of commentaries that are at once incisive and poetic, and as the director of films about musicians. He has created a compelling portrait of the French violinist Théo Ceccaldi, *corps à cordes* (2018), and two of bassist (and vocalist) Joëlle Léandre, *Affamée* (2019) and *Duende* (2023), the latter remarkable for its settings—ancient forests and abandoned mines—that match the depth and power of the subject's playing. With *MAELSTRÖM for Improvisers*, Pouget takes on an expansive project, a film almost two hours long, presenting 22 improvising musicians playing and often discussing their work, each set within a unique environment, whether home studio, barn, ruin or heavily graffitied industrial site.

A broad spectrum of musicians appears, balanced between twelve men and ten women, ranging across cultures from Western Europe to the US to Japan, and presenting generations of pioneering and likely familiar figures, from Léandre, Raymond Boni, Evan Parker, Satoko Fujii, Gerry Hemingway, Joe Morris and Kahil El'Zabar to significant emerging artists such as Portuguese trumpeter Susana Santos Silva and French saxophonist Sakina Abdou. More than a documentary, *MAELSTRÖM* is a distinct creative work from beginning to end, revealing Pouget as much *auteur* as director. Along the way, one encounters, first individually, trumpeter Santos Silva and Daniel Depoutot, sculptor of bizarre skeleton-like robots that become a noise orchestra; the two later combine in a virtual noise concerto. Pianists discovering different worlds in the instrument's interior include Agustí Fernández, Fujii and Betty Hovette. Clara Levy and Emanuele Parrini find fresh approaches to violin and viola, while Christiane Bopp and Silvia Bolognesi respectively transmute trombone and bass into vehicles of unsuspected, subtly personalized, distinction. Sonia Sanchez and Beñat Achiary approach shamanic transformation in their individual, primal combinations of voice and percussion, Sanchez doing it with dance, Achiary with hollow poles. Isabelle Duthoit participates too, her whispering, screaming voice alone.

MAELSTRÖM for Improvisers goes beyond documentary to become a special kind of artwork—anthology, memorial, invocation—from its initial litany of deceased Afro-American musicians to its unique framing device: Daunik Lazro, on tenor saxophone, invokes Albert Ayler in the film's opening, then John Coltrane at the conclusion, playing "Lonnie's Lament" (arguably Coltrane's most beautiful tune) with a busy roadway intervening between saxophone and camera. It's a durable symbol.

For more info visit soufflecontinu.com