

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 Belya 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), Belya 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, Belya is a powerful force.

For more info visit ropeadope.com. Belya 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 Bronisław 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.

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ON DVD



MAELSTRÖM for Improvisers
Christian Pouget (Films Utôpik)
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 Benat 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