



Sounds For Relaxing Days
Lajos Dudas (Mudoks)
by Anna Steegmann

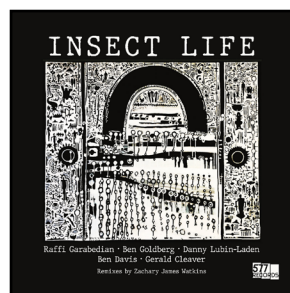
While the album's title, *Sounds For Relaxing Days*, might suggest smooth, easy-listening jazz, this music offers something even more subtle: lyrical, measured and quietly sophisticated, modern jazz with an apparent affinity for the cool jazz aesthetic. For this retrospective, Hungarian-German clarinetist Lajos Dudas (who turns 85 this month) researched more than 70 recordings and numerous radio and TV productions across Europe, specifically from material recorded between 1976-2022. Ultimately, he selected six live and four studio tracks to create the calm, unhurried atmosphere he explicitly sought: a relaxed, pleasant sound, "no overloaded avant garde, thousands of insignificant notes, no pointless technical gimmicks." He certainly succeeded.

The result is an album that feels ideal for a lazy afternoon or intimate dinner, with predominantly sparse instrumentation. There's also a strong focus on duo settings, with the superb guitarist Philipp van Endert, complemented on other tracks

by different bassists and drummers. The opening track, an introspective version of Fats Waller's "Ain't Misbehavin'", immediately enchants through understated interplay: the guitar gently frames the leader's lines, leaving ample space around his clarinet as he improvises freely on the melody with a warm, rounded tone. "A Csitári Hegyek Alatt", a Hungarian folk song and the album's longest track at nearly eight minutes, is another clarinet-guitar duo that captivates with its lyrical, melancholic mood. The musicians listen attentively and allow each other room to shine, transforming a simple love song with two basic harmonies into something intriguingly jazzy through added bitonal chords. Cole Porter's "Night and Day" receives a similarly graceful treatment, guitar and bass (Leonard Jones) laying down a gentle pulse over which the leader's clarinet calmly soars. The lively, mostly uptempo "Toledo" (Aladár Pege, Dudas) adds percussion by Jochen Büttner to van Endert's guitar, evoking the bustle of a Spanish town, while also featuring beautiful, slow clarinet passages in the lower register. Fellow Hungarian (and past Dudas collaborator), the late guitarist Attila Zoller's "Meet"—with clarinet, guitar, bass and drums—brings a bubbly, lush energy that contrasts nicely with the more reflective selections.

Dudas has said he assembled this recording at the close of his career as the kind of truly worthy jazz clarinet he wanted to hear. He invites listeners to do the same: put their feet up, pour a glass of wine, close their eyes and simply enjoy.

For more info visit mudoks.bandcamp.com



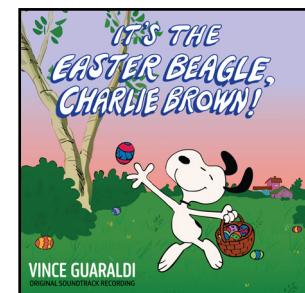
Insect Life
Insect Life (Raffi Garabedian, Ben Goldberg, Danny Lubin-Laden, Ben Davis, Gerald Cleaver)
(577 Records)
by Ariella Stok

Nominally a jazz album, *Insect Life*, the eponymous debut by the Oakland-based improvisational collective, operates as an experiment unfolding in real time, its materials mutating as they circulate. It juxtaposes free improvisation underpinned by inventively expressive clatter, with remixes suffused with electronic processing, to create a strain of warped sound that feels like the discovery of a personal artifact rather than a polished production. The sessions were recorded in the home of clarinetist Ben Goldberg, a central figure in the Bay Area and NYC's avant garde. He is joined by Raffi Garabedian (tenor), Danny Lubin-Laden (trombone), Ben Davis (cello) and, as a catalytic guest, Gerald Cleaver (drums). The intimacy of the recording environment is palpable; the effect is that of close collaborators drifting together into a shared concentration, then disappearing into a collective sound they've created and then released—if your friends happened to be world-class improvisers.

Threaded through the album are four remixes by Zachary James Watkins of Black Spirituals, not treated as appendices or bonus tracks, but rather arriving midstream; they disrupt continuity and reshape how the listener hears what comes before and after. Watkins' interventions grind the ensemble's material into something harsher and more abstract—

drones streaked with metallic clatter, horn fragments smeared by echo, rhythmic information stretched until it feels mechanical, almost industrial. The effect is disorienting in a productive way: a Doppler-blurred sense of motion, like sound passing through a tunnel and emerging altered on the other side. Each track is labeled a "scene," an apt description for music that functions as a series of fleeting environments rather than narratives. One of the album's strengths is how often it withholds clear answers. The opening moments feature plucked, damped strings—possibly prepared—before the next track where horns gather into a loose chorus, swirling and colliding, their outlines familiar but stubbornly pursuing their own logic. Beneath them, Cleaver continually nudges the ensemble away from expectation with drumming that rarely settles into pulse. He taps, rustles, shakes; his kit seems to deconstruct itself. The result is music that resists easy description, inviting the listener not to decode it, but to inhabit it—briefly, attentively and without certainty.

For more info visit 577records.com. Ben Goldberg is at The Jazz Gallery Feb. 13 and Big Bar Feb. 15 (both with *Invisible Guy*) and The Stone at The New School Feb. 14 (with *The Out Louds*). See Calendar.



It's The Easter Beagle, Charlie Brown!
Vince Guaraldi (LMFP)
by Patrick Romanowski

Charlie Brown? Oh, good grief! This month marks 50 years since pianist-composer Vince Guaraldi's death from a heart attack at age 47. Guaraldi was the musical genius behind the scores for the animated television specials, the *Peanuts* series, created by Charles M. Schulz, a collaboration that began in 1964 with the album-only release of *Jazz Impressions of a Boy Named Charlie Brown*, which led to the 1965 TV special, *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. Producer Lee Mendelson went on to create over a dozen *Peanuts* holiday features for the franchise, with music penned by Guaraldi. In recent years, sons Jason and Sean Mendelson have been digging into studio archives, gathering the original *Peanuts* "cues" and putting together lost session tapes to release the soundtracks as complete pieces of music. *It's The Easter Beagle, Charlie Brown!* is just one of a half dozen or so Guaraldi titles that the Mendelsons have released on their LMFP label, and there's more to come.

The *Easter Beagle* is a classic *Peanuts* trip, but with a fairly unique instrumentation for Guaraldi and company, departing from his more standard acoustic trio setting and venturing into funky, electrified '70s studio territory, exploring some of the more keyboard-oriented playing that he would pursue in his later years. With Guaraldi (electric piano, electric harpsichord, electric guitar), Seward McCain (bass), Robert Claire (flute), Glenn Cronkhite and Eliot Zigmund (drums), the group swings beautifully and Guaraldi is in full stride, with his signature impressionistic touch imbuing each piece with warmth as well as melancholy. Cool patterned grooves also blend wonderfully into renditions of classical pieces from Beethoven and Bach. The opening cue, "Peppermint Patty" is a delightful thematic number with stellar brush work. "Easter

