

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

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

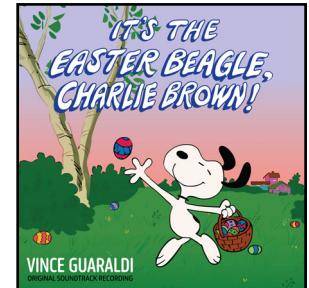
by different bassists and drummers. The opening track, an introspective version of Fats Waller's "Ain't Misbehavin'", immediately enchants through understated interplay: the guitar gently frames the leader's lines, leaving ample space around his clarinet as he improvises freely on the melody with a warm, 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

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.

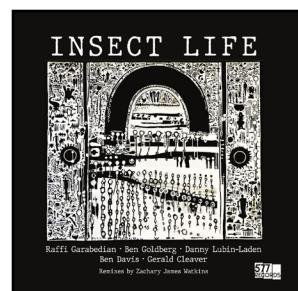
For more info visit 577records.com. Ben Goldberg is at The Jazz Gallery Feb. 13 and Big Bar Feb. 15 (both with Invisible Guy) and The Stone at The New School Feb. 14 (with The Out Louds). See Calendar.



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



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—

Theme/Easter Theme (Reprise)" is a great little baroque piper with fine flute work on top from Claire. "Snoopy and Woodstock" is a whimsical, elastic '70s jazz-funk vamp, almost in the vein of classic Weather Report. McCain lays down a fat, fuzzed-out riff under the steady jangle of a double-time tambourine that is looped with a tasty wah-wah guitar lick from Guaraldi. "Woodstock's Dream" is another tidy little soul-pop shuffle hooked with a bluesy piano riff.

This series of reissues is a treat for *Peanuts* completists and Guaraldi aficionados alike, and this one in particular (which was released as a limited edition Easter eggshell color vinyl) is a sweet one worth digging, novelty aside.

For more info visit mendelsonproductions.com



About (or On), First Visit
Ellery Eskelin Trio New York (ezz-thetics)
by Bill Meyer

It might be tempting to say that organ jazz and jazz standards are in tenor saxophonist Ellery Eskelin's DNA, influenced since childhood by his mother, who supported their household by playing standards in various lounges around Baltimore. There have been points in his career when Eskelin has acknowledged the music of his youth without engaging it head-on. Keyboards were notably absent from his 1996 tribute to Gene Ammons, *The Sun Died*. And in his storied trio with accordionist Andrea Parkins and drummer Jim Black, the organ sounds were sampled and the decidedly non-idiomatic tunes were Eskelin's own. But as far as his music has traveled from conventional jazz form, he has maintained a wonderfully full and judiciously breathy tone rooted in pre-free jazz, which serves him well in Trio New York's elaborations upon material originally composed by Eubie Blake, Irving Berlin and Lionel Hampton, among others.

Prior to convening Trio New York, with Gary Versace (Hammond organ) and Gerald Cleaver (drums), which recorded two albums in 2011 and 2013, Eskelin was primarily concerned with improvising freely. That's what he and Versace were doing in a private jam, when they both realized that they were unconsciously gravitating to "I Got Rhythm" changes; Eskelin recognized an opportunity to organically bring the two approaches together: solid standards and the freedom of improv. Understanding that freedom is at the heart of the music originally released on *Trio New York* and *Trio New York II*, now reissued as the double-disc *About (or On), First Visit*.

The original albums' song-titling practice, which acknowledged both the themes that the players gradually sidled up to and the conscious distance maintained from them, gives this collection its name. Both aspects of that method manifest on "About (or On)...Monk". The musicians introduce Thelonious Monk's "Off Minor" in fragments, from which they spin lucid fantasias that maintain an idiomatically swinging organ combo feel, while they abstract the tune with unsentimental ingenuity. Eskelin sticks closer to the melody on the trio's treatment of Richard Whiting's "My Ideal", titled "About (or On)...Aspiration", which frees the organist and drummer to play slow and loose around the nominal leader. Freedom here means not only freedom from

playing by rote, but also the freedom to not ignore a tune's inherent beauty and history. For Trio New York, the outcomes of such free play are profound.

For more info visit werners-ezzhetics.bandcamp.com. Eskelin is at The Stone at The New School Feb. 20 (with Sylvie Courvoisier). See Calendar.



Morricone Is Dissolving
Italian Surf Academy (41st Parallel)
by John Pietaro

Marco Cappelli, master guitarist, theorist, satirist and citizen of the world has been carving, shaping and reconstructing his craft since his early years in Italy, where he initially formed Italian Surf Academy. Wonderfully confounded, this trio bridges multiple genres and as many miles while embracing the underground as the academic; crowned by spy and surf guitar through fields punk laced, here's a singular mix of jazz, contemporary classical, rock and Spaghetti Western music. Lauded film composer Ennio Morricone (1928-2020) has long been in the purview of Cappelli, Damon Banks (bass) and Dave Miller (drums), but their latest set is an homage cut by a post-modernist prism. *Morricone Is Dissolving* is best described as an elongated, necessary suite.

Threading through much of this spectacle is the compelling prose-poetry of Denver Butson, a writer who has collaborated several times with Cappelli and violist Matt Maneri, among other improvising musicians. His gritty, road-worn baritone is the perfect complement to not only the music but the subject. Right from the opener "If You Ask Ennio Morricone", Butson's word painting, sometimes a beautiful loosening of associations, offers magical imagery of the composer and his legacy "just a moment ago," though we lost Morricone himself six years ago this July. That sound, that plectrum-attacked Western low-end we know so well establishes "Ecstasy of Gold" (built on a Morricone theme), electric guitar touching electric bass in the inseparable spot where none can tell where this ends and that begins. And then Butson returns with "In Order to Become Morricone", his poetic imagery conjuring myth. Even as the poet speaks, reverb-laden slide and twang guitar color the atmosphere as drums and bass fills capture the remaining space.

The central triptych "For a Fist of Dollars"/"I Want to Ask You Something"/"For a Fist of Dollars Reloaded" is a bustling fantasia of Morricone's best-known themes for filmmaker Sergio Leone, re-cast into a pulsating march with the leader plunging through distortion, wah-wah and pure tone, his twang bar acting as yet another instrument. Butson's spoken word, strained through a scotch-and-cigarette-colored larynx, ruminates on Morricone's faceless, distant place within cinema lore, and throughout, Banks and Miller are the ideal support and, at points, embattled counterpoint.

Morricone Is Dissolving deserves to be heard and seen as an expansive theatrical work. This latest Italian Surf Academy album scored as one of this writer's Best Recordings of 2025.

For more info visit 41stparallelrecords.bandcamp.com. The album release concert is at Barbès Feb. 9. See Calendar.

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