

BOXED SET



Five From '65: The Quintet Summer Sessions
Chet Baker Quintet (New Land)
by Duck Baker

The late trumpeter-vocalist Chet Baker (who would have turned 96 late last month) still seems to be a controversial figure for many, almost 38 years after his death and 73 years since he won the *DownBeat* Readers' Poll as best trumpeter. Baker's clean-cut good looks seemed to appeal to readers of the magazine, but according to his detractors, his playing was a pale imitation of Miles Davis, and he looked and sang something like June Christy. Certainly Baker was influenced by Davis, but he didn't imitate him. He had his own sound, his own distinctive phrasing, and his own story to tell. You might reasonably compare him to Art Farmer, who also owed something stylistically to Davis but was very much his own man.

One could have hoped that all of this had been forgotten by the time Baker moved back from a European sojourn to New York in 1964, but if his good looks were held against him as a youth, the tariff was even higher when the shine had worn off. He was hardly the only well-known jazzman of his day to have a heroin habit, but he may have been the only one to be arrested for narcotics use in six different countries

within three years. It would be nice if one could write about Baker without mentioning his sickness, but unfortunately these issues determined everything about the circumstances of these recordings. James Gavin's informative notes describe the part played by producer Richard Carpenter, an unscrupulous character who made a career out of bleeding musicians with substance abuse issues. Having gotten Baker's name on an exploitive management contract, Carpenter tracked down four sidemen at cut-rate prices and sent the band into the studio with almost no rehearsal time. In many cases they hadn't even seen the tunes they were to record ahead of time, several of which were dashed off by another Carpenter client, Jimmy Mundy, a capable Swing era arranger-composer. As Carpenter had publishing rights and even composer credit for Mundy's tunes, it suited him to use as few standards as possible.

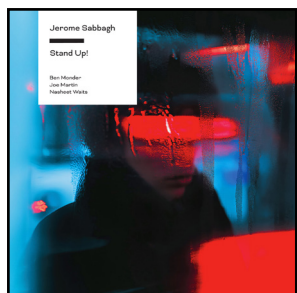
So things didn't augur well. Baker had pawned his trumpet, but someone had given him a flugelhorn, which he took to right away. And luckily, the musicians Carpenter had lined up were top notch. The brilliant tenor saxophonist George Coleman shared frontline duties, and though the pianist, Kirk Lightsey, was unknown to jazz audiences at that time, his great work on these records would change all of that. Roy Brooks was a familiar name, having just played drums with Horace Silver for several years. And bassist Herman Wright was a solid walker with a big sound. Coleman is in fine form here, delivering well-formed solos even at breakneck tempos. As for Baker, he seemed to relish the somewhat unfamiliar setting, and so made some subtle stylistic adjustments. He had always had a penchant for peppering his solos with short, almost abstract punctuations, and uses these to great effect,

but his tendency to lay behind the beat is less marked, and there are too few tracks on which he is focused on exploring the depth of slow and medium tempo tunes. This may be because Carpenter was too cheap to include more standards. Mundy's contributions are nice enough, but many of them are basically just ditties that serve as vehicles for improvising. Baker does turn in a memorable performance on the prettiest of these, "Serenity", as well as "On a Misty Night" (Tadd Dameron), the latter on which Coleman is terrific and clearly not daunted by covering a song that will forever be associated with John Coltrane.

Against all odds, the quintet gelled nicely, and managed in just three days to record five LPs, originally released on Prestige as *Groovin'*, *Smokin'*, *Boppin'*, *Cool Burnin'* and *Comin' On* (which invited yet another comparison that Baker could only lose, with Davis' *Workin'*, *Steamin'*, *Relaxin'* and *Cookin'*). Whatever the reason, critical reception was mostly negative, even hostile, and any hopes Baker might have had for a boost to his career were dashed. Not that he wasn't pretty good at messing his life up himself, and in Carpenter he had found someone who could do even more damage. That said, good reviews could have helped him find more gigs. Instead, Baker went back to his home state of California to make some of the worst albums of his career.

These records are deserving of the deluxe production they have been given with this limited edition, 180g, five-LP, boxed set release. The remastered sound is sharp, and the new liner notes and 28-page booklet are superb. This set should help many listeners discover terrific music that has been undeservedly undervalued for the past 60 years.

For more info visit newland.ochre.store



Stand Up!
Jerome Sabbagh (Analog Tone Factory)
by Rachel Smith

On his latest record, *Stand Up!*, France-born, Brooklyn-based saxophonist Jerome Sabbagh demonstrates his unique compositional voice and ensemble sensitivity. Released on his own Analog Tone Factory label, the album features eight originals, each dedicated to a musical figure (or two) that the leader admires. This includes a pair of collaborators: the late drummer Paul Motian (with whom he played at the Village Vanguard in 2011) and pianist Kenny Barron (with whom he recorded, for his Analog Tone, in duo and quartet in 2023). *Stand Up!* finds Sabbagh with his longtime colleagues Ben Monder (guitar) and Joe Martin (bass) plus, newcomer to the group, Nasheet Waits (drums). Having worked with Motian, Al Foster, Daniel Humair, Andrew Cyrille and Victor Lewis, Sabbagh certainly knows a great drummer—and Waits fits perfectly into the sonic realm here.

All of the album's eight tunes, even as nods to a stylistically diverse group of musicians, fit together tightly—at once a testament to Sabbagh as a composer (everything comes through his musical voice) and bandleader. In each case, his colleagues respectively

and collectively bring a singular energy to the selections, and somehow never stray from its unique group sound, gelling just as well in their solo showcases as in the ensemble groove. A prime example is "Lone Jack", with Sabbagh and the rhythm section playing with time, as Monder delivers an exquisite complement to the saxophonist's melody. Waits brings a darkness and intensity to "Mosh Pit", but has a superbly-light cymbal touch on "Vanguard". Monder contributes an otherworldly glow to "The Break Song" (which conjures up the album's cover image), while Martin grounds each number, though audibly encourages them to spin off into the inquisitive, as heard on "Vanguard". To close out the album, Sabbagh keeps it

simple on "Unbowed", allowing his tone to delicately and melodically shine through and over minimalistic, rumbling, resonant accompaniment.

Though the album is entitled *Stand Up!*, the music feels more pensive than active: the saxophonist's delivery seems at once introspective and reflective, providing a cocoon for the listener's mind to burrow and ponder in. Though it may not demand one's attention insistently, the music does frequently summon the listener into a sometimes melancholy, beautiful, otherworldly trance.

For more info visit analogtonefactory.com. Sabbagh is at The Django Jan. 3. He is also at Smalls Jan. 12 (part of Winter Jazzfest's French Quarter Jazz Festival). See Calendar.

