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JAN 8-9

UNITY JAZZ FESTIVAL



JAN 15-17

DUKE IN AFRICA

THE JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER ORCHESTRA WITH WYNTON MARSALIS

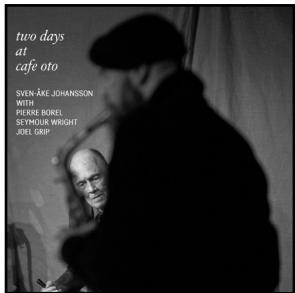


JAN 30-31

COME SUNDAY: THE SACRED WORKS OF DUKE ELLINGTON



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Two Days at Café OTO
Sven-Åke Johansson (Otoroku)
by John Sharpe

Even though recorded at age 82, a little over a year before his Jun. 15 death last year, *Two Days at Café OTO* captures the Swedish, Berlin-based drummer **Sven-Åke Johansson (1943-2025)** in undiminished exploratory form. A pivotal presence in European free improvisation since the '60s, Johansson is known not only for his work with Peter Brötzmann—most notably on *For Adolphe Sax* and *Machine Gun*—but also for his wide-ranging conceptual projects, from “Concert for 12 Tractors” to “MM schäumend: Overture for 15 Handheld Fire Extinguishers”. But none of these works disguise the fact of Johansson’s highly-attuned sensibilities for improvised music, heard throughout this double-album documenting a short residency at the titular venue. Two of the most adventurous contemporary alto saxophonists, Pierre Borel (Die Hochstapler, Umlaut Big Band) and Seymour Wright (لچم [Ahmed]), join him, along with Ahmed stalwart and co-founder of Umlaut Records, bassist Joel Grip. Across four lengthy excursions and one shorter outing, in both trio and quartet permutations, the principals develop an elastic conversational dynamic, favoring motion and inquiry over climax or closure.

Johansson’s drumming relies on pared-down rudiments—a kick-drum thump, a hi-hat zap, a brush of snare—deployed with purposeful spacing that subtly steers the ensemble. Wright specializes in pithy, textural alto exclamations, willfully abrasive and raw, while Borel traces springy lines, often trading in fragments that evoke bebop, Monk and Eric Dolphy, among others. The music’s most bracing stretches occur when both saxophonists engage in prolonged, back-and-forth invention, reshaping snippets of jazz vocabulary into wiry, kinetic exchanges, particularly on the third and fifth pieces (the pieces are simply numbered with the names of the participants appended). Grip binds the ensemble with a firm, yet flexible pulse, responding to Johansson’s minimalism with grounded, economical figures. Johansson also turns to accordion during parts of the performance, prompting some of the set’s more atmospheric moments, as on the fourth track where his cascading patterns, bowed bass and Borel’s breathy saxophone converge in a spare reverie before the music fractures again into stop-start motion. Ultimately, what emerges is less a late-career summation than a reminder that Johansson’s imagination never stopped seeking new terms for engagement.

For more info visit otoroku.bandcamp.com



Portrait of Sheila (Blue Note Tone Poet)
Portrait Now (Dot Time)
Sheila Jordan
by Ken Dryden

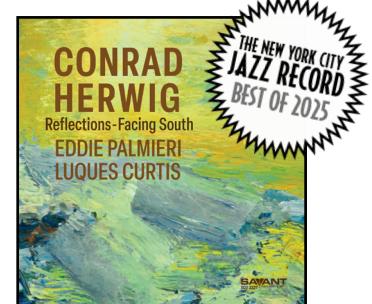
Sheila Jordan (1928-2025) passed away last year on

Aug. 11, a few months shy of turning 97 years young. She was singing from her early youth and although she was a jazz fan, her unusual approach to singing scared off many record labels and tested club owners’ patience. Jordan was not only driven and willing to go where the music inspired her, but in that dynamic was never one to fall into predictable routines.

Her landmark debut album, *Portrait of Sheila*, has certainly stood the test of time since its 1963 release, in no small part due to Jordan’s fresh approaches, adventurous spirit, emotional delivery and courage to stick to her guns as to how she wanted to interpret the music. This recent 180g vinyl reissue—part of Blue Note’s limited, deluxe edition, Tone Poet series—restores the warmth of the original sessions in a superb Kevin Gray mastering. The session’s set list, which blends standards, then-recent compositions and jazz tunes, would eventually become classics for jazz vocalists globally. Her band—veteran Barry Galbraith (guitar), the young Steve Swallow (bass) and Denzil Best (drums)—prove sensitive to Jordan’s free-spirited singing. Her playful take of “Dat Dere” (Bobby Timmons), adding Oscar Brown Jr.’s timeless lyric, was influenced by raising her young daughter, Tracey, and features Swallow as her sole accompanist, a setting she continued to explore throughout her career. Jordan’s emotional rendition of “Willow Weep for Me” brings out the loneliness of this oft-performed chestnut.

By the end of her career, as she continued to regularly perform into 2025, Jordan was widely acknowledged as a major jazz artist, having been honored with numerous awards, plus a gargantuan following of admiring fellow vocalists and fans. Her intimate 2022 studio session, *Portrait Now*, with frequent collaborators, Roni Ben-Hur (guitar) and Harvie S (bass), is likely her recording swan song. Yet, the ravages of age seem to have had little effect. Buoyed by the bassist’s creative accompaniment, she scats up a storm in a breezy rendition of “The Touch of Your Lips”, brings out the hopefulness in “You Must Believe in Spring” and reprises the wistfulness of “Willow Weep for Me” six decades after her recording debut. Jordan doesn’t merely rely on well-known repertoire either, as she also can be heard exploring Kenny Dorham’s lesser known “Fair Weather” (featuring his lyrics). Of course, Jordan had to include one of her vocalese numbers, performing a mini-autobiography and inspired scat in “Relaxing at the Camarillo” [sic]. This relaxed date serves as the perfect finale to Sheila Jordan’s storied career.

For more info visit dottimerecords.com



Reflections - Facing South
(featuring Eddie Palmieri, Luques Curtis)
Conrad Herwig (Savant)
by George Kanzler

Of *Reflections - Facing South*, Conrad Herwig writes of this unique, sans percussion-instrument album: “This is basically a reflection of a lifetime of work. And there are a lot of reflections here—of jazz, of salsa, of Afro-Cuban, Afro-Caribbean, and South America.” He goes on to say that it was his idea but “Eddie [Palmieri] never does anything without playing a huge role in shaping it into something beautiful.” **Eddie Palmieri (1936-2025)**, the composer-pianist-