

MUSE

MUSE ON A BRIGHT FUTURE

BY MARC MEDWIN

“Why not?!” There’s no bridling the enthusiasm in Zev Feldman’s voice on the unseasonably warm day of our zoom conversation. I’ve asked him why the Muse Master Edition series, and why now. “I’m just so passionate about this label. I’ve been collecting Muse LPs for years, and they just capture so much of what was special about the 1970s.” Feldman’s voice counterpoints the ambiance as he walks outside, constantly on the move, just as in his career as an archivist and label curator. Each word is imbued with the excitement mirrored by the multivalent sounds of the first three releases of this Muse reissue campaign, licensed from Craft Recordings and inaugurating Feldman’s Time Traveler imprint. “It was time to make a move. Some of these reissues, like Roy Brooks’ *The Free Slave*, are going for exorbitant prices, and now, we’re providing upgrades.”

Feldman, fondly known as the “Jazz Detective,” is co-president with George Klabin of Resonance Records

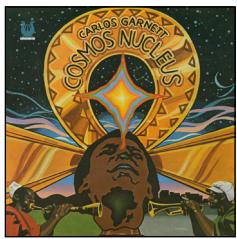
and co-founder of the Elemental Music label with Jordi Soley. First employed at Polygram in the early ‘90s, Feldman is celebrated for scouring the planet for recorded treasures, often overseeing archival projects on Verve and Blue Note. He is indignant about Muse’s vast catalogue being underserved thus far. “Listen, for anybody collecting any of the classic jazz reissue series coming out, Muse needs to be at the top of the list,” he says emphatically. “Muse Records founder Joe Fields (1929-2017) was a visionary! These are 180gr vinyl reissues, analog remastering at every stage, from the master tapes—and they include new liner notes and photos. Just the treatment these albums deserve.”

The music bears abundant witness. The massive titular track of saxophonist Carlos Garnett’s *Cosmos Nucleus* (1976) surges with exploratory vigor, and, as reissue annotator Sid Schwartz’ nail-on-head commentary has it, “is the record’s center of gravity and spiritual thesis.” Plunging exuberantly in and out of swing, the changes bolster the alternately rapt and fiery musings of a 25-piece ensemble—including Roy Campbell (trumpet), Zane Massey (tenor), Cecil McBee (electric bass), Neil Clarke (percussion)—with scorching solos a-plenty. A particularly potent swinging interlude allows a young Kenny Kirkland

one of his first opportunities on record to stretch out on electric piano. This revelatory moment leads into a stunning percussion interlude peppered with full-band exhortations, the track indicative of the genre diversity in juxtaposition harnessed so poignantly on Garnett’s sixth date for the label.

Similar inclusion informs Kenny Barron’s leader debut, *Sunset to Dawn* (1973), with Bob Cranshaw (Fender bass), Freddie Waits (drums), and Richard Landrum and Warren Smith (percussion), all of whom blaze and introspect in fluid aggregates. One of the album’s most intriguing aspects seasons the opening moments, where Barron plays an exquisitely tremoloed electric piano. Feldman is ecstatic about it. “Are you kidding me? Hearing him on a Fender Rhodes!” In the new notes, Ted Panken describes the instrument’s “timbral potentials (Barron) addresses with nuance and a distinctive phrasing that marks his inspired plugged-in declamations throughout the album.” It should go without saying that Barron’s acoustic work amazes similarly, as on his wistfully virtuosic solo version of “A Flower”, a staple of the Yusef Lateef summer 1972 tour, heard in other Feldman projects (e.g. *Atlantis Lullaby* and

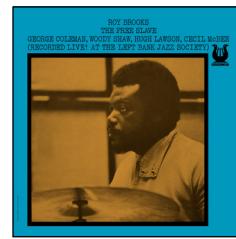
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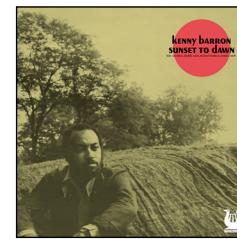
Cosmos Nucleus
Carlos Garnett



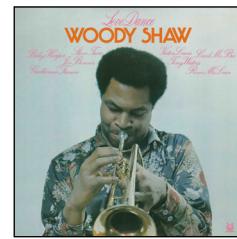
Double Exposure
Joe Chambers/Larry Young



Free Slave
Roy Brooks



Sunset to Dawn
Kenny Barron



Love Dance
Woody Shaw

VOXNEWS

BLACK GOLD

BY TESSA SOUTER

This year marks the 100th anniversary of what is now Black History Month. It began as Negro History Week in February 1926, established by Dr. Carter G. Woodson—the second African American to gain a PhD from Harvard. Excluded from white academia despite his credentials, Woodson made it his mission to integrate Black history into school curricula, public libraries, churches and communities—so that the study and celebration of Black contributions to American life would become part of the fabric of society. He must be rolling in his grave right now.

In the past year, among other indignities, DEI initiatives have been dismantled, prominent Black officials replaced by white individuals, grants for Black history projects terminated, and the National Museum of African American History and Culture criticized for focusing “too much” on slavery. This year, national parks will offer free admission on Jun. 14—Flag Day and President Trump’s birthday—but not on Martin Luther King Jr. Day or Juneteenth, both of which were removed from the list this year. Yet jazz remains a political music—from Charles Mingus’ *Fables of Faubus* (a direct response to Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus’ resistance to school integration), to the jazz artists making headlines for refusing to perform at the John F. Kennedy Center after President Trump added his name to the façade. Jazz has always spoken truth to power, and at no time in the past 50 years has it been needed more.

In his introduction to the 1964 Berlin Jazz Festival, Martin Luther King Jr. wrote: “Jazz speaks for life. The

Blues tell the story of life’s difficulties...only to come out with some new hope or sense of triumph. And now, jazz is exported to the world. For in the particular struggle of the Negro in America there is something akin to the universal struggle of modern man. Everybody has the Blues. Everybody longs for meaning. Everybody needs to love and be loved. Everybody needs to clap hands and be happy. Everybody longs for faith. In music, especially this broad category called jazz, there is a stepping stone towards all of these.”

GRAMMY-winning saxophonist and NEA Jazz Master **Gary Bartz**’ aptly-named *Damage Control* (on which he also sings, along with Barney McAll, Daniel Merriweather, Shelley FKA DRAM and Rita Satch) is a call to “relax and chill,” says Bartz—who, as a young man, considered joining the Black Panthers before choosing music as his path of resistance. For more soul-soothing, don’t miss five-time GRAMMY winner, Doris Duke Artist and genre-crossing jazz and chamber music innovator **esperanza spalding** at the Weill Recital Hall (Feb. 7) in “a well-being concert,” exploring the power, pleasure and purpose inherent in sustaining community and collective wellness. Vocalist, educator and longtime Steely Dan touring member **LaTanya Hall** assembled an extraordinary line up of jazz elders for her skip-proof album, *If Not Now, When...* Born from a period of COVID-induced vocal silence and artistic reflection, the album presents lesser-known songs (including two by Abbey Lincoln) that quietly encapsulate Black history. Hall gives the band plenty of space to stretch out, creating the perfect backdrop for her smoky, emotionally resonant voice, now better than ever. A century after Carter G. Woodson began his work, the music—and the message—endure. As Harry Belafonte said, “You can cage the singer, but not the song.”

SEE YOU THERE...Vocalist **Samara Joy** and Christian McBride headline the annual Ralph Pucci Jazz

Set at NJPAC (Feb. 25), benefitting Jazz House Kids, the nonprofit founded and led by jazz singer **Melissa Walker**. Joy, a former mentee, will be interviewed by—and perform with—McBride, JHK’s Artistic Director, in a full circle moment in jazz mentorship. At Christ & St. Stephens Church (Feb. 1) Dave Chamberlain’s Band of Bones presents a birthday tribute to trombonist JJ Johnson featuring vocalist **Antoinette Montague**, a formidable presence both musically and politically, from founding the Jazz Woman to the Rescue Foundation, to teaching incarcerated individuals through Music on the Inside (MOTI). American Voices celebrates the father of jazz, Louis Armstrong, with vocalists **Champion Fulton** and **Catherine Russell** at Hunter College (Feb. 24). At Birdland: NYC-based French chanson singer and harpist **Margot Sergent** and a too rare appearance by Danish vocalist **Sinne Eeg** (Feb. 1); **Catherine Russell** (Feb. 10-14); **Gabrielle Stravelli** (Feb. 14); **Nicole Henry** (Feb. 23). At the Aman: **Kim Kalesti** (Feb. 11); **Emily Braden** (Feb. 17); **Briana Swann** (Feb. 17); **Marianne Solivan** (Feb. 21); **Jane Irving** (Feb. 25). And for Valentine’s Day: **Dianne Reeves** performs her annual JALC Rose Theater concerts (Feb. 13-14); **Nicole Zuraitis** is at Hudson Hall (Feb. 14).

At the Landmark on Main, **Billy Stritch** celebrates the Judy Garland show, with Gabrielle Stravelli, Nicolas King, Alysha Umphress and Aisha DeHaas (Feb. 7). **Deanna Kirk** fêtes Irving Berlin in stories and songs with **Lisa Faith Phillips** at Pangea (Feb. 13). At Jazz Forum: pianist Julius Rodriguez features **Ekep Nkwelle** (Feb. 6-7); Brazilian pianist and vocalist **Eliane Elias** in a rare intimate setting (Feb. 13-14); **Stella Cole** (Feb. 20-21).

At Mezzrow: **Vanisha Gould** (Feb. 1), **Janice Friedman** (Feb. 4), **Naama** (Feb. 15), **Marianne Solivan** (Feb. 19), **Lucy Wijnands** (Feb. 22).

lens of our generation, taking both the musicians and the audience on a kind of journey, almost like walking through a house of mirrors.

NYCJR: I'm curious, what are your top three Miles albums?

BEASLEY: I did a deep dive into *Seven Steps to Heaven*, the first time I heard Herbie Hancock, Tony Williams and Ron Carter as a band. *Nefertiti* is a desert-island record. *Amandla* is meaningful to me because we played that music when I was in Miles' band in 1989.

NYCJR: What was it like playing with him?

BEASLEY: I was 28 or 29 at the time, and I'd already spent six or seven years playing with Freddie Hubbard in between studio work. Playing with Miles was a far-fetched dream, which I never ever thought would happen. I was lucky to meet Miles' nephew, Vince Wilburn, who asked me to send a tape. When Miles called me, I thought it was a prank call. Anyway, I was old enough to understand that I had to be humble and serious. On the first day of rehearsal, he walked in, came straight up to me, and as we shook hands, neither of us blinked for a while. I wanted him to check me out and know that I was sincere—I was there to learn, to be a good band member, but also not to be pushed around. In hindsight, I didn't need to do any of that. He turned out to be incredibly supportive, funny and a great teacher. That moment was pivotal, and after that we had a really good relationship.

He was probably the most dedicated artist I've ever been around. This was a time when he wasn't feeling well physically. He had a cot backstage, right off the stage, and some nights, he'd have to lie down for a few minutes and then come out to finish the concert. After every show, he would listen to recordings, either that night or the next morning, and had comments for each musician about what he wanted to tweak or change a few things, or how he wanted me to approach something differently. One night, right before we went on, he grabbed my hand and said, "Listen man, if you can't comp like Ahmad Jamal, then don't play." I was like, okay. To this day, I still think about that. At first, I thought, I don't even know if I've ever heard Ahmad comp unless it was for a bass player. But then I started to understand what Miles meant. Ahmad might play lightly for a minute, then stop, then come in with a big statement—and then get out of the way. That instruction has so many layers. It taught me about space, restraint and intention: stay out of the way until it's time to speak, and when you do, make it count.

NYCJR: You're going to be an integral part of a significant celebration of Miles' music this year here in

the US. Then you're going to be traveling into Europe again, doing something similar.

BEASLEY: I have five Miles Davis projects this year! The first one is reimagining *Tutu* and *Amandla*, with Marcus Miller and Holland's Metropole Orkest, in mid-March. Ten days later, I kickoff a 12-city tour with the Unlimited Miles band from late March through May, including a five-day stop at Birdland (Mar. 31-Apr. 4): "Unlimited Miles: Miles @100" with Sean Jones, Marcus Strickland, Kurt Rosenwinkel, Ben Williams and Terreon Gully.

In July and August, I'll be re-imagining *Filles de Kilimanjaro* with Hamburg's NDR Big Band in Germany. Then in September, I'm doing a concert with Frankfurt's HR Big Band, featuring tenor saxophonist Isaiah Collier. In October, I'll head to Stockholm with Magnus Lindgren for a revival of three legacy concerts that were held at Stockholm's Konserthuset concert hall, which is celebrating its 100th anniversary: Miles and Coltrane both played there in 1960 with Wynton Kelly, Paul Chambers and Jimmy Cobb, followed by Coltrane with his quartet, and later with Miles again with Herbie and Wayne. The concert hall has preserved the original setlists from those performances, and there's even YouTube footage of some of those concerts. We're using those historical setlists to create a program that honors that legacy, with Nicholas Payton (trumpet), Jaleel Shaw (saxophone), John Patitucci (bass), Greg Hutchinson (drums) and Magnus. It's a way of connecting the past to the present in a very tangible way.

NYCJR: Can you share any thoughts on February being Black History Month?

BEASLEY: I look forward to Black History Month and am glad to celebrate Black history all year and every year. In February, I'll be marking Black History Month on Valentine's Day with Dianne Reeves—a real storyteller—in Rose Theater at Jazz at Lincoln Center. As a human being and jazz musician, I owe so much to the Black community; in fact my entire career. I was deeply immersed and moved by Black-American music from a very young age. Because of that, when I moved to California at the age of 14, I actively sought that out. I had been told the Leimert Park neighborhood in LA was a major center of Black music and community, especially jazz, so that's where I went. I remember being welcomed openly. If you could play, were genuinely interested in learning, and were respectful, that was enough, you were accepted. That meant so much to me and has had a lasting impact to this day. That kind of openness, unfortunately, isn't something Black people have consistently received in the broader white community. It's striking to me how much trauma and injustice African Americans have endured in the US, and yet how much grace and generosity they continue to show. I think about that often, and it continues to shape who I am, both as a musician and as a human being.

For more info visit johnbeasleymusic.com. Beasley is at The Appel Room Feb. 9 (part of "The Nearness of You" concert in honor of Michael Brecker) and Rose Theater Feb. 13-14 (with Dianne Reeves). See [Calendar](#).

Recommended Listening:

- Thelonious (Marty Krystall, John Beasley, Buell Neidlinger, Billy Osborne) – *Thelonious* (K2B2, 1986)
- John Beasley, Robert Hurst, Vinnie Colaiuta – *Surfacing* (Beasley Music/EWE, 2000)
- John Beasley – *Letter to Herbie* (Resonance, 2008)
- John Beasley – *Positootly!* (Resonance, 2009)
- John Beasley – *Presents MONK'estra, Vol. 1-2* (Mack Avenue, 2016-17)
- SWR Big Band, Magnus Lindgren, John Beasley – *Bird Lives* (ACT Music, 2020)

(LABEL SPOTLIGHT CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11)

Golden Flower, the former on Elemental Music, the latter on Resonance, both on which the pianist participated). Then, there's "Al Kifha", a post-bop scorch, absolutely ferocious and razor-precise, a quartet firing on all proverbial cylinders. "You know," Feldman remembers, "I had the pleasure of working with Kenny in the '90s and hearing him play so many times, listening to this album brought back so many great memories."

Feldman is justly proud of the Muse campaign, from their being cut by engineer Matthew Lutthans at The Mastering Lab in Salina, KS, to Optimal Media pressings and the Stoughton Press jackets. The liner notes deserve special mention, and Feldman waxes eloquent. "These writers are storytellers, and I can't overstate their importance. I absolutely love getting the chance to deal with these great minds in our community." Of this batch, *The Free Slave*—recorded in 1970, originally released in 1972 as Muse's third-ever album—is treated to the most overtly philosophical essay, courtesy of Shannon J. Effinger, who scores a direct hit, firing from William Blake's bow of burning gold: "Duke Ellington famously said, 'If jazz means anything, it is freedom of expression.' However, if that is true, why has its 'freedom' been questioned since its inception?" Effinger explores issues of liberty, community and authenticity via a wonderfully broad historical understanding of the music and its guardians, one of which, Baltimore's Left Bank Jazz Society, was the group directly responsible for Brooks' uplifting and irrepressibly soulful live recording from the Famous Ballroom in April 1970. Woody Shaw (trumpet), George Coleman (tenor), Hugh Lawson (piano) and Cecil McBee (bass) dialogue with an audience raising the temperature as much as anyone in the group. "Hey come on Roy, we understand you, do your thing man," they encourage as the drummer launches into the samba groove of "Five for Max". It's so easy to be carried along in the energy current as Shaw's blues-and-bop phrases and Lawson's largely chordal musings pave the way for the drummer's tonally inflected solo.

Feldman uses *The Free Slave* as a launchpad for another flight of fancy. "I have to put in a word for the numerous other independent labels, like Inner City, Xanadu and Beehive, giving us all that great work in the '70s. How can people say that 'fusion' was killing off creativity in this music? It's just not true!" Nothing proves him right more than these three recent reissues, and it appears that they form the iceberg's tip. Just reissued in January are Woody Shaw's *Love Dance* (1975) and Joe Chambers and Larry Young's *Double Exposure* (1977). Beyond that, Feldman won't divulge. He is keenly aware of the risks and strategies associated with putting out luxury, limited editions such as these, always watching the marketplace for clues and trends, but his end game is to bring the subject of his passion to as many listeners as possible. "My primary goal is to help people to discover this fantastic music and keep our community growing." Feldman can cherry pick from a catalogue of Muse gems, with multiple releases by such figures as saxophonists Ricky Ford and Houston Person, trumpeters Jack Walrath and Wallace Roney, guitarists Pat Martino and Larry Coryell, bassists Richard Davis and Buster Williams, drummers Michael Carvin, Louis Hayes and Barry Altschul, vocalists Etta Jones and Sheila Jordan plus many, many others. The investigation continues, and those appreciatively reaping the rewards will wait and muse on a bright future.

For more info visit instagram.com/timettravelerrecordings. Muse artists performing this month include Lonnie Plaxico at Zinc Bar Feb. 9 (with Tsutomu Nakai), Louis Hayes and Steve Nelson at Dizzy's Club through Feb. 1, Philip Harper at the Cellar Dog Feb. 5 and Smalls Feb. 27, Buster Williams at Smoke Feb. 1 (with Nicholas Payton), Benny Green at Mezzrow Feb. 13 and 14, and Ron Carter at Dizzy's Club Feb. 24 (with Nancy Assis). See [Calendar](#).



FREE CONCERTS
www.jazzfoundation.org

NYC Parks
Pelham Fritz Recreation Center
18 Mt. Morris Park W., 6PM
2/20 - Bertha Hope Solo

Monday Night Jam
National Jazz Museum in Harlem
58 West 129th St., 6PM
2/23 - Monday Night Jam

This project is supported in part by an award from the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York Legislature and by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council and by the Howard Gilman Foundation.

NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL ON THE ARTS
COUNCIL ON THE ARTS

NYC Cultural Affairs
HOWARD GILMAN FOUNDATION

National Jazz Museum in Harlem*
58 West 129th St., 2PM
2/5 - The Dynamic Duo (Tyler Mitchell & Nicoletta Manzini)
2/12 - Teddy Royal
2/26 - Abiodun and Friends

*and livestreaming on JFA Facebook and YouTube