

ON SCREEN



Les grandes répétitions: Cecil Taylor à Paris
Gerard Patris/Luc Ferrari (INA-Mode)
by Paul Gaita

One of five documentaries made for French TV between 1966 and 1968 by French composer Luc Ferrari and director Gerard Patris, and grouped under the umbrella title *Les grandes répétitions* (the great rehearsals), *Cecil Taylor à Paris* finds the pianist-poet and free jazz pioneer (who would have turned 97 this month) with the “Student Studies” iteration of the Unit–Jimmy Lyons (alto), Alan Silva (bass) and Andrew Cyrille (drums)—rehearsing at a stately French home in the Place des Vosges shortly after that album’s completion. Between extended numbers, a reserved Taylor holds forth in interview segments, discussing in somewhat gnostic (and alternately bemused/annoyed) terms his thoughts on music, his own upbringing and other topics. The emphasis in all cases is the pursuit of freedom. Taylor speaks about untethering his music from formal structure and understanding: “Hearing is playing. Music does not

exist on paper.” He applies this same thinking to freeing his spirit from the social constrictions imposed on Black individuals; and when asked about his thoughts on Bach, John Cage and Karlheinz Stockhausen—the subject of another *grandes répétitions* documentary—he notes, “[They don’t] come from my community.”

Freedom is naturally emphasized in the music heard in the film, which gains remarkable resonance from the spacious location; in one shot, Lyons plays in a fireplace roughly the size of a service elevator, to draw on its natural tone. But it’s also felt in Patris’ direction: his camera drifts across the rehearsal space, lingering on Silva bowing or Cyrille tapping out complex polyrhythms, and then cutting sharply to Taylor coolly putting his piano through an intense workout. Patris wisely eschews any sense of a narrative structure, and in fact, leans into nontraditional, avant garde approaches throughout: spoken credits, historical film clips and images, and the words to Taylor’s recitation of his unpublished “Ambitus” poem float against nimbus-like clouds.

At just 45 minutes in length, *Cecil Taylor à Paris* is too brief and amorphous to be considered a true documentary; an impression, or a moment captured in time is perhaps more accurate. But the film (a restored version of which played in January at NYC’s MoMA, as part of its *To Save and Project* series) is a rare and potent encapsulation of Taylor’s boundless ambition and vision, and worth experiencing for ardent and newly-minted fans alike.

For more info visit ina.fr

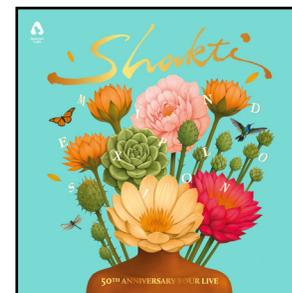


nada sagrada
Brandon Lopez (Relative Pitch)
by Kurt Gottschalk

Brandon Lopez has become, quite deservedly, an in-demand bassist in the Downtown scene. His playing is rich and lyrical while suggesting a mysterious darkness. His ongoing collaboration with poet Fred Moten (in duo and in trio with drummer Gerald Cleaver) is especially indicative, underscoring the strength, frankness and sincerity of Moten’s words and, not incidentally, of his voice. In-demand musicians become bandleaders. That’s the way these things go. And at least within the realms of free improvisation, what being a bandleader is isn’t always clear. One thing that’s clearly to Lopez’ credit as a leader is pulling together the exceptional septet that played at the 2023 Vision Festival, heard on this recording: DoYeon Kim (gayageum), Cecilia Lopez (electronics), Mat Maneri (viola), Zeena Parkins (electric harp), and Cleaver and Tom Rainey (drums). More than half of the ensemble members have been key parts of the Downtown scene since the last century, and all of them he’d worked with before. That’s some NYC pedigree.

The single, 39-minute track begins a bit nebulously (and typically), as if they’re charting course. But even at the outset, there’s a dimensionality, a shape outlined by pizzicato strings and electronic glissandi. They gain momentum, gather mass, in short order, but a series of surprises is still in store. Squiggly electronic tones, more pronounced than before, seem out of place, then quickly claim space. A gentle, loping viola, bass, drum trio seems too sudden a shift, but soon becomes a new foundation. Parkins’ harp sears through, almost like a guitar solo, but not quite. A quick rhythm from the drums is complemented by strings, although it’s not clear which ones. Are the harmonious moments accidents? Are the vocalizations inadvertent? There’s a lot going on, but somehow never too much. It’s a deeply engaging listen. Whether the product of notation or conversation or sheer force of personality, Lopez leads the ensemble through a slow series of waves, each peaking higher than the one before. *nada sagrada* is an exemplary session, the kind bandleaders deserve credit for.

For more info visit relativepitchrecords.bandcamp.com. Lopez is at P.I.T. Mar. 15. See Calendar.



Mind Explosion (50th Anniversary Tour Live)
Shakti (Abstract Logix)
by Jim Motavalli

This document represents the end of the line for an exhilarating international experiment that began in 1973, when British jazz guitarist John McLaughlin and tablas player Ustad Zakir Hussain first played together in New York. When they met, Hussain

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