

IN PRINT



Ne Me Quitte Pas (A Song by Jacques Brel and Interpreted by Nina Simone and Others)
Maya Angela Smith (Duke University Press)
by Anna Steegmann

Maya Angela Smith's 152-page book *Ne Me Quitte Pas* begins with her personal connection to the renowned song. First captivated in high school from the rendition by Nina Simone (who died 23 years ago next month at age 70), Smith's appreciation for the song deepened along with her love for the French language. She was also the only Black student in her college French class, when a professor introduced her to the original version by Belgian singer-songwriter Jacques Brel. Now, as a professor of French at the University of Washington, Smith shares "Ne Me Quitte Pas" with her students and readers of this published book from last year, which highlights the song's enduring cultural significance.

"Ne Me Quitte Pas" stands as a haunting and poetic plea for a lover not to leave. Written by Brel in 1959, the song gained widespread acclaim following his 1966

performance on French TV. Smith explores how the song has transcended language, culture and identity, having been covered over 1,650 times and performed in nearly 30 languages. The 1966 English version was written and sung by American poet-singer Rod McKuen, whose adaptation is highlighted for its shift in tone, transforming the emotion from despair to hope. While Edith Piaf, Brel's mentor, famously disliked the song, Simone was deeply moved and brought to tears by it, even before understanding the lyrics. Through persuasive prose, Smith provides a multifaceted analysis of the song, capturing its evolution as a cultural phenomenon. She illustrates how it acts as a vessel for translation, bridging not only French and English, but also marginalized identities and mainstream culture. The book pays special attention to Simone, whose haunting interpretation infuses the song with profound emotional depth, shaped by her experiences as a Black woman in a racist America.

Smith intertwines her personal journey of discovering the song with broader themes surrounding the complexities of interpreting art across cultures and the challenges of translation. She demonstrates how various artists and communities have adapted the song and focuses on female and queer performers who challenge traditional gender roles by reimagining "Ne Me Quitte Pas". The book also features Smith's analysis of flamboyant performances by biracial Welsh singer Shirley Bassey, as well as the song's numerous adaptations for film and stage.

For more info visit dukeupress.edu



Collusion and Collaboration
Kelsey Mines/Vinny Golia (Relative Pitch)
Everything Sacred, Nothing Serious
Kelsey Mines (OA2)
by Andrew Schinder

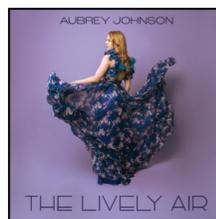
Seattle has one of America's most diverse and well-established experimental music scenes, providing a striking comparison now to the city's over-analyzed grunge explosion of the early '90s. Indeed, among the current whole, the former logging city has a pretty impressive under-the-radar jazz scene. Bassist Kelsey Mines, who was born and raised in The Emerald City, fits right within the progressive ethos of its music community. Over the past decade or so, Mines has traversed across wide-ranging genres and stylings. She has dabbled in lo-fi electro-pop and classical chamber music, and is currently a member of the indie rock supergroup Drink the Sea with (among others) R.E.M.'s Peter Buck. These projects may possess varying degrees of accessibility, but they are never uninteresting.

This past year, the prolific Mines (who recently has moved to NYC) released several new recordings, none of which fit together and all of which reflect the exciting range that she continuously displays. On *Collusion and Collaboration*, she partners with legendary free-form, avant garde multi-instrumentalist Vinny Golia on a series of stripped-down, minimalist,

improvised pieces that perfectly meld together Mines' bass with a number of woodwinds wielded by Golia, including flute, clarinet and soprano saxophone. Additionally, Mines often also contributes vocal chanting to complete the mix. The results are highly intimate and often atonal, but never abrasive. In particular, her vocals often work to soften the occasional shrillness of her partner's falsetto tones. "Improv 5" (which is not the fifth track; the song titles are numbered but presented out of order) sounds otherworldly, but ultimately soulful. "Improv 7" reminds listeners of free jazz' heyday, with Mines approximating a walking bassline underneath Golia's gritty and striking, yet highly disciplined, tones.

Demonstrating Mines' extreme flexibility, where *Collusion and Collaboration* is challenging and at times discordant, *Everything Sacred, Nothing Serious* is groovy and darn right pleasing; the latter's album title perfectly summarizes the duality of these two records. While always jazz-adjacent, *Everything Sacred, Nothing Serious* represents the bassist's first pure, straight-ahead exercise in the genre. Mines (who composed all songs and again provides vocals) and her largely Pacific Northwest-based group: Elsa Nilsson (flute, bass flute), Beserat Tafesse (trombone), John Hansen (piano), Danilo Silva (guitar) and Jeff Busch (drums), create an atmosphere of retro-cool, with Nilsson's breathy, featured flute in the limelight. The title track is a lovely tribute to the halcyon days of '60s bossa nova, and "Staying with the Trouble" evokes images of naturalistic post-noir '70s cinema. "Até" is a breezily spiritual duet between Mines' vocals and Nilsson, with Hansen's piano providing the foundation; the song certainly extols Seattle's forward-thinking musical landscape, but not without also offering listeners a relaxed beauty as well.

For more info visit relativepitchrecords.bandcamp.com and originarts.com/oa2. Kelsey is at Settlement Music School (Philadelphia, PA) Mar. 8 (with Ginita y La Orquesta Esa). See 100 Miles Out.



The Lively Air
Aubrey Johnson (Greenleaf Music)
by Josh Gagnon

In the five years since her last release as a leader, vocalist and composer Aubrey Johnson has been busy, appearing on over ten albums as a collaborator since 2020's *Unraveled*. Johnson's control of tone and meticulous melodic style are valuable additions to the contemporary jazz landscape, and with her latest album, *The Lively Air*, these strengths serve as a gravitational center with a great band and captivating compositions in orbit.

Certain influences of Johnson's are apparent and celebrated throughout the album. Her take on Joni Mitchell's "Help Me" shows a reverence for the original work, preserving and recontextualizing many of the iconic features from Mitchell's 1974 album *Court and Spark*. The arrangement allows for spacious phrasing, giving pianist Chris McCarthy space to accentuate the compositional color. Mitchell's influence can also be heard on Johnson's renditions of "Hope" and "Don't Be Afraid", each of which display a deep, through-composed narrative style that Mitchell helped pioneer. The former selection especially showcases one of the

more striking textures on this album: following a dynamic alto saxophone solo from Alex LoRe, Johnson and violinist Tomoko Omura embark on a stunning shout chorus. The ensuing wordless vocal melody displays an intricate virtuosity through the vocalist's range, and the pairing brings out an impressive sonic character. "Chorinho", written as a tribute to Brazilian composer Egberto Gismonti by her late uncle, keyboardist-composer Lyle Mays (1953-2020), exhibits a similar texture between Johnson and Omura. The album closes with another piece by Mays (with Luiz Avellar) entitled "Quem é Você (Close to Home)". The arrangement displays the band's versatility in a more typical ballad setting. The group effectively locks into the slower groove, as heard in the tightly-knit rhythm section of bassist Matt Aronoff and drummer Jay Sawyer.

For more info visit greenleafmusic.com. Johnson is at The Church of the Heavenly Rest Mar. 1 and the album release concert is at Birdland Mar. 22. See Calendar.



From What I Recall
Simona Premazzi/Kyle Nasser Quartet (OA2)
by Jason Gross

About 15 years ago at a Smalls Jazz Club late night session, two musicians met up and found they were kindred spirits: Italian pianist Simona Premazzi and Boston saxophonist Kyle Nasser (whose reflective 2015 debut *Restive Soul* is worth seeking out). After playing together and gigging over the years, the pair formed a quartet in 2021 with Noah Garabedian (bass) and Jay Sawyer (drums). Along with touring internationally, they co-produced this promising 11-song debut album *From What I Recall*. Premazzi describes their writing as "contrapuntally and embracing the concept of contrast and tension/release" and indeed, it comes through in the quiet intensity of this record, with an interesting contrast between the two composers.

Nasser leads with his 12-tone "Iacchus" album opener, featuring a quizzical piano/saxophone theme before the ensemble eventually trails off in different directions. Premazzi's "Back Seat" imitates a muffled conversation, starting with a staccato saxophone theme that tumbles through variations of itself, later mimicked on piano, plus a lovely, moody bass solo and a funky piano/drums exchange. Her "Persistence of Change" offers a splashy duet with Garabedian and casual duo with Nasser, which leads to an ascending, pounding piano climax. Premazzi's "Raoul Blues" (a tribute to the late "gonzo" journalist Hunter S. Thompson) begins with boogie-woogie piano runs, followed by Nasser's relaxed saxophone performance, which gets punctuated by a series of Sawyer's drumming spotlights. After a Nasser/Sawyer improvisation, the saxophonist's "Stalking" alternates between fluttering piano and a speedy theme. His "Requiem for K.O." and "Knock Out" present variations on the same theme, starting with a grief-stricken mood and Bach-inspired melody, then soaring into a flighty horn motif. "Rocks That Aren't So Smooth" (Nasser) sports a cool, bop feel, leading to a jolting, start-and-stop jam session. Premazzi's title track further revs up the proceedings with a high-speed piano and saxophone chase, before settling into a slower-tempo groove and a calm piano

meditation. Nasser ends the album on "Scamander" (the mythological Greek river god) with a calm, controlled air, followed by a twisting melody with the pianist, which then breaks off into Premazzi's lyrical playing while the saxophonist performs an extended modal run that slowly builds and recedes in intensity.

From What I Recall is an impressive, collaborative debut, calling for a follow-up that will reveal where the duo will go next.

For more info visit originarts.com/oa2. Premazzi is at Five Spot Jazz Mar. 5, Cellar Dog Mar. 13 and Ornithology Jazz Club Mar. 23. See Calendar.

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