

ON SCREEN



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

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 gnomic (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approaches throughout: spoken credits, historical film clips and images, and the words to Taylor’s recitation of his unpublished “Ambitus” poem float against nimbus-like clouds.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

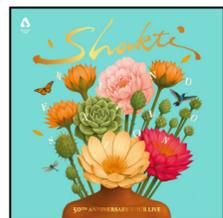


nada sagrada
Brandon Lopez (Relative Pitch)
by Kurt Gottschalk

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 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 tabla player Ustad Zakir Hussain first played together in New York. When they met, Hussain

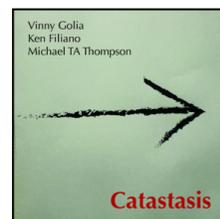
described the encounter as “a reunion of long-lost brothers.” Sadly, the collaboration won’t go further, because Shakti without Hussain (who died at the end of 2024) is impossible to contemplate.

Mind Explosion (50th Anniversary Tour Live) preserves the group’s luminous 2023 tour. Vocalist Shankar Mahadevan is up front on the opening track “Kiki”, his pyrotechnics closely matching the fast pace of violinist Ganesh Rajagopalan (the star on this one) and Hussain, with Selvagesh Vinayakram on added percussion. Western listeners may think of Indian classical music as primarily instrumental, but vocalists are equally virtuosic in the ancient South Indian Carnatic tradition. The outlier guitar, not a feature of Indian classical music, evokes ancient roots and is seamlessly integrated, with thankfully no attempt by McLaughlin to tamper his guitar or guitar synthesizer. The 15-minute “Giriraj Sudha”, led by Mahadevan, is quietly meditative, recalling the Mahavishnu Orchestra; its second section picks up the tempo, with guitar and violin doubling in passages (and probably sending both guitarists and fiddlers to the woodshed), but Hussain’s grounding work on tablas is absolutely essential to make this piece work. “Lotus Feet” (originally appearing on the group’s 1976 debut) provides a “catch our breath” moment, with McLaughlin’s echoing strings and ably supporting Rajagopalan’s violin and Mahadevan’s wordless vocal (though it doesn’t suggest vocalese, some comparisons could certainly be made).

The instrumental “5 in the Morning, 6 in the Afternoon” has a catchy figure that could turn into a rock riff at the drop of a hat. McLaughlin asserts himself here with fast, bent notes, but absolutely serves the music, rather than fighting for dominance. The other extended piece is “Shrini’s Dream”, dedicated to the memory of a fallen “angel,” mandolin player U. Srinivas, who played in the revived Remember Shakti group beginning in 1997. It’s a fitting conclusion to the 50 years of an amazing cross-cultural group of musicians.

This album was nominated for a 2026 “Best Global Music Album” GRAMMY. Though it didn’t win, Shakti did deservedly triumph on the same stage the year before with *This Moment* in 2024.

For more info visit abstractlogix.com. “Zakir Hussain Eternal: Celebrating 75 Years of Genius” is at Carnegie Hall Mar. 6. See Calendar.



Catastasis
Vinny Golia, Ken Filiano, Michael TA Thompson
(Nine Winds)
by John Sharpe

Few contemporary improvisers are as comfortable generating interest over extended durations as woodwinds virtuoso Vinny Golia (who welcomes octogenarian status on the first of this month), and *Catastasis* places that discipline under a microscope. Partnering with his peers—longtime associate, Ken Filiano (bass) and NYC stalwart Michael TA Thompson (drums)—the veteran woodwind specialist demonstrates how prolonged collaboration can nurture ever more profound creation. Consequently, they fuse in three studio collectives that test concentration, memory and invention.

The digital album’s proportions define its

character. With even the shortest track breaking the half hour mark, there can be no safety net: no edits, no resets, no second takes. The threesome revel in the challenge, maintaining momentum and lucidity through ongoing interplay. For listeners, the length can pose its own demands. There’s no right way of dealing with such situations, yet attention need not remain fixed to register the music’s impact. Whenever focus returns, it finds the trio typically engaged in some novel negotiation of texture or direction. Although some passages gel more effectively than others, at best they leave a residue of images and emotional tensions that linger in the mind.

At the center resides the contrapuntal relationship between Golia and Filiano. The reedman proves a seemingly inexhaustible source of ideas, drawing on tonal distortion and a sharply-angled attack, without ever resorting to protracted extremes. In that, he’s aided by the volatile drama of Filiano’s resonant bass lines, shifting fluidly between bowing and plucking, generating motion and using subtle electronic effects to expand his instrument’s profile. Thompson complements rather than confines, assembling pithy accents and woody timbres into a flexible tumbling pulse. Neither he nor Filiano shut down Golia’s options. Apart from brief interludes, the group interaction flows continuously. Development proceeds incrementally, guided by tacit agreement rather than overt signals. As just one example, in “NY-1” an insistent stretch of twisting tenor, droning arco and lurching beat gives way when Filiano introduces a suspended electronic haze, opening space for braided multiphonics and percussive tinkle, before the exchanges morph again. Notably they do all this while avoiding the predictable cycle of buildups and crescendos, which typifies so much free improvisation. In its stead is something much rarer: a sustained high-wire narrative shaped in real time, with consistency, restraint and imagination.

For more info visit vinnygolia.bandcamp.com. Ken Filiano is at Downtown Music Gallery Mar. 10 (with John Hagen) and Ibeam Brooklyn Mar. 14 (with Jeff Pearing). See Calendar.



12 Stages of Spiritual Alchemy
Ivo Perelman/Ray Anderson (Fundacja Stuchaj)
The 7th Dinner LIVE
Joe Hertenstein/Ray Anderson (Fundacja Stuchaj)
by Jeff Cebulski

With his buzzing horn and inner rhythmic machine, the singular trombonist Ray Anderson has accentuated his music in different ensembles, styles and modes. His *oeuvre* includes duets, whether with tubist Bob Stewart in the Heavy Metal Duo, with bassist Mark Dresser on numerous occasions and recordings or, as heard on the often-delightful 2023 album *Double Trouble* (Challenge), with drummer Bobby Previte, who easily lubricated the trombonist’s engine.

It would seem impossible to corral Anderson’s New Orleans-ish tendencies, which is why the recent release, *12 Stages of Spiritual Alchemy*, with esoteric Brazilian saxophonist Ivo Perelman, would be of interest. On it Perelman, a prodigious recording artist who has released numerous albums of exploratory, often avant garde improvisations with a wide array of artists (including many with pianist Matthew Shipp), is clearly animated by Anderson’s presence, and their alchemy renders a dozen, at times riveting, pieces. The improvisations’ titles mirror the classic 12 Steps (of

addiction groups) but not in the traditional alchemical order. Yet, their order makes sense. The first offering, “Separation” (the filtering of volatile from fixed—a purification), establishes the “spiritual” aspect, as Anderson’s opening, brassy vibrations are countered by Perelman’s more placid statement before the two meet at a point of distortion, from which elliptical squawking evolves into an oblique bop liaison. Later, after “Calcination”, “Putrefaction” and “Dissolution”, “Coagulation” occurs, and the two musicians combine for more melodic moments without sacrificing any edge. The classic alchemical routine has “Projection” (the turning of base metals into gold) last, but here it comes earlier: perhaps a form of sanctification that precedes the “Multiplication”, “Fermentation” and “Cibation”, all elements of a continuing and renewed spiritual life. All in all, the themes enhance this interpretive adventure.

On *The 7th Dinner LIVE*, with the propulsive German drummer Joe Hertenstein, Anderson co-leads a formidable group, including Michael Moore (alto, clarinet) and Michael Formanek (bass), for six postmodern performances recorded during three European concerts in 2024. (It is worth noting that Hertenstein supported Perelman and Shipp on 2017’s *Scalene*.) Perhaps as a nod to Anderson’s roots, Hertenstein here often promenades down a progressive Bourbon Street as he rides the snare and tom tom throughout each selection. The title track begins with one of those rides, leading into an abbreviated call-and-response between the horn frontline, as Formanek instrumentally prances around and through. Moore’s opening solo dips and weaves as Anderson quips, before the trombonist parries with typical buzz. More of the same occurs on “Alles Jutta”, a paean to the late German pianist Jutta Hipp. “Ballad for Paul & Poo” slows the dynamic down considerably, with Moore switching to clarinet, and Anderson who reaches deep to a lower-registered expression. “Bottle Opener” and “Fourdance” are Moore’s chamber-like pastiches that advance on plodding Hertenstein beats while Formanek tunnels through the trombone-saxophone divide. The reedman’s “Providence” extends the chamber mode until Hertenstein moves in and stirs things into a smooth lather.

With these two releases, Ray Anderson and friends continue to offer fans quirky and interesting free(r) jazz, based on internal and external applied rhythm as well as most significantly the juxtaposition of the trombone-saxophone tradition that forebears such as Roswell Rudd (with the likes of Archie Shepp and John Tchicai) excelled at.

For more info visit sluchaj.bandcamp.com. Anderson is at Roulette Mar. 12 (with Bob Stewart). Joe Hertenstein is at The Keep Mar. 29 (with Welf Dorr). See Calendar.

Maryanne de Prophetis

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