

BOXED SET



The Complete Live at the Plugged Nickel 1965 Miles Davis (Columbia-Legacy)
by Tom Greenland

On vinyl and CD for the first time in 30 years (as a 10-LP or 8-CD boxed set with updated packaging, archival photos and new liner notes), *The Complete Live at the Plugged Nickel 1965* sessions—released in conjunction with Miles Davis’ centennial celebrations this year—is well worth the 7.5-hour deep-dive it takes to appreciate its considerable value. Recorded December 22-23, 1965, during a two-week run in the basement venue in Chicago’s Old Town, the result encapsulates an artistic breakthrough for the trumpeter’s “second great quintet.” The group—with Wayne Shorter (tenor), Herbie Hancock (piano), Ron Carter (bass), Tony Williams (drums)—had recorded *E.S.P.* in January that year, which documented its new approach with original compositions, but hadn’t been able to gig because of Davis’ health issues (two hip operations and a broken leg). They were further frustrated because Davis catered to audiences by playing the blues, ballads and swinging standards he was known for, and because Columbia Records wanted to record the gig. Asking these hotshots to play the same old stuff night after night is like buying a Shelby Cobra only to drive it in reduced speed zones. What they needed was an open, unpoliced road to see how well the machine would handle. So, without telling Davis, the other four made an “anti-music” pact to deliberately thwart any conventions and expectations at their upcoming gig/recording session, hoping thereby to provoke innovation through confrontation. Risky behavior, especially with the tape machines rolling, but it worked. According to legend, the temperamentally taciturn Davis never reprimanded them for the prank, presumably because he recognized the merit in their audacity.

What we hear, over 60 years later, is a young, all-star band working over familiar repertoire, finding new freedoms in old, established forms. There are seven sets: three on Wednesday (12/22), four on Thursday (12/23), and 39 tracks total. Each number follows a predictable pattern: Davis begins with a brief, often fragmentary or abstract paraphrase of the tune, then takes a solo, followed by Shorter and Hancock, returning to the end of the number with an even briefer reference to the tune. All sets end with “The Theme.” Except for “Agitation” (from *E.S.P.*), everything performed are standards, and some, such as “I Fall in Love Too Easily”, “Stella by Starlight”, “All of You”, “If I Were a Bell”, “Milestones”, “My Funny Valentine”, “No Blues”, “Walkin’” and “When I Fall in Love” appear in multiple renditions. Given these predictable elements, almost everything else on the record is refreshingly, startlingly unpredictable.

Most unpredictable of all is Williams (allegedly the chief instigator of the “anti-music” pact). Driving the entire band with a tiny tip of his right-hand stick on the ride cymbal, he eschews any expectations to keep time for the others. Instead, the drummer messes with it any and every way he can: pushing the beat by playing just ahead of the collective pulse, abruptly modulating between rubato and ballad tempos, medium- and up-swing, double-time, 3-over-4 and 4-over-3 polyrhythms, straight and swing eighth notes—all accomplished

without sounding mannered or arbitrary, without losing the groove. Like more conventional drummers, he plays “in the pocket,” but his conception of the pocket is much deeper and wider than any other drummer of his generation and any who preceded him.

Carter is Williams’ enabler and abettor, his partner in rhythmic trickery, the steadiest timekeeper of the bunch, with a solid 4/4 walking pulse at any tempo when required. However, although he plays in the same wide pocket as Williams, always in close synchrony, he’s not always playing the same meters and tempos at the same time. He might be feeling beats in 4 while Williams is feeling them in 3, or walking double-time while Williams plays half-time—roles that might reverse only a few phrases later, perhaps many times throughout a number. One of the duo’s most radical episodes of tempo hijacking occurs on “No Blues” (2nd version), where, behind Shorter’s solo, they slowly and steadily speed up, only to slow back down. Another hijacking occurs on “No Blues” (1st version) when Williams, overwhelmed by Davis’ tentative opening to a solo, abruptly launches into a fast aggressive beat, dragging Davis along behind him while Carter stands his ground. Miraculously, amidst all this rhythmic anarchy, Carter and Williams’ shared pulse feels firmly anchored.

Hancock’s role is also substantial. Just as Davis often omits crucial parts of familiar song melodies when he introduces them, relying on an audience’s memory to fill in the missing elements, Hancock typically omits crucial notes in his chords—for example, a major or minor third degree—that would otherwise clarify the song’s underlying harmony, opting instead for more ambiguous voicings and reharmonizations. His accompaniment patterns are similarly ambiguous, often based on symmetric figures that cycle over and against Williams and Carter’s polyrhythmic pulsing. His sharp ears quickly discern and echo the soloist’s ideas, but more often than not he recontextualizes and transmogrifies these ideas, dishing them back to the soloist in new shapes and sizes.

Shorter makes an outstanding contribution to these sessions through intelligent, imaginative improvisations. Listening to him on “Walkin’” (1st version), “The Theme” (1st version), “On Green Dolphin Street”, “My Funny Valentine” (1st and 2nd versions), “Four”, “So What”, “If I Were a Bell” (2nd version), “I Fall in Love Too Easily” (4th version) and “All Blues” (his most ecstatic moment) reveals a consummate artist who consistently derives and develops his ideas from the song’s melody, conveying a plethora of emotional textures without histrionics. These sessions are arguably a highpoint of his long, illustrious career.

Davis, like Williams, is a key catalyst in the collective combustion. He’s out of practice, having laid off for a year, and his chops, especially the first night, are shaky. He takes short solos with long pauses and you can even hear him grunting in dismay over mangled notes. But he’s better the second night, particularly on “Walkin’” (2nd version) and “I Fall in Love Too Easily” (3rd version). More importantly, his emotional charisma and restless creativity set a tone and a bar, bringing out the be(a)st in Williams, balanced by the cooler emotional temperatures of Shorter and Hancock. Like a great film director who’s carefully cast the players and set the scene, he knows enough to stay out of the actors’ way so that they can do their best work.

For more info visit legacyrecordings.com. Miles Davis centennial tributes this month include “A Tribute to Miles Davis” (featuring Jimmy Owens) at Flushing Town Hall Mar. 20, “Miles & Trane Centennial” at Birdland Mar. 24-28 (featuring Jeremy Pelt) and “Miles Davis at 100” at Birdland Mar. 31-Apr.4 (featuring Sean Jones). See Calendar.



The Cosmic Piano
Matthew Shipp (Cantaloupe Music)
échappée
Joachim Kühn (Intakt)
Creeks and Stars
Ursel Schlicht (Acheulian Handaxe)
by Daniel A. Brown

A triumverate of recent releases from Matthew Shipp, Joachim Kühn and Ursel Schlicht refocus our attention on the potential, vulnerability and volatility of solo piano performance. On these particular albums, it feels as if the respective players are seeking some form of grace or overt transcendence. Any and all trappings of traditional playing or reverential reference points are absent. Thankfully, these three notable pianists boast the best assets of restless, virtuoso playing, and their current albums each play like rewarding challenges for both player and listener.

A musician who is as conscious of traditions as much as indifferent to bowing before them, Shipp continues to morph new forms with *The Cosmic Piano*. The opening title track sets the stage: the song seems to assemble itself in real time as he methodically yet intuitively gathers together, and discards, ideas of intervals and chord fragments to unravel a sustained study of spontaneous composition. “Cosmic Junk Jazz DNA” is a chimeric of stride shifts and jabbing swing, Shipp’s impressive right hand peeling off ideas and accents that veer from crystalline to dissonant grit. “The Other Dimensional Tone” is a poignant ballad, the sound of a blues changing color as it seems to float over a sonic cityscape. Over the course of the tune’s 13 minutes, the pianist reexamines and retrofits ideas; at the halfway point, the glacial chords of the song’s beginning are supplanted by a volley of harpsichord-like arpeggios that propel the performance to its end. Forward motion is given notice with the crackling “Orbit Light” and “Subconscious Piano” and a glimmering, haunting farewell closes out the session with “A Cosmic Thank You”.

Recorded shortly before his 80th birthday, *échappée* is a double-album set from veteran German pianist Joachim Kühn that is varied and impressive. Over the course of the collection’s 13 tracks, Kühn allows equal bandwidth for uptempo, if not frantically berserk pieces, along with more placid, ruminative performances. After a few cursory chordal ideas, “Höre und Sehe” quickly transforms into a swirl of syncopated flurries, bass notes jabbed into place as pivots; the catch-and-release quality of “Indiscret” boasts dissonant chromaticism offset by unpredictable rests. Kühn redirects the energy for “Dominic”, a slower, abstract waltz-feel that boasts darker-shaded chords with glassy arpeggios trickling up and down the performance. “Renata” is sheer romanticism, an elegiac mood that is offset by the pianist’s expansive chords and icy, high-end tonalities. The 13-minute showcase, “My Long Life with Brother Rolf”, is as varied and unpredictable as the musical relationship between Joachim and his late, clarinet-playing brother and longtime musical collaborator.

Inspired by a summer 2022 experience of visiting 32 locations in art-fair documenta fifteen in Kassel, Germany, *Creeks and Stars* is a seven-song collection from Ursel Schlicht that highlights her certain technique in conjunction with cerebral, ethereal improvisations. The 12-minute opening, title track wastes no time in guiding the listener along, Schlicht quickly bridling together hyper-arpeggios and fragmented chords to create a contracting and

expanding map of melody and countermelody. The phantasmagoric “Undercurrent” features swirling dissonant, even menacing, volleys of notes that resolve into an oddly comforting end. “Sous la tente” generates a casual beauty through a minimal motif of shifting chords, while album closer “Airy Spirit” uses upper-register trills to give life to a piece that slowly walks and crawls through some truly impressive, odd-metrical playing.

For more info visit cantaloupemusic.com, intaktrec.ch and handaxe.bandcamp.com. Matthew Shipp plays solo at Looove Annex Mar. 14 (part of OUT Fest, presented by Arts for Art). See Calendar.



Another Perfect Day
Bill Orcutt (Palilalia)
Solo at Café OTO
Shane Parish (Red Eft)
by Bill Meyer

Bill Orcutt is a determined autodidact who has built a diverse body of work out of a highly idiosyncratic guitar technique, including intentionally selected limitations (his guitars have only four strings), as well as mischievous applications of computer know-how. Shane Parish is a guitar teacher who helps players of all levels to advance their skills, and also uses his formidable command of the instrument to pursue deep dives into various songbooks, sound worlds and methodologies. But opposing approaches can also complement each other. When Orcutt needed a performable score of *Music For Four Guitars*, a computer-enabled creation that sounds like Steve Reich played by the Magic Band, he turned to Parish, who subsequently joined the Bill Orcutt Guitar Quartet (BOGQ). The two LPs under consideration are solo instrumental performances, each recorded at London’s Café OTO on November 14, 2023, immediately prior to a BOGQ gig. Both are pithy (around half an hour each) statements of what each man can do with an electric guitar.

Over the past decade, Orcutt has tempered his approach on several unaccompanied guitar recordings, including one that set his playing adrift on a sea of strings sampled from easy-listening records. *Another Perfect Day* heralds the return to disc of the in-your-face guy who has been synthesizing structural sophistication and primal attack since the ‘90s. The set’s material launches a half-dozen themes, drawn mainly from two preceding solo LPs, into overdrive. Orcutt’s tone has a raw edge that could shred your garments as notes fly between his amp and the club’s exit, and his penchant for disrupting his sturdy melodies with an echolalic stutter ratchets up the tension. The resulting performance is by turns wrenching and exhilarating, and its pith is a canny strategy to keep the intensity high; too big a serving would simply dull its impact.

Parish’s *Solo at Café OTO* set draws on folk material, much of which has traveled back and forth across the Atlantic. It opens with “She Moves Through the Fair”, a death-haunted Irish ballad that introduces the album’s methodology. The melody materializes out of some ruminative picking and hangs in the air, stark enough that you can’t miss it. Then Parish starts pulling the tune apart, testing its fragments and using them for spiraling extrapolations rendered with a tart, just-reverberant-enough tone. The themes of “Barbara Allen” and three songs taken from the John Jacob

Niles songbook appear and reappear like the North star on a partly cloudy night, blinking in and out as his gambling finger-picking tests the implications of their rhythms. The choice of Niles as a source is particularly interesting, since he was a folk music researcher who freely rewrote the songs that he collected. Parish is similarly unsentimental in using old lumber to build new dwellings. He also includes “Sycamore Trees”, a song that David Lynch and Angelo Badalamenti had Jimmy Scott sing at the close of the second season of *Twin Peaks*. Parish is much rougher on it, grinding the tune down to distorted chordal pileups; this is the one time that he sounds as jagged as Orcutt.

For more info visit palilalia.com and shaneparish.bandcamp.com. Parish plays solo and with Bill Orcutt Guitar Quartet at Roulette Mar. 20. Orcutt is also at Roulette Mar. 21-22 and Solar Myth (Philadelphia, PA) Mar. 23. See Calendar and 100 Miles Out.



Journey to the New: Live at the Village Vanguard
Marcus Gilmore (Drummerslams)
by JR Simon

Journey to the New: Live at the Village Vanguard is drummer (and grandson of Roy Haynes) Marcus Gilmore’s long-awaited debut release as a leader, though he has been on the scene for over 20 years playing with a wide variety of artists ranging from Chick Corea, Pharoah Sanders and Pat Metheny to Queen Latifah. Joined by Morgan Guerin (EWI), David Virelles (piano), Emmanuel Michael (guitar), Rashaan Carter (bass) and Burniss Travis (electric bass), this is a group motivated by how sound enters, accumulates, recedes and ultimately resolves. Gilmore’s drumming is rhythmic and textural, but also structural, creating scaffolding that allows the ensemble to move and breathe as a single organism.

The album opens disarmingly with “Voltaire”, a track that quietly unfolds with voices entering without urgency during an ethereal prelude, in which Gilmore remains almost completely absent. It takes nearly seven minutes before the drums appear, and when they do, we’re rewarded with a cool groove and a hummable melody. Throughout the live performance, Gilmore resists any temptation to dominate. This is unmistakably an ensemble project, with relatively few protracted solos and several passages featuring minimal percussion. On “Hindsight” and Geri Allen’s “Open Handed Reach”, the music turns inward, contemplative and deeply comforting. Virelles’ piano and Guerin’s EWI performances shine here, creating lush, enveloping soundscapes that linger even after the notes fade. “Cape Stride” offers a different facet of Gilmore’s artistry, showcasing his cymbal work in particular. The range of sounds and textures he conjures underscores his reputation as a drummer who thinks in color as much as rhythm. All of this careful restraint makes the title track’s eruption all the more gratifying. Opening with an astonishing 3.5-minute drum solo feels almost unreal in its density and imagination. How can this much motion and this many rhythms come from one person? And how does it all fit together so clearly? These are mysteries worth the price of admission. The audience exclamations remind the listener that this

was recorded live, and you’ll feel like you’re right there with them in the hallowed jazz space that is the Village Vanguard.

Cohesive and thoughtfully sequenced, *Journey to the New* is no vanity project. It’s a statement of collective intent, guided by a drummer whose orchestral sense of voicing and long-form design is evident throughout.

For more info visit drummerslams.com. Gilmore is at Village Vanguard thru Mar. 1 (with Gerald Clayton) and Mar. 31-Apr.5 (with Jakob Bro). He is also at Carnegie Hall Mar. 6 (part of “Zakir Hussain Eternal: Celebrating 75 Years of Genius”). See Calendar.

Composers Concordance		March 2026 Events	
Imitations	Timbre Tantrum: Violas	Generations XV	
Feat. CompCord Ensemble	Saturday, March 14th @ 7pm	Rhythmic Arts Center NYC	
Sunday, March 1st @ 7pm			
Ki Smith Gallery			
Trio Terrano	Generations XV		
Sunday, March 8th @ 8pm	Saturday, March 21st @ 8:30pm		
Saint John's in the Village	The Stonewall Inn		

SAINT PETER'S CHURCH

JAZZ VESPERS 5PM

March 1
Marion Cowings

March 8
Amy London

March 15
Ron Jackson

March 22
Adriel Vincent Brown

March 29
Emi Makabe

100TH BIRTHDAY 6:00 PM
March 17
Nobuko "Cobi" Narita

RSVP
saintpeters.org/events

610 LEXINGTON AVE AT 54TH STREET • COMMUNITY & JAZZ SINCE 1905 • SAINTPETERS.ORG