

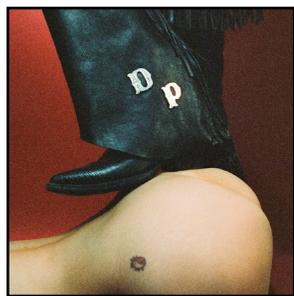
**With a Song in My Heart:
Exploring the Music of Richard Rodgers**
Denny Zeitlin (Sunnyside)
by Jim Motavalli

Pianist Denny Zeitlin first recorded in the early '60s, and the octogenarian is still playing extremely well, as this, his latest album release, proves in spades. The 11-track *With a Song in My Heart: Exploring the Music of Richard Rodgers* (recorded live at Piedmont Piano in Oakland, CA) is a beautifully recorded solo piano program on which he really digs into the melodic depth of the composer's music, even though Zeitlin has picked some of Rodgers' more familiar works. So it's not necessarily a deep dive into the catalogue of Rodgers obscurities.

"Falling in Love with Love" sets the pace. Zeitlin is a two-handed pianist who sometimes sounds like he's four-handed, while eschewing the pyrotechnics of an Art Tatum. "I Didn't Know What Time It Was" starts with firm bass notes and then explores the timeless melody in 7/4 time. The improvisational ideas come quickly, but Zeitlin never strays too far from the fundamentals of the tune. "He Was Too Good to Me", an introspective ballad, is played with great tenderness, as befits the woeful Lorenz Hart lyrics. The dashing, uptempo take on "Johnny One Note" will make even the most jaded jazz listener smile: it just sparkles all the way through, from the first rolling notes that get topped by the song's catchy hooks. The piano's bass notes rumble throughout, as if it's Cecil McBee, an early collaborator who played with the pianist dating back to 1964's *Cathexis* (Columbia), Zeitlin's leader debut. The glorious "Have You Met Miss Jones" opens with some fast, ascending thematic notes, but then steps back and dives deep into the core meaning of the tune. The most exploratory cut on the album, Zeitlin even plays the bridge in three different keys, and the transition back to the song itself is brilliantly handled. By contrast, the album closing title track is spacious and straightforward, with such a subtly keen and patient approach that you could even overdub a singer.

Overall, *With a Song in My Heart* is one of the best solo piano album releases of the last few years. And the fact that it was recorded by an artist who turns 88 this month makes it all the more to be treasured.

For more info visit sunnysiderecords.com



I Wish You Would
Dida Pelled (La Reserve)
by Wif Stenger

Tel Aviv-born, Brooklyn-based Dida Pelled has shown a bluesy streak in her jazz guitar and singing since her 2010 debut, which she embraces in *I Wish You Would* with a tasty set of blues classics and lesser-known nuggets from nearby on the color palette. The most

atmospheric track is "Rosa Mae" by Mary Lou Williams, which ushers you into a cozy old-time nightspot where neighborhood musicians jam and secret lovers meet. It's mostly an instrumental duet between the leader's guitar and Sullivan Fortner's understated Fender Rhodes, Pelled coming in on vocals towards the end with mellow scat and a smoky, laid-back groove worthy of JJ Cale. They're backed by the ace rhythm section of Tony Scherr (bass) and Kenny Wollesen (drums), two players who've worked with a wide array of artists, including Rickie Lee Jones and Norah Jones, who might be reference points for Pelled's easygoing vocal style.

On the title tune her voice drops just behind the beat, conversational and street-smart, over Fortner's tasty piano and Wollesen's shuffling Bo Diddley-esque beat. That's one of two tunes here by Billy Boy Arnold, a living link to the tradition: he started out with Diddley in the early '50s and is still with us at age 90. The other Arnold song, "Sittin' on Top of the World", is a sparser affair, conjuring up Pelled on a front porch on a warm summer night. Meanwhile, David Bowie nerds might notice that "I Wish You Would" is one of two songs here that he also recorded, the other being the 1920s flapper anthem "(I Wish I Could Shimmy Like My) Sister Kate" (which was covered by another easygoing singer-guitarist, Madeleine Peyroux). The tune is often done as an over-the-top campy romp, but this version is a bit more laid back, still verging on bawdy, with Fortner laying down some honky-tonk and ragtime lines. Pelled's guitar and vocals are irresistible on John Lee Hooker's "Dimples" and "Blues in the Night". The latter may be the most frequently covered tune of the selections from this album, but Pelled manages to make it her own, at once sultry, raunchy and gentle. The album closes with the short, stripped-down "Trouble", showing off Pelled's voice with just simple guitar accompaniment.

After five albums over the past decade and a half, this one should bring Dida Pelled to a broader audience—if there's any justice in this blues-soaked world.

For more info visit lareserverecords.com. Pelled is at Mezzrow Apr. 1, Ornithology Jazz Club Apr. 2 and Birds Apr. 25. See Calendar.



**Absorb
Reflective**
Joel Futterman (Squid Note)
by Daniel A. Brown

A certain north-star of higher-reaching contemporary jazz piano, Joel Futterman (who turns 80 this month) offers up two captivating releases with *Absorb* and *Reflective*. The former features long-form pieces, while the latter finds Futterman exploring a series of miniatures. Between these two polarities, and in total with both albums, we are given a worthy update on 60-plus years of potent, unpredictable pianistic explorations.

The four parts contained within *Absorb* demand certain surrender from the listener—or at the very least, an open bandwidth. "Absorb Part 1" is fueled by a restless, microtonal rumble that seems to goad, exhort and command Futterman's cascade of high-end jabs and pointillistic ideas. Opening with a lush, modal filigree, "Absorb Part 2" gradually wanders into a chromatic stroll that soon dissolves into arcane territory, revealing that *dynamics* is a certain mastered skill of Futterman's; over the course of his career, his consciousness of the actual timbral possibilities and limits of the piano, of felt hammer hitting and releasing

string, is on great display during this piece's 23-minute run. The commentary and roiling bitstream of notes and ideas is underpinned by the physicality of touch in "Absorb Part 4", where the pianist deftly holds together glimmers of gospel, Thelonious Monk-dented blues and cosmic swirl, through a 12-minute vortex that seems to ascend to a semblance of something known, only to morph into an even greater, alien beauty. Bassist William Parker's liner notes offer that the music heard herein "connects to the sacred history of the unknown—the joy of music and the experience of living another day." An apt takeaway that emphasizes the ineffable mood that this album cultivates and sustains.

While shorter in duration, the 19 miniatures of *Reflective* are no less formidable, fanning between the cerebral and volatile. Harp-like chordal cascades and staccato strikes set the stage in "Reflective 1"; an eerie minor-key rhythm arrives and falls in "Reflective 4", Futterman toying with a playful chromatic theme that is then engulfed by a barrage of lower-register ideas. "Reflective 7" begins with a deceptively, Satie-like motif, suddenly swept away by the impulse of restlessness, brief notes flicked into the pool. Universal elements—such as the pianist's signature staccato use of triplet and five-note arpeggios, unpredictable and malleable-toned chords and a targeted use of decay—still only give the listener a partial map of where they might be led. The actual sense of "jazz" music is only provided through quick glimpses and hazy glimmers. This all-encompassing and inventive sensibility, combined with Futterman's absolute technical mastery, is a reminder of the potent work he did for many years with perhaps his greatest foil, legendary alto saxophonist Jimmy Lyons. Most tellingly, or even surprisingly, is the final "Reflective 19", a paean to the blue-flame jazz ballad, albeit one with a flickering

RECOMMENDED NEW RELEASES

- Rodrigo Amado This Is Our Language Quartet—*Wailers* (European Echoes)
- Richard Andersson—*Monk & More* (Hobby Horse)
- Alibaster DePlume—*Dear Children of Our Children, I Knew: Epilogue* (International Anthem)
- Pierre Favre Trio—*Bird Food* (Blaser Music)
- GEORGE—*Looking for Consonance* (Out Of Your Head)
- Devin Gray, Andrea Parkins, Frank Gratkowski—*Hz of Gold* (Rataplan)
- Colin Hinton—*Three Suites* (Endectomorph Music)
- Gregory Hutchinson—*Kind of Now: The Pulse of Miles Davis* (Warner Music)
- Irreversible Entanglements—*Future Present Past* (Impulse!)
- DoYeon Kim—*Wellspring* (TAO Forms)
- Joachim Kühn—*Joachim Kühn & The Young Lions* (ACT Music)
- Brian Lynch—*Torch Bearers* (Holistic MusicWorks)
- Joe Magnarelli—*Decidedly So* (Cellar Music)
- Eyal Maoz, Piero Bittolo Bon, Zeno De Rossi—*Forced to Feel* (Chant)
- Judith Owen—*Suit Yourself* (Twanky)
- Oscar Peterson Trio—*At Baker's Keyboard Lounge* (Verve)
- David Sánchez—*Tambó* (Ropeadope)
- Miroslav Vitous, Michel Portal, Jack DeJohnette—*Mountain Call* (ECM)
- Steve Wilson—*Enduring Sonance* (Smoke Sessions)
- Various—*Flying High: Still Soaring* (Jazz at the Ballroom/ Songbook Ink)