



bluegrass
WDR Big Band (Directed by Bob Mintzer)
 (MCG Jazz)
Big Band Bass
WDR Big Band, John Goldsby, Bob Mintzer
 (Bass Lion Publishing)
 by Ken Dryden

Since the formation of WDR Big Band, the jazz orchestra of the German public broadcaster Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR) in 1946, the group has evolved and grown into one of the most acclaimed large jazz ensembles in Europe and the world. The state-sponsored orchestra offers musicians year-round salaries and the ability to tour Europe to perform. The band also has a long tradition of inviting veteran directors, arrangers and guests for their recordings and broadcasts; Bob Mintzer has been the director and arranger for several of its recent recordings.

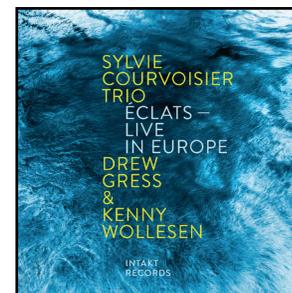
bluegrass expands the horizons of the big band, with music composed by two bluegrass greats who are additionally featured guests: violinist Darol Anger and mandolinist-guitarist Mike Marshall. Both played together as a duo for decades in addition to their time in the David Grisman Quintet, being well-versed in jazz as well as classical music. Mintzer's arrangements successfully fuse bluegrass with big band jazz, and all songs were recorded live. Marshall's "Slip and Slide" is transformed by Mintzer's inspired voicings

for horns and reeds, featuring the composer's intricate mandolin and a strong solo by alto saxophonist Karolina Strassmayer. The traditional murder ballad "Down In the Willow Garden" retains its wistful air even without the lyric, showcasing Anger's masterful violin and Mintzer's playful tenor as the piece takes on a more contemporary sound. Mintzer contributed the jig-like "Green Lawn", a demanding work that Anger and Marshall devour like it was long part of their repertoire. His EWI adds a modern twist to the bluegrass setting. Anger's "Replace It All" is given a funky backbeat, with a call-and-response between the band and his violin, and Jeremy Powell adds a soulful, gritty tenor. Bluegrass comes to the forefront as the guests introduce Marshall's lively "Dexter", a toe-tapping hoedown featuring the underrated pianist Billy Test, plus Mintzer and Anger.

John Goldsby retired at the end of 2024 after serving as the WDR Big Band's bassist for thirty years. *Big Band Bass* serves as a fond farewell, celebrating his contributions as a composer, featuring seven of his works, which also showcase his bass out front. Album opener, "Sonatinita" was written and arranged by Vince Mendoza, a lively Afro-Cuban number that features a flute choir with the rhythm section before the full band enters, spotlighting trombonist Ludwig Nuss then Goldsby. The bassist's uplifting "Blue Balloon" (arranged by Mintzer) is a swaggering anthem, punctuated by its surging brass and strong solos by alto saxophonist Johan Hörlén and trumpeter Ruud Breuls. The infectious groove of "You Can Call Him Maestro" (another arrangement by Mintzer) seems inspired by the writing of Thad Jones and features Goldsby's intricate bass along with guest trombonist Jonathan Böbel. Goldsby is the only soloist in his Latin-tinged "Sergio" (arranged by Michael Abene). The

combination of inventive compositions by Goldsby, the creative arrangements and top-notch musicians help to make this album stand out as a milestone recording by the 80-year-old WDR Big Band.

For more info visit mcgjazz.org and goldsby.bandcamp.com. Bob Mintzer is at Birdland Apr. 7-11 (with Yellowjackets). See Calendar.



Éclats - Live in Europe
Sylvie Courvoisier Trio (Intakt)
 by Bill Meyer

You don't have to dig far into the lore of the Sylvie Courvoisier Trio to encounter its origin story. Back in the 2000s, when Courvoisier spent a lot of time working with John Zorn, he spent some of that time leaning on her to start a trio. The pianist resisted, opining that the format was too straight, too burdened with expectation and there was no way she was going to play standards. But Zorn has ways of getting his way, and it turns out that there was plenty of potential in the idea. *Éclats - Live in Europe* is the fourth that Courvoisier, Drew Gress (bass) and Kenny Wollesen (drums) have made together since 2014. There's nary a standard among them; in fact, one thing made plain by

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