



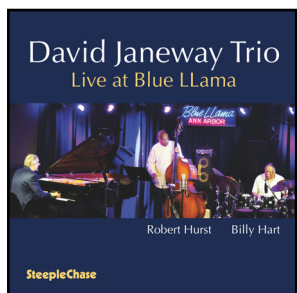
The Woods
Ryan Blotnick (Fishkill)
 by Josh Gagnon

In addition to his varied musical and artistic influences, guitarist and composer Ryan Blotnick's relationship with the natural world is a driving force behind his new album, *The Woods*. Blotnick draws a comparison between a forest's ecosystem and the way in which his quartet plays together. Like the mycelium networks beneath the forest floor, his band of Tyler G. Wood (piano, organ), Adam Chilenski (bass) and Otto Hauser (drums) act as interlinked organisms, growing and changing throughout each track with a musical hive mind. With this new album, the compelling textures created throughout speak to the group's masterful work together.

The quartet opens with a warm collective improvisation to introduce the leader's original composition "The Magic". These first two minutes are something of a musical invocation, drawing in the listeners' attention in preparation for what follows. The second half of the track continues the loose, airy quality of the introduction while establishing an underlying pulse between Hauser's beat and Chilenski's bass ostinato. This leads nicely into "Pecao" (a piece inspired by Blotnick's time in the Yucatán), which establishes a clave in its outset. The terraced building of rhythmic character creates a great album opening statement. "Snowfields" stands out as a departure in character from the rest of the recording. Where an open, warm texture occupies the majority of the listening minutes, "Snowfields" is like a needle drop into a driving, distorted jam session. Named after particular areas of expert terrain on ski slopes, the feeling of adrenaline and excitement is fitting. Given the contrast from the other selections, Blotnick's guitar tone here is precise and tasteful, and the ensemble is well-balanced, even with the given increase in volume. The last two tunes stand out as highlights of the record: "Smokey Corners" and "Lurvey Spring" express a lyrical style, in which the band seems quite at home.

Throughout, Blotnick's melodic style shines, with lush accompaniment from his collaborators and, at times, the whole band lands on a chord together, adding a memorable feeling of weight to the music's texture.

For more info visit ryanblotnick.com. The album release concert is at Threes Brewing May 18 and Avalon Lounge (Catskill, NY) May 20. Blotnick is also at The Richardson May 19. See *Calendar and 100 Miles Out*.



Live at Blue Llama
David Janeway (SteepleChase)
 by Ken Dryden

Since retiring from his psychiatric practice a few years ago, pianist David Janeway has devoted himself

full time to his jazz career. His latest trio session was recorded live at Blue Llama in Ann Arbor, MI, in 2024. Like his earlier trio (with Cameron Brown and Billy Hart), his new band features two veteran players: Robert Hurst (bass) and once again Hart (drums). It's an interactive trio, not oriented to leader and sidemen.

The Detroit native has long lived in the New York metropolitan area, but he has absorbed the influences of numerous piano masters from around the country. The set heard herein is typical for Janeway: a mixture of time-tested works, interpretations of jazz classics and his own tantalizing originals. It is refreshing to hear his unique approach to the standard "All the Things You Are" (Jerome Kern), eschewing the B-flat introduction made famous by Dizzy Gillespie, substituting a dreamy, reflective solo introduction before the rhythm section joins in a flash, exploding into a driving post-bop setting with brief interludes of bossa nova. Janeway's playful treatment of the bittersweet ballad "I Should Care" gives it an even more lighthearted air. The poignant ballad "A Child Is Born" (Thad Jones) has become a go-to song for numerous jazz musicians; the trio approaches it here as an understated jazz waltz, allowing the lyricism of the work to naturally come through, with just enough embellishments to call it their own.

Janeway obviously appreciates "The Star-Crossed Lovers", from the Ellington-Strayhorn Shakespeare suite, *Such Sweet Thunder*, reflecting the story of Romeo and Juliet. His lush arrangement captures both the lyricism and sense of forthcoming tragedy with inspired voicings. The medley of two diverse McCoy Tyner works begins with a solo piano take of the reflective ballad, "Search for Peace", leading into a rollicking sendoff for the live audience with a brisk rendition of "Blues on the Corner". Janeway's own compositions certainly merit wider attention. "Forward Motion" was the title track to his earlier album (also on SteepleChase). Its lively, Latin-tinged, rhythmic undercurrent, fueled by Hart's powerful drumming, inspires the pianist and bassist to fully engage. And the pianist's upbeat "K's Shuffle" showcases Hurst's hip, extended arco bass solo, leading into Janeway's bluesy piano, which Hart punctuates with gusto.

For more info visit arkivmusic.com/collections/steeplechase. The album release concert is at Mezzrow May 8. Janeway is also at Beanrunner Café (Peekskill, NY) May 30. See *Calendar and 100 Miles Out*.



mutima
Cecil McBee (Strata-East - Mack Avenue)
Music Inc.
Music Inc. (Strata-East - Mack Avenue)
 by Terrell K. Holmes

Bassist Cecil McBee, who turns 90 this month, has been an important and celebrated musician for decades, mostly as a valued sideman in bands and on recordings of other jazz greats (including saxophonists Charles Lloyd, Yusef Lateef, Pharoah Sanders and Sam Rivers). He is also central to a pair of recently reissued albums on the landmark label Strata-East, each one marking a significant debut.

By 1974, McBee was well-established when he recorded his first album as a leader, *mutima*, writing and arranging all of the songs. He plays two solos on the ambitious opener, "From Within", and from the first raga-inflected notes, the bassist creates a stunning arco dialogue that is an impassioned, lyrical *tour de force*. "Voice of the 7th Angel", though brief, bursts with

color, buoyed by the soaring vocals of the stellar Dee Dee Bridgewater, a year away from her Tony Award-winning star turn in the Broadway production of *The Wiz*. McBee's blistering pizzicato lays the foundation for the hard bop/free jazz hybrid "Life Waves". Tex Allen (trumpet), George Adams (tenor) and Alan Braufman (alto) form a fierce front line, while Onaje Allan Gumbs (piano) provides vibrant underpinnings. The title track, and "A Feeling", are each delights, with excellent playing by Adams (soprano), Art Webb (flute) and Gumbs (electric piano). "Tulsa Black" is a full-blown R&B funk dance party with robust horns, thumping percussion and an electric bass line laid down by heir apparent Cecil McBee, Jr. that lands like a string of Muhammad Ali jabs. The tune induced this writer's boogie down overbite and confirmed *mutima* as one hell of a debut.

When trumpeter Charles Tolliver and the late pianist Stanley Cowell founded Strata-East, their core principles were artistic integrity and self-reliance. The label's 1970 eponymously-titled debut release, *Music Inc.*, exemplifies their mission statement. It's not only an excellent album, but also a testament to Strata-East, as an enduring tribute to the talent, vision and determination that Tolliver and Cowell shared over their half-century long collaboration (Cowell passed away just over five years ago). While ostensibly a quartet album, with Tolliver, Cowell, McBee and drummer Jimmy Hopps, it's actually a swinging big band jaunt (with woodwind players Clifford Jordan and Jimmy Heath; trombonists Curtis Fuller, Dick Griffin, Garnett Brown and John Gordon; trumpeters Richard Williams and Virgil Jones; tubist/baritone saxophonist Howard Johnson, et al.), with Tolliver and Cowell sharing the composing and arranging. Tolliver soars above the Latin rhythm of "Ruthie's

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- **Dave Douglas Gifts Quintet – Transcend (Greenleaf Music)**
- **Champion Fulton, et al. – Flying High: Still Soaring (Jazz at the Ballroom/Songbook Ink)**
- **Michael Formanek – New Digs (Intakt)**
- **Pierre Favre Trio – Bird Food (Blaser Music)**
- **Bill Frisell – In My Dreams (Blue Note)**
- **Colin Hinton – Three Suites (Endectomorph Music)**
- **Gregory Hutchinson – Kind of Now: The Pulse of Miles Davis (Warner Music)**
- **Jon Irabagon/Dan Oestreicher – Saturday's Child (Irrabagast)**
- **DoYeon Kim – Wellspring (TAO Forms)**
- **Alexis Marcelo – Solo Piano (Intakt)**
- **Jason Miles – 100 Miles for Miles Davis (s/r)**
- **Liudas Mockūnas, Samuel Blaser, Marc Ducret – Twisted Summer (Jersika)**
- **Art Pepper – Everything Happens to Me (1959 - Live at The Cellar) (Widow's Taste-Omnivore)**
- **Scott Robinson – Call of the Tarogato (Circumplex)**
- **Ted Rosenthal – Trio in 4 Acts: The Good Old Days (TMR)**
- **Maria Schneider Orchestra – American Crow (ArtistShare)**
- **Nate Wooley's Columbia Icefield – A Silence Opens (Out Of Your Head)**
- **Min Xiao-Fen/Julian Kytasty – Boundless (Anderson Audio)**
- **Sam Yahel – Quiet Flow (La Reserve)**