

name from the architectural practice of reinforcing a beam with parallel timbers to repair or strengthen it, a fitting metaphor, given the quartet reflects on life, loss, resilience and renewal: they fortify one another. Across the album, jazz phrasing merges seamlessly with gospel, folk and ballad traditions, with two originals from each singer, plus two collaborations and one jazz standard. The project is additionally grounded by its excellent rhythm section: Miki Hayama (piano, organ), Keith Ganz (guitar), John Brown (bass) and Kobie Watkins (drums). The arrangements are notably generous, keeping the lyrics central while allowing the instrumentalists ample space to shine.

Album opener, "River Song" sets a luminous tone. Hayama's piano introduction paves the way for the four singers to enter in unhurried succession. While each voice retains its distinct color, the ensemble eventually falls into a single, shimmering texture, mirroring the lyrics' theme of shining in each other's love. Another album highlight is Zenzalai Helm's "Combat Boots and Glass Slippers", which balances intricate harmonies with a buoyant, infectious groove. The collectively composed "Origins" creates a spacious, multiverse-like choral texture, punctuated by atmospheric, instrumental interludes. Freelon's evocative contribution, "A Brother Just Like You", is deepened by the soulful alto saxophone playing of Dexter Moses and the warm trombone lines of Robert Trowers. A haunting centerpiece, "Dying Season" features Deloatch's rich contralto. Its somber, faded closing leaves a resonance that lingers long after its final note. The ensemble's spirited, swinging take on the standard "It Had to Be You" (Isham Jones, Gus Kahn) proves that even within a traditional framework, the collective finds a fresh, invigorated voice.

This synergy was brought to life at the group's recent appearance at Carnegie Hall's Stern Auditorium (Apr. 1), where they performed four tracks from the album, followed by a newly-composed, intoning hymn, titled "1000 Grandmothers". Accompanied by The Tribe Jazz Orchestra and several university vocal jazz ensembles, the quartet translated the album's intimate "sistering" into a massive, orchestral celebration, met with a rapturous response from the NYC audience.

For more info visit sisteringproject.com



Flying High: Still Soaring (A Tribute to the Voices That Taught the World to Swing)
Various (Jazz at the Ballroom/Songbook Ink)
by Marilyn Lester

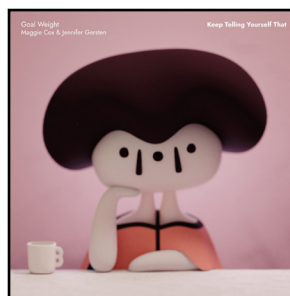
In 2024, *Flying High: Big Band Canaries Who Soared*, a project birthed at the nonprofit San Francisco venue, Jazz at the Ballroom, honored the legacy of "canaries"—the female vocalists who gained prominence singing with major big bands during the '40s. This year, the follow-up, *Flying High: Still Soaring* put the focus on the livelihoods these "canaries" developed after leaving the big band spotlight for solo careers. Produced by Jazz at the Ballroom's Executive Director, Suzanne Waldowski, with music director-pianist-vocalist, Champion Fulton, the final product features ten tracks with a lineup of Bria Skonberg, Tahira Clayton, Carmen Bradford and Nicole Zuraitis, supported instrumentally by Klas Lindquist (alto, clarinet), Buster Williams and Neal Miner (basses), and Fukushi Tainaka and Charles Ruggiero (drums).

While the playing is consistently top-notch, the vocal outcome is a mixed bag.

Fulton, always in excellent form, deserves special credit for including "Just For a Thrill" (Lil Hardin Armstrong, Don Raye), a torchy blues in which she amps up the been-done-wrong factor and rolls out some creative piano ideas in a feature that marks out the story arc. And why special credit? Because Lil Hardin (1898-1971), whose musical significance is now mostly sidelined, was a major artist, composer and leader in her day; she was also Louis Armstrong's second wife, who launched his career. On "If Dreams Come True" (Edgar Sampson, Benny Goodman), Fulton supports Lindquist in a swinging instrumental rendition replete with crisp alto voicings. Another under-appreciated standard is the torcher, "Goodmorning Heartache" (Irene Higginbotham, Ervin Drake), but sung by Clayton without emotional depth. Likewise, Bradford interprets Bernice Petkere, Joe Young's "Lullaby of the Leaves" from a lament into a swinger with jarring vocal tricks. Trumpeter-vocalist Skonberg sings and plays neatly on "It's Been a Long, Long Time" (Jule Styne, Sammy Cahn), featuring a magnificent, melodic bass feature by Williams. Ending the album is "Sentimental Journey" (Les Brown, Ben Homer, Bud Green) via a quirky yet powerful swing-blues by Zuraitis.

The project has been touring, led by Fulton and Lindquist, appearing at Birdland Theater for three nights last month with Miner (bass) and Ruggiero (drums). On their opening night (Mar. 27), the ensemble book-ended two young vocalists—Laura Anglade and Imani Rousselle—with a collection of jazz favorites, including many from the album. Anglade offered a credible "Secret Love" (Sammy Fain, Paul Francis Webster) and tried her hand at scat on "Manhattan" (Richard Rodgers, Lorenz Hart). More confident in her presentation, if overly enthusiastic, Rousselle was too chirpy with "Good Morning Heartache", but fell into a more effective groove with "Social Call" (Gigi Gryce, Jon Hendricks). A highlight came with Lindquist's feature of a gorgeous, melodic tune written by fellow Swede Alice Babs for husband Nils Ivar Sjöblom. Hugely talented, Lindquist's alto saxophone tone will surely make fans of Johnny Hodges sit up and take notice. Closing out the Birdland set was a full cast swinger of Duke Ellington's "It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)".

For more info visit jazzattheballroom.com/flying-high-2026



Keep Telling Yourself That Goal Weight (Maggie Cox/Jennifer Gersten)
(Relative Pitch)
by Ariella Stok

Goal Weight, the duo of Maggie Cox (bass) and Jennifer Gersten (violin), works close to the seam where instrumental identity begins to fray. Both are classically trained with experience playing in orchestral contexts—they met as fellows at Tanglewood in 2021—but on *Keep Telling Yourself That*, their debut, that virtuosity functions towards bending, breaking and pushing towards the formation of a new shared language, proceeding as a study in contact.

In the album opener "Candy Doll Bluff", what reads at first as rhythm—rattling figures, clipped pulses—turns out to be the sound of impact: strings struck, surfaces activated, the instrument treated

as a small percussion kit. Pitch is there, but arrives as residue. On the album's two 10+ minute tracks, "Brian 1" and "Your New Uncle", the duo extends this logic, worrying at the materials, winding and unwinding tension, until the music settles into a kind of suspended attention. Midway through "Your New Uncle", the sound thins to a breath: bow noise, near-silence, the sense of air moving across something fragile. Elsewhere, as on "Who's Who When the Alarm Sounds", a low drone gathers mass and menace, approaching the timbral blur of a wind instrument before breaking under percussive blows. The final pair, "Pyrex Messiah" and "Good Things Come to Those Who Wait", admit more conventional tone—melodic fragments, a softening of attack—as if to remind the listener what has been withheld.

Heard live at Lower East Side boîte Tawny, those same concerns register as visible, physical acts. In their first set, as a duo, Cox and Gersten played at the edge of audibility. The bass produced groans and low, patient drones, while the violin moved in quick, skittering lines on top, before easing into a loose, almost rhythmic exchange. Their sounds met, forming a small weather system of sighs and swells. Extended techniques that read as mysterious abstraction on record came to life—bowing below the bridge, pressing into the string until it splintered into tremolo, harmonic slides. For the second set they were joined by Webb Crawford, whose guitar introduced a third current—buzzing, scraping, slightly abrasive—opening the music outward and suggesting its elasticity by how easily it absorbed another presence. What the album proposes in detail, the performance tested in air: a music of surfaces, where sound is not given but made, and remade, under the hand.

For more info visit relativepitchrecords.bandcamp.com

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