



Blue Fire: The Van Gelder Session
Dave Stryker (Strikezone)
 by George Kanzler

The heyday of popularity for (Hammond B3) organ trios is now a half century old and many of those trios were with drums and guitar. Some prime examples: Jimmy Smith, from his 1956 leader debut, prolifically recorded in the format throughout his career—featuring guitarists Thornel Schwartz, Eddie McFadden, Quentin Warren, Kenny Burrell and Grant Green; organist Jack McDuff's early '60s ensemble with guitarist George Benson (in his pre-vocalist days) plus various other stripped-down organ threesomes, such as those led by Charles Earland and Larry Young. Many were recorded at Rudy Van Gelder's chapel-like, domed-ceiling recording studio in Englewood Cliffs, N.J., which is exactly where guitarist Dave Stryker fulfilled a dream of his with *Blue Fire: The Van Gelder Session*, making this album by his organ trio, a band he's led for two decades.

The trio's organist, Jared Gold, is firmly in the tradition of past, early B3 groove masters and the organ's decades of ascendancy since. He commands solid bass lines and tends to solo in the resonant

middle and even lower registers of his instrument. Drummer McClelleny Hunter also knows how to lay down a groove and apply an infectious backbeat. Four of the nine tracks are originals by Stryker, with one by Gold; the four others include two from the golden American standards book: "The Folks Who Live on the Hill" and "Summer Night", as well as a Latin rhythm-tinged version of The Beatles' "The Fool on the Hill". The last standard is a bebop "rhythm changes" classic in Charlie Parker's "Dexterity".

Stryker's full-toned, muscular guitar is front and center on most of the tracks, laying down the tune and soloing with deep fluidity. He and his cohorts are in the pocket on the opener, his "Van Gelder's Place", a backbeat blues that conjures up the spirit of the chitlin' circuit that once thrived in urban centers, often with bands featuring the B3 and a guitar. In contrast, the title cut features a theme comprised of scale runs evocative of lightning bolts over racy broken rhythms, with impressively swift lines in the guitarist's quicksilver solo. Another original by the leader, "Waiting for Ruby" (a ballad worthy of being a future standard) reveals the leader at his most lyrical and emotionally moving.

In his liner notes, Stryker avers his trio "captured some of the magic" in the fabled Van Gelder studio, and undoubtedly they did—in addition to having captured the essence and appeal of organ trios from previous generations.

For more info visit strikezonerecords.com. Stryker is at *Birds* May 1, *The Django* May 16 and *Midnight Blue* May 30. He is also at *Shanghai Jazz* (Madison, NJ) May 8, *Ross Farm Jazz Festival* (Basking Ridge, NJ) May 9 and *La Zingara* (Bethel, CT) May 13. See *Calendar* and *100 Miles Out*.



Songs from the Poetry Box
Steve Swell & Ellen Christi (The Bodily Press)
 by John Pietaro

Steve Swell may just be the hardest working trombonist in new music. He's surely one of the most innovative. With performances throughout NYC and around the globe, and scores of recording credits, Swell has been a free-jazz icon for decades. But with this release, *Songs from the Poetry Box*, he's added a whole other designation to a still-growing resume.

Partnering with vocalist-producer Ellen Christi, another long-time reference point within New York's jazz avant garde, Swell gathered dozens of poems he'd been writing and storing in an old 45 RPM carrying case, christened "the poetry box." While the concept of Swell-as-poet hasn't been a total secret, the extent of his work in this area surely has. Swell and Christi reviewed the array and devised a plan to bring his verses to the foreground. Through layering, Christi grounds the poet's spoken word in varying nests of sound design and instrumental tracking wherein Swell's trombone, occasional pocket trumpet and rubber gloves (yes), roam aerial alongside his musical partner's celebrated vocalizations. Her history of engineering and production began with tutelage in

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