

Rome over a ten-year stretch in which the vocalist lived abroad, relocating back downtown, duly armed with technical mastery to pair engineering with arrangement and a bit of John Cage-ian mysticism. *The Poetry Box* captures this PLUS, on selected tracks: William Parker (bass), Sam Newsome (soprano), AJ Federico (guitar), and the spiritual contributions of late great Roy Campbell (trumpet) and Tom Bruno (drums).

Opener “The Human Condition”, wonderfully outspoken, cites human frailty and the resultant manipulation of the power class, as well as rebellious arts in the face of repression: *The slime and stench of the greed and the/tangled reasoning that makes it good and holy/standing on truths that only Hollywood could convince you exist...Here’s the shattered edge that fueled free jazz back when. In a time when too many see mere inference as “boldness,” Swell and Christi speak fearlessly. The latter’s electronic music, here and among other cuts, is icy, brittle, stinging, like late capitalism itself. “Caution Voyager”, seemingly inspired by Walt Whitman’s “The Untold Want” (Now voyager sail thou forth to seek and find), a call to artists if ever there was, and “Estuaries”, beautifully matches Swell’s trombone with his spoken baritone. And once Newsome’s soprano joins the fray, a backdrop of collective improvisation brings lyrical radicalism into New Thing heritage. A central work, “Poets of the Now” speaks of urban decay and class prejudice as well as the force of the present moment. Christi’s floating soprano voice forges a journey aesthetically beautiful even within poetic harshness. Other highlights include the moving biographical sketch, “The View from 1962, a True Story”, which speaks strongly of racial segregation and its fallout on children. And with “Astonishments”, Swell’s poetry*

and Parker’s insistent arco bass recount the downtown urgency that forged this music.

For more info visit bodilypress.com. *Swell* is at *The Stone at The New School* May 1 (part of a *Connie Crothers* tribute). *Christi* is at *Downtown Music Gallery* May 12 (with *patrick brennan*). See *Calendar*.



Baltimore Jazz Collective
Baltimore Jazz Collective (Stricker Street)
 by Scott Yanow

The Baltimore Jazz Collective—a sextet comprised of Sean Jones (trumpet), Todd Marcus (bass clarinet), Alex Brown (piano), Kris Funn (bass) and Quincy Phillips (drums), with tap dancer and occasional vocalist, Brinae Ali—was formed as a celebration of Baltimore’s jazz legacy: all of the songs performed on their debut recording are by Baltimore-based musicians. While Eubie Blake, Baby Laurence and Gary Bartz are represented, the catch is that most of the numbers on this release are actually by the group’s current members.

Jones emerges immediately as the band’s star, and every solo that he takes on this set, particularly on “Red-Lined”, can be considered spectacular. Marcus is a bit underutilized, only having a few spots outside of

the ensembles. Brown’s McCoy Tyner-inspired piano playing is a strong asset, as is the rhythmic support of Funn and Phillips. Ali is a bit of a wild card: her breaks as a tap dancer add to the music’s excitement and variety, while her singing/spoken word interludes are less memorable.

The set begins with “Minor Swing” (no relation to the Django Reinhardt piece of the same name), a lightly funky groove piece by pianist Cyrus Chestnut. “Red-Lined” is divided into three parts, including an opening drum solo and a closing vamp for Brown to solo over. The mysterious atmosphere of “Watermelon” utilizes Ali’s voice in the ensemble, and features the two horn players interacting with each other, while Marcus’ “Link to Lateef” is a complex but hard-swinging tune featuring rapid unison lines by the horns. Adding “Memories of You” (Eubie Blake) to the set is a nice touch, but it’s unfortunate that Sean Jones’ arrangement modernized the chord changes, taking away much of the song’s beauty. Ali is featured with her tapping and singing/speaking on “Sunday at Eubie’s”, “For Baby” and a throwaway, “The Thong Song”. The set concludes with the melancholy and episodic ballad “Fleeting Stillness”, a four-song, five-minute medley of Bartz tunes (all played with infectious and funky rhythms), the modal jazz waltz “Intercession” and an exuberant “Dance My Pain Away”.

All in all, *Baltimore Jazz Collective* is a bit of a mixed bag but with enough bright moments to be a worthwhile listen. The future direction of this promising group, with nominal leader Jones, should be well worth following.

For more info visit baltimorejazzcollective.hearnow.com. *Sean Jones* is at *Carnegie Hall’s Resnick Education Wing* May 2. See *Calendar*.



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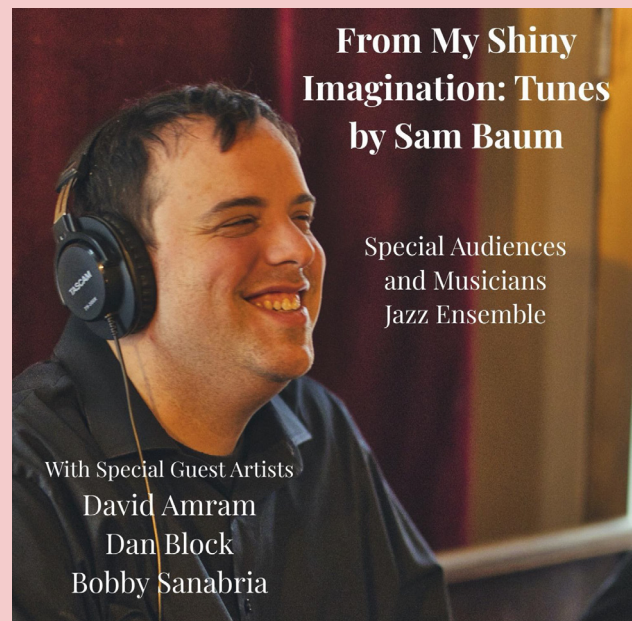
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