

ON SCREEN



Trap Jazz
Sadé Clacken Joseph (Jammcard Films)
by Paul Gaita

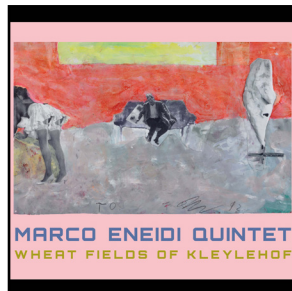
Director Sadé Clacken Joseph's documentary *Trap Jazz* serves as both an introduction to and an exploration of a new fusion of genres: jazz and trap music. Trap jazz is a decade-old style of hip-hop that hails from the American South and borrows its moniker from "trap house," a slang term for a location where illicit drugs are sold. On paper, the two forms might seem worlds apart, but as Joseph and her subjects illustrate, jazz and trap are built on similar foundations—shifting time signatures, complex rhythms and atmospheric sonic structures. Their union in trap jazz provides not only new directions for both genres to explore, but also a sense of purpose and support for its proponents.

Divided into three sections, *Trap Jazz* (with guests including Quincy Jones, Chief Xian aTunde Adjuah, Lalah Hathaway and Big Boi) is rooted in the perspective of the form's founders, including Atlanta-based musicians Chris Moten, Joshua "Cassius Jay" Cross and Devon "Stixx" Taylor. As with all inventions, trap jazz is born out of a number of inspirations: their own musical backgrounds, which began in church and expanded to intensive training in jazz, and a creative drive, which needs an outlet beyond the limits of their professional lives as performers, arrangers and producers. Their environment is also a factor: trap music, as we come to learn, is more than an offshoot of the drug trade, and has evolved over time to provide a metaphor-by-way-of-soundtrack for the struggle faced by Black neighborhoods saddled with poverty, discrimination and neglect.

As Joseph rightly points out, that sounds more than a bit like the crucible in which jazz was forged—blues and gospel, both shaped by the suffering wrought by slavery. Those shared origins prove crucial in the trio linking jazz and trap in 2015, and the results are more than just instrumentation over beats (that's been done before, with varying results). The fusion here is a natural fit, as Moten illustrates by mixing "Take the 'A' Train" with trap production. Purists may argue otherwise, but the pairing sounds fresh and innovative while honoring the respective sources.

Much of *Trap Jazz* is devoted to the development of the sound, though it also delves into the personal lives of the main proponents. This twin focus coalesces around Moten, whose deep connection with his father (also a musician) is burdened with issues of separation due to his incarceration. Here, Joseph shows, with considerable emotion, how music can rebuild and inspire, as father and son find connection through playing together. The reunion is affecting and heartening, much like the film itself.

For more info visit site.jammcard.com. *Trap Jazz* is streaming on Hulu. *Trap Music Orchestra* is at The Jazz Gallery May 13. See Calendar.



Wheat Fields of Kleylehof
Marco Eneidi Quintet
(Balance Point Acoustics/Botticelli)
by Bill Meyer

Nothing was ever easy for Marco Eneidi. The alto saxophonist worked with the best (Cecil Taylor, Jimmy Lyons, William Parker, Peter Kowald), but he always scuffled, moving from Oakland, CA, to NYC, to Vienna, Austria to Cuernavaca, Mexico, where he died ten years ago this month at the too-young age of 59. But to know him was to deeply appreciate both his music and spirit. This recording, *Wheat Fields of Kleylehof*—made in 2004 but not released until last year—is evidence of that. The album's cover painting is by Franz West, an Austrian art dealer who helped him out for a spell. William Parker contributed a poem of remembrance, and the album was recorded, mixed, mastered and released by musicians Scott R. Looney, Weasel Walter and (Balance Point Acoustics founder) Damon Smith, who spent time on the Bay area scene that Eneidi nurtured, sometimes in his company.

The album's title is a tip of the hat to Nickelsdorf, an Austrian town that was an oasis in Eneidi's personal desert. The quintet—Darren Johnston (trumpet), John Finkbeiner (guitar), Damon Smith (bass) and Vijay Anderson (drums)—features people who worked with him individually quite a bit, but seem to have played in this particular configuration only once. Here, they convened to play a set-long suite of contrasting themes and moods. The leader's playing is quick and fluent, with a harsh edge to his tone that easily cuts through the action. You can spot glimpses of his inspirations—from Charlie Parker to Ornette Coleman, Marshall Allen, and, of course, Lyons—though he never emulates their methods.

Eneidi's themes are structured but open, giving his musicians plenty of room to express themselves in singular ways while fueling the intensity that was his calling card. Anderson is as persuasive sustaining a battering barrage in his opening duet with Eneidi as he is sculpting barely-there contours with cymbals during the album's quieter moments. Johnston uses more extended technique than he does now, growling and puckering, but also laying out the music's melodic contours with bold, punchy lines. Finkbeiner likewise shifts between vinegary stutters and smudged colors, and Smith is a vortex of looming, boiling sound. Everyone rises to the challenge laid down by Eneidi's sizzling presence.

For more info visit balancepointacoustics.bandcamp.com



Looking for Consonance
GEORGE (Out Of Your Head)
by Brad Cohan

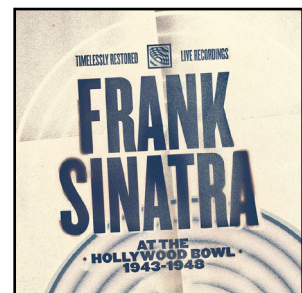
The wall-to-wall percussive wizardry John Hollenbeck has demonstrated over two-plus decades on recordings—

leading The Claudia Quintet, his Large Ensemble and NDR Big Band, among other projects—stirs with dizzying intricacies, mutating forms and structures, melodic expression and rapid-fire energy. Very few jazz drummer-composers have the momentum-pushing presence he does: listening to his gripping and seemingly effortless dominance behind the kit is truly a joy to take in—and he executes it without an overbearing touch or stepping on the toes of his bandmates. That's why *Looking for Consonance*, the sophomore effort by GEORGE, Hollenbeck's adventurous newish group, is so apropos: 'Consonance' is defined as "the harmony or agreement of sounds produced simultaneously, resulting in a pleasing and stable auditory experience." Hollenbeck might beg to differ with some aspects of that definition (as per the album's liner notes and his dissection of the word), but considering the exceptional interplay and rapport he shares with his GEORGE bandmates—Anna Webber (tenor, flutes) and Sarah Rossy and Chiquita Magic (voices, synthesizers)—he needn't look any further for consonance; it's all there in copious amounts.

As the band's second recording, their new album may feature a slightly altered lineup that debuted on 2023's superb *Letters to George* (saxophonist and vocalist Aurora Nealand is no longer with the group), but it's just as electrifying, if not more so, with Rossy now in the mix. The two-pronged synthesizer punch of Rossy and Magic sends Hollenbeck's compositions to cosmic heights that bring a futuristic and celebratory Sun Ra vibe to them. On the riveting "bounce", their sun-kissed and kaleidoscopic synth splatterings—coupled with angelic oohs and ahhs, growls and cries—sets an upbeat and catchy tone (Hollenbeck is on fire with hard-charging ferocity) that carries throughout the entire, ebullient piece. On the next tune, "Lewis (dedicated to George Lewis)", the leader switches gears with ease as he lays out angular funk grooves while Webber's flute playing goes toe-to-toe with his hectic beats. The sci-fi funk attack continues on the blazing hot "George and Dee (dedicated to George and Dee Gamble)", while on the intense "Norma (in support of reproductive autonomy)", Hollenbeck unleashes face-melting flurries of heroic drum salvos amid exquisite wordless vocals and Webber's melodic saxophone lines.

On *Looking for Consonance*, Hollenbeck's GEORGE is on a whole other level of harmony, sonics and monster beats.

For more info visit outfyourheadrecords.com. The album release concert is at Public Records May 3 (part of Long Play Festival). See Calendar.



At the Hollywood Bowl (1943-1948)
Frank Sinatra (SING Inc.)
by Marilyn Lester

Can there be such a thing as too much Frank Sinatra? The singer-actor had a massive career; at his passing in 1998 his discography included 59 studio albums and 297 singles, plus compilation albums, soundtrack recordings and boxed sets. *At the Hollywood Bowl (1943-1948)* adds to that tally, featuring live performances from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences Academy Night (August 4, 1945), the Music for the Wounded Benefit Concert (August 8, 1948) and the Hollywood Bowl concert of August 14, 1943. The release, with liner notes by Sinatra historian Chuck Granata,

offers 18 tracks on CD and 11 on vinyl—all recorded during Sinatra's tenure with Columbia Records. Per the style of the day, the music is muscularly orchestral and over-the-top schmaltzy—difficult for even Sinatra to penetrate with emotional depth. But the extensive audio restoration is unquestionably magnificent.

Five ballads from the Academy Award show include "Ol' Man River" (Jerome Kern, Oscar Hammerstein II) from 1927's *Showboat*. The audience of the day most likely would have been aware of the original singers: operatic baritone Jules Bledsoe (Broadway) and Paul Robeson (West End) who delivered deeply evocative readings of this profound song. Yet, the Caucasian guy from Jersey wondrously managed to dig into the lyric and pull out its aching essence. But on 1945's ironic tune from *Carousel*, "If I Loved You" (Richard Rodgers, Hammerstein), Sinatra's rendering is likeably smooth, but *sans* emotional heft. Three tunes are drawn from Music for the Wounded Benefit Concert and among them is another from *Carousel*, a gut-wrencher, "Soliloquy". Sinatra's vocal prowess shines, but again, the interpretive master that he would become is in the wings. He does let the treacle work for him on a shortened version of the romantic "Time After Time" (Jule Styne, Sammy Cahn), which the budding actor introduced in the 1947 film *It Happened in Brooklyn*. The 1943 concert also features "Ol' Man River" plus six other crowd-pleasers from the usual suspects, such as the Gershwins and Cole Porter. "All or Nothing at All" (Arthur Altman, Jack Lawrence) opens a window to the intensity Sinatra later demonstrated on 1955's *In the Wee Small Hours*. "She's Funny That Way" honors the under-served lyricist Richard Whiting in a sweet reading of a love letter to his wife set to music by Neil Moret.

At the Hollywood Bowl is a worthy project for historians and fans alike. Bits of Sinatra speaking are fun, but most of all, the release documents the essence of the singer and legendary performer he was to become.

For more info visit shopsingmarket.com. Tributes this month include "Strictly Sinatra!" (with Jazz Loft Big Band, Tom Manuel, Pete Caldera) May 1-2 at The Jazz Loft (Stony Brook, NY), "Sinatra with Style" (with Richard Cortez) at Birdland May 17, "Tribute to Frank Sinatra" (with Misha Piatigorsky) at Adèleide's Salon May 29 and "Not Just Sinatra" at The Cutting Room (with Steven Maglio Big Band Orchestra) May 31. See Calendar and 100 Miles Out.



Jason Moran Plays Duke Ellington
Jason Moran (Yes)
by Fred Bouchard

While many of us praise and may try to emulate our idols, Jason Moran does so in word and deed for Thelonious Monk, Fats Waller (the unabashedly glitzy *All Rise*), James Reese Europe—and notably, recently, Duke Ellington.

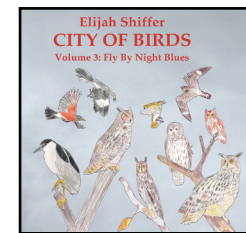
Going solo, he crafts a masterclass, starting jauntily, and then disruptively crashes the abyss of singularity, closing with deeply respectful, hallowed, ruminative ballads. With this release of *Jason Moran Plays Duke Ellington*, Moran himself explains his thinking and his process: "Ellington has long been the most important pianist because he mapped the world with his hands. Not simply the geographic, but the emotional landscapes... We [artists] never tire of painting the mountains. And

for years, I stared at this mountain, knowing that this mountain inspired Monk, and many others, to attack the piano to create a dream. And like any trail on the mountain, [it's] nice to take the same trail because there is always something new to discover. This batch of songs remains my essential trail mix."

"I Got It Bad (And That Ain't Good)" starts our uphill trek in a jaunty, mixed-meter, stutter-stepping *habañera*. "Sophisticated Lady" finds our girl seductively tricked-out, mascara hidden behind a two-note bass ostinato, until waves of electronica finally reveal her bridge. "Melancholia" calmly lays out key phrases in gentle sustained swirls and calls on Duke's skittering downward glissandi. An early composition, "Black and Tan Fantasy" (1927), turns from ominous march to bluesy strut, and into an agonizing (13-minute) galactic cataclysm: avalanche with chimes or an Ives-ian black hole? For "Reflections in D", Moran points out that Duke's warmly nostalgic memorial to his late mother also serves as his own tribute. We enjoy sprightly, if unsettling, overlooks along our climb: Moran's own "Means" and Ellington's "Jeep's Blues" tribute for his altoist Johnny Hodges. When a lone medley of a ditty shuffle ditty, "Wig Wise", explodes in a pixillated *altissimo* starburst, we're relieved by the pianist's own laid-back James P. Johnson-like barrelhouse blues. Coming down, we peacefully, gratefully, observe breathtaking alpine flora: "Fleur de France", "Single Petal of a Rose" and Billy Strayhorn's "Lotus Blossom", notably played by Duke as a eulogy on *And His Mother Called Him Bill* (1967). As we return to base camp, we contemplate a ray of hope: "I Like The Sunrise", originally written for and sung by Al Hibbler on the 1946 *Liberian Suite* album.

Moran's truthy, toothsome, chili-spiked handfuls energize and cheer us along Duke's (and life's) long, winding trails.

For more info visit yesrecords.bigcartel.com. Moran is at Roulette May 1 with *BlankFor.ms* (part of Long Play Festival) and is being honored with a "Trailblazer Award" at The Jazz Gallery Gala at Cosmopolitan Club May 18. See Calendar.



City of Birds Volume 3: Fly By Night Blues
Elijah Shiffer (Star Jelly)



Callithumpian
Elijah Shiffer and the Robber Crabs (Star Jelly)
by Mike Shanley

While most alto saxophonists have a devotion to Bird (Charlie Parker), Elijah Shiffer is fascinated by *birds*, our feathered friends that lay claim to an equally unique musical vocabulary. In 2023 and 2025, Shiffer released two volumes of original compositions based on the melodic songs and behaviors of the creatures he has witnessed as a bird watcher.

City of Birds Volume 3: Fly By Night Blues continues with the same chordless quartet—Shiffer (alto), Kevin Sun (tenor), Dmitry Ishenko (bass), Colin Hinton (drums)—along with three duets with Bruce Acosta (guitar), with Shiffer switching from alto to clarinet on two of them. The leader's writing, coupled with the quartet's expressive performance, is less like an esoteric idea than an articulate dive into his subject matter. In his liner notes, Shiffer cites the bird that inspires each track, along with some context. So it's no coincidence that "Who Hoots for Toot?" evokes Thelonious Monk, since the barred owl's clipped call resembles the pianist's "Brake's Sake" (the title also tips a hat to drummer-son T.S. Monk). "I Know I'll

Find Her Soon" divides male and female great horned owls between Shiffer and Sun, each in different keys, creating an exchange of ideas that feels harmonically rich. "Mock Nocturne" begins almost as a ballad, but Shiffer shatters the mood by continually jumping on the end of Sun's phrases. Here, Ishenko and Hinton yearn to move into free territory; throughout the set, their energy keeps these unique melodies in the pocket. A nuanced set of beats ignites the title track, which deftly puts an ovenbird's tune to a boppish groove.

Shiffer has also released a digital-only live album, *Callithumpian*, with the Robber Crabs, a band that combines 1910-20s jazz styles with the aggression of no wave. While both of those divergent touchstones might be felt during the 11 tracks, anyone yearning for the more lucid compositions of John Zorn's Naked City will enjoy the way "Mustang Mascot" jumps from jagged theme to lopsided noisy funk, or the way "Tentacle Mind" begins pensively only to get manic, led in both situations by Shiffer's brawny alto and Christian Cail's spastic mash of skronk and technique on guitar. Hinton is a carryover from the prior album and also plays drums in this project, with Max Kutner handling electric bass. A reading of Conlon Nancarrow's "Player Piano Study 3A" maintains the same wild spirit as the band's originals. The one misfire comes with vocalist Maya Luz' "Manicures and Mood Swings", a collection of vapid, unfunny, overheard comments read over a shuffle beat. Her original "My Thrill", on the other hand, is a dramatic ballad that builds dynamically as the band floats out of tempo around her.

For more info visit elijahshiffer.bandcamp.com. Shiffer's *City of Birds* album release concert is at Brothers Wash & Dry May 9. Shiffer and the Robber Crabs album release concert is at Bar Jade May 21. See Calendar.



Bruce Gertz Quintet live
at Shapeshifter Lab

(837 Union St., Brooklyn)

MONDAY, MAY 4 (7 PM)

with Sheryl Bailey (guitar), Rick DiMuzio (tenor), Gilson Schachnik (piano), Gary Fieldman (drums)

Professor of Bass at Berklee College of Music since 1976, Gertz (who has written six books and is a contributing editor to *Bass World* magazine) has performed and worked with Count Basie, Cab Calloway, Dave Brubeck, Gary Burton, John Abercrombie, Bill Frisell, Gil Evans, Jon Hendricks, Jerry Bergonzi, Joe Lovano, George Garzone, Mike Stern, Larry Coryell and Danilo Pérez, in addition to leading his own groups.



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