

# IN PRINT



**Der KühnFaktor. Frei + Unabhängig: No Limits im Jazz**  
Joachim Kühn, Michael Brüning (Alfred Music)  
by Anna Steegmann

In *Der KühnFaktor. Frei + Unabhängig: No Limits im Jazz* (*The Kühn Factor. Free and Independent: No Limits in Jazz*), legendary jazz pianist Joachim Kühn delivers a memoir that mirrors musical improvisation. Non-linear in structure, the narrative progresses through episodic flashbacks, digressions and leaps of thought. Co-authored with Michael Brüning and released on the occasion of Kühn's 80th birthday, the volume serves as both a primary source for the history of European free jazz and a candid self-portrait of an artist who has remained remarkably consistent in his defiance of genre. If there is one word that defines Joachim Kühn, it is restlessness.

Born in the East German city of Leipzig in 1944 to a father who was a circus acrobat and a Jewish mother who gave birth in secret during one of the frequent, often incendiary, Allied bombing raids, Kühn's early life was marked by the political repression of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) under the yoke of the Soviet Bloc, as well as a self-imposed, rigorous discipline of ten-hour daily practice sessions. Influenced by his older brother, acclaimed clarinetist Rolf Kühn (1929-2022), he fell in love with jazz at an early age. He formed a trio in 1964 and is credited with introducing free jazz, then considered "American, imperialist music," in the GDR. Readers get a fascinating look at the high stakes of avant garde expression behind the Iron Curtain. His subsequent defection via Vienna in 1966 was a pivotal moment, allowing him to join his brother and launch an international career.

Kühn portrays his evolution as a musician with an eye toward the role luck has played in his journey. He has performed across Europe, the US, Asia and Australia, never losing his uncompromising approach to improvisation. Whether playing in duos, trios, quintets or as a sideman, he has collaborated with legendary American musicians such as Ornette Coleman, Don Cherry, Slide Hampton, Jimmy Garrison and Archie Shepp, as well as fellow Europeans Karl Berger, Albert Mangelsdorff, Aldo Romano, Michel Portal, John Surman, Martial Solal, brother Rolf and many others. He documents his turn to electronic keyboards, his signature "Diminished Augmented System," and his entry into the West Coast fusion scene. The book includes a comprehensive index, a rich collection of photographs and images of paintings by Kühn and drummer, painter Daniel Humair who originally inspired the pianist to additionally become a visual artist. Tributes from 60 prominent musicians, producers and journalists are also included.

Currently available only in German, *Der KühnFaktor* is essential for anyone interested in learning about an uncompromising creative life. Above all, it is a wonderful tribute to a major artist who recently turned 82 and remains a powerhouse of improvisation.

For more info visit [alfred.com/products/der-kuhnfaktor-00-20310g](http://alfred.com/products/der-kuhnfaktor-00-20310g)



**Here Today Gone Tomorrow**  
Paul Dunmall Quartet (RogueArt)  
by Marc Medwin

Certain musicians play their surroundings by enhancing collaboration. UK multi-instrumentalist Paul Dunmall (who turns 73 this month) consistently raises the temperature in any environment he creates, whether completely improvised or with his diverse compositions. This improvised quartet unites old and new Dunmall collaborators in music of invigorating freshness. *Here Today Gone Tomorrow's* three long tracks—the briefest at nearly 15 minutes—travel the improvisational spaceways Dunmall's been charting for nearly five decades. Drummer Mark Sanders' intricately rhythmic cymbal work and John Edwards' resonant bass pizzicato lay the groundwork for block chords from pianist Liam Noble, hitting the titular piece's flexible groove dead-center.

It is difficult to avoid witnessing shades of Mujician, Dunmall's quartet with Paul Rogers and the late Keith Tippett and Tony Levin, as the music's swing and facility converge and the heat increases. Immediately, interplay informs every level, especially the whimsical little phrases Dunmall and Noble bandy about, atoms of exchange creating micro-centers as the music weaves a hypnotic narrative. The sectional form inhabits realms of song, chamber music and atomistic interaction of the stereotypical Euro-free variety, especially in Edwards' jaw-dropping solo. The leader's switch from tenor to soprano, and his range on the instrument, is stunning, paving the way for a register-leaping solo from Noble; Sanders and Edwards slide in and out of time, as has always been their wont.

It is impossible to document in any meaningful way the various configurations into which the quartet clusters and fragments as structure morphs into form. Moments need to suffice, like the sudden and nearly humorous ending of the titular piece, or the slowly evolving moon-beam harmonies Noble conjures to begin "Speaking Silence", from which Edwards' arco emerges only to fade toward rasping obscurity. Can there be anything more beautiful than Dunmall's quietly glowing soprano as it opens "Light" amidst cymbal shimmer? Even to describe his playing is futile. He conforms to no school, and while he is a master of melody, the harmonies he implies are just as rich.

Dunmall and his quartet ride waves of tradition while never succumbing to them, and as like the album's title—all ends too quickly.

For more info visit [roguart.com/artist/paul-dunmall/266](http://roguart.com/artist/paul-dunmall/266)



**Classics Reimagined: Impromptu 2**  
**The Good Old Days**  
Ted Rosenthal Trio (TMR Music)  
by Ken Dryden

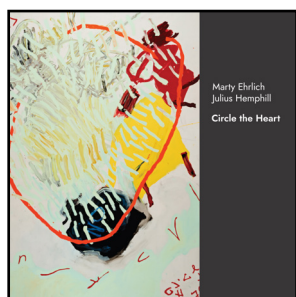
Pianist Ted Rosenthal has consistently proven himself during his long career as a pianist, bandleader, composer and arranger, in addition to his valuable

work on recordings by the likes of Gerry Mulligan, Jim Hall, Ken Peplowski, Randy Sandke and Jay Leonhart, among many others. His ambitious series *Trio in 4 Acts*, recorded in the summer of 2024, features his two trios with special guests.

The third volume in the series, *Classics Reimagined: Impromptu 2*, features his inspired arrangements of classical works, joined by Noriko Ueda (bass) and either Quincy Davis or Tim Horner (drums). Like many jazz musicians, Rosenthal has an extensive classical background and composed an opera using the text of letters written to his father by his paternal grandmother ("Dear Erich"), before she and Rosenthal's grandfather perished in the Holocaust. The pianist gives Chopin's "Waltz In C-Sharp minor" a hip samba treatment, featuring each trio member in turn. Clarinetist Ken Peplowski (1959-2026) is added for Modest Mussorgsky's "The Old Castle" (composed for the suite *Pictures at an Exhibition*). Rosenthal sticks close to the melody for the first chorus before transforming the piece into a swinging waltz, with Peplowski matching the leader's improvising skill. Violinist Sara Caswell is added for Sergei Rachmaninoff's "Vocalise" in an emotional duet with Rosenthal that conveys a sense of sorrow. Ueda and Davis join them for English Late Romantic composer Sir Edward Elgar's neglected gem "Salut D'Amour" and French Impressionist/iconoclast Erik Satie's "Je Te Veux", both of which prove fruitful for Rosenthal's quartet as they explore these timeless melodies with a modern touch.

The fourth volume of the trio series is *The Good Old Days*, featuring both of Rosenthal's working trios, with Martin Wind or Ueda (bass) and Horner or Davis (drums), in different pairings, plus Peplowski on two tracks. The pianist's bop chops are on full display with the first trio in his strident setting of "From This Moment On" (Cole Porter), while his playful setting of "Two Sleepy People" (Hoagy Carmichael) brings to mind Fats Waller's recording, minus the vocal. Rosenthal shows off his ragtime skills in his lively interpretation of Scott Joplin's timeless "Maple Street Rag", backed by Horner's light percussive touches. The full trio is on hand for a swinging, sentimental rendition of "Autumn in New York" (Vernon Duke) and Ueda and Davis join the leader for another lively swinger, the title track, a piece that has the flavor of Duke Ellington without being imitative. The virtuoso skill of the late clarinetist Peplowski, across a wide variety of styles from early jazz to modern day, is well known, and his swinging tone is a highlight on two Rosenthal compositions: "Hot Sauce" (inspired by Louis Armstrong's early hit recording "Struttin' With Some Barbecue") and the engaging calypso of "Sunny Side Up", which finds him with Rosenthal engaging in some memorable call and response, backed by the potent rhythm team of Ueda and Horner.

For more info visit [tedrosenthal.com](http://tedrosenthal.com). Rosenthal is at Mezzrow May 8-9. He also plays *The Side Door* (Old Lyme, CT) May 1 and *Jazz Forum* (Tarrytown, NY) May 22-23. See *Calendar* and *100 Miles Out*.



**Circle The Heart**  
Marty Ehrlich/Julius Hemphill (Relative Pitch)  
by John Sharpe

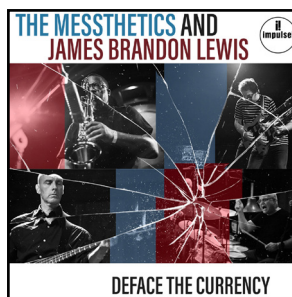
Woodwinds virtuoso Marty Ehrlich vividly remembers this 1982 concert from Worcester, MA, but he only

recently discovered a tape affirming the success of the date. *Circle The Heart* presents his sole duo performance with fellow reedman and significant inspiration, Julius Hemphill. Both grew up in St. Louis, although Hemphill had already left by the time the young Ehrlich became involved with members of the city's Black Artists Group (BAG). Ehrlich later joined, first, Hemphill's NYC-based big band, and then his (post-World Saxophone Quartet) sextet. Ehrlich believes the idea for the program to comprise his originals, apart from the encore, emanated from Hemphill. Whatever the genesis of the decision, it was a good call. Ehrlich's five tunes supply ample structural grounding for ensuing improvisation, while remaining accessible and varied. He writes contrapuntally for the most part, with unison passages and vamps used sparingly. Both men wield alto and soprano saxophones, as well as flute, with Ehrlich additionally playing bass clarinet. Their timbres converge more than expected, each favoring supple articulation, though Hemphill leans into blues tonalities while Ehrlich gravitates more towards lyricism.

The opening "Tribute" mixes an elegiac chamber vibe with light-hearted skipping digressions. In their elegance, the subsequent extemporizations could be composed. Not so the exhalations, blurts and squeaks that introduce "Pliant Plaint", before tightly coiled alto saxophone eruptions ultimately unfurl into a boppish theme. The somber title cut offers a marked shift in texture as Ehrlich pitches reiterated bass clarinet patterns against his partner's airborne flute. The piece turns more wayward still as Hemphill's vocalized overtones encourage a whinnying response. However, the highlight is the penultimate "The All Told Alto Blues", full of declamatory, swinging and playful interplay. Hemphill's "Border Town" provides the encore, alternately wistful and sprightly, and a fitting valediction.

Since Hemphill's death in 1995, Ehrlich, along with fellow altoist Tim Berne, has done much to ensure his mentor's legacy endures. Among his endeavors, the curation of the Hemphill boxed set, *The Boyé Multi-National Crusade for Harmony* (New World, 2021) stands out, but this newly-released archival release not only underscores the great reedman's talents—it constitutes a notable issue in its own right.

For more info visit [relativepitchrecords.bandcamp.com](http://relativepitchrecords.bandcamp.com). Julius Hemphill's Music for Six Saxophones led by Marty Ehrlich is at Brooklyn Music School May 3 (part of Long Play Festival). See *Calendar*.



**Deface the Currency**  
The Messthetics and James Brandon Lewis (Impulse!)  
by Ken Waxman

A left-field swivel for tenor saxophonist James Brandon Lewis, his second session with the Washington, D.C.-based The Messthetics trio could be characterized as punk-jazz, but with extemporization replacing excess. That doesn't mean *Deface the Currency* is any less combative or clamorous as a hardcore rock or jazz disc, it's just that there are more musical peaks and valleys in the presentation. The basic contrast resolved involves suturing the extended reed textures of Lewis, who leads his own tight-knit quartet in free-jazz settings, with the shattering string punches from the electric bass of Joe Lally and the aggressive back beat of Brendan Canty,

both of whom have a day job as members of the hardcore band Fugazi. Bridging the two solitudes is inventive guitarist Anthony Pirog, whose rock roots haven't stopped him from working with the likes of improvisers William Hooker and Ches Smith.

Overall, there may be a hint of where the quartet is aiming with this disc, since the final extended "Serpent Tongue (Slight Return)" has psychedelic echoes. This is especially clear when the guitarist breaks free of the prestissimo exposition that balances on shaking and shattering notes and tones to confront Lewis' widening cornucopia of honking scoops and altissimo. Pirog's burred string fingering, which inflate into twangs and the use of fuzz pedals, screams—and especially the title is reminiscent of Jimi Hendrix' 1968 blues "Voodoo Child (Slight Return)". Otherwise, while there may be interludes that touch on gutsy ballad extensions, or Pirog sneaking the occasional C&W lick into an otherwise heavier and harder exposition, foot-tapping funk far surpasses fragility or formalism. This dynamic is especially apparent on "Gestations" where sawing electric bass lines set up the theme, variations of which are soon passed back and forth between the guitarist's shaking and elastic flanges and the saxophonist's high-pitched split tones and reed slurs. As the four-part narrative intensifies, it threatens to fragment into cacophony, but finally squirms into accommodation with thick low-pitched bass stops. Above all, it's apparent that none of the players are trying or demanding any of the others attempt a watered-down version of their individual style. But it's the tension and release that's obvious as opposite textures collide, which make *Deface the Currency* so gripping.

For more info visit [impulserrecords.com](http://impulserrecords.com). The album release concert is at Le Poisson Rouge May 6. This project will also be at Tubby's (Kingston, NY) May 4 and Solar Myth (Philadelphia, PA) May 8. See *Calendar* and *100 Miles Out*.



**In The Brass Palace**  
Kurt Elling/WDR Big Band (Big Shoulders)  
by Marilyn Lester

Buckle your seat belt and be advised: the first selection on the six-track *In The Brass Palace* will fairly blow you away. Two powerful forces of music, GRAMMY-winning singer Kurt Elling and the renowned WDR Big Band, enter galactic territory with Joe Jackson's 1982 megahit, "Steppin Out". The dynamic original was jazz/vocalese-adjacent, featuring a drum machine beat and repetitive synthesizer lines. Elling recorded a mellow version on *The Gate* (Concord, 2011), but retooled for the big band, the arrangement achieves vigorous rhythmic thrust via note substitutions and a shout chorus. And there's plenty of propulsion with Elling's off-the-charts scat. On the first night (Mar. 18) of a four-day residency at Birdland, the vocalist likewise began with a banger of "Steppin Out" with the Future of Jazz Orchestra, a big band of emerging young players curated by Jazz at Lincoln Center. About that burner and his steppin' out into big band territory—Elling announced, "It's just time." Word.

In Germany's muscular WDR Big Band, conducted by saxophonist Bob Mintzer, Elling has found the perfect collaborative partner. His abilities as a scatter and a master of vocalese allow him to improvise and integrate into the unit as another instrument—of the vocal kind. Common to album and live performance

was "They Speak No Evil", which is based on Wayne Shorter's "Speak No Evil", with lyrics by Elling, adapted from Robert Pinsky's poem *The City Dark*. Opening staccato brass statements lead to a vocalese repetition of "they never speak," punctuated by further declarative vocal phrases. The WDR version delivers occasional discordance and features an assertive trombone solo by Andy Hunter. Introducing the tune at Birdland, Elling praised Shorter as the bodhisattva of jazz. It's no surprise that Elling has a background in such matters; he very nearly became an ordained minister. These days it's the gospel of jazz he preaches, in a clipped vocalese of its own sort, infused with wit, humor and positivity—and a characteristic sense of swing. Fronting the Future of Jazz Orchestra, Elling was, as ever, a high-energy, forward-looking balm for our current existential socio-political climate.

Elling included the album's melodic "Desire" (aka Thad Jones' "Forever Lasting") in the live concert. In ballad mode, his somewhat gravelly, nasal tone features vibrato, but his splendid capacity as a storyteller is front-and-center. Duke Ellington gets a bushel of Elling love on the album with "I Like the Sunrise", the opening track of 1947's *The Liberian Suite*, sung by Al Hibbler. The tune is one of the relatively few that Ellington wrote lyrics for—a highly evocative piece capturing the feel of sunrise as a beacon of hope and promise. And being Ellington, the jazz phrasing is inherent in the melodic structure, completely understood by Elling, who delivers the tune basically untouched, as a masterful jazz hymn.

*In The Brass Palace* is a stunning achievement. The doors have opened wide for King Kurt Elling.

For more info visit [kurtelling.bandcamp.com](http://kurtelling.bandcamp.com)

## Composers Concordance

### May 2026 Events

**'Animals Carnival'**  
Anne Akiko Meyers & Gene Pritsker's Sound Liberation

May 3rd, 6pm  
Joe's Pub

**SOUND LIBERATION**  
**ANIMALS CARNIVAL**

May 3rd, 6pm  
Joe's Pub

**14th Annual CompCord Festival - Comedy**

- I. Sh\*t L'stz - May 17th, @5pm - St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery
- II. Stand-up / Get Up - May 22nd, @7pm - im Kempner Fine Arts
- III. 16th Annual Comp-Play-Comp Marathon - May 24th at 5pm - Loft393
- IV. CompCord Polka Band -May 29th at 7pm - Loft393

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