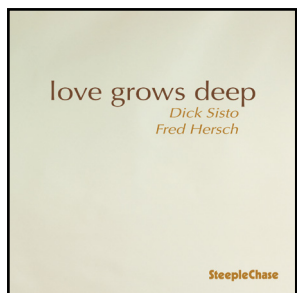


classical, and traditional African music. Guidry's 2024 follow-up *Amen* was no less ambitious, though calmer overall, as she explored her Southern roots, including gospel and spiritual/meditative music, and also incorporating spacey electronics, dreamy atmospheric, new age and classical minimalism.

On this new, self-released album, *Five Prayers*, Guidry looks inward with an ambient collection, crafted with electronics complementing her bassoon, performed mostly as solos or as duets. "Convince Me To Stay" sets the tone, starting with calm, soothing electronics, as her bassoon gracefully swoons in, gently gliding through. "You've Done What You Can" is on the same wavelength, but has a touch of melancholy to it; her playing sounds more careful and considered here, as if it's regretful, heightened by a faint background echo that tries to console, while a warm, comforting blanket of electronics appears. "Hold and Be Held" starts with shimmering, balmy electronics as a base for gentle, elongated wind tones, which are subtly, delicately complemented by harpist Elizabeth Steiner. "Myles" commences with bell-like atmospheric, in part from pianist Diego Gaeta, and whispering shades of synth sounds and distant bird calls. As it progresses, the piece includes subtle, rhythmic pulses, unique to this track and reminiscent of The Orb and Steve Roach. Nevertheless, the entire spiritual vibe here remains blissfully intact. The 16-minute "I Know You're Here With Me" isn't an epic journey so much as it is an extended meditation, along with Gaeta's pianistic input: a cloud-like mist of electronics, over which we hear Guidry's mournful bassoon, is dotted by gentle piano tones. The mood eventually turns mysterious, but there's still a transcendental vibe, though the title might provide a clue of perhaps a long-lost friend and cherishing memories.

Five Prayers is easily recommended for listeners who enjoy the soothing, spiritual music of Alice Coltrane and Laraaji.

For more info visit guidrybassoon.com. Guidry is at Park Avenue Armory Jun. 3-4. See Calendar.



Love Grows Deep
Dick Sisto/Fred Hersch (SteepleChase)
by Rachel Smith

Neither Dick Sisto nor Fred Hersch is a stranger to an intimate album. The Kentucky-based vibraphonist and NYC-based pianist, longtime friends, join forces on the recently released *Love Grows Deep*—a reissue of *Duo Live* (Ear X-Tacy)—which takes listeners back to a 2001 concert at the Kentucky Center for the Arts, and features eleven tunes (only nine of which appear on the original release).

The album immediately stands out for its instrumentation, though it's not a first for either: Sisto recorded a piano-vibraphone duo album with Kenny Werner, and Fred Hersch has played and recorded in duo with Gary Burton. The tunes here represent an admirable melding of these two musicians and their instruments. At times, the merging is so smooth that only an attentive ear can pick up which notes are played on which instrument. The opening selection, Benny Carter's "Only Trust Your Heart" immediately establishes a relationship of mutual support between the two. Neither instrument is relegated to a support capacity, and both musicians comp each other's solos lightly and thoughtfully. The solos are so well integrated that one might miss when the tune moves

from a solo to duo and back again.

Sisto and Hersch are likewise balanced as composers, as well, contributing two and three originals, respectively, to the program. Both musicians showcase the traditional capacities of their instruments: the vibraphone sounds clean; the piano sounds lush. But more interesting are the moments where they seem to tap into one other's sound. Hersch brings out the percussive quality of the piano (after all, it is a percussion as well as a string instrument) and Sisto brings out the chordal capabilities of the vibraphone. The duo depart from their beautiful complementarity with some productive dissonance on two of the pianist's tunes, "At the Close of the Day" and "The Chase". This aesthetic break from their conjoined sound serves as a reminder that we are listening to two musicians—one who has been rightfully recognized for his craft, and another who deserves more attention.

For more info visit arkiomusic.com/collections/steeplechase. Hersch is at Village Vanguard Jun. 16-21. See Calendar.



Love and Anger
Theo Bleckmann (Sunnyside)
by Thomas Conrad

It is only a small exaggeration to assert that current jazz vocalists can be divided into two categories: Theo Bleckmann and everyone else. Bleckmann is unique: in the character of his vocal instrument; in his daring; in his vast range of emotional subject matter. He is best known for his haunting, often ethereal voice that, with or without words, wafts like pure spirit and gets under your skin. But *Love and Anger* reveals that he is also capable of genuine power. He has now released over 20 recordings as a leader, and many more as a sideman. *Love and Anger* may be as straightforward a "song album" as anything Bleckmann has recently done, with as centered and grounded a set of collaborators. They are Michael King (piano)—who has been making the news in Christian McBride's young band Ursa Major—Matt Penman (A-list bassist) and Ulysses Owens Jr. (drums and album producer). Ben Monder (guitar) and Timo Vollbrecht (saxophones, flute) also join on several tracks.

Bleckmann's choices of songs are insightful and diverse. Chronologically, they span over 300 years, from Henry Purcell to Frank Ocean. Emotionally, their reach is even greater. Two songs by Kate Bush traverse a huge chasm of feeling, from darkness and angst (the title track) to unconditional love for a child ("Bertie"). Janis Ian's "Stars" is about the quicksand that is fame, especially early fame. As is so often the case when Bleckmann interprets a song, his soulful, intelligent, articulate voice, with its impeccable diction, uncovers new shades of meaning, new subtleties of nuance. "Stars" becomes a more complex story. On something as familiar as "You've Got To Hide Your Love Away" (Lennon-McCartney), his arrangement and his voice celebrate The Beatles song in sheer exhilaration. The album closes with "Take My Hand, Precious Lord". There are two *capella* versions, one with a background choir of Bleckmann's own overdubbed voices. His rendering of this beloved traditional hymn transcends specific religious ideology, and becomes a deeply moving human message. It becomes, "through the storm, through the night," a universal supplication for asylum.

For more info visit sunnysiderecords.com. Bleckmann is at Brooklyn Public Library May 31.

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