

Ellis (tenor). Sung's inspired setting of Clark Terry's lesser-known "Samba Da Gumz" is a brief, richly textured feature for trumpets and flugelhorn that segues into her "Positively C.T." salute to the late horn virtuoso. Unaccompanied brass leads the way, before the piece transforms into a snappy blues that wails much like a Terry original. Sung switches to electric piano, joined by Ellis on soprano, for a sojourn into Wayne Shorter's dreamy ballad "Diana", segueing into "Wayne's World" as she returns to grand piano. Her playful tribute to the late master interweaves a colorful blend of ideas with a constantly shifting perspective, as she and Ellis flesh out the center of this engaging work. Tenor saxophonist Nicole Glover takes center stage in Sung's energetic post-bop salute to Jimmy Heath, "A Little Bird Watchin'", while bassist Vicente Archer and the composer also shine in the solo spotlight. Sung's diverse three-part suite "Pianism" fêtes three piano giants: (the late) Barry Harris, Kenny Barron and Herbie Hancock. Each movement provides an intriguing portrait of its namesake, with ample surprises awaiting the listener.

This is Helen Sung's most ambitious album to date and will stand the test of time.

For more info visit sunnysiderecords.com. Sung is at Zinc Bar Jul. 13 (with Mark Lewandowski) and Jazzcultural Jul. 24-26 (with Steve Wilson). She is also at Gordon Hall at Music Mountain Summer Festival (Falls Village, CT) Jul. 11. See Calendar and 100 Miles Out.



Talk to Your Tomatoes
Stevie Holland (150 Music)
by Marilyn Lester

Does vocalist-songwriter-actress Stevie Holland really talk to her tomatoes? The title track, the fun piece on the album, written by lyricist Holland, with composer husband and album producer-arranger, Gary William Friedman, is a Dave Frishberg-like instructional, a slightly swinging philosophy that communing with vegetables is a good way to achieve inner peace. The tune is one of three written with Friedman on this ten-track outing, the others being "When These Two Hearts Collide" (a Latinesque ballad of relationship difficulties) and "You Pull Through" (an instructional for maintaining a stiff upper lip in life). These tunes are pleasant enough, but largely don't stack up to the varied covers, beginning with opener "On a Clear Day" (Burton Lane, Alan Jay Lerner), more suitable to Holland's rangy vibrato and slightly nasal vocal tone. With a foot in musical theater (Holland is also a playwright), the album also includes Friedman's "How I Feel", lyrics by Will Holt, a bluesy tear-jerker from Broadway's *The Me Nobody Knows*.

What is consistently excellent on this album are its production values and superb musicianship from Chet Doxas (alto), Matthew Sheens (piano), Ben Monder (guitar), Matt Aronoff (bass) and Jeff Davis (drums). Additional color is provided by Sam Hoyt (trumpet, flugelhorn), Mike Fahie (trombone) and a nonet of string players (violins, violas, celli). The one jazz standard on the album, "Round Midnight" (Thelonious Monk, Bernie Hanighen) features an *a capella* opening, sliding into duo accompaniment with Monder—another slow mover on the other end of cheerful. The guitarist's artistry is, however, superb. "Help Me" (Joni Mitchell) and "Blossom" (James Taylor) both lack verve. "Pure

Imagination" (Leslie Bricusse, Anthony Newley) finally picks up the pace, with Sheen's solo adding the necessary juice and swing, encouraging Holland to join in the party. Closer, Brooks Bowman's songbook standard, "East of the Sun (And West of the Moon)", often taken as an uptempo celebration, here falls back to Holland's predilection for doleful, sometimes lethargic, approaches to lyric interpretation.

Talk to Your Tomatoes is ideally suited to diehard Holland fans, those who can look beyond vocal presentation and tempi to excellence in musicianship, and those who might be in a mood to drown sorrows.

For more info visit stevieholland.com. Holland is at 54Below Jul. 28. See Calendar.



Of the Earth
Shabaka (Shabaka)
by Andrew Schinder

British musician Shabaka (né Shabaka Hutchings) was closing in on jazz superstardom, hitting significant commercial heights (for jazz or otherwise) with his fusion projects *The Comet is Coming* (electro dance rhythms) and *Sons of Kemet* (politically-charged global beats), among several other groups. His skill as a tenor saxophonist rivaled some of the instrument's best in clarity and power—and then Shabaka moved on, transitioning away from the tenor as his primary instrument, mostly utilizing the flute and clarinet on 2024's *Perceive its Beauty, Acknowledge its Grace*, an amalgam of different styles and moods that blend together in a rich, ethereal synthesis, balancing his roots with a musical curiosity.

Moving even further away from traditional jazz on this, Shabaka's new album, *Of the Earth*—a hybrid of diverse styles including contemporary chamber, ambient, techno and hip-hop—begs the question: was Shabaka ever really a "jazz" musician in the first place? Indeed, he plays saxophone, and his groups relied heavily on improvisation, but he could never be constrained in any kind of descriptive box, despite the efforts of many in the music industry to define him. Regardless of this album's genre (or anti-genre), it nonetheless represents an impressive achievement.

The album opens with "A Future Untold", creating a cosmic, otherworldly atmosphere that includes his return to recorded saxophone, layered over a cello and electronic keyboard. Shabaka's hip-hop vocals—heard on "Go Astray" and "Eyes Lowered"—feature his deep, hauntingly effective moody voice. He amps up the rhythm midway through "Step Lightly", creating a driving, looping electronic beat that bolsters layered flute textures. "Marwa the Mountain" reduces *Sons of Kemet's* trademark tribal groove to its bare essence, with Shabaka utilizing a range of woodwind patterns over percussion that slowly increases in intensity.

While his previous record was positioned as a solo album, a recording on which he had plenty of help—including from André 3000, Carlos Niño and Brandee Younger—here on *Of the Earth* Shabaka is all alone, taking charge of composition, production and all instrumentation, thus laying himself bare.

For more info visit shabaka.world. The album release concert is at Central Park Summerstage Jul. 1 (part of Blue Note Jazz Festival, co-presented by City Parks Foundation). See Calendar.

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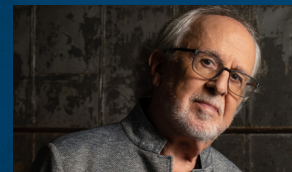
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