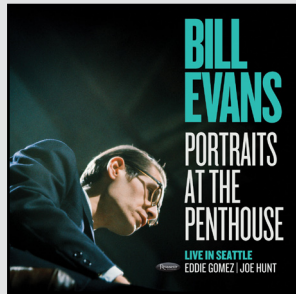


UNEARTHED GEM



Portraits at the Penthouse: Live in Seattle
Bill Evans (Resonance)
by Marc Medwin

Augmenting the already impressive catalog producer and Resonance co-president, Zev Feldman, has amassed, *Portraits at the Penthouse: Live in Seattle* is another variable in the ever-intriguing Bill Evans equation. These superb 60-year-old recordings from Seattle’s Penthouse were made for broadcast by radio host, Jim Wilke, and his archive affords this glimpse into a trio previously undocumented in the Evans discography.

In May 1966, the trio of Evans, Eddie Gomez (bass) and Joe Hunt (drums), formed the previous month, arrived for a residency at the Penthouse. While there’s no shortage of Evans/Gomez documentation, *Portraits at the Penthouse* is now the earliest. It’s also the only album to include Hunt, who played with Evans on and off for about a year. As with all of Feldman’s lavish packages, multiple perspectives purvey these historical details. We learn that Hunt and Gomez would practice together, and

the relationship is palpable. While Hunt expresses some discomfort with the trio’s take on “Autumn Leaves”, Gomez’ is one of the only solos on the album eliciting applause from a rapt audience. Dig the two-note phrases the bassist initiates beginning at 1:32, Evans laying out completely, and the whiplash pace with which Hunt echoes them. The polite audience acknowledgement ushers a slightly bewildered Evans back in, but like those succinct Max Roach solos enhancing Charlie Parker records, bassist and drummer have made their point.

It’s a magnificent trio. They can swing like mad, as the abbreviated but poignant “Nardis” Evans solo, drenched in percussive blues and dyadic syncopation, makes abundantly clear. Far from what the Miles Davis-penned tune would become in later years, this trio seethes with distilled energy. But they can just as easily dig deep into a ballad, as happens on a luscious “Round Midnight” rendering. Hunt’s brushwork is exquisite and precise, mirroring the nuance informing Gomez’ sinewy slide within the first minute and Evans’ always multihued articulations. The trio rides each minute change via arcs and angles, and their gestural symbiosis is quietly stunning. It could be posited that restraint governs the dialogue a bit too completely, but the music-making equals that from any of Evans’ best-known trios. In anticipation of the pianist’s centennial (three years from this month), there should and hopefully will be more from this group in the catalog.

For more info visit resonancerecords.org. “A Celebration of Bill Evans” tribute is at *The Pocket* Aug. 12. See Calendar.



La plus belle saison
Emilie-Claire Barlow (Empress Music Group)
by Marilyn Lester

Canadian singer-arranger Emilie-Claire Barlow, solidly established up north for over 25 years, is Toronto-born but currently moves between her hometown, Montreal and Southern Mexico. Along the way she developed a connection to the music of the Francophone province of Québec, releasing her 15th studio album, *La plus belle saison*, sung entirely in French.

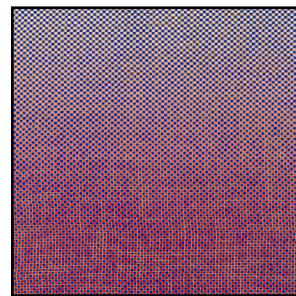
The album’s eleven tracks (all by Canadian and French songwriters) blend chanson with samba, folk, pop and jazz. The opener is a lively, traditional musette, “Dans les rues de Québec”, written by one of France’s most iconic singer-songwriters, Charles Trenet. Guitar-driven, with a lively Lex French trumpet feature, it sets a mood and reveals Barlow’s smoky vocal tone and assured delivery. In contrast, a modern take of French *amore* follows with a Latin-tinged “Quelles sont les chances” (uncredited) in which Barlow and guest vocalist Damien Robitaille offer a flirtatious duet.

Samba appears in “J’ai rencontré l’homme de ma vie” (Luc Plamondon, François Cousineau) and pop-funk in “Jerrycan” (Anique Granger)—a highly contemporary, percussion-driven tune with hip

backing vocals and Barlow in rap-adjacent delivery. With a momentary illusion of being a sea chanty, “Les deux printemps” (Daniel Bélanger) soon moves into a waltz beat, offering a hard-driving insistent declaration of emotion with exchanges between saxophone and Barlow’s scat vocals. Variety is also featured in the spirited bluegrass “D’la bière au ciel” by another English-to-French convert, Canadian singer-songwriter and guitarist Jim Corcoran, who guests on the track. Closer, “Pendant que” offers an emotional statement, verging on a dirge, but somehow very French, written by and guesting poet-singer Gilles Vigneault.

At Birdland last month, in the first set of the concluding night of three (Jul. 11), Barlow shared the stage with her rhythm section and trumpeter Lex French in support. She barely touched upon *La plus belle saison*, but the vocalist did offer variety in superbly re-imagined pop tunes: a blues version of Paul Simon’s “The 59th Street Bridge Song (Feelin’ Groovy)”; a Latinesque, scatful “Don’t Think Twice, It’s All Right”, the Bob Dylan classic; and a charmingly swingy “Raindrops Keep Fallin’ on My Head” by Burt Bacharach and Hal David. Moving to the French portion of the set, she began with the Trenet piece, “Dans les rues de Québec” and then the mournful, “Pendant que”, more effectively placed here than as an album closer. Not on the album, a French version of “Dream a Little Dream of Me” (Fabian Andre, Wilbur Schwandt, Gus Kahn) was offered with a Julie Londonesque edge of sexiness. Overall, Barlow proved an animated, charming sophisticate, comfortable in her skin and connected to her audience.

For more info visit
empressmusicgroup.com/emilie-claire-barlow



Slo-Mo Neon Luminare Hoverings
Ambrose Akinmusire/Mary Halvorson (Nonesuch)
by JR Simon

Though they have known each other and played together for years, *Slo-Mo Neon Luminare Hoverings* is trumpeter Ambrose Akinmusire and guitarist Mary Halvorson’s first recorded collaboration. What emerges is an intimate conversation built as much from timbre and texture as from melody and harmony.

The duo’s use of delay pedals is central to the album’s identity. Rather than serving as an effect, looping creates an additional musical plane, allowing each musician to improvise not only with each other, but also with echoes of their own ideas. The result is music that feels as though it is unfolding in real time, balancing spontaneity with uncanny structural cohesion. “Prelude in the Ash” opens with Akinmusire’s heralding trumpet call before easing into an unhurried, searching dialogue. His remarkably broad timbral palette, particularly his crystalline altissimo register, provides a striking contrast to Halvorson’s endlessly inventive guitar work. Few discover as many unexpected colors and textures from a single instrument as Halvorson, whose imagination remains one of contemporary jazz’ great gifts.

“This Vivid” offers the album’s most compelling demonstration of the duo’s looping aesthetic. While literal screams briefly command attention, it is Halvorson’s layered guitar phrases that captivate, accumulating into intricate, interlocking layers that

somehow sound both meticulously constructed and entirely spontaneous. “Soundcheck” returns to a more ambient landscape, with Akinmusire’s trumpet cutting cleanly through the surrounding textures. The standout “Blood & Sand” begins with the album’s most immediately memorable melody. Its repeating guitar figure gently anchors the performance, while Akinmusire spins a lyrical trumpet line above it. Even as the improvisation ventures further afield, Halvorson’s accompaniment provides a reassuring center of gravity. The title track closes the album with a lush, swirling sea of sound in which trumpet and guitar merge into a richly-textured whole.

Slo-Mo Neon Luminare Hoverings challenges listeners but never feels academic. Instead, it presents two exceptional improvisers listening intently, taking risk and discovering new sonic landscapes together.

For more info visit nonesuch.com. Akinmusire is at *Baruch Performing Arts Center* Aug. 3 (part of *NoMad Jazz Festival*). See Calendar.



Filin
Melissa Aldana (Blue Note)
by Scott Yanow

Most of the great jazz saxophonists at one time or another have recorded a ballad album. *Filin* is Melissa Aldana’s, but it’s a bit different than the work of others. “Filin” (which translates to “feeling” in English, from Spanish) is the name given to romantic Cuban boleros dating from the late ’40s through the early ’60s, which often originated in pre-revolutionary Cuban films. Sung in Spanish, and popular at the time, the melodies are mostly unknown in the US today. But because Spanish is the Chile-born Aldana’s original language, she was able to relate to the lyrics more than if the selections were taken from the Great American Songbook. In addition to the Cuban numbers, the saxophonist also added a pair of complementary numbers from Brazil.

For this project, Aldana is joined by Gonzalo Rubalcaba (piano), who suggested many of the pieces, Peter Washington (bass) and Kush Abadey (drums). Their playing is quite sensitive throughout and, while there are some mostly-brief piano and bass solos, the focus is primarily on the leader. The exceptions: “No Te Empenes Mas” and “Las Rosas No Hablan” both have vocals in Spanish by the always-remarkable and ever-flexible Cécile McLorin Salvant. Her passionate yet restrained singing perfectly fits the mood of this quiet, introspective, sometimes-wistful album. Aldana primarily caresses the melodies like a cool-toned singer, while offering understated creativity. On the uniformly slow tempos, she consistently makes melodic statements that are quite conversational, as if she were speaking aloud in a soft voice. Occasionally she sounds reminiscent of Ben Webster (“Dime Si Eres Tu”), John Coltrane (“Imagenes”) or present-day Charles Lloyd (Hermeto Pascoal’s “Little Church”), while generally sounding like herself.

The results of *Filin* are subtle, laid-back, quietly sensuous and charming.

For more info visit bluenote.com/artist/melissa-aldana. Aldana is at *Close Up* Aug. 1 (with Kush Abadey) and *The Stone* at *The New School* Aug. 21 (with Linda May Han Oh). See Calendar.

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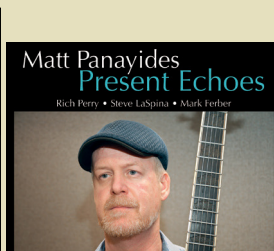


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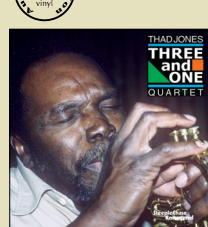
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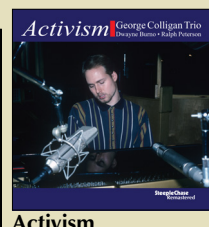
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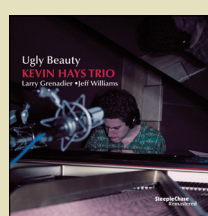
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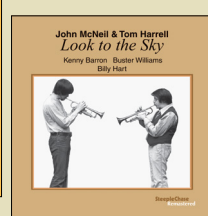
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