



Another Kind of Bird
Richard Baratta (Savant)
by Scott Yanow

Unlike his pal Dizzy Gillespie, who was one of the co-founders of Afro-Cuban jazz, Charlie Parker rarely played Latin-inspired music. He did compose one Latin jazz standard (“My Little Suede Shoes”) for a 1951 session that included two Latin percussionists, and he appeared as a guest with Machito’s orchestra (1948-49), but those were exceptions. However, Parker’s music can easily be transformed into Latin jazz, as drummer Richard Baratta proves on his latest release, *Another Kind of Bird: Reimagining Charlie Parker*. Baratta worked together with pianist Bill O’Connell to devise nine arrangements of Parker songs (plus “Embraceable You”) for a sextet that also includes Vincent Herring (alto), Paul Bollenback (guitar), Michael Goetz (bass) and Paul Rossman (percussion). In addition, there are guest appearances by Craig Handy (tenor, soprano, flute), Abraham Burton (alto) and Eric Alexander (tenor).

Rather than merely playing bebop with Latin rhythms added, O’Connell modernized the pieces while retaining the original melodies, giving each of the musicians ample opportunity to jam over the often-altered chord changes. Sometimes the alterations are a bit jarring, as on a funky rendition of “Now’s the Time”, the introduction to “Donna Lee” (which gives little hint of the tune’s melody), a drastically reharmonized “Embraceable You” and a rather intense version of “Ah-Leu-Cha”. Bollenback’s often-rockish guitar solos, although well-played, may take a moment to get used to in this setting. Highlights are bountiful, including “Yardbird Suite”, which finds the optimal balance between the original song and more modern ideas; Herring is consistently the solo star throughout. There is also a heated trade-off by the two saxophonists on “Donna Lee”. Handy takes a dazzling soprano solo on “Ah-Leu-Cha” and has an equally-rewarding spot on flute during “Little Suede Shoes”.

As its title implies, *Another Kind of Bird: Reimagining Charlie Parker* is a colorful, unpredictable album that is from the 21st century rather than the ‘40s. While bebop purists may find it to be a mixed bag, those with no preconceived expectations will find the high musicianship and chance-taking, as well as modern arrangements, to be of strong interest.

For more info visit jazzdepot.com/savant.html. The album release concert is at Millbrook Vineyards & Winery (Millbrook, NY) Sep. 5. See 100 Miles Out.



Kevin Sun, I/II
Kevin Sun (Endectomorph Music)
by Mike Shanley

For a contemporary, open-eared tenor saxophonist-composer like Kevin Sun, inspiration comes not only from musical forebears (John Coltrane, Benny Golson) but also composers slightly beyond the jazz realm



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(Ryuichi Sakamoto, Angelo Badalamenti) and more unlikely sources (video games and annoying hold music). Whatever the stimuli, Sun’s melodic scope, coupled with the occasional production trick, bring his ideas to fruition on this companion set of albums. Releasing both simultaneously, he sees them less as a two-part concept and more “like a pair of video games set in the same universe, each with its own style and cast of characters.”

Kevin Sun, I finds the leader in a quartet completed by Max Light (guitar), Walter Stinson (bass) and Jon Starks (drums). “Go In” sets expectations high and then pushes the band even further. Sun built it on the changes of Coltrane’s brisk “Countdown”, where the rhythm section plays a choppy foundation as the saxophonist and Light keep the flow smooth. The clipped tenor and guitar melodies of “Scrollwork” threaten to get too technical but never take that plunge. Several songs utilize cross-fading between channels to elevate the music. “Souls of Fire”, which comes from the video game *Dark Souls*, features Light floating between the speakers. “Between Night and Day” is bookended by backwards guitar (Sun’s first hat tip to David Lynch and *Twin Peaks*), making it the flowing centerpiece of this volume. In closing, a reading of Sakamoto’s “Riot in Lagos” overlays two tracks of the quartet, one per channel, each complementing rather than convoluting the work of their counterparts. Starks, especially, handles this task inventively.

Kevin Sun, II was recorded by Sun’s touring band with Christian Li (piano), Stinson (bass) and Kayvon Gordon (drums). The album’s seven tracks followed a week on the road, and the cohesion from that jaunt can be felt in the music. This time, *Demon Souls*, the precursor to *Dark Souls*, serves as a springboard. Sun arranged the plaintive “Souls of Mist” from that game while thinking of Coltrane’s “Crescent”, a combination that takes the setting into a new realm. It follows “Unformed, Shrouded by Fog”, a melody built on the spoken introduction to the *Dark Souls* trilogy, highlighted by the saxophonist’s rich tenor voice and a piano solo that sounds like cascading harp arpeggios. Later, “Laura Palmer’s Theme” evokes the dichotomy of tranquility and terror underlying *Twin Peaks* through turbulent, emotional piano and tenor solos. Just as the album starts becoming a soundtrack for an unmade film, the quartet cuts it straight with “Belong, Sonny”, the title both an anagram of Golson’s name and a salute to a fallen master. This track solidifies the side of Sun that includes a deep knowledge of straightforward blowing.

Whether drawing on game music or his own writing, Kevin Sun’s sharp senses pick up on small elements that others might miss, and he makes them bloom.

For more info visit endectomorph.com. The albums release concert is at Bar Bayeux Sep. 19. *Sun* is also at Five Spot Jazz Sep. 17 and Bar Bayeux Sep. 30 (both with Oscar Peñas). See Calendar.



Original
Mike Osborne/Stam Tracey (Cadillac)
by John Sharpe

The title of this remarkable, free-flowing duet proves doubly apt. It describes not only the music, but also the artistic trajectories of alto saxophonist Mike Osborne

(1941-2007) and pianist Stan Tracey (1926-2013). This month marks what would have been the saxophonist’s 85th birthday (it also is his 19-year deathaversary). And with the many 2026 centennial celebrations (Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Randy Weston, Melba Liston, Jimmy Heath, et al.), this December additionally marks Tracey’s.

These two towering figures of the British jazz scene transformed American influences into unmistakably individual voices. Tracey spent seven years as the house pianist at Ronnie Scott’s Jazz Club, which hosted a galaxy of touring stars. He elicited praise from many: Sonny Rollins famously asked the audience, “Does anyone over here realize how good this guy is?” A generation younger, Osborne emerged as a soloist alongside fellow reedman John Surman in composer Mike Westbrook’s Concert Band, before leading a series of his own fiery trios. Osborne was among those credited with persuading Tracey to continue playing when the latter, dismayed by lack of opportunities, considered quitting. He did so by introducing the older man to the sort of completely improvised performance documented here.

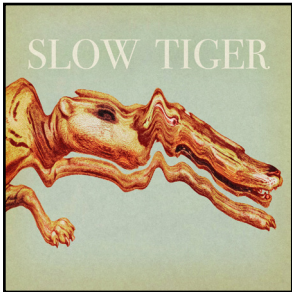
Recorded at a South London concert in 1972, this first-time reissue presents two sidelong tracks, totaling 47 minutes. Acute, mutual listening informs the instantaneous mood changes across a stream of cyclical patterns and oblique tension-inducing responses. While spontaneous, the mercurial dialogue remains tethered to the jazz tradition through an abundance of rhythmic and melodic passages, thanks to the protagonists’ grounding. Tracey absorbs Thelonious Monk’s angular displacements and Duke Ellington’s muscular piano lyricism into a percussive language entirely his own, one that adapts effortlessly to these uncharted excursions. Osborne meanwhile matches Ornette

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Coleman’s lyrical imagination with folk-inflected tunefulness, but delivered with a tart Jackie McLean-like tone. Nonetheless, some of the most arresting moments arrive when they abandon progenitors. Nowhere is this clearer than midway through “Part 1”, in a startling collision between skirling bagpipe-like yelps and a succession of hammered tremolos, but the saxophonist’s playing drips raw emotion almost everywhere.

Although the response from contemporary critics was mixed, this album still sounds fresh and vital over half a century later. The pair hooked up several more times, but it stands as one of their most potent summits. Tracey entered similarly off-the-wall territory with the likes of Evan Parker and Keith Tippett, before retreating to more conservative fare until his death in 2013. Sadly, Osborne struggled with mental illness and retired from music in 1982, which makes this release an invaluable addition to the scant evidence of his prowess.

For more info visit cadillac77.bandcamp.com



Slow Tiger
Slow Tiger (Endectomorph Music)
by Andrew Schinder

Keyboardist JP Schlegelmilch organized the New York-based quintet Slow Tiger in the wake of the post-pandemic comeback of live music, and in so doing managed to redefine the scope of what an organ-driven jazz group could be. On its self-titled debut album, Slow Tiger traverses multiple genres that traditional jazz combos don’t typically explore. The record is certainly one of the more distinctive jazz releases to emerge in recent memory, but the band manages to be unique without sounding off-putting or pretentious. Slow Tiger, in fact, pulls off a substantial achievement by balancing idiosyncrasies with listenability.

On this collection of originals, Schlegelmilch’s organ is joined by Kenny Warren (trumpet), Adam Schneit (tenor, clarinet), Andrew Dow (electric bass) and Nathan Ellman-Bell (drums). Warren and Schneit take the lead on most tracks, with Dow and Ellman-Bell working together as a crackerjack rhythm section. Schlegelmilch straddles the two sections, providing balance and depth where needed, and jumping out front with relative frequency.

Opening track “Powerpuff Backpack”, written by Warren, bears a name perfectly suited to such a quirky tune. With their organ/bass harmonizing, Schlegelmilch and Dow create a circus-like atmosphere of whimsy that alternates with a delightfully melodic organ/trumpet duet. Schneit’s clarinet then kicks in, improvising over organ lines in a mid-track breakdown before the band takes it home with the core melody. Schneit’s “Wharf Street” is a jazz interpretation of classic psychedelic pop, and queries whether a jazz group has ever attempted such an endeavor since Jimi Hendrix closed out Woodstock with “Hey Joe”. The band recreates the style without sounding cloying or precious, which is a real feat. Schlegelmilch and Ellman-Bell provide a head-bobbing rhythm, over which Schneit and Warren add soulful brass harmonizing. The album takes a left turn with the organist’s “Mending the Nets”, deflating the preceding flights of fancy with a moody, melancholy piece where Schneit and Warren improvise over Schlegelmilch’s

atmospheric tones. Warren’s “Eleven in Six”, which amps the energy back up, is a fascinating listen. The bassist and drummer create a driving rhythm that, in keeping with the retro flavor of “Wharf Street”, evokes ‘60s spy movies. This contrasts, however, with the free-jazz cacophony of Schneit and Warren, creating a brilliantly divergent ambience.

The album concludes with Schlegelmilch’s title track, and one would assume that the composition acts as Slow Tiger’s theme or mission statement. Instead, the music is measured and reflective but also triumphant, as if the group is keenly aware of what they have achieved.

For more info visit endectomorph.com. The album release concert is at Threes Brewing Sep. 27. See Calendar.



Live at the Lilypad 2017
Dave Liebman & Ra Kalam Bob Moses (Ra Kalam)
by Jeff Cebulski

While the great post-Coltrane saxophonist Dave Liebman gets top billing, the dominant presence on this live album, recorded almost a decade ago, is drum master Ra Kalam Bob Moses and his associates – percussionists Raphael Lehnen, Michael Knobloch and Tony “Sadhu Bhav” Falco – whose rumbling fuels most of the nearly 50-minute improvised foray on *Live at the Lilypad 2017*. Liebman climbs, dances and weaves throughout, but each piece begins with Moses on the move, providing an impactful sound mantra atop which the saxophonist orates.

“Peace Universal”, an original Moses composition, receives two renditions here. The album opener features Liebman’s elastic, Eastern-tinged tenor, riding Moses’ throbbing drum kit and welcoming the listener into the duo’s musical mysticism. “Soprano Burn/Piano Dance” settles things down a bit, starting with another pulsating Moses solo augmented by adjoining cymbals. Liebman, on soprano, plays upper register commentaries before changing to piano during a sedate but nonetheless dramatic moment adorned with soft percussion.

In perhaps the most satisfying performance, “Lift Off to Hyperspace” finds the drummer in an energetic Elvin Jones-ish groove that Liebman matches with a deep Coltrane-like tenor display, reaching heights of spiritual expression. “Cry of the Wild” mixes Moses’ tom-tom attack with added percussion that simulates animalistic yearning, while “Joyous Ascension” extends his pounding for two-and-a-half minutes before Liebman pounces with an impressively animated excursion that again conjures Coltrane, this time more in swing mode. A second “Peace Universal” finds Liebman switching to soprano, with a passive, prayerful meditation that counters Moses’ Eastern-tinged, rhythmic backdrop. The finale, “Drums of Compassion”, a pulsatile statement, seals the session in fine fashion.

The recording succeeds on at least two fronts: it reminds us that Dave Liebman (who turns 80 this month) has been the longest-running purveyor of John Coltrane’s late period legacy; it also reveals the still-vital, 78-year-old Ra Kalam Bob Moses to be a percussive link between East and West, creating a world beat that energizes the searching soul.

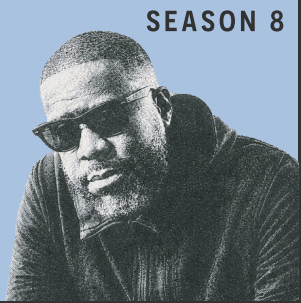
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