

(*The Digging*, 2016) and then on to relatively calmer, more keyboard-heavy fare (*Da Fé*, 2021), Dan Blake has happily skirted styles and expectations. Now, he ups the ante again with an ambitious project that pulls triple duty. The work of wrongly-convicted former death row inmate and writer Jarvis Jay Masters provided the inspiration for Blake's latest release, *Got My Wings*, which is mostly played solo. The album also serves to educate students about justice reform and provide musical accompaniment for an enigmatic Tomiko Magario dance piece.

A swirl of reverbed, delayed and looped saxophones, which later call and respond, launches the music with "Red Tara", recalling the earlier work of Sam Gendel and the bouncy interplay of the World Saxophone Quartet. The title track is, appropriately, more flighty, with recurring flute and clarinet loops (reminiscent of Jon Hassell's lighter moments) and transcendent piano tones, later gracefully, gently floating around, assisted by Mike Sempert's sound design. The lovelorn "Heart Connection" changes pace, its sad noir built on bluesy saxophone, atmospheric electric piano and synth bass drum thumps. Starting with stern synthesizer strings and gentle electric piano, "Pema" continues the melancholy mood, later layering in stretched-out flute, clarinet and saxophone tones and returning to a brooding spirit before picking up pace and then tapering off gracefully. Processed angry rumbling noises begin "Just Because You're Out", leading to eerie saxophonic loops and ripples before transforming into aggressively repeated and occasionally abstract patterns. This segues into Masters himself making a cameo appearance at the end on "Doesn't Mean You're Free", reciting resiliently over Blake's gospel-like keyboard and saxophone, with occasional programmed drum crashes. A wave of

triumphant saxophones is soon accompanied by Bryan Copeland's frantic salsa drumming, then winds back down to Masters' filtered voice and the leader, whose gentle electric piano precedes the composition's more frenzied section.

Got My Wings is as rich as you could hope for with a multi-media, multi-purpose collection—and it's inspirational too.

For more info visit adhyaroparecords.com. Blake is at Smalls Sep. 9 (with guest Arturo O'Farrill). See Calendar.



Transcend
Dave Douglas (Greenleaf Music)
by Bill Meyer

Dave Douglas is a project-oriented guy. Each record, each band, begins with a framing notion. On *Transcend*, the trumpeter approaches the later music of Duke Ellington as inspiration. Appropriately enough, the platform for this endeavor is the same band that he used to explore Billy Strayhorn's music several years ago on *GIFTS*, but here it is augmented for greater orchestral potential. Tomeka Reid (cello) joins James Brandon Lewis (tenor), Rafiq Bhatia (guitar) and Ian Chang (drums)—the latter two constituting two-thirds

of the band Son Lux. Reid's presence adds ballast, a welcome lower-frequency presence.

Both the sound of the ensemble and the material they play assure that this is not a straightforward tribute. Bhatia's choice of effects brings a flickering, digital aura that is complemented by the echo laid onto the drumming of Chang, who switches up his attack as the music requires. But his solid-rock punch is ever close at hand. And while three tunes are drawn from Ellington's sacred works, six are Douglas originals that foreground the ensemble's blend of probing horns, sturdy bowing and 21st century post-rock textures.

Ellington's sacred music represented a late career summation. These works capped a 50+ decade career in which Ellington knew he had the maturity to define his spiritual beliefs. He said. "this is the most important music I've ever written." While there's plenty of strong playing on *Transcend*, it never imparts a sense of now or never. The problem in part is technological; even when the band sounds like it's kicking some butt, as on "Energy Fields", the sound mix cushions the impact. Unlike the recent work of Lewis and Reid, the music doesn't feel transcendent. Rather, it continues Douglas' practice of putting together a killer band, here without ever quite letting it off the leash.

For more info visit greenleafmusic.com. Douglas' FONT (Festival of New Trumpet Music) is Sep. 14-20 at Brooklyn Conservatory of Music, The New School, Close Up, The Sultan Room, The Jazz Gallery, Nublu, The Cutting Room and The Statuary, featuring artists including Jim Seeley, Dave Adewumi, Milena Casado, Skylar Tang, Ingrid Jensen, Akiki Bradley, Adam O'Farrill, Volker Goetze, Ahmed Abdullah (who receives the annual FONT Award of Recognition) and many others. See Calendar and 100 Miles Out for line-ups and details.

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