



The Devil I Knew
Nicole Zuraitis (La Reserve)
by Anna Steegmann

Nicole Zuraitis is a supremely gifted vocalist, pianist, arranger and composer. In 2024, she won the Best Jazz Vocal Album GRAMMY for *How Love Begins*, becoming the only person to write and arrange an entire winning album in this category. With *The Devil I Knew*, her eleventh album as a leader, she delivers her most ambitious project to date.

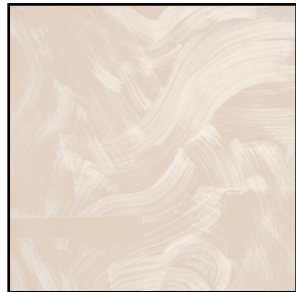
The 20-track concept album is divided into five “chapters” containing “books” (the tracks), which explore themes of self-reflection, intimacy, crumbling romance, grief and transformation. Zuraitis, who wrote (or co-wrote) all but one of the songs, intersperses her lyrics with poems by Dorothy Parker, Emily Dickinson and Edna St. Vincent Millay, which introduces each book. This gives the record a striking throughline, a song cycle that demands to be heard as a complete work. She is joined by an elite roster of collaborators, which includes producer Larry Klein; arrangers Vince Mendoza (strings) and Jerry Hey (horns); Christian McBride, Sam Weber and Larry Klein (bass); Jon Cowherd and Larry Goldings (organ) plus David Cook (piano); Donny McCaslin and Larry Williams (tenor),

Brandon Fields (baritone), Rashawn Ross (trumpet) and Lori Stuntz (trombone); Scott Sharrard, Idan Morim and Gilad Hekselman (guitar); the vocalist’s husband Dan Pugach (percussion), the Budapest Scoring Orchestra plus back-up singers, spoken word artists and others.

Stylistically, Zuraitis resists any single idiom. She sounds dreamy on “The Hardest Part” and funky on “Let Us Hang” (Walter Becker, Larry Klein), shy and moody on a dark trio outing with Pugach and McBride on “He’s a Demon, He’s a Devil, He’s a Doll” (Don Raye, Harold Spina). On “Won’t Make It Out Alive,” driven by McBride’s walking bassline and Goldings’ solid organ work, her vocals pivot smoothly between fragility and defiance. The album’s closing track, Hoagy Carmichael’s “I Get Along Without You Very Well”, leaves her voice beautifully exposed over lush string arrangements. At the album release concert at Dizzy’s Club (Aug. 5) with her touring band (Pugach, Morim, Weber)—sans horns, organ or string orchestra—the vocalist captivated the audience with an impressive vocal range and deeply emotional piano playing. This was most evident on the sparse tracks where she accompanied herself, and in an outstanding duo with McBride on “He’s a Demon...”

As part of her extensive summer, national and international touring schedule, Zuraitis continues to enchant live audiences, and *The Devil I Knew*—live and on record—matches her ambition and execution. Another GRAMMY may well be waiting for her.

For more info visit lareserverecords.com. Zuraitis is at City Winery Sep. 27 and Drom Sep. 30. She is also at COTA Jazz Festival (Delaware Water Gap, PA) Sep. 13 and Avram Theater (Southampton, NY) Sep. 17. See Calendar and 100 Miles Out.



Peace Anthems
Various Artists (Red Hook)
by Kurt Gottschalk

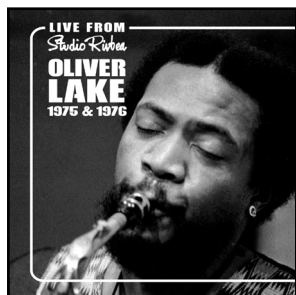
It might be hard, at least for some, not to think of John Lennon and Yoko Ono’s Vietnam Christmas carol “Happy Xmas (War Is Over)” on initially glimpsing the new compilation *Peace Anthems* and the track “War Is Over” by Ethiopian-Italian singer Martha Deribe and Italian pianist Simone Maggio. Their song isn’t a cover per se, but it might be said to be one in spirit. The 1971 single wasn’t a news alert, it was a message of hope. The unpopular Vietnam War would rage on for several years more—and the planet, of course, would carry on in a constant state of military conflict for another 55 years and counting. The newer “War Is Over” is a lovely lullaby about being safe at home, perhaps sung to a returning soldier, but maybe to anyone who needs to hear it, Deribe ever so soothing and Maggio altogether balm on Fender Rhodes.

The song stands out as the only sung track on *Peace Anthems*, but it’s hardly the only provision of comfort. The set is, start to finish, a warm embrace. Poet Moor Mother delivers a prayer, processed and reshaped by BlankFor.ms. Pianist Amina Claudine Myers, a high priestess of calm within a storm, plays two gorgeous

duets with trumpeter Wadada Leo Smith; “Reflections on Palestine” in particular demonstrates Smith’s unique ability to capture sentiment and setting in sound. He appears again in a trio with drummer Andrew Cyrille and Qasim Naqvi on modular synthesizer. Naqvi also contributes a synth solo, which like two tracks here by Kit Downes on pipe organ, offers a brief oasis of ambience, a sensation foreshadowed early on by Taylor Deupree’s ethereal guitar effects in trio with Kalia Vandever’s mournful trombone playing and Thomas Morgan’s lilting bass performance.

This 27-minute tranquility suite, released to mark Red Hook’s fifth anniversary, positively floats by. The label (now based in Ireland, not Brooklyn) has released records by many, but not all, of the artists included here. Maybe the others are yet to come. There’s not a cut in the lot that wouldn’t be satisfying at double or quadruple the length. Maybe think of it not as a collection of selections from other releases in the label’s small catalog, but a sampler of a better future.

For more info visit redhookrecords.com. The album release concert and Red Hook Record’s 5th Anniversary celebration is at Roulette Sep. 18-19. See Calendar.



Live from Studio Rivbea, 1975 & 1976
Oliver Lake (NoBusiness)
by Ken Waxman

A sonic souvenir of alto saxophonist-flutist Oliver Lake’s first years in NYC and a reminder of the freedom available to improvisers during the city’s so-called Loft Jazz era of the ’70s, *Live from Studio Rivbea, 1975 & 1976* (the fourth volume in the Rivbea Live! Series) captures two sets from the best-known loft venue. Curated by Sam and Bea Rivers, Studio Rivbea was where the *Wildflowers: The New York Loft Jazz Sessions* set was recorded. Two of the seven selections here are from that same date, while the others are from a year earlier.

Formerly part of St. Louis’ Black Artists Group (BAG) collective, and later a founding member of the World Saxophone Quartet in New York, Lake, who turns 84 this month, frequently interacted with creative musicians from all points, including (on all tracks here) New Haven native, guitarist Michael Gregory Jackson and Chicago bassist Fred Hopkins (1947-1999). The Windy City is additionally represented by Phillip Wilson (1941-1992), who plays drums on two tracks, spelled by local Jerome Cooper (1946-2015) on the others. Fellow BAGster Baikida Carroll (trumpet) appears on two tracks, most prominently the extended “Rue Roger”, which likely commemorated Lake’s recent Paris sojourn at that time. The piece includes the most textural contrasts: Carroll’s brassy grace notes ascend to triplets when not intertwined with the leader’s soprano saxophone puffs, tongue stops and nasal honks. Guitar riffs create contrapuntal pops and frails, while Cooper’s martial drum rolls anchor the bottom. Before a tandem horn recap of the theme, Hopkins adds additional colors by varying an unyielding pulse with string slides.

Hopkins provides gutsy invention throughout. If he isn’t creating crisp frails and thick stops, alongside descending guitar strums and percussion clatters, to buoy the saxophonist’s bites and squeaks on the busy “A Space Rontoto”—he’s using the darker tone of his low strings to nudge flighty flute peeps away from excess airiness on “Re-Cre-Ate”. Overall the bassist’s varying pulse is the rhythmic glue that holds together

Jackson’s sometimes too decorative picking and keeps the drummers’ persuasive pressured ruffs and centered press rolls from overloading the music.

Since these recordings, Lake has gone on to experiment with many genres, from near-rock to notated music. But these well-paced sets serve as a reminder of his expertise as an innovative sound explorer. They also serve as a fitting remembrance of the skills of three now-deceased players equally involved in stretching jazz’ definition.

For more info visit nobusinessrecords.com. SEED Artists presents FLUX Quartet’s tribute to Oliver Lake at Montclair Public Library (Montclair, NJ) Sep. 13. See 100 Miles Out.



Steve Davis Meets Hank Jones, Volume 2
Steve Davis (Smoke Sessions)
by Pierre Giroux

Some recordings arrive years after they were made yet still sound as if they happened yesterday. *Steve Davis Meets Hank Jones, Volume 2* is one of those rare sessions. This is the second helping from a 2008 encounter between trombonist Steve Davis, the late, legendary pianist Hank Jones (1918-2010) and the great bassist Peter Washington. It captures three musicians who never seem to be trying to impress anyone. They are simply making music together, and that is exactly what makes this new release so rewarding.

Davis has said he wanted the recording to feel like an evening at Bradley’s, the celebrated Greenwich Village piano bar. The intention was for Washington and Jones to play as if it were just another night on the bandstand, with Davis simply joining in. That is precisely how it comes across: no grand concept, no unnecessary polish, just three great musicians listening, responding and swinging with complete ease.

The first volume leaned towards ballads, but this one smiles a little more. Charlie Parker’s “Au Privave” opens with crisp ensemble lines, then the music loosens into a wonderful, natural exchange. Davis’ trombone has a rich, singing sound, while Jones seems to float above the rhythm without ever losing the pulse. Washington, as always, is the quiet force holding everything together. “My Heart Stood Still” follows with effortless swing and the easy confidence that runs through the session, with Jones covering the keys with his inexhaustible stream of ideas. The Rodgers and Hart classic “I Could Write a Book” brings a touch of lightness as the trio delights in its familiar melody without ever sounding predictable. There is not a wasted note or phrase. “Nardis”, which became a cornerstone of Bill Evans’ repertoire, may be the album’s biggest surprise. Jones digs into the number with an edge, reminding us of how adventurous he could be when the spirit moved him. Davis answers with beautifully-measured ideas, while Washington anchors everything with customary authority. On “The Nearness of You”, the trombonist lets the melody unfold naturally, while Jones colors the harmony with his unmistakable, customary elegance.

The alternate takes of “Nardis”, “I Could Write a Book” and “The Nearness of You” are far more than bonus material. They serve as a reminder that great improvisers never tell the same story twice.

For more info visit smokesessionsrecords.com. Davis is at Dizzy’s Club Sep. 25-26 (part of the “John Coltrane Centennial Celebration”). See Calendar.

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118 Tracks (5) CDs 108pp color booklet Notes by David Sager

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