

CLOSE UP RECORDS

EMBRACE THE NEWNESS
BY JOSH GAGNON

A jazz venue, a hip neighborhood bar, a cultural incubator. Since its opening in 2024, Close Up has become known as many things. Beyond its reputation for programming some of the city's most notable contemporary voices, this Orchard Street outpost has quickly become a fixture for Lower East Side nightlife, featuring a vinyl listening room and a robust food and beverage program. Last month, Close Up began a new endeavor: releasing nine albums on its inhouse boutique label, recorded live at the club. These albums vary in style and scope, capturing the variety present on any given week in the listening room. With this new

record label, Close Up reminds us that it's more than a venue—it's a movement.

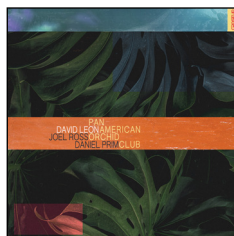
In conversation with some of the musicians featured on these newly-released recordings, one gets the impression that Close Up is a critical part of the current moment the NYC scene is in. David Leon, whose *Panamerican Orchid Club* was among the new label's first releases, likens what is happening at Close Up to the Loft era scene of the '70s. Like the Loft scene, Close Up's programming encapsulates contemporary jazz in all its forms, not tethered to one particular aesthetic. There's also a feeling that, like the lofts, a venue like Close Up almost had to exist. Solomon Gottfried, one of the club's co-founders, describes this phenomenon as something that is "way bigger than us...we're just a container." The label side of the venue now brings this outside the walls of 154 Orchard Street, documenting this new era of and for the music.

Like the hole in the scene that necessitated the club, its new project of starting up a label extends the time-honored tradition of live albums coming from the city's jazz clubs. Whether on bootlegs or formal live sessions, the live jazz album has been a cornerstone of the music for the better part of a century. From NYC clubs such as the Village Vanguard, Blue Note, Smalls or the old Five Spot and Café Bohemia, listeners around the world have been transported into these rooms to hear the masters on record. Close Up brings this tradition to the new age, exposing listeners to a fresh take on the city's scene. The label is run by a small team: producer Gottfried, executive producer Daniel Gaynor, recording engineer (and photographer) Jimmy Katz, mixing and mastering engineer (and bassist) Eivind Opsvik and album designer (and guitarist) Tim

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A Mysterious Letter
Zekkereya El-magharbel



Pan American Orchid Club
David Leon



Fiesta En Casa
Daniel Prim Y Su Parampaman



I'll Be Thinking of You on Thursday
Carmen Quill



Strands
Tony Malaby

VOXNEWS

THERE AIN'T NOTHIN' LIKE THE REAL THING...

BY TESSA SOUTER

There's been a lot of talk in the news and on social media lately about the evils of AI. A top safety researcher for Anthropic was recently quoted as saying that there's more than a 10% chance it could kill humanity within the next decade. In music, this is already happening before our very eyes and ears: companies using musicians' work without consent or compensation; entirely AI-generated tracks flooding streaming services; fake or cloned voices; and—if it hasn't happened yet, it surely will—companies deciding that a generated jingle or backing track is cheaper than hiring real musicians. "Listeners have been clear in telling us that they don't like seeing an artist profile that seems human, only to find out that the persona is AI-generated," says Spotify. Meanwhile, a Deezer poll found that 40% of listeners would skip an AI track if they knew it was AI, without even listening to it, *even though they may not be able to identify the difference when they do hear it.*

In mid-September, Spotify added an AI Persona badge to artist profiles whose public identities appear to be AI-generated, rather than real people. More significantly, those AI Personas will, by default, be excluded from Spotify's editorial and algorithmic recommendations. Artists will be encouraged to identify themselves voluntarily, but Spotify says it will also review profiles and apply the badge where appropriate. We shall have to see how effective *that* is. It should also be noted that, as Spotify states: "This badge is about the artist's public identity, not about how the music was made." In other words, a human artist can use AI to generate parts

of a song—or even the entire track—and release it under their own name without getting the AI Persona badge. So, contrary to the headlines, Spotify has not "killed AI music." It has targeted AI *personas*, a very different thing.

On the other hand, live music, of which you as an audience member are a vital part, is undeniably human—authentic, imperfect (with flashes of soaring brilliance and graceful recovery), nuanced, spontaneous and responsive in real time. Chilean singer-songwriter **Claudia Acuña's** stunning performance last month, at the newly-opened The Pocket, was a perfect demonstration: about as organic and "real" as it gets. Celebrating her beautiful new album, *Ave de Luz* (Delfin), with a great band behind her, every note, every phrase was in the service of the song and, one felt, her life experience. So gut-wrenchingly real and profoundly emotionally resonant, it landed with almost physical force.

Few artists have done more to shape the modern language of vocal jazz than former Manhattan Transfer member **Janis Siegel**, herself a fabulous—and always fun—live performer. Her new album, *The Art of Vocalese* (Origin), is both a tribute to her mentor, master vocalist-lyricist **Jon Hendricks** (featuring rediscovered Hendricks lyrics) and a reflection on a lifetime devoted to inspired storytelling and beautiful vocal harmonies. "This was my first project immediately after the retirement of The Manhattan Transfer," Siegel says. "It's as much a tribute to Manhattan Transfer and the work we did as anything else." The album also features vocalists **Raul Midón**, **Lea DeLaria** and Siegel's vocal trio **JaLaLa**, with **Laurel Massé** and **Lauren Kinhan**.

New York jazz vocalist, lyricist and educator **Amy London** has announced *Alto Madness* (FiveCat), her first solo album in eight years. A founding member of the **Royal Bopsters**, who appear as special guests on the lead single "New York Afternoon", London wrote three new vocalese passages for the album, adding to the more than a dozen she has written and recorded over her career. The album also memorializes London's five-year weekly residency at Swing 46. "I was so inspired by the high level of musicianship onstage, I decided we should document this wonderful collaboration," says London. Catch her live at Birdland (Oct. 11).

Speaking of spontaneity, **Brigitte Fontaine's**

landmark 1970 Saravah album *Comme à la Radio* has just been reissued. Infused with the freewheeling improvisation of the Art Ensemble of Chicago (the album features AEC members Joseph Jarman, Roscoe Mitchell and Malachi Favors), the recording is about as spontaneous as studio albums get. The deluxe double LP pairs the original album with a second LP of rare bonus material and a 24-page bilingual booklet featuring an introduction by journalist Andy Beta, essays by Wadada Leo Smith (who, along with fellow trumpeter Lester Bowie, also plays on the album), Fontaine biographer Benoît Mouchart and Benjamin Barouh, plus a recent interview with Fontaine and the late Areski Belkacem.

Vocalist-composer **Judi Silvano's** Garden Winds, a voice-bassoon-flute trio, celebrates its new album, *First Flight* (JSL), at Westbeth (Oct. 3) and Jazz at the Barn (Oct. 18). At Ibeam Brooklyn (Oct. 4), catch Trio Nu, a collaborative group of improvisers led by vocalist **Noa Fort**, in a rare appearance while they're in town. **Amber Weekes** celebrates the centennial of her mentor and friend, prolific songwriter, poet, lyricist, vocalist and Civil Rights activist **Oscar Brown Jr.** Her album, *To Oscar With Love* (Amber Inn), honors a legacy that feels as relevant as ever. **Teri Roiger** will celebrate Thelonious Monk's birthday at Five Spot Jazz (Oct. 10). California singer-songwriter **Sylvia Brooks** is in town for the NYC release of her new album, *Soliloquy* (SBM), at Drom (Oct. 4). Billed as "an evening of music meant to be felt in the room," it marries four jazz standards with four original compositions exploring the many facets of human experience. Singer **Jon Regen** celebrates *Live in London* (JRM/Symphonic), recorded last year at the London Jazz Festival. A protégé of the great Kenny Barron, catch him at The Django (Oct. 21). Last year, vocalist-songwriter **Vicki Burns** debuted a spectacular Halloween show at the Green Room 42, which she is reprising at Chelsea Table + Stage in "Love Spell: An Enchanting Halloween" (Oct. 30). Singer-songwriter **Somi** celebrates her new album, *What Does It Take to Bloom?* (Salon Africana), at Sony Hall (Oct. 1) and SOPAC (Oct. 3). The daughter of Rwandan and Ugandan immigrants, Somi weaves global sensibilities into a grounded reflection on the journey toward belonging, through jazz, soul and spoken word. *Tessa Souter appears at Saint Peter's Church (Oct. 11)