

Hurry Red Telephone
Marc Ribot (Pi Recordings)
by Bill Meyer

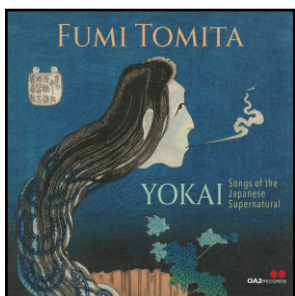
A dozen years have passed since guitarist Marc Ribot made his last totally instrumental album, *Live at the Village Vanguard*. On that outing, he and a rhythm section (bassist Henry Grimes and drummer Chad Taylor)—with feet planted firmly on either end of the free jazz historical continuum—drew connections between fire music and pre-WWII standards such as “Ol’ Man River” and “I’m Confessin’ (That I Love You)”. Not long after that recording, the world changed, and it showed in the albums that Ribot made. His voice was up front, saying what he needed to say: a world that should know better was going to hell.

Matters haven’t gotten any better, but Ribot has stepped back from the microphone anyway, and on *Hurry Red Telephone* he’s assembled a new, flexibly-configured instrumental quartet. Once more, Taylor is on drums, bringing an encyclopedic command of swinging, pummeling and loping beats that drive everyone else like a controlled gale. Matched sets of bassists and saxophonists fill the other two chairs—Sebastian Steinberg and Briggan Krauss on three tunes, Hilliard Greene and either James Brandon Lewis or Brian Settles on the other three. And for good measure, David Watson kicks off the opener with some blood-boiling bagpipes before yielding the mic to Lewis.

Once more, Ribot uses instrumental music to connect points that are decades apart, but this time, it’s personal. Steinberg is a confederate from the ’90s, when they played together in the band Shrek, and a pair of tunes by Ribot’s mentor, Haitian guitarist and composer Frantz Casseus, take the music back to the beginning. But the guitarist’s tone is very much in the noise-saturated, rock-informed style he’s favored in the last decade with Ceramic Dog. The combination of past notions and present sonics works quite well.

On *Hurry Red Telephone*, while playing in unison with the horn players, Ribot leads his ensemble through a set of emotive originals that encompass winding near-prog, hurtling free jazz and damp-sleeved, defiant balladry. Casseus’ “Rara” closes the album on a note of jubilant, pure joy, demonstrating that in a world that’s increasingly unreal, sometimes the only thing to do is feel.

For more info visit pirecordings.com. The album release concert is at Roulette Oct. 19. See Calendar.



Yokai: Songs of the Japanese Supernatural
Fumi Tomita (OA2)
by Marilyn Lester

What an intriguing idea! Like Western mythology, Japanese art and literature are full of spirits, phantoms

and divine entities (good and bad) occupying at least a thousand years of history. According to Japanese animism, spirit-like entities, called *yokai*, reside in all things, including natural phenomena and inanimate objects. In *Yokai: Songs of the Japanese Supernatural*, bassist Fumi Tomita draws on this folklore to create the musical equivalent of anime worlds such as those created by Studio Ghibli; think *Howl’s Moving Castle* or *Night in the Valley of the Witches*.

Each of the album’s nine original compositions describes a specific entity, yet the compositions have an overall lyrical cohesion, and although quite pleasing are also strangely haunting. There is a wonderful, mystical synchronicity among the players joining Tomita: Carl Clements (saxophones, flute), Jason Ennis (guitar) and Gary Fieldman (drums). The most evocative tracks are “Kitsune (The Fox)” and “Wakana Hime (Princess Wakana)”. The former conjures an image of a wily fox stalking a chicken coop (and ultimately succeeding), while the swaying rhythmic flow of the latter, with its harp-like guitar licks and delicate flute, invokes an ethereal princess gliding through the halls of a castle. Clements’ flute also beautifully suggests the oceanic currents of “Amabiko (Sea Lad)”. Elegant drumming underscores the moods of “Daija (Monster Snake)” and “Kiyomori”, a vengeful spirit. But if there’s an expectation of chaos with “Hyakki Yagyo (A Night Parade of One Hundred Demons)”, this charming piece counters any such idea.

In 2023 Tomita was dealing with grief and a spiritual crisis after his father’s death; he began exploring a book of Japanese woodblock prints his wife had given him, which depicted many of the *yokai*. Indeed, the resulting compositions make the most sense as a panacea for grief; they are beautiful and spiritual, invoking the supernatural in the form of angels and good fairies rather than demons. No matter the impetus, the result is an album that’s ultimately uplifting.

Yokai: Songs of the Japanese Supernatural isn’t Hollywood scary or Japanese frightening (take a look at some of those woodblock creatures), but it is folklorically attuned and a delight to be enjoyed.

For more info visit originarts.com/oa2/recordings. The album release concert is at ShapeShifter Lab Oct. 18 and Christ Church Cathedral (Hartford, CT) Oct. 17. See Calendar and 100 Miles Out.



Dedicated to You
Branford Marsalis/Dianne Reeves (Blue Note)
by Emily Steinhilber

The repertoire of John Coltrane (whose centennial was marked last month) survives reverence by remaining usable and alive. Vocalist Dianne Reeves joins saxophonist Branford Marsalis’ quartet on *Dedicated to You* to perform six standards, all of which were originally recorded on *John Coltrane and Johnny Hartman* (Impulse!, 1963), in addition to readings matched with instrumental versions of several Coltrane originals. “They Say It’s Wonderful” establishes the shared vocabulary of breath, patience and phrasing. Recorded by Rob Hunter at Spivey Hall at Clayton State University, *Dedicated to You* makes that space audible.

Sometimes a record makes closing your eyes feel like the most intelligent response; within the opening

moments of Marsalis’ version of “Central Park West”, the safest place in the world is inside a saxophone. Marsalis plays soprano here, in duet with pianist Joey Calderazzo, revisiting Coltrane’s ballad with remarkable composure. Calderazzo gives the harmony room to settle, while Marsalis holds the melodic line in a warm, centered tone, allowing phrases to arrive, resonate and recede. Marsalis establishes the romantic language through the horn; Reeves finds another route into the same tenderness. On “Autumn Serenade”, that relationship becomes rhythmic. Reeves adjusts her placement around the pulse, leaving openings for Marsalis, who answers with distinct, vocal phrasing. Voice and saxophone approach, separate and reconnect without crowding one another.

On “Lush Life”, Reeves holds Strayhorn’s long, melodic contours with a rounded, luxurious tone and extraordinary dynamic control; the technique disappears into the line. “Nancy (With the Laughing Face)” gives Marsalis the corresponding instrumental challenge. He preserves the melody while changing its weight through small inflections, finding expression inside the tune rather than decorating it beyond recognition. “Big Nick” says, okay, enough velvet, folks—here’s the band. Eric Revis (bass) and Justin Faulkner (drums) establish a pocket with propulsion while Marsalis and Calderazzo work freely above it; it’s a blissful ensemble groove architecture. “26-2” tightens the rhythmic and harmonic demands further. The quartet moves through the complex changes with conversational ease. Lines pass between players, the rhythm section keeps the music buoyant, and the complexity never announces itself as such.

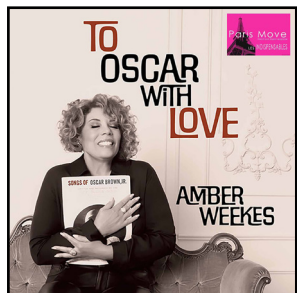
Marsalis has described Coltrane as being “like a whale,” a musician who knew the tradition and

RECOMMENDED NEW RELEASES

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- Jeff Colella/Putter Smith – *Between Friends* (AJI)
- Kris Davis Trio – *Lost in Geneva* (4166 Records)
- Paul Dunmall – *Afraid to Speak* (Discus Music)
- Kirk Knuffke, Marilyn Crispell, Thommy Andersson – *Paintbrush* (Sunnyside)
- Ben Goldberg Duo – *Dreaming Upon Waking* (BAG Productions)
- Muriel Grossmann – *First Meditations on John Coltrane* (RR Gems)
- Joel Harrison – *Live at Big Ears: In A Silent Way Reimagined* (AGS Recordings)
- Kevin Hays – *Live at The Stone* (AHT)
- Alden Hellmuth – *Tether* (Leiter)
- Mathis Picard – *The Sound Orchestra* (La Reserve)
- Adam Rudolph – *Invisible Threads* (Omni Sound)
- Janis Siegel – *The Art of Vocalese* (Origin)
- Space (Lisa Ullén, Elsa Bergman, Anna Lund) – *London Concert* (Fönstret)
- Henry Threadgill, Vijay Iyer, Dafnis Prieto – *Fifteen* (Nonesuch)
- Too Noisy Fish – *Tolstoy* (Inside Jazz)
- Isabella Sherwood – *The Sweetest Sounds* (Sabrina)
- Wadada Leo Smith – *Constellations and Hemispheres* (Burning Ambulance Music)

understood how to expand it, while describing his own goal here as remaining “sympathetic to the music.” Sympathetic is the operative word. Marsalis knows the tradition well enough to expand it without conquering it. *Dedicated to You* moves through preservation, reinterpretation, vocal dialogue, melodic tenderness and the quartet works as a functioning organism; the group adheres to a musical methodology where every note feels chosen.

For more info visit store.bluenote.com. The album release concert is at Carnegie Hall Oct. 27. See Calendar.



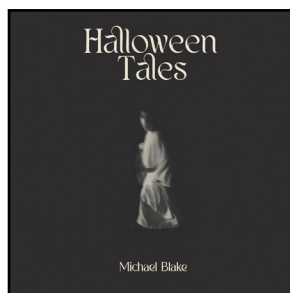
To Oscar with Love
Amber Weekes (Amber Inn)
by Anna Steegmann

Los Angeles-based jazz vocalist Amber Weekes has built her career on well-chosen tribute projects. Timed to this month's centennial of singer, songwriter and civil rights activist Oscar Brown Jr. (Oct. 10, 1926 - May 29, 2005), whom Weekes counted as both mentor and friend, *To Oscar with Love*, her fifth album, may be her most personal yet. Weekes approaches Brown's compositions as a living text that continues to hold up a mirror to the Black American experience today. Four tracks originally released on earlier albums have been remixed, remastered and re-orchestrated here. Weekes is one of the most compelling storytellers in modern vocal jazz. She lets songs breathe with measured, almost instrumentalist-like phrasing, and her warm timbre, dynamic range and narrative depth pull the listener in.

The album opens with a playful “Mr. Kicks”, her phrasing loose and conversational, setting the tone for an album unafraid to shift registers song-to-song. She leans into Brown's comic side on “But I Was Cool”, matching his sendup of stoic masculinity with knowing restraint rather than caricature, and brings a sly, flirtatious swing to “Hazel's Hips” that lets the lyric's wink land without overplaying it. On “Hum Drum Blues”, she delves into the grittier, blues-rooted side of Brown's writing, her tone shifting as the material demands. The album's emotional center is the Civil Rights-era lullaby, “Brown Baby”. Weekes' delivery is hushed and patient, treating the song's hope for a freer future as something private rather than performed. “A Tree and Me” and “Strong Man”—the latter written for Abbey Lincoln—give Weekes room to stretch past homage into interpretation. She sounds most at home here, her voice unhurried and confiding, as if finishing one of Brown's sentences rather than repeating it. With its patient, melodic unfolding, the track could become a signature piece in her live sets.

Producer and violinist Mark Cargill frames several songs with string writing that never overreaches, while Tony Campodonico (piano), Paul Jackson Jr. (guitar) and Harvey Estrada (bass) turn in standout performances. They are joined by an expansive lineup of talented musicians—far too numerous to name individually—who add texture without crowding out Weekes' storytelling instincts. *To Oscar with Love* succeeds because Weekes inhabits this material rather than merely honoring it—which is exactly what Brown himself might have asked for.

For more info visit amberweekes.com



Halloween Tales
Michael Blake (s/r)
by Marilyn Lester

You won't hear Johann Sebastian Bach or the Phantom of the Opera spooking it up at the organ with the “Toccata and Fugue in D minor”, but you will hear wily tenor saxophonist Michael Blake celebrate that scary time of year with *Halloween Tales*—and why not? Why should the winter holidays have all the fun? And so Blake has rounded up nine perfect, thematic tunes and gleefully and ingeniously reimagined them, with Gary Versace (piano), Ben Allison (bass) and Michael Sarin (drums) playing clever, often humorous and funky improvisations.

The stage is set with the opener, the theme from John Carpenter's 1978 slasher epic, *Halloween*. The haunted-mansion underscore and relentless piano repetition of the original begins here with Blake's stalking tenor to Allison's relentless bass, as Versace enters with terrifying piano insistence. A rising arc of saxophone hysteria cements the frightening mood. When Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn scored *Anatomy of a Murder* in 1959, their GRAMMY-winning music was, in cinematic terms, considered wonderfully innovative and avant garde. The theme's edgy, spiky, dramatic and driving statements are faithfully delivered here by the rhythm section, creating fertile territory for Blake's contrasting smoothed-out creative ideas. Ellington-Strayhorn are heard again with “Stalking Monster”, the second movement of the *Night Creature* suite. With Ellington's sly piano and a dollop of Ray Nance's violin, the hip intent of the original is unmistakable. Blake retains the mood with an extended, lyrical saxophone improvisation; this monster is one cool cat of the nightlife scene.

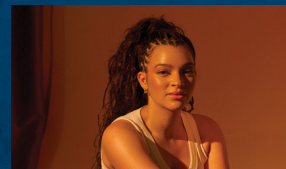
The references in *Halloween Tales* are mostly cinematic, but one songbook standard takes its place in the track list: Cy Coleman's “Witchcraft”, a composition that gives Blake a head start for improv with its unusual 40-bar ABCDA form. But in place of the usually jaunty melody, is a haunting piano intro, with Blake sliding into the lyricism of the tune with elongated minor statements, then opening up to a more discernible melodic familiarity. Picture Morticia and Gomez Addams dancing to this one—and perhaps also to a waltz on the lighter side of the Halloween spectrum: pianist-composer Vince Guaraldi's “Pumpkin Waltz” from the TV special, *It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown*. Blake maintains the lyrical and joyous mood of the piece, despite the notion that a doleful Charlie Brown might be playing the tenor. “Transylvanian Lullaby” (*Young Frankenstein*), “Sally's Song” (*The Nightmare Before Christmas*) and another Guaraldi Charlie Brown tune, “Breathless”, precede the closer, Blake's original, “The Creep”, a portrait of an outlier straight from the graveyard.

Blake grew up celebrating Halloween in Canada, with pillowcases full of candy, streets full of firecrackers and an “invitation to wave your freak flag and enjoy the unexpected.” He's translated that fun mood into his *Halloween Tales*—so don your best costume, get ready to trick or treat, and revel in the mystery of spooky fun.

For more info visit michaelblake.bandcamp.com. The album release concerts are at Bar Bayeux Oct. 3, The Django Oct. 22 and Bar Lunático Oct. 31. See Calendar.

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NOV 11

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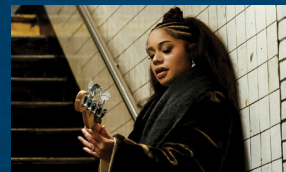
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