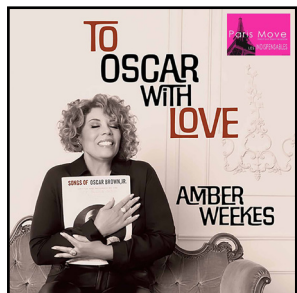


understood how to expand it, while describing his own goal here as remaining “sympathetic to the music.” Sympathetic is the operative word. Marsalis knows the tradition well enough to expand it without conquering it. *Dedicated to You* moves through preservation, reinterpretation, vocal dialogue, melodic 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.



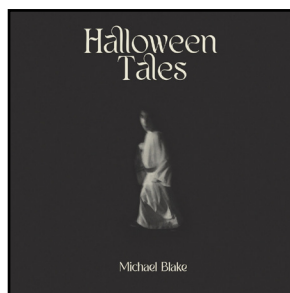
To Oscar with Love
Amber Weekes (Amber Inn)
by Anna Steegmann

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 Campodónico (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.

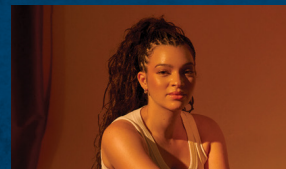
The references in *Halloween Tales* are mostly cinematic, but one songbook standard takes its place in the track list: Cy Coleman's “Witchcraft”, a composition that gives Blake a head start for improv with its unusual 40-bar ABCDA form. But in place of the usually jaunty melody, is a haunting piano intro, 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.

Blue Note NEW YORK

UPCOMING SHOWS



NOV 2-3

**ELENA
PINDERHUGHES**



NOV 5-6

**SID SRIRAM
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& AUSTIN WILLIAMSON**



NOV 7-8

KENYON DIXON



NOV 9

YAZMIN LACEY



NOV 11

**THE DON BROWN
COLLECTIVE**



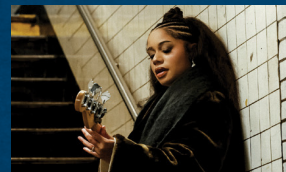
NOV 16

MAMAS GUN



NOV 18-19

**CHARLES LLOYD
QUARTET**



NOV 20-22

ANEESA STRINGS



NOV 24

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