

DROP THE NEEDLE



Mother Ship
Larry Young (Blue Note Tone Poet)
by Andrew Schinder

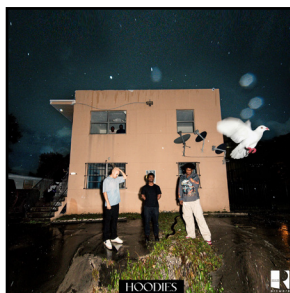
One of the seminal organists in jazz history, Larry Young helped establish the Hammond B-3 organ as a legitimate instrument in a post-Coltrane jazz idiom. Born and raised in Newark, NJ, Young, in his tragically shortened life (he would have turned 86 this month, but passed away at age 37 in 1978), developed a complex, layered approach that started out in the realms of soul jazz and post-bop and ultimately explored funk, fusion and the avant garde.

Blue Note's Tone Poet series has recently reissued Young's posthumously-released *Mother Ship*, the organist's sixth and final album for Blue Note, which found him at a stylistic crossroads. Young was moving away from the more straight-ahead sound of *Unity* (1965), considered by many to be his masterpiece. As brilliant as *Unity* is, however, *Mother Ship* is perhaps even more fulfilling. Not the crowd pleaser that *Unity* is considered, here the organist and his group experiment with different textures, sonic possibilities and time signatures. Recorded in 1969, this album went unreleased until 1980, and even then remained fairly unheralded.

There are two secrets to *Mother Ship*'s success—two Morgans, in fact (no relation): Lee and Herbert. Lee Morgan's trumpet work is aggressive and confident, the musician fully unleashed from his hard bop output over the prior decade, while fellow Newarker, tenor saxophonist Herbert Morgan provides additional depth. While not as celebrated as Lee, the saxophonist was a regular collaborator of Young's (appearing on the organist's prior albums *Of Love and Peace*, *Contrasts* and *Heaven on Earth*) and his contributions to this session are essential. The quartet here demonstrates a palpable, substantial chemistry, as the harmonic brassiness of the two-horn frontline beautifully complements the leader's dark, enigmatic organ sound. Though drummer Eddie Gladden did appear on two earlier Young albums (*Contrasts* and *Heaven on Earth*), he was a bit of an unsung hero at this early juncture in his career. Throughout this session, he can be heard providing a relentless, reliable, motoring, rhythmic undercurrent, including on the opening title track, on which Gladden provides a background percussion freakout for its duration. It's a monster, with the horns blasting off, in contrast with the leader's sinister organ tones. "Street Scene" mellows out the mood, an exercise in funk that allows the two Morgans to cook. "Trip Merchant", perhaps the album's most fascinating track, is a dense, percussion-forward avant garde mood piece that enables the musicians to play free, while encouraging each to demonstrate enough discipline to maintain cohesion.

With Tone Poet's *Mother Ship*, Blue Note has provided the jazz community, as well as the legacy of Larry Young, a great service with this vinyl-only, 180g audiophile re-release, which comes in a snazzy, deluxe, gatefold tip-on jacket.

For more info visit store.bluenote.com



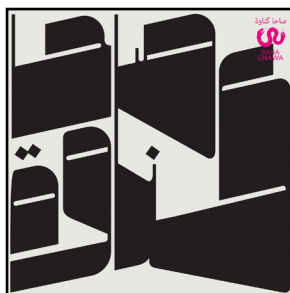
Hoodies
New Jazz Underground (Artwork)
by Rachel Smith

They say that timing is everything. Bands only get one chance to make their debut and New Jazz Underground (NJU)—the working trio of Juilliard graduates Abdias Armenteros (saxophones, vocals), Sebastian Rios (bass) and T.J. Reddick (drums)—has certainly picked the right moment in the band's lifetime to release their debut album. There's the energy: "how do you do (ii)" begins as a percussion-vocal duo, with tension bubbling under the surface, until it explodes into the trio's full intense sound. There's the strength of the compositions, and the fact that these three players gel perfectly. NJU has been playing "Hold My Halo (Paint Me Perfectly)" for more than four years, and the track is one of the album's high points. While there are certainly solos, the focus of the album remains the sound of the band as a whole. About half of *Hoodies* also centers on a unifying concept: an ambitious six-part suite written by the band's primary composer, Rios, which moves masterfully from blues to traditional Irish music influences.

While this is the band's full debut album, it is not their first release: it follows last year's six-track EP *Dying of Thirst*, which featured reinventions of the music of Kendrick Lamar, and which showed NJU to be a creative band with expressive power tied to their generation. Those same strengths come through here, as this release already marks a change in the band's self-presentation. While the music feels fresh, its connection to today is subtler. Titles such as "Pseudo latin vibe" and "sad boy interlude" feel like a residue of the band's earlier status as a viral sensation. The group's identity has since grown with this music.

The history of jazz has always been pushed forward by such creative, thoughtful, young minds like New Jazz Underground.

For more info visit newjazzunderground.com. The album release concert is at Exit Zero Jazz Festival (Cape May, NJ) Oct. 25. See 100 Miles Out.



Saha Gnawa
Saha Gnawa (Pique-Nique)
by Tom Greenland

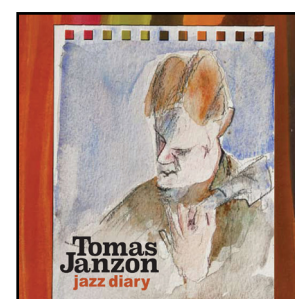
Moroccan Gnawa and jazz turn out to be compatible playmates. Both are multicultural musics that arose from the spiritual and secular traditions of slaves. Saxophonist Pharoah Sanders and pianist Randy Weston, among others, have previously explored their compatibilities, but one of the most exciting projects to emerge is Saha Gnawa, an eclectic ensemble co-led by Maalem Hassan BenJaafar (vocals, guembri) and Daniel Freedman (drums).

BenJaafar's deep understanding of Gnawa, developed through childhood tutelage under the

Moroccan masters, is fused with Freedman's fluency in African, Afro-Caribbean, Arabic and jazz musics. The basic sound is driven by BenJaafar's thumping guembri—a bass lute with hollowed-out wooden resonator box, camel skin top and goat strings—which approximates the intimate moans of nomadic Saharan dromedaries. His soulful, repetitive vocals are answered by a men's chorus (Amino Belyamani, David Lizmi, Ahmed Jeriouda, Naoufal Atiq) accompanying themselves on qraqebs (double-cupped iron castanets) in two-handed, trance-inducing rhythms that slipperily shift between 3- and 4-beat accent patterns—akin to the way a swing beat shifts between triplets and even eighth-notes. Add to this Freedman and Gustavo DiDalva's layered percussion, Guilherme Moneiro's prickly, muted guitar and Jason Lindner's subtly dissonant keyboard and synthesizer textures—and something wonderful (and 'wanderful') starts to transpire.

This sound world has been germinating for over a decade in BenJaafar's Innov Gnawa ensemble, but Saha Gnawa takes the further step of adding improvisational firepower in the form of special guests Gilad Hekselman and Nels Cline (guitars) and Donny McCaslin (tenor). Hekselman (who appears on five of the album's eight selections) adds yet another layer to the cake, but on "Aicha", the only track in an odd meter—beginning in 5/4, smoothly segueing to 6/8 halfway through—he delivers a short, melodic solo employing outward-bound pentatonic motifs. Cline contributes muffled trills to "Soudani Manayou" as the band slowly but steadily accelerates; on "Bacha Hamou" he colors his more extroverted solo with mellow distortion. The most notable cameo is by McCaslin who, though commencing and concluding quietly and tastefully, nevertheless releases a gush of energy in the middle of "Negshah". Another highlight is "Tbal", which features Nuyorican vocalist Abraham Rodriguez Jr., invoking Santería deities much as, earlier in the song, BenJaafar invokes African spirits. Percussionists Gilmar Gomes and Román Díaz (representing Brazil and Cuba, respectively) add additional palpitations to the music's racing heartbeat.

For more info visit sahagnawa.com. Saha Gnawa is at Pioneer Works Oct. 17-18 (part of Ragas Live Festival). See Calendar.



Jazz Diary
Tomas Janzon (Changes Music)
by Jeff Cebulski

The Swedish expatriate guitarist Tomas Janzon has settled in NYC, but he is never too far from his first American home, Los Angeles. His longtime musical partner, the bassist Nedra Wheeler, resides there, and his new album, *Jazz Diary*, was recorded in Pasadena, CA, in two 2025 sessions. An added live track attests to their sympatico relationship: "Six on Five", a scintillating live duet, was recorded in the early 2000s. Janzon's classical-influenced, bluesy Spanish guitar is juxtaposed here with Wheeler's deep bass expression and hollow-bodied percussion. The duo's synchronicity powers this typically lean, harmonically angular collection, which mostly developed from early-morning notations the guitarist sketched on folded sheets, usually in the wee hours. This peek into the composing process makes this new