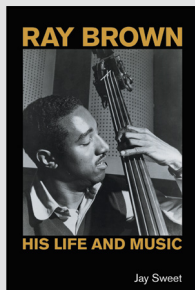


IN PRINT



Ray Brown: His Life and Music **Jay Sweet (Equinox)** by Ken Dryden

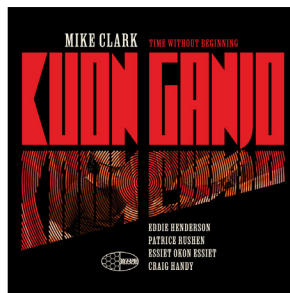
Legendary bassist Ray Brown, whose centennial is this month (b. Oct. 13, 1926 – d. Jul. 2, 2002) has long been acclaimed for his vast contributions as a sideman, bandleader, composer and soloist. Author Jay Sweet’s in-depth biography, *Ray Brown: His Life and Music*, explores many aspects of Brown’s career and life, offering an excellent synopsis of his evolution from a young, self-taught Pittsburgh musician to becoming a full-fledged professional who was widely respected by his peers and listeners worldwide.

While working on the road as a teenager, Brown solicited work by mailing agencies, which resulted in offers from bandleaders Lucky Millinder and Billy Eckstine. But it was meeting trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie in a club that resulted in his prompt hiring. This was the moment his career received a significant jump start. Other important early milestones included backing Ella Fitzgerald in 1947, which led to their marriage (their union dissolved in 1953 due to Brown’s desire to expand his musical horizons by touring with Jazz at the Philharmonic and the Oscar Peterson Trio). He stayed with Peterson until late 1965; the two remained friends and played together when the opportunity arose, making numerous recordings together over the next three decades. During his years with Peterson, Brown took advantage of opportunities to play outside the Trio, recording his first solo albums and continuing to grow as a composer. By the mid ’70s he was working regularly as a leader or as a co-leader.

Much of the book is devoted to discussing Brown’s recordings with various groups, noting highlights as well as less-noteworthy performances. The author’s survey is extensive. He cites recordings by title with mention of record labels and catalog numbers within the text, instead of burying them in footnotes in the back of the book (a major help to collectors). And not only are his plethora of jazz dates discussed, but so too are his prolific work on pop and soundtrack albums. One of the bassist’s triumphs was coaxing pianist Gene Harris out of semi-retirement to join his quartet. After a long tenure recording for Concord Jazz with the L.A. Four and his own band, Brown would sign to Telarc Jazz, where he produced a formidable output of albums during his final years, while continuing to tour and mentor younger musicians, including pianists Benny Green and Geoffrey Keezer, as well as fellow bassists John Clayton and Christian McBride.

Jay Sweet has done an excellent job in helping readers understand how important the bassist is to jazz history, and what better bassist than Ray Brown to prove that point.

For more info visit equinoxonlinelibrary.com



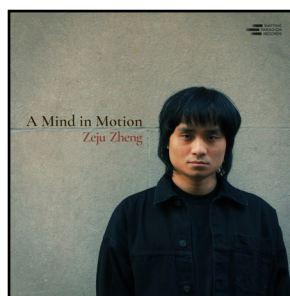
Kuon Ganjo - Time Without Beginning **Mike Clark (Wide Hive)** by Scott Yanow

It has long been a well-known “secret” that Mike Clark, drummer with Herbie Hancock’s funk-oriented Headhunters and a colorful contributor to a large assortment of sessions, loves to play straight-ahead jazz. His last five albums as a leader (*Blues on Top*, *Plays Herbie Hancock*, *Standard Deviations*, *Kosen Rufu* and *Itai Doshin*) are filled with standards and swing. With the exception of bassist Essiet Okon Essiet (whose predecessor was Henry Franklin), *Kuon Ganjo* reunites the same band from his prior *Itai Doshin* album: Craig Handy (tenor), Eddie Henderson (trumpet), Patrice Rushen (piano, keyboards).

The album’s title is a Buddhist term, which translates to “time without beginning,” an eternal state that transcends measurable time. Not surprisingly, this relatively brief Clark composition is taken out-of-tempo and is the session’s most adventurous performance. Otherwise, the set consists of a three-minute version of Sonny Rollins’ “East Broadway Rundown” (Rollins’ original was over 20 minutes long), “Softly as in a Morning Sunrise”, “Monk’s Dream”, Hancock’s “Toys”, Wayne Shorter’s “Beauty and the Beast” and Jan Hammer’s passionate “Lungs”, plus a minor blues in “Austin City Shuffle”, and the slightly exotic “Eddy and Hyde”. In general, the music played is swinging, post-bop jazz, with concise solos, each musician making every note count. Henderson, 84 at the time of this recording, is as ageless as ever. That said, Handy’s muscular, fluent solos frequently take the honors. It is refreshing to hear Rushen playing no-nonsense jazz, and the supportive Essiet takes a few worthy, notable solos along the way.

One can feel Clark, who turns 80 this month, smiling throughout this rewarding set, content to play mostly in a supportive role, while consistently uplifting the music by bolstering the performances from each of his bandmates along the way.

For more info visit widehive.com. The album release concert is at Jazzcultural Oct. 1. He is also at Smalls Oct. 12. See Calendar.



A Mind in Motion **Zeju Zheng (Shifting Paradigm)** by Tom Greenland

An artist’s debut recording as a leader is an exciting event, a chance to present their personal vision, show their stuff, make a statement. China-born, NYC-based guitarist Zeju Zheng makes his opening move with *A Mind in Motion*, an album of original compositions, with Arnie Sainz (piano), Drew Gress (bass) and Chidiebere Emmanuel (drums). Many artists in a similar situation might be tempted to saturate a CD or digital download

with 78 minutes of crafty compositions and sizzling solos to display their chops and savvy. Zheng’s playing is indeed impressive, but he seems more interested in making an impression, in moving his listeners with sincere intent, as his impassive yet penetrating gaze in the front cover photo makes clear.

Recorded in March 2023, while Zheng was working on his master’s degree in jazz performance at NYU, the music is unhurried and unworried, like sparse poetry. The focal point is his beautiful guitar tone: warm with a honed edge, often wetted with a long-delay echo effect. The quavery echo can become a bit distracting on held notes, but most of the time it adds wonderful depth and clarity to his guitar sound. Zheng’s phrasing is rigorously motivic, the arc of his improvisations built on a foundation of short, clear units chained together. There are starts and stops. He leaves space to let statements sink in. When he speeds up, as on “Simple”, “Little Song” and “Waiting for You”, his tone and taste remain, his sound suggestive of Pat Martino’s driving eighth-notes and Pat Metheny’s liquid lyricism. On slower numbers such as “Drain” and “At the Corner”, Zheng’s melody readings are spartan, unadorned, while his improvisations are suffused with shifting shapes that become songs within songs, lending them a feeling of inevitability. Sainz is an active—even hyperactive—partner, closely shadowing Zheng’s every move with imitative counter-moves, almost like another echo effect, his solo style similarly motivic and lyrical. Gress, the group’s elder statesman, shines on his extended turns on the two ballads. Emmanuel does some of his best work on “Little Song” and “Simple”, blowing over a 7/8 outro vamp on the latter.

Given the promise of this debut, one wonders what Zheng sounds like today, three-and-a-half years later.

For more info visit shiftingparadigmrecords.com. Zheng is at Kato Sake Works Oct. 10. See Calendar.



Alight Upon the Lake: Live at the Jazz Showcase **Yusef Lateef (Resonance)** by Fred Bouchard

Twelve (mainly wind) instruments, eight genres, five careers, 83 years active. Statistics may quantify the career of the late Yusef Lateef, but the tally barely recounts the tale (read: legend) of this beloved reedman, composer, educator, philosopher, historian and extraordinary spirit. Born 106 years ago this month (Oct. 9), William (Bill) Emanuel Huddleston (Evans) grew up in Detroit, MI, and immersed himself in its diverse hotbed of musical activities, helping to evolve it further. He starred in the bands of Dizzy Gillespie and Cannonball Adderley, wrote short stories and academic studies and co-authored an autobiography, *The Gentle Giant* (2005), with journalist Herb Boyd (who shared these jacket notes). He was a philosophical soul, as the cover of his debut album, *The Thinker* (Savoy, 1957), suggests: its cover depicts his quintet in front of Rodin’s statue.

On these unearthed recordings, Lateef helms a fab four of brethren from the Philly scene—Kenny Barron (piano), Bob Cunningham (bass) and Albert “Tootie” Heath (drums)—playing all out on an uproarious weekend at Chicago’s world-class Jazz Showcase club in June 1975. Across three LPs (nearly three hours of music), the quartet consistently excites with originals and free-form fantasias. Barron’s “Untitled” roams the Lateef-scape, segueing travels to Jamaica, the Mideast

and Motor City, with all hands in: bowed Bob, 88-key Kenny, chugging Tootie. Lateef's tricky "Mutually Exclusive" flits through post-Coltrane "Giant Steps" modal riffs with extra verve. Detroit drummer Roy Brooks' "Eboness" features heady, vibrato-rich bamboo flute over swooning dotted-eighth bass à la Horace Silver. "Inside Atlantis", another Barron original, swims by like a suite from Sea World. Tenor rips the changes like sharks after herring, then swims with whales in strong, swooning bass lines; piano whisks us to a folksy fishing village where dock kids troll for snappy wire-brush bait-fish. On "I Remember Webster" Lateef tenderly evokes the breathy aura of gentle giant Ben (Webster), "a kindred spirit," who passed in 1973. "Opus 1 & 2", Akira Inoue's meditative chant for piano, bowed bass and Zen-tense "Eastern" flute, floats smoothly into a grrr-easy, funk groove.

The bandleader woos his "Golden Goddess" by reciting "If I were the wind...", inhabiting Aeolian and Boreal temperaments, then wafting an impassioned flute ballad to vocal house acclaim. "Straighten Up and Fly Right" (the Nat "King" Cole 1943 crossover hit) gets a-rockin' and a-stompin' as Lateef keens, flashes and wails over relentless rhythm. "Yusef's Mood", a YAL favorite, brings up the house in a rowdy romp and sets it back down with a "Goin' Home" a cappella coda for the grateful, enthralled faithful. One disappointment: Lateef never shares his signature double-reed mastery on oboe or bassoon all weekend!

Deep kudos to Joe and Wayne Segal, lifelong stewards of the music and its creators, and deacons/proprietors of the Jazz Showcase (which will be celebrating its 80th year in 2027), and to producer/caretaker Zev Feldman.

For more info visit resonancerecords.org



New Digs
Michael Formanek (Intakt)
by Stuart Broomer

The title *New Digs* may reference bassist-composer Michael Formanek's relocation from America to Portugal a few years ago. It might also refer to the new compositions that Formanek has crafted for the remarkable septet assembled here. Trumpeter João Almeida is a Portuguese native; alto saxophonist John O'Gallagher is, like Formanek, an American resident in Portugal; tenor saxophonist-clarinetist Chet Dexas is a Canadian transplanted to New York; Formanek's partners in Thumbscrew, guitarist Mary Halvorson and drummer Tomas Fujiwara, are also NYC residents, while Alexander Hawkins, a key figure playing Hammond organ, is English. Together they create music of special resonance, varied voices and influences, merging with Formanek's strong, new compositions.

The opening, "New Old World", signals a frequent contrast between weaving unison themes and free improvisations. As a bassist, often in a foundational role, Formanek has a keen sense of background and foreground, something that's frequently in play here. The title "Prequel" references the first musicians assembled for the project. It's essentially a quartet

piece, emphasizing the band's rhythmic and electric foundations: Hawkins providing dense organ, Halvorson electronic squiggles and Fujiwara brilliant machine-gun drumming, with Formanek developing a subtly detailed, complex lead.

The leader's roles as composer, orchestrator and bassist are all strongly reflected in "Gone Home/Interlude for Susan Alcorn", beginning with a moving unaccompanied bass solo. When the ensemble enters, it's with suggestions of hypnotic minimalism and Gil Evans-like transparent voicings. Admirable lead work from Almeida shifts from composed to improvised melody before turning to Halvorson's harp-like arpeggios and Fujiwara's sparkling percussion, ultimately concluding with Dexas' impassioned tenor soloing over rich orchestral support.

The same subtle matchings of composed material and liberated improvisation contribute to all nine of Formanek's works, with every member of the group coming to the fore. "Braxes" has a strong initial theme, but its principal development is a collective improvisation by the three winds supported by Formanek's bass line. "Quinze" opens with an extended passage of spacey organ, dissonant clusters resolving to single tones and a stunning distortion solo from Halvorson. O'Gallagher contributes an intense, keening invocation before the theme of "It Was" emerges, in turn surrendering to a dense overlay of improvisation, the conclusion framing the work with an ever-brief unaccompanied envoi from O'Gallagher.

For more info visit intaktrec.ch. Formanek is at Close Up Oct. 28. He is also at The Jazz Gallery Oct. 29 and Firehouse 12 (New Haven, CT) Oct. 30, both with Myra Melford's Splash. See Calendar and 100 Miles Out.

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