



Open Air: The Complete Saxophone Quartet Compositions of Julius Hemphill
Marty Ehrlich (Out of Your Head)
by Tom Greenland

Only Marty Ehrlich could’ve pulled this project off so successfully. As a long-time friend, mentee, sideman and collaborator of the late saxophonist-composer Julius Hemphill, he has both the requisite artistry and life experience to present *Open Air: The Complete Saxophone Quartet Compositions of Julius Hemphill*, a double album containing all 41 of Hemphill’s known saxophone/woodwind quartet pieces.

Folks familiar with World Saxophone Quartet recordings from the late ’70s through the late ’80s will have heard about two-thirds of these arrangements as performed by Hemphill, Oliver Lake, David Murray and Hamiet Bluiett. What they won’t have heard is another dozen or so pieces that Ehrlich discovered while establishing the Julius Hemphill Archive at New York University, which make their recording debut here. Many of the compositions are arranged for soprano, alto, tenor and baritone saxophones, but a significant number utilize various combinations of flutes (soprano, alto) and clarinets (soprano, alto, bass) and/or saxophones. With the help of saxophonists Allan Chase, Robert DeBellis,

Brian Landrus, Andy Laster, Jeff Lederer, Lisa Parrott, Jason Robinson and Andrew White, Ehrlich recorded the repertoire in two formats: as live, in-studio quartet performances, or (aping his mentor’s *modus operandi*) as overdubbed tracks. Amazingly, the latter technique doesn’t affect the vitality of the performances because, as Ehrlich observes in his liner notes, “each piece has its own expressive imperative.”

Hemphill’s voice as a composer-arranger resonates with that of Thad Jones, who took swing and blues, core values of Count Basie’s sound, and turned them into something more contemporary. Hemphill’s down-home roots are likewise evident, even as his melodic lines explore the post-bop frontier, while his harmonies veer from gospel chorales, to swinging *solis* and *tuttis* heard in big band arrangements, to angsty soundscapes more germane to contemporary classical praxis.

Space prohibits the detailed praise this project deserves, but a few highlights should suffice. “R&B” and “Stick” epitomize the folksy futurism referenced above, the former with sexy *solis* and slow striptease, the latter with funk and finesse. “My First Winter, I”, on the other hand, suggests a Nordic landscape and an existential soundscape: gorgeous but chilling. “Hearts” is wonderfully weird, laced with plummy chords. “Pillars Latino” is catchy and complex, with tricky cascade entrances and knotty counterpoint. “Big Foot”, full of quirks and twists, is admirably executed by the quartet. “Ji Ji Tune” is joyfully outrageous. “Void”, just over a minute long, is nevertheless chock-full of clever ideas and varied textures.

While the album’s emphasis is on composition, there are distinguished solo turns as well: DeBellis’ upfront alto on “Untitled”, a chart that could serve as a treatise on melodic chromaticism; Landrus’ warm, full-throated baritone, which elevates “Bumpkin” and

“Connections”; Robinson’s fine tenor work on “My First Winter, II”; and Ehrlich’s silky, Johnny Hodges-esque alto lighting a romantic fire on “Georgia Blue”.

A significant release, *Open Air* is testimony to both Ehrlich the artist/curator and Hemphill the arranger/innovator.

For more info visit outofyourheadrecords.com. Ehrlich is at Greenwich House Music School Nov. 5 (part of “Celebrating Frank Kimbrough”) and The Clemente Nov. 10 (part of the Jeff Schlanger Memorial). See Calendar.



In Light of a New Moon
Asaf Yuria (JOJO)
by Rachel Smith

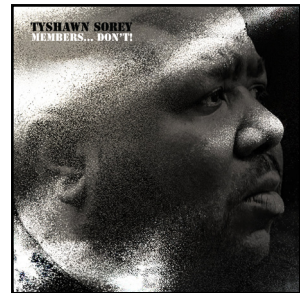
On *In Light of a New Moon*, Tel Aviv-born tenor saxophonist Asaf Yuria continues to explore the hard bop tradition he has long admired and grew up in. The group’s sound here, and lineup—George Cables (piano), Omer Avital (bass) and Billy Hart (drums), with Joe Magnarelli (trumpet on two of the album’s seven tracks)—harkens to classic jazz sessions at the legendary Rudy Van Gelder Studio, once upon a time in Hackensack, NJ and now in Englewood Cliffs, where Yuria’s new album was recorded.

The saxophonist’s desire to place himself in this tradition, not only as a bandleader and musician, but also as a composer comes through in music and title of his sole original, “In Praise of Shadows”. The tune is right at home among two standards (“Polka Dots and Moonbeams” and “Con Alma”), Hank Mobley’s “Hipsippy Blues” and two George Cables compositions.

His quintet’s album release last month (at Midtown’s hot new spot, Jazzcultural)—with Santi Debriano in place of Avital—additionally offered a preview of his next album, which is drawn from the same recording session. The concert made it clear that this music was created across generations; Yuria, now 40, played with the fire and energy of his younger self, bringing power to the band. At times during his solos, however, it felt like the story was getting buried by ornamentation or a profusion of notes. Magnarelli was more selective in his solos, and the space he left between notes was especially effective on the group’s live rendition of “Hipsippy Blues”. In concert this issue was most apparent on the ballad “Polka Dots and Moonbeams”—in contrast to the recording, where the tune is stripped down to just Yuria and Cables, bringing out its vulnerability and intimacy. The duo format returned, though in a less powerful way, for the final tune on the album, Dizzy Gillespie’s “Con Alma”. Though Cables was inventive as always, this skill comes at the personal cost of allowing the whole band to take on the Gillespie tune, which they successfully did live.

The album, the concert and the ensemble are proof of the message that hangs on a sign near Jazzcultural’s entrance: “jazz is alive and well in New York”!

For more info visit jojorecords.com/asaf-yuria



Members... Don't!
Tyshawn Sorey (Pi Recordings)
by Kurt Gottschalk

Max Roach’s 1968 album, *Members, Don’t Git Weary*, is frequently, and rightly, seen as the drummer-composer continuing on a path he’d set in 1961 with the crucial *We Insist!*, aligning his music with the growing Civil Rights Movement. But the title of the 1968 album leaves room for interpretation. It’s a direct address, but to whom? Is he calling for activists not to allow themselves to grow weary of their mission? The title track—the only vocal piece on the album and the only one Roach wrote, borrowing from the riches of Black devotional song—is a plea to the congregation not to falter on the path to salvation. There was also, at the time, another movement at play: the jazz world opening up to electric instruments and new forms of modal playing and spiritual thinking. Roach convened a group of younger players—Gary Bartz (alto), Charles Tolliver (trumpet) and Stanley Cowell (piano), with the elder Jymie Merritt (electric bass) and Andy Bey singing the title track—for an album that looked forward to the future of jazz while suggesting hope for the future of the race.

Tyshawn Sorey, a contemporary drummer and composer of merit, has updated Roach’s album, giving it a renewed urgency for maybe even more troubled times. He shortens the title to an admonishment—*Members... Don’t!*—amps up the energy, resequences it and triples the length for a stunning revitalization of an important and overlooked statement. The album opens with a lovely arrangement of “Abstrusions” in a

slow escalation prominently featuring Adam O’Farrill (trumpet) and Mark Shim (tenor). The whole album, in fact, feels like an escalation, even with lovely passages by Lex Korten (piano) and a moving, unaccompanied solo by Tyrone Allen II (bass) during the 26 minutes of Cowell’s “Equipoise”. Sorey’s drumming is on point, a propulsive undercurrent pulling toward the conclusion. And what a conclusion it is. Sorey moves the title song to what seems its rightful place, as exuberant conclusion, and employs the exceptional interpreter Fay Victor to chirp, growl, shout, swing and gospelize through Roach’s text.

The album was recorded live at the end of a four-night engagement at NYC’s The Jazz Gallery in June 2025, marking the venue’s 30th anniversary. It’s a warm and detailed recording, with the audience in there during the occasional break, affirming the excitement of this potent new realization.

For more info visit pirecordings.com. Sorey is at Miller Theatre Nov. 7 (with *Paradoxical Frog*). See Calendar.



¡Brilla! Suite!
Angelica Sanchez Quartet (RogueArt)
by Matty Bannond

Four straight-backed improvisers square up for an eye-level congress on this confident release. Soloists seldom demand deferential hush. Instead, the flow of ideas keeps pressing onward. Above busy rhythms and chattering patterns, individuals must make every statement pay off, giving each moment of lucidity a hard-earned quality. That flat hierarchy reflects the protagonists’ ample experience. On *¡Brilla Suite!* Angelica Sanchez’ quartet explore eight originals by the pianist-leader, who leaves big gaps for interplay and extrapolation for her bandmates Adam O’Farrill (trumpet, electronics), John Hébert (bass) and Chad Taylor (drums).

The group’s dead-serious credentials are unmistakable from the first number, “Funny Thing”. O’Farrill’s trumpet has a wah-wah quality, as he and Sanchez garble the wonky melody over Taylor’s idiosyncratic drumming. Notes clump together in flurries during an extended piano solo. It is an intense piece, with lots of license for digression and few dips in velocity. “Shines” is perhaps the most tightly-composed track, with a neatly defined melody and tuneful passages of free playing. Taylor swaps sticks for brushes beneath O’Farrill’s solo. The trumpeter leaves big pauses between phrases, crisp lines often circling in place before zooming ahead. The album closer, “Put Your Hand in the Black Hole”, features the heaviest use of electronics. After a dark section of thudding low piano notes and shivery cymbals, looping pulses, like an ultrasound heartbeat, form an undercurrent for Sanchez’ meandering lines.

¡Brilla Suite! is a collection of sonic short stories, each distinctive, but all bearing the mark of Sanchez’ self-possessed compositional style. Without a main character, the four figures in the quartet share the work of advancing their narrative. It is music where rock-solid instincts strike against sharp ideas to send hot sparks soaring through the speakers.

For more info visit roguart.com. Sanchez is at National Jazz Museum in Harlem Nov. 6 (part of *M3 Festival*). See Calendar.

DROP THE NEEDLE



Renee Said
Elan Mehler (Newvelle)
by Ken Dryden

Since co-founding the Newvelle record label with Jean-Christophe Morisseau in 2016, pianist Elan Mehler has been on a mission to document unique new music. For every recording session, the label uses the long-established Eastside Sound in Lower Manhattan, a studio that allows for a consistent, ideal analog sound. And Newvelle’s attention to detail does not stop there: each album is released as a high-quality, vinyl-only, 180g pressing, which comes inside a tip-on gatefold jacket that features unique album artwork by Icelandic contemporary artist Ragnar Kjartansson.

Mehler’s new album as a leader is part of the *Newvelle Ten Collection*, a five-album series—with other titles by leaders Martin Wind, Ingrid Jensen, Loren Stillman and Skúli Sverrisson—celebrating the label’s tenth anniversary. His session features an all-star cast of veteran players: Stillman (alto), Scott Robinson (tenor), Ben Monder (guitar) and Tony Scherr (bass), plus drummers Francisco Mela and Matt Wilson (the drummers are both present on five tracks, with Mela on the left channel and Wilson on the right).

Mehler’s approach emphasizes both space and interweaving lines. The main focus is on his compositions, beginning with the whispering ballad “Renee Said”, which slowly blossoms as the full group is added, its lush blend of voices conveying passion as the intensity grows. Paul Motian is underappreciated as a composer, so Mehler’s striking setting of his “Byablue” (first recorded by Keith Jarrett in the late ’70s, when Motian was part of Jarrett’s American Quartet) is especially welcome. Mehler, Stillman and Monder ably negotiate its repeated line and challenging overlapping harmonies, perhaps inspired by the pioneering work of Ornette Coleman. The pianist’s rambunctious “Dani’s Fortress” conveys the image of a happy young girl at play. “White Cloud’s Dark Sky” puts the spotlight on Robinson, with Monder’s surging guitar and the leader’s piano taking off in a gallop as the piece fades out. The miniature ballad “Wolf Orchard” conveys a sense of looking back, maybe even with a tinge of regret. “The Violence of Reason” has a low-key gospel flavor, inviting comparison to Charles Mingus’ more churchy compositions; the piece conveys perfectly the anguish and frustration of loss. Mehler’s angular, multi-faceted “Tilt” is given a dramatic reading. This rewarding record date also includes the leader’s arrangement of the late pianist Frank Kimbrough’s “Quickening”, which is filled with multi-part, overlapping voices.

For more info visit newvelle-records.com. Mehler is at Greenwich House Music School Nov. 5 (part of “Celebrating Frank Kimbrough”). See Calendar.



November 1 | 3:00 p.m.
Art Blakey Alumni Band:
Carl Allen's Messengers
of Jazz



November 22 | 3:00 p.m.
Bob Mintzer with the
WP Jazz Orchestra



April 18, 2027 | 3:00 p.m.
The Joshua Redman Quartet

THE JAZZ ROOM WILLIAM PATERSON UNIVERSITY

COMING IN 2027 | SNEAK PEEK



February 28, 2027 | 3:00 p.m.
Leoneilke Scheuble's "3
Generations of Jazz" Trio,
featuring bassist Bill Crow



March 11, 2027 | 7:30 p.m.
Tia Fuller with the
WP Jazz Orchestra
Sponsored by Gigi Gryce Memorial Fund
and Thomas Larson

FREE TO TICKET HOLDERS: All Jazz Room concerts include Sittin'In Meet—the—Artist sessions. Visit our website for more information.

SHEA CENTER FOR PERFORMING ARTS | WAYNE, NJ
WP-PRESENTS.ORG | 973.720.2371