

GLOBE UNITY



Reaching for the Moon
Elina Duni/Rob Luft (ECM)
Twisted Summer
Liudas Mockūnas, Samuel Blaser, Marc Ducret
(Jersika)
Cosmogonie
Srdjan Ivanovic Blazin' Quartet
(Rue Des Balkans/L'autre Distribution)
by Daniel A. Brown

In honor of this month's Geography Awareness Week (Nov. 16-20), we turn our attention to an array of groups—a duo, a trio and an augmented quartet—that feature a strong presence from Eastern Europe. These three albums are informed as much by modal folk music themes as free improvisation and electronics. If there is a unifying aesthetic, it involves shared exploration of dissonance and consonance, malleable song-forms and fearless searching.

Reaching for the Moon is an intimate duo between Albania-born, Switzerland-based vocalist-percussionist Elina Duni and London-based guitarist-

electronicist Rob Luft, and the album benefits from the ethereal production that is the sonic calling card of ECM. The pair's savvy eclecticism is evident across the eleven selections, which include both covers and original compositions. On the title track, penned by Irving Berlin, Luft alternates between volume-pedal swells and chiming motifs, as Duni's lilting voice conveys Berlin's lyricism-like blue smoke. On the original "Foolish Flame", Duni mourns and honors the fire of love, while Luft coaxes sonorous chords and arpeggios from his acoustic guitar. "Magnolia" plays like a 21st-century incandescent torch song. Tributes to Ornette Coleman, Gabriel Fauré and others, combined with Duni and Luft's consistently enchanting delivery, make this album a higher-reaching set.

Twisted Summer is a recent collaboration between Lithuanian reedsman Liudas Mockūnas (clarinet, soprano, tenor, bass saxophones), Switzerland-born but Berlin-based trombonist Samuel Blaser and French guitarist Marc Ducret. This international summit of free-form playing takes its inspiration from Jimmy Giuffrè's drummerless trios. Over the course of six pieces, the musicians decode, obscure and then ultimately release a musical conversation spun through the vernacular of dreams. On opener "Drop It", an atonal, heraldic exchange between Mockūnas and Blaser is seasoned by crisp commentary from

Ducret. The 14-minute title track explores an unpredictably hazy chord progression, eventually detonating into full-tilt blast. The miniature "How Lovely" introduces a fourth member of the group—silence—as the trio drops lengthy rests into the roiling playing. All in all, this is solid stuff for open-eared audiences.

Cosmogonie is a collection of (all-caps-titled) pieces that are unpredictable and uncompromising. An intriguing merger of jazz, universal soteriology and creation myths (especially ancient Greek mythology), this 14-song set is led by Paris-based, Serbo-Bosnian drummer Srdjan Ivanovic, and features his Blazin' Quartet—Andreas Polyzogopoulos (trumpet), Federico Casagrande (guitar), Mihail "Misho" Ivanov (bass)—along with select guest players. Opener "CHAOS" invokes '60s Sun Ra with its cosmic percussion rattle and wailing tonalities. Ascending horn lines are buoyed by rich string counterpoint on the threnody of "ÉTHER & HÉMÉRA"; symphonic grandeur is achieved with the echoing "PONTOS". "CRONOS & RÉA" seems to be inspired by Tony Williams' Lifetime. Ivanovic's drumming crackles with a fat-back fusion vibe, as Casagrande and Polyzogopoulos volley metallic riffs across the funky abyss.

For more info visit ecmrecords.com, jersikarecords.com and srdjanovic.com

has a buoyancy that is hard to argue with. Lerman's tap dancing lends an irresistible swing to the performance. Ram Ramirez, who wrote the jazz standard "Lover Man", also composed "I Just Refuse to Sing the Blues". With her relaxed confidence, Russell doesn't deny the blues; she simply refuses to be imprisoned by them. Jazz writer Leonard Feather penned "Keep Your Mind on Me", a blues-tradition number the singer delivers with smoldering cool, backed by inspired solos from Arntzen, Allred and Kellso, all fully in keeping with the theme.

By the time Russell reached "F' Taint One Thing It's Another", "You Can't Pull the Wool Over My Eyes" and "Everybody Loves My Baby", the concert had settled into a loose, swinging feel, enhanced by Lerman's lightning-fast tap dancing. The band and Russell seem to enjoy each other's company as much as the audience.

For more info visit dottimerecords.bandcamp.com. Russell is at St. Ann's Church Nov. 5 (part of "Singing the Alan Lomax Archive" benefit for the Association for Cultural Equity) and Newark Museum of Art (Newark, NJ) Nov. 14 (part of TD James Moody Jazz Festival). See Calendar and 100 Miles Out.



House of the Singing Blossoms
Anthony Wilson Nonet (Sam First)
by George Kanzler

During the decade from 1997 to 2006, guitarist Anthony Wilson released four acclaimed nonet albums. Last year he resurrected this format, recording this double live album at L.A.'s Sam First jazz club. Wilson's Nonet is an exceptionally nimble and versatile band, equally capable of all-out swing or pensive, delicate moods. It

can rouse spirits or plumb emotional depths, and over the course of eleven tracks in the newly-released *House of the Singing Blossoms*, the group covers vast sonic and emotional ground.

Wilson honors his father, the great bandleader Gerald Wilson, with the opening reading of Gerald's "Triple Chase", an uptempo chase featuring raucous solos from his reed section: Nicole McCabe (alto), Bob Reynolds (tenor) and Henry Solomon (baritone). The closer, "Simple Song" (Ben Wendel) is a six-note, riff-like theme that repeats in different keys, with solos from Reynolds, Alan Ferber (trombone), Gerald Clayton (piano) and, trading vamps with the ensemble, Mark Ferber (drums). Besides featuring two of his own compositions, the leader also explores tunes from Joe Zawinul and Keith Jarrett, rounding out the eclectic menu with The Beatles' "Because" (featuring a striking use of mutes behind his guitar solo) and tenor saxophonist Bennie Wallace's jaunty, Tex-Mex-flavored "Bordertown". The pair of Zawinul tunes reveals how varied the nonet sound can be: "In a Silent Way" begins with deep, rich solo guitar, eventually cushioned by the harmonized melody from *sotto voce* horns, all over a distinct ticking rhythm; "Walk Tall" (a boogaloo Zawinul wrote for Cannonball Adderley) is bright and brassy, with spunky horn lines.

The original title track is a feature for Clayton, backed by surprisingly rich undertones from brass and reeds. "Blues for Wandering Angels" (Anthony Wilson's other original) takes advantage of trumpeter CJ Camerieri's doubling of French horn, as it keens over the slow, rumbling ensemble theme, before giving way to a string of solos. The Jarrett tracks, "Introduction & Yaqui Folk Song" and "Le Mistral", each offer more permutations of the nonet's sound, from the diminuendo passed among individual musicians on the first, to the

syncopated bounce and riffs on the latter.

This recording is a welcome return of one of the most creative midsize bands of the last few decades.

For more info visit samfirstrecords.com. Wilson is at Dizzy's Club Nov. 24 and Round Hill Community House (Greenwich, CT) Nov. 22 (both with Bennie Wallace's BackCountry Jazz). See Calendar and 100 Miles Out.



minwi
Nite Bjuti (Intakt)
by Sophia Valera Heinecke

According to some, creation is not without loss; when something new is born, energy is taken from somewhere else. The birth of the album *minwi* is an unquestionable gain. Recorded live at Nublu in 2023, collaborators Candice Hoyes (vocals, sampling), Val Jeanty (percussion, turntables) and Mimi Jones (bass) establish a foundation of awareness, grounding the listener in a new world in what is the trio's sophomore album. The knowledge invoked seems to arise from sisterhood, both ancestral and present, underscoring the music's themes of connection and legacy.

From the opening "Ode to Octavia"—in which we are traveling, cycling in sound, echoing in outer space,

charting distance with breath—to the sense of both birth and loss in album closer "Wombfire", which features flutist Nicole Mitchell (who contributes centrally to the piece's low pulse and breathing), this recording crawls through memories of love and taking hold of the collective imagination of women building together in vision and reality. The theme of creation again arises in "Burf Myself", which asks the fundamental question: "What do I need?" The answer comes through cyclical rhythms, handclaps and swirling discoveries that give insight into the process of this renewal. Hoyes' vocals transcendently soar, calling us back to a deeper past. "You heard me," she does not ask but rather proclaims, encouraging a need to go inward, to rest and emerge rejuvenated. "BlaxkMermaids" tells a story of possibility, accompanied by the regal presence of guest trumpeter Milena Casado. Lyrically the tune is a tribute to ancestors who chose the ocean over the certainty of enslavement during the Middle Passage. "Chefchauen Blu" activates all the senses with its percussion, imagining friends together seeing this so-named blue city in Morocco. The refrain, "everywhere we go we will feel...", trails off in laughter and circles back to "everywhere we go, shawty, will feel like home." Holding its spiritual depth in the lineage of blues is "Hijas", the third eye of the album. The rhythm naturally catches the body, involving the listener in its mesmerizing simplicity.

Dreams, birth, imaginings, relationships—these are all journeys that Nite Bjuti braves together. Losing yourself in this emotional and beautiful album is easy to do. Finding yourself in it invites the question: who might hold you in creating new worlds like these musicians hold each other?

For more info visit intaktrec.ch. Nite Bjuti's Candice Hoyes is at Joe's Pub Nov. 11. See Calendar.

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Live @ Jazz at Lincoln Center
Catherine Russell (Dot Time)
by Pierre Giroux

Though it might be hard to believe, Catherine Russell's first live album feels less like a concert document and more like spending time with someone who knows exactly where she is coming from. *Live @ Jazz at Lincoln Center* was recorded at the Appel Room during a special weekend tribute to the Hot Club of New York, a group devoted to listening to old jazz and blues 78-rpm records. Russell's connection is hardly accidental. She is the daughter of pianist and bandleader Luis Russell (who was also music director for Louis Armstrong) and of vocalist-guitarist Carline Ray (of International Sweethearts of Rhythm fame), so this repertoire is part of her inheritance—yet she never sings it as a historical exercise.

Accompanying Russell is an experienced ensemble, including Ben Paterson (piano), Matt Munisteri (guitar), Russell Hall (bass) and Domo Branch (drums). The horn section features Evan Arntzen (tenor, clarinet), Jon-Erik Kellso (trumpet) and John Allred (trombone). Tap dancer Michela Marino Lerman adds rhythmic vitality to four tracks. Saxophonist Mark Lopeman's arrangements capture the rich musical world from which the songs emerged, moving between the sophisticated swing of the big band era and the earthy vitality of the blues and early jazz, while keeping everything sounding remarkably fresh.

"Now You're Talkin' My Language" delivers an easygoing swing, with Russell in full command and with sharp interjections from Arntzen, Allred and Kellso keeping the groove on track. "Never Too Old to Swing"

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