UNEARTHED GEM

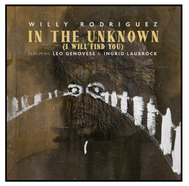


Blue Moon Over Paris (ORTF Recordings 1963-1968)
Art Blakey & The Jazz Messengers
(Elemental Music)
by Duck Baker

This excellent 2-LP set, *Blue Moon Over Paris*, presents two performances by master drummer Art Blakey & The Jazz Messengers in the City of Lights. The first took place at L'Olympia Theatre on Apr. 25, 1963, and many hard bop fans consider the lineup of Wayne Shorter (tenor), Freddie Hubbard (trumpet), Curtis Fuller (trombone), Cedar Walton (piano) and Reggie Workman (bass) to be the very best that Blakey ever led. Certainly it was among the best, and since this lineup (with the exception of Workman) had been playing together consistently for a couple of years, they were all completely in tune with one another, achieving an effortless swing with a great group feeling, even at breakneck tempos. All three horn players are in top form, particularly Hubbard, who is downright frightening at times. Walton is too low in the mix to be heard very well behind the horns, but his more-audible solos are also terrific, and he makes the most of his feature, "That Old Feeling". This last comment could also be made of Shorter's gorgeous reading of "I Didn't Know What Time It Was".

As Bob Blumenthal points out in his as-always excellent notes, the record-buying public's taste shifted away from hard bop after the mid '60s, and it became much harder for Blakey to keep his bands working and recording regularly. The 1968 lineup heard here on the second LP never made a studio record, and this is the first authorized release of one of their live concerts. Three members of this group were already well-regarded veterans: Bill Hardman (trumpet) had been a Messenger for a couple of years in the late '50s, while Julian Priester (trombone) made his reputation mostly during a three-year stint with Max Roach, in whose group Ronnie Mathews (piano) first gained attention shortly thereafter. Billy Harper (tenor) was an unknown at this point, though his passionate style was fully formed, and the two live recordings of this Blakey lineup offer a rare glimpse into the not oft-documented bassist Lawrence Evans (who had only recorded once prior to this, with Freddie McCoy). Check out the bassist's solo on "Moanin'". Though none of these musicians achieved the star status of Shorter and Hubbard, they were all top-notch players with their own stories to tell, and Blakey brought out the best in them.

For more info visit elemental-music.com



In the Unknown (I Will Find You)
Willy Rodriguez (Sunnyside)
by Jim Motavalli

Recorded at the legendary Van Gelder Studio, drummer Willy Rodriguez' new album is a very personal one, tracing the arc of his mother's illness and passing. The cast is small: the leader with Ingrid Laubrock's impassioned tenor and soprano playing and Leo Genovese's versatile piano and Hammond organ contributions. There's no bassist, nor is one needed. (Additionally, guitarist-singer Allan Harris contributes spoken word to a few tracks.)

The narrative is chronological, starting with the title track. Harris (giving voice to Rodriguez in happier days) tells us, "All I did was smile, and smile, and smile." The music is, well, not uplifting exactly, but deeply reflective—and as the piece progresses, increasingly troubled. The trio is brilliantly supportive as Laubrock erupts on tenor. On "The Perplexity of Eternity", Genovese's hypnotic piano (a nod to Mal Waldron) is interrupted by the saxophonist's anxious clarion call.

The illness progresses, and Rodriguez turns to spiritual comfort and contemplation of the life after this one. Harris' voice is increasingly buried in the mix as emotions in sound overwhelm (the piece ends with what disturbingly sounds like an EKG monitor flatlining). On "Curie's Notes", Laubrock waxes luminous against an electronic drone—which soon takes the music over. "A Room Full of Confusion" signals last moments, led by the pianist's gentle and spare performance, with the other two players sitting out until three minutes in. Laubrock is at her most haunting here. The leader finally enters as Genovese begins to evoke a heartbeat, as the saxophonist builds to a climbing crescendo, then slowly recedes. "Where I Saw You Last" begins with scrapings (the piano's strings?), then gradually assumes an abstracted shape with isolated keyboard notes. The operating room has been cleared, perhaps, with signs of desperate medical intervention left behind. As a composition, it's lonely as hell. "(The Route)" marries atmospheric saxophone to a rumbling piano and a light touch of percussion for the journey out of the body. It leads naturally to "Follow the Light", mirroring many near-death experiences. The piece is a funereal organ solo that evokes the ceremony for the people left behind as the soul departs.

In the Unknown (I Will Find You) is not a light listen, but it's an emotionally intense experience exploring, convincingly in sounds and composition, life's transitions.

For more info visit sunnysiderecords.com. Rodriguez is at Ibeam Brooklyn Dec. 12 and Downtown Music Gallery Dec. 22. See Calendar.



Live in San Francisco
Michael Carvin Experience (MCE Music)
by Jason Gross

Houston, TX-born drummer Michael Carvin (who turns 82 this month) moved to LA in the early '60s, where he gained his earliest experience. But once he moved to NYC to play with Freddie Hubbard's band in the early '70s, Carvin quickly made a name for himself, including recordings as a leader for labels such as SteepleChase and Muse. He has worked with the likes of Jackie McLean, Alice Coltrane, Dizzy Gillespie and Abbey Lincoln, been a leader and a prolific producer (for saxophonists Ron Blake and Keith Loftis, as well as drummer Tyshawn Sorey, among others). In addition, he is one of the most-respected drum teachers: the "Michael Carvin School of Drumming's Each One Teach One" alumni is an impressive roll call of contemporary drummers since the '70s, including: Victor Jones, J.T. Lewis, Michael Shrieve, Billy Martin, Eric McPherson, Nasheet Waits, Ralph Peterson, Rodney Green, Jaz Sawyer, E.J. Strickland, Chris Beck, Darrell Green and many others.

His new release, *Live in San Francisco*, is culled from two West Coast shows from April 2025, documenting Carvin's trio with Peter Smith (piano) and Mike Gurrola (bass). Opener, the lovely John Coltrane ballad "Dear Lord" starts with the pianist's wide-ranging shadings, which grow prouder and more majestic. Rodgers and Hart's "I Could Write a Book" has a jolly groove framed by Smith's blocky chords, then kicks into high gear mid-way through as Smith gets more insistent, transitioning to a lithe Gurrola bass solo. Thelonious Monk's "Rhythm-a-Ning" starts with a minimalist drum solo, leading up to the bouncy theme, which is adorned with pronounced drum accents and taken at a somewhat faster-than-usual tempo. Julius Fučík's 1897 military march, "Entrance of the Gladiators" includes another lengthy drum solo for the leader, who showcases his extraordinary ability to be a self-sufficient, master drummer-percussionist and not one to shy away from the spotlight (note to listener: check out his 1995 solo drums album *Drum Concerto at Dawn*).

Another Great American Songbook selection, Carl T. Fischer's "We'll Be Together Again", notably sung by Billie Holiday, is taken as written, as a reflective ballad. A relatively upbeat take on the standard "Autumn Leaves" is framed by Smith's dexterous piano tinkling and Gurrola's meditative bass. The jazz standard "It's You or No One" starts with Carvin's drum rolls, leading to a lively theme statement by Smith, followed by Gurrola's fast-paced spotlight and then the leader's more sparse solo, which eventually gains steam. Monk's "Bemsha Swing" caps the album off with Smith's respectful take on the theme, alternating with Carvin's drum blasts (recalling Max Roach's tympani booms from the original), before settling into the tune's rhythmic and melodic groove.

On *Live in San Francisco*, Carvin puts his stamp on some beloved tunes, demonstrating his mastery, while also letting his bandmates shine, as has come to be expected on any Carvin-led date. A drummer and bandleader of the highest order.

For more info visit michaelcarvin.com

ON SCREEN



Zachariah
George Englund (ABC Pictures)
by Paul Gaita

Billed as "the first electric Western" on its one-sheet, and also known as an "acid Western" (a designation that *El Topo* director Alejandro Jodorowsky might contest), director George Englund's 1971 93-minute feature film, *Zachariah,* seeks to draw a parallel between the quest for identity at the heart of the Western story with the search for enlightenment that fueled the '60s counterculture movement. Despite input from five writers, including *Wonderwall* director Joe Massot and members of the comedy troupe The Firesign Theater, this now out-of-print film was only moderately successful; *Zachariah* has striking imagery and some heady philosophical dialogue, but ultimately drifts in the same murky waters that most pop-psychedelic films of the period now float. It does, however, feature plenty of music, including a part for drummer Elvin (whose centennial is next year) as fearsome outlaw, "Job Cain."

Defeating Jones' Cain is the first benchmark that cowpokes Zachariah (John Rubinstein) and Matthew (Don Johnson) must pass in order to reach their goal of becoming world-class gunslingers. Jones' on-screen appearance suggests that this will be easier said than done; he emerges from the darkness of a saloon in a silver sleeveless vest (where the classic lineup of the rock group, the James Gang, is playing) and proceeds to gun down one challenger before taking a seat at Jim Fox' drum kit and pounding out a ferocious, thunderous solo (backed minimally by the James Gang). But sadly, it's not included on the ABC Records soundtrack and was reportedly overdubbed in part by session legend Earl Palmer due to audio issues with the footage, which is, in and of itself, haphazardly edited. Jones cuts an impressive figure and seems at ease on camera. Though Job is suggested to be a "Bad Man" (a notion underscored by the solo), Jones' warmth shines through the image, and it's entirely understandable that Matthew would split with the (earnest but drippy) Zachariah and throw in his lot with Cain's gang.

Elvin Jones' screen time is limited—he has just one additional dialogue scene before facing off against Matthew—and ultimately, one may wonder why he participated in the production, for which he apparently replaced Ginger Baker (of Cream and Blind Faith fame), his highly-publicized drum duel adversary that very same year. It's possible that for Jones this is part of a larger attempt to assert himself as a solo performer four years after John Coltrane's passing, or to explore more eclectic sounds as with his collaboration with Oregon five years after *Zachariah*'s release. Jones doesn't appear to have commented on the project, but despite its shortcomings, his appearance is a likable curio that we, particularly in the jazz world, are glad to have.

For more info visit imdb.com/title/tt0068011 or go to youtube.com/watch?v=A7OQbGrfPcE





