DRUMMER ISSUE

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.

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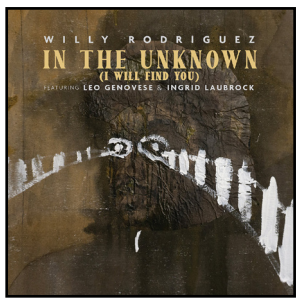

In the Unknown (I Will Find You)
Willy Rodriguez (Sunnyside)
by Jim Motavalli

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

