George Burton, in-demand pianist from Philadelphia, teamed with producer Derrick Hodge for this strong and often surprising debut album. Piano and Rhodes are very present and the vivid, hard-swinging rapport between Burton, bassist Noah Jackson and drummer Wayne Smith, Jr. gives the album its backbone.

There’s more going on, however. Horn players drop in and out of rotation: trumpeter Jason Palmer and saxophonist Tim Warfield are particularly well represented on a few cuts; trumpeter Terell Stafford appears just once, on the straight-eight ballad “In Places”; alto saxophonist Chris Hemingway joins Les Paul-slinging guitarist Ilan Bar-Lavi on “Song 6”; and “From Grace to Grace”, lending a more up-tempo, rock-tinged feel at the beginning and end (“Song 6”, the first full-band track, comes back in a beautiful, laid-back trio version without drums for the finale).

There is a prevailing hardbop intensity as well as an inward lyricism in Burton’s writing and narrative cohesion: “First Opinion”, an electronically tweaked 90-second sketch for soprano sax, Rhodes and glitchy drums, segues to the somewhat McCoy Tyner-esque quartet Waltz feel of “Second Opinion”. Palmer and Warfield pair up with devastating force on the difficult quartet waltz feel of “Stuck in the Crack” and are similarly relentless on “Bernie’s Tune” (an old Gerry Mulligan-Chet Baker form of “Stuck in the Crack” and are similarly relentless. Given Morgan’s robust, thick precision and Baron’s churning detail, enough of a rhythmic environment is stoked for Bro to chase ideas with their germs in appealing melodies, spreading out through stippled fields and thorny tessellations as on the neighboring tunes “Heroines” and “PM Dream”. The delicate transmission of mood here is something quite remarkable in Bro’s playing—not always subtle, he builds from diffuse areas into arresting tonal shifts and toys with explorations of metallic classicism and smudged dissonance. But “Shell Pink” brings the three together in a cohesive meld, romantic and cloudy overlays in gentle, brief minor runs floating atop brushy elbows and massive, resonant bass tugs. Sculpting and dissecting sonic values out of partly-amplified ether is this trio’s primary focus and they do it with taste and dramatic flair.

For more information, visit innercircuitmusic.net. This band is at Zinc Bar Jan. 7th as part of Winter Jazzfest. See Calendar.

The German label ECM has remained on one leading edge of new jazz or another for the last 47 years. While holding fast to an aesthetic, from their minimalist cover art and terse liner notes to an airy, sharp sonic imprint, their 1,500-titles-strong catalog remains diverse. ECM’s latest documents include new work by septicetarian drummer Andrew Cyrille, Danish guitarist Jakob Bro and Swiss pianist Nik Bärtsch.

Cyrille first appeared as a sideman on ECM, via saxophonist Marion Brown’s Afternoon of a Georgia Farm in 1970. The Declaration of Musical Independence is Cyrille’s first album as a leader for ECM and joins him with synthesizer artist Richard Teitelbaum, guitarist Bill Frisell and bassist Ben Street on nine tunes, originals except for the Coltrane-inspired opener “One Time”. Not to be confused with anything on the 1958 United Artists record assembled for pianist Cecil Taylor, this was a piece given to drummer Rashied Ali and passed on to Cyrille as a snare exercise, onto which Frisell grats incisive peaks, harmonic inquisitions and grungy whirs, abetted by Teitelbaum’s wispy accents and richly expansive Rhodes. His album title refers to a statement once made by Charles Mingus and imaginative and slinky feel on Rhodes. His album title

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