

Fran Vielma and His Venezuelan Jazz Collective

Tendencias

PAPELON 667

★★★★

Percussionist and composer Fran Vielma has assembled a star-studded band of Venezuelan and Latin-American jazz musicians to perform nine of his own pieces and an arrangement of “Pasaje Del Olvido” on *Tendencias*.

The horn section of trumpeter Michael Rodriguez, alto saxophonist Miguel Zenon and trombonist Angel Subero is tight and unified on the heads, while stepping back gracefully for extended solos that showcase individual voices.

The ensemble is not quite hard-bop and not quite salsa—they’re something more complex and unprecedented, and take sharp left turns at times. Luis Perdomo is on keys for most of the album, his fluid lines and powerful chords driving the band. But on “A Modo Patanemeño” and “Ehlba,” Cesar Orozco takes over, and his florid style changes the whole picture.

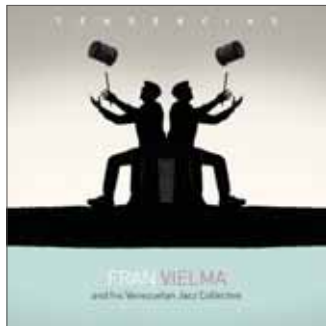
The final piece, a percussion-piano duo with Perdomo, takes the album out on a soft, romantic note.

—Philip Freeman

Tendencias: Monk En Aragua; Cereal De Bobures; Tendencias; Pasaje Del Olvido; Minanguero; Mis Dos Luces; Hubbardengue; A Modo Patanemeño; Ehlba; Miel De Cayena. (59:26)

Personnel: Fran Vielma, vocals, percussion; Michael Rodriguez, trumpet; Miguel Zenon, alto saxophone; Angel Subero, trombone; Luis Perdomo, Cesar Orozco, piano, Fender Rhodes; Roberto Koch, bass; Pablo Bencid, drums; Jeremy Bosch, Manolo Mairena, vocals.

Ordering info: franvielma.com



Akira Tana

JAZZaNOVA

VEGA 14050

★★★

JAZZaNOVA is awash in the vibrant sounds of Rio de Janeiro, and drummer Akira Tana’s immersion in the city is the reason.

The drummer’s latest venture is a reimagining of the Brazilian songbook with an air of modern sensibility and heavy texture. Chalk those layers of sound up to the album’s arsenal of artists: The Bay Area trio of pianist Peter Horvath, bassist Gary Brown and percussionist Michael Spiro fuel intimate conversations between vocalist and soloist. And when those soloists include saxophonist Branford Marsalis and trumpeter Arturo Sandoval, confident navigation is inevitable. As expected, *JAZZaNOVA* offers some Jobim classics—five to be exact. And the album’s uniqueness resides in Tana’s mindfully selected vocalists to do Jobim justice. Each exploration features a distinctive storyteller, including Sandy Cressman, Jackie Ryan and Carla Helmbrecht.

On both tributes and back-pocket Brazilian classics, *JAZZaNOVA* showcases fresh perspectives and synchronicity among Tana and his personnel.

—Hilary Brown

JAZZaNOVA: Águas De Marco; Love Dance; Chega De Suadade; Bilhete; Corcovado; Condênname A Callar; Waiting For Angels; Jangada; Caminhos Cruzados; Aquele Frevo Axe; Por Causa De Você; Diride; La Gloria Eres Tu. (56:34)

Personnel: Akira Tana, drums; Ricardo Peixoto, acoustic and electric guitar; Branford Marsalis, saxophone (2, 7, 10); Arturo Sandoval, trumpet, flugelhorn (1, 4, 5, 8, 9, 11, 13); Peter Horvath, piano; Gary Brown, bass; Michael Spiro, percussion; Claudio Amaral, Sandy Cressman, Carla Helmbrecht, Jackie Ryan, Claudia Villela, Maria Volonté, vocals.

Ordering info: akiratana.com



Erik Friedlander

Artemisia

SKIPSTONE

★★★★

Artemisia is a story of inspiration. Sparked by a Pablo Picasso glass sculpture, cellist Erik Friedlander went to work writing music and forming the Throw A Glass ensemble to record it.

“Inspired by the murky history of absinthe,” one might think the music would be somewhat otherworldly or highly experimental. Instead, across 10 tracks listeners find an assortment of styles that, for the most part, offer an intelligent blend of familiar strategies. The lilting, lighthearted swing of “Seven Heartbreaks” could be heard as music for a children’s story about a “green fairy,” while dramatic tension drives the mysterious “The Devil Made Liquid.”

As a narrative music, thematic connections clearly can be heard. As composed music, though, *Artemisia* still manages to breathe in possibility, as if the musicians were creating spontaneously. The highly notated, lively “Sparkotropic” has Friedlander tying his cello in furious ribbons of notes with drummer Ches Smith’s fancy, dancing rhythmic patterns close on his heels. The rubato of “La Fee Verte” is a good example of Throw A Glass’ ethereal nature: quiet, ready to pounce, only to remain dreamy, hypnotic, an open place where (with Smith’s occasional probes) cello and Mark Helias’ bass sing together.

—John Ephland

Artemisia: The Great Revelation; Artemisia; Seven Heartbreaks; The Devil Made Liquid; Sparkotropic; La Fee Verte; As They Are; Tulips Bruch Against My Legs; Blush; Drop By Drop. (62:41)

Personnel: Erik Friedlander, cello; Uri Caine, piano; Ches Smith, drums; Mark Helias, bass.

Ordering info: erikfriedlander.com



Ken Fowser

Don't Look Down

POSI-TONE 8178

★★★

What goes around comes around, and around. Bebop is today’s gift that keeps on giving; it’s the “new” dixieland.

Ken Fowser is a youngish, Philadelphia-reared, Gotham-based tenor player who’s been mining the fertile grooves of the bop tradition for a decade. He’s an amiable and adept throwback.

Bantamweight originals on Fowser’s third leader date, though, deliver jabs and feints, not haymakers. “Maker’s Marc” opens with a Latin riff, featuring facile keyboardist Rick Germanson, whose alert comping and inventive fills really help firm up Fowser’s command of the hard-bop vernacular. The bandleader flips the repeat lick of the tune on “Queens” and fades it with a refreshingly manic out-chorus. Forget ballads: These guys run full-steam ahead. But an abbreviated solo format effectively skims the tunes, with little chance to dig in.

The takeaway is of cheerful, easy swagger, but also a sense of glibness, kinda mailing it in. Inclusion of any indestructible Blue Note anthem (something from Mobley, Silver, Walton) would’ve earned bonus points.

—Fred Bouchard

Don't Look Down: Maker’s Marc; Coming Up Shorter; You’re Better Than That; Fall Back; Don’t Look Down; Divided State; I’ll Take It From Here; Queens; Top To Bottom; Inversions; From Six To Midnight. (53:18)

Personnel: Ken Fowser, tenor saxophone; Josh Bruneau, trumpet (1–8, 10); Rick Germanson, piano; Paul Gill, bass; Joe Strasser, drums.

Ordering info: posi-tone.com

