

Peter Zak Standards

STEEPLECHASE 31815

★★★

The bar for piano trios that take on a set of standards sits so high that it might as well be the high jump competition at the Olympics. Not only does Keith Jarrett's rapturous standards trio come immediately to mind, but close behind are pianists as diverse as Bill Charlap, Kenny Barron, Fred Hersch and Ethan Iverson, to say nothing of the legendary trios led by Bill Evans, Oscar Peterson and many others. The obvious question is: What are you going to bring the party?

For veteran pianist Peter Zak, the approach is truly unique, if not brave, given the format and the material. Zak put the band together specifically for the recording, and had never even played with bassist Jay Anderson (drummer Billy Drummond rounds out the trio). He held no rehearsals, picked some songs that weren't in his own repertoire and recorded everything in one afternoon.

The results, particularly considering that background, are quite good, if not spectacular. Here, Zak steers a center course, sticking close to the melodies and not throwing his unfamiliar bandmates any surprising rhythmic or harmonic curveballs. These are solid, interesting pieces—things of beauty on their own, and things of beauty in this trio's capable hands.

—James Hale

Standards: Moon And Sand; I Loves You Porgy; The Night Has A Thousand Eyes; I Had The Craziest Dream; So In Love; The Star-Crossed Lovers; I'm All Smiles; The Very Thought Of You; Wives And Lovers; Indian Summer. (68:57)

Personnel: Peter Zak, piano; Jay Anderson, bass; Billy Drummond, drums.

Ordering info: steeplechase.dk



Conrad Herwig/ Igor Butman Reflections

CRISS CROSS JAZZ 1385

★★★

An easy rapport and unforced musical camaraderie prevades on this fine collaboration by trombonist Conrad Herwig and Russian-born tenor saxophonist Igor Butman. A quarter century ago, the fifty-something players met in Moscow—Moscow, Idaho, that is, home of the Lionel Hampton Jazz Festival—and what they bring to the expressive table is a sturdy example of unabashedly mainstream jazz wisdom.

It helps that the album features a stellar complement of players, with Russian-born trumpeter Alex Sipiagin completing the classic sax/bone/trumpet front line, and a turn-on-a-dime rhythm section of drummer Jeff "Tain" Watts, pianist David Kikoski and bassist Kenny Davis. Apart from Gershwin's "Who Cares?," the material is penned within the group, mostly by Herwig, and consciously heeding an ever-shifting stylistic mandate: No two tunes heed a similar vein. From the semi-brooding balladic nature of the title track, "Reflections," to the intricate, Shorter-esque designs of "King Of The Mountain," esprit de corps and artfully directed chops flow easily here, as does the reflective instinct.

—Josef Woodard

Reflections: Falling Out; King Of The Mountain; Wingspan; Reflections; Ovidame; Who Cares?; Samba De Igor; Big O's Blues. (60:17)

Personnel: Conrad Herwig, trombone; Igor Butman, tenor saxophone; Alex Sipiagin, trumpet, flugelhorn; David Kikoski, piano; Kenny Davis, bass; Jeff "Tain" Watts, drums.

Ordering info: crisscrossjazz.com



Brandee Younger Wax & Wane

REVIVE MUSIC

★★★

Some albums are destined to become cult classics—albums that hardly garner massive mainstream attention but nevertheless make lasting imprints. Harpist Brandee Younger's latest disc is one of them.

Wax & Wane is undeniably aware of its historical lineage, particularly on the soul-jazz continuum. Younger explicitly pays homage to her lodestar, harpist Dorothy Ashby, twice. She opens the disc with a makeover of "Soul Vibrations," a late-'60s Richard Davis-composed gem that Ashby featured on her classic *Afro-Harping*. Younger's version is less trippy than the original, but it's anchored with rugged funk by way of Dezron Douglas' electric bass line and Dana Hawkins' hip-hop-centric drumming, which underpins a billowing melody by Younger and flutist Anne Drummond.

Younger retains a level of retro-chicness on the originals, too. The alluring "Essence Of Ruby" sounds like an obscure, mid-'70s collaboration between Alice Coltrane and the Mizell Brothers, while the upbeat title track could easily pass as an outtake from Stevie Wonder.

If Younger continues to evolve as an improviser, bandleader and composer, a masterpiece will surely be in her future.

—John Murph

Wax & Wane: Soul Vibrations; Essence Of Ruby; Ruby Echo; Afro Harping; Wax And Wane; Ebony Haze; Black Gold. (27:00).

Personnel: Brandee Younger, harp; Anne Drummond, flute; Chelsea Baratz, tenor saxophone; Mark Whitfield, guitar; Dezron Douglas, bass; Dana Hawkins, drums, percussion; Chargaux, violin, viola.

Ordering info: brandeeyounger.com



Luis Perdomo Montage

HOT TONE MUSIC 109

★★½

Pianist Luis Perdomo can burn—no doubt about it. Check YouTube for his solo on "Giant Steps" with Ravi Coltrane, impeccably conceived, building momentum and intensity nonstop. It's the kind of solo that launches audiences to their feet, which makes *Montage* puzzling.

Whether playing someone else's tune or something of his own, there's no sign here of that intensity and focus. For example, Perdomo interprets two standards without any dynamic variation: a rather quickly sinking "Thinking Of You" and a version of "Body And Soul" that seems more sleepy than passionate.

Several original tracks are flagged by the word "montage." My guess is that these are free improvisations, perhaps based on the words that follow "montage" in the title. Thus, "Montage: Fleeing" opens with two wandering lines in the lower register, and "Montage: Angst" is essentially a sequence of rumbling clusters. This is slender evidence on which to base any conclusions, but it does suggest that an ability to tear through a performance with other musicians doesn't necessarily promise similar successes at driving alone with only a minimal roadmap.

—Bob Doerschuk

Montage: Montage: Fleeing; Monk's Dream; Montage: Sleepwalker; Mambo Mongo; Amani; Montage: Angst; Cal Massey; Si Te Contara; Thinking Of You; Montage: Air; The Sky Beyond; La Revuelta De Don Fulgencio; The Boundary Law; Montage: The Ascent; Body And Soul. (57:36)

Personnel: Luis Perdomo, piano.

Ordering info: hottotone.com

