



Standards
Peter Zak (SteepleChase)
by Ken Dryden

Peter Zak moved to New York long ago and made a name for himself with a series of CDs for SteepleChase. While one can hear stylistic influences in his playing, they are never so much in the foreground as to label him as being of a particular school. *Standards*, his 11th date as a leader for the label, is a trio date as most of his previous recordings. Joined by bassist Jay Anderson (with whom he was playing for the first time) and drummer Billy Drummond, Zak came into the session with songs worked out but with no rehearsal, letting the musicians find their own approaches.

Zak tackles a number of once popular songs that haven't been recorded as much in recent times, in addition to still-in-demand favorites. The trio kicks off with a lively samba setting of Alec Wilder's "Moon and Sand", which contrasts with the numerous laid-back ballad recordings. George Gershwin's "I Loves You, Porgy" was championed by Bill Evans and Zak's glistening arrangement allows plenty of space to emphasize its beauty, with understated bass and whispering brushes as the perfect backdrop.

The pianist takes a typically breezy journey through "The Night Has a Thousand Eyes", with the trio alternating between an energetic Brazilian Carnival flavor and driving bop. The Duke Ellington-Billy Strayhorn ballad "The Star-Crossed Lovers" was a long-time feature for the bandleader's alto saxophonist Johnny Hodges, but Zak transforms it into a brisk swinger with a Latin undercurrent. Drummond's engaging, constantly shifting percussion fuels the leader's imaginative solo and a superb chorus by Anderson. Ray Noble's "The Very Thought of You" has grown in stature over the last few decades and the trio's spacious, playful rendition has a special charm by keeping its romanticism intact.

Burt Bacharach's "Wives and Lovers" may not yet be a standard, but Zak's uptempo romp through it reveals its possibilities. And though Victor Herbert's "Indian Summer" has been recorded throughout much of jazz history since it was composed nearly a century ago, Zak reshapes it with a brief hook inserted into the melodic line in his swinging arrangement, keeping this would-be warhorse very much at home in modern jazz.

For more information, visit steeplechase.dk. Zak is at Fat Cat Jul. 5th. See Calendar.



Wanted
Grégoire Maret (Sunnyside)
by Terrell Holmes

For the past few years Geneva, Switzerland-born harmonica player Grégoire Maret has been garnering acclaim through gigs and guest appearances on numerous albums. Now he's assembled an impressive lineup of musicians, singers and MCs for his debut

album *Wanted*, merging jazz, R&B and hip-hop to produce exciting amalgams where the glorious past invigorates the all-encompassing present in exciting ways.

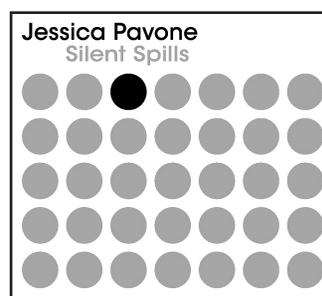
Like Esperanza Spalding, Robert Glasper and others, Maret uses diverse sources of musical inspiration to blend the traditional and the contemporary seamlessly. *Wanted* opens with "2Beats", a standard contemporary blueprint with slick freestyle flowing by Kokayi alternating with album co-producer Terri Lyne Carrington's sensual vocals. Frank McComb emotes on "Diary Of A Fool" with the silky, earnest ruefulness of Kenny Lattimore. And the wonderful Dianne Reeves lends her flawless tone and feeling soul to the slow-jam "Heaven's".

On other songs Maret uses vocalizing by top-flight artists as a variation on sung lyrics: the smooth title track features Take 6 member Mark Kibble adding some cool, dynamite harmonizing on this airy floating tune; Luciana Souza lends her warm voice to "Groove", the jazziest cut; the great Ivan Lins weaves his vocal magic on the ballad "Voo Do Pássaro". On all of these songs harmonica doubles the voices on the melodies to expand the palette. Another cut, though, uses a different type of 'vocalizing' when master percussionists Mino Cinelu and Kofo The Wonderman converse on the stirring and lush world music anthem "Talking Drums".

Maret also tips his Panama hat to the standards. There's a funky take on Wayne Shorter's "Footprints" and arrangement of Bill Evans' "Blue In Green" with striking contrasts among the harmonica, Roger Rosenberg's brooding bass clarinet and Chris Potter's tenor saxophone. The album ends on a touching note with the late, great Jimmy Scott musing on the sentimental "26th of May". Scott's inimitable high-pitched voice cleverly steals the album under the guise of sending it off into the sunset.

But this is Maret's show. All of those gigs and guest spots prepared him for his close-up and he delivers big time. He's a solid composer and his harmonica playing is nonpareil, whether gently embroidering someone's vocal or instrumental solo or weaving his own extended, impassioned praise shout. Perhaps the most impressive moments, though, are when he doesn't play. Knowing when to step aside underscores his poise, maturity and self-assurance, all of which make *Wanted* such an excellent album.

For more information, visit sunnysiderecords.com. Maret is at Jazz Standard Jul. 26th-27th with Emar Castañeda. See Calendar.



Silent Spills
Jessica Pavone (Relative Pitch)
by Wilbur MacKenzie

Violist Jessica Pavone has produced an immense catalog of diverse releases over the last ten years, ranging from solo music, large-scale chamber and orchestral works, her longstanding duo with guitarist Mary Halvorson and improvising groups of all types while also contributing to an equally diverse body of work supporting such leaders as Anthony Braxton, Taylor Ho Bynum, Leah Paul, William Parker and Jason Cady. Her new album *Silent Spills* collects her recent creations for solo viola with electronics.

Throughout *Silent Spills*, Pavone's prodigious technique is reined in just enough to highlight the

simplistic beauty of the viola's natural resonance. Though often augmented with electronic processing, the austere melodic material and repetitive structures always draw the listener towards the sound itself, with a sense of carefully measured time.

On "Dawn To Dark", pizzicato work is paired either with singing or with a distorted wash of delay, always perfectly in balance to maintain a sense of drifting through space. The subsequent transition to the delay-laden harmonics of "Ugly Story" is beautiful in its subtlety. These two tracks make a wonderful pairing at the center of the five-track CD.

Opening the album is the title track, a rhythmic, pulse-based work, which features a single repetitive note gradually expanding to bouncing attacks and harmonics, with the tempo accelerating until being overtaken by a wash of delay-laden controlled feedback. As the paradoxically delicate and chaotic texture recedes, the second track, "Shed The Themes Of Broken Records", begins with an evocative but simple gesture that grows as it is repeated until the primary thematic material is laid out: a constantly shifting dialogue between chords built on extremely wide or extremely close intervals.

Pavone's sense of harmony is based not so much on the consonance/dissonance dichotomy, but rather on sonority and perpetually fluctuating stasis. The ability to create extensive dramatic narrative from a carefully chosen set of unadorned motives distinguishes her solo work. The material moves slowly but always brings the listener along through the subtle changes of color and mood.

For more information, visit relativepitchrecords.com. Pavone curates and is at The Stone Jul. 26th-31st, this project taking place Jul. 29th. See Calendar.

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