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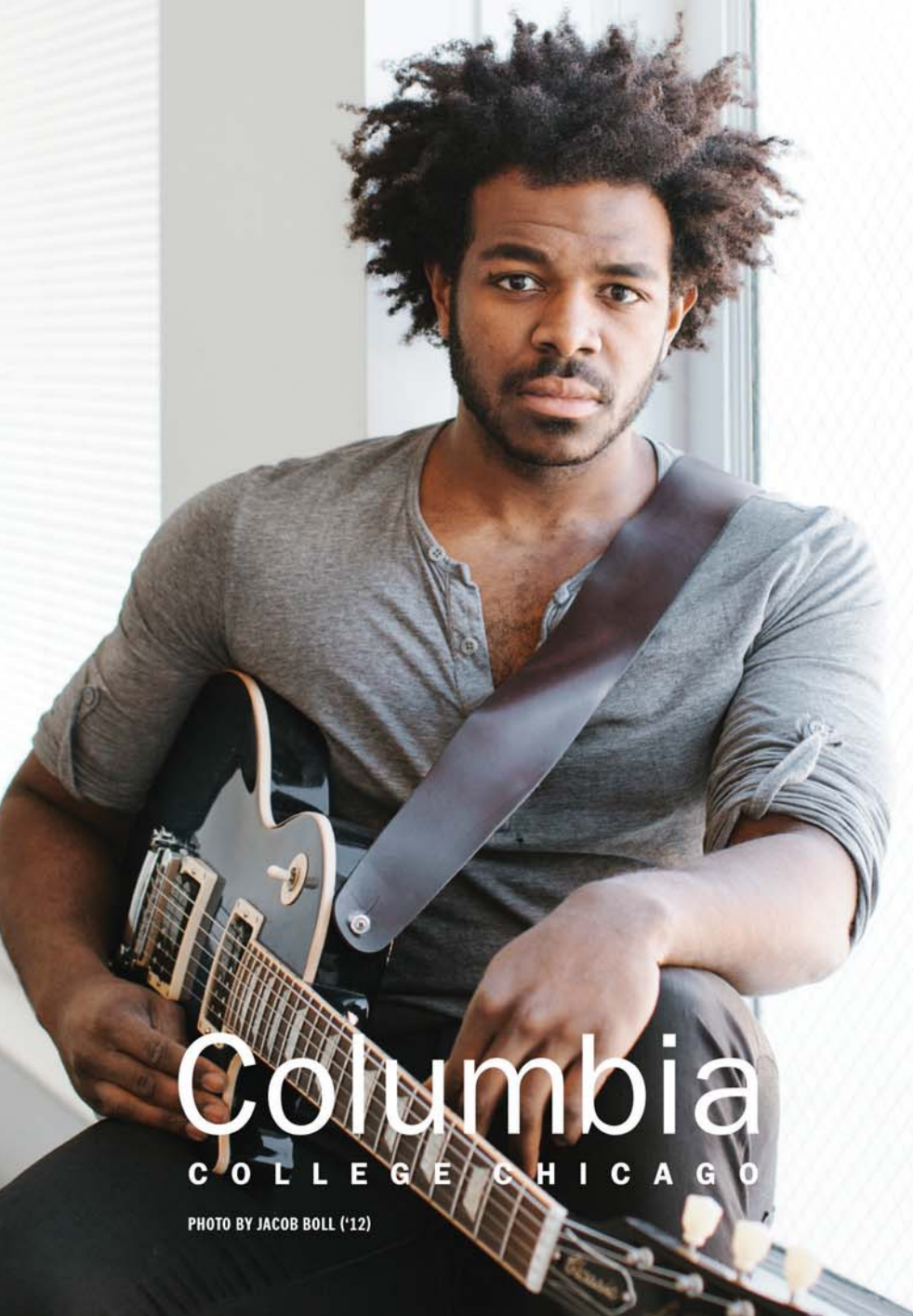
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DOWNBEAT

JULY 2015

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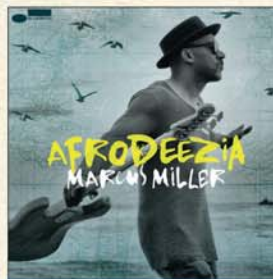
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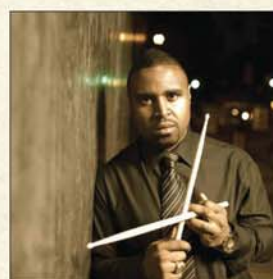
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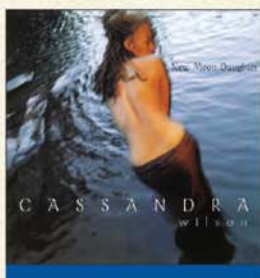


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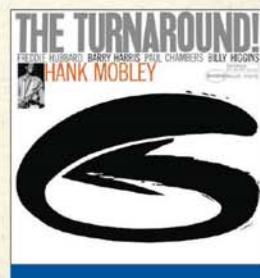
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JULY 2015

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BY KEN MICALLEF

Sanchez's original drum score for the film *Birdman* has been praised around the world, and it inspired two new albums that have elevated him as a composer and bandleader.

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Kenneth Whalum III (left), Kirk Whalum and Rick Braun at a show filmed for release as the DVD *The Gospel According To Jazz, Chapter IV*

COURTESY OF CHRISTIAN CULTURAL CENTER, BROOKLYN, NY



Cover photo of Antonio Sanchez shot by Jimmy and Dena Katz at the Blue Note Jazz Club in New York City on April 2. Info for this venue is at bluenotejazz.com.



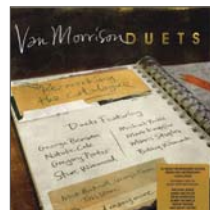
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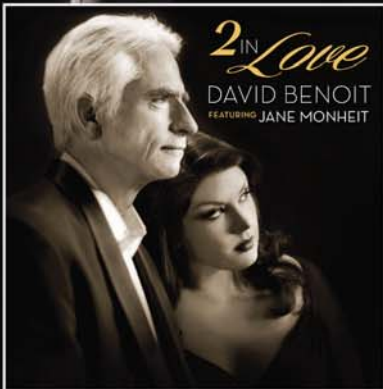
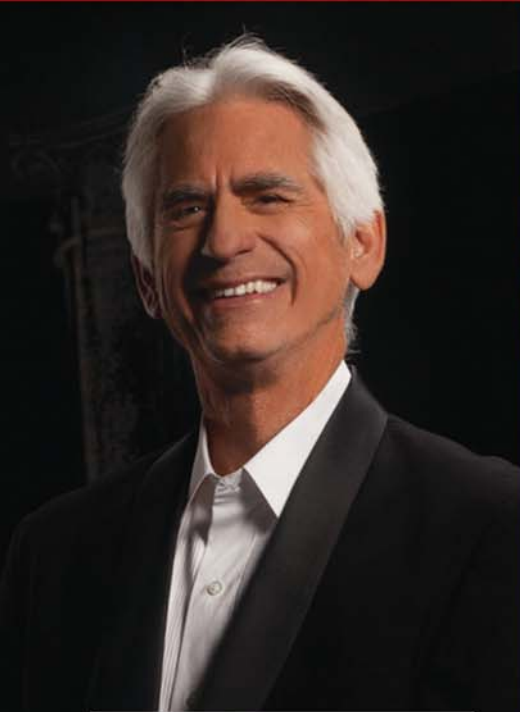
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NEW FROM CONCORD MUSIC GROUP



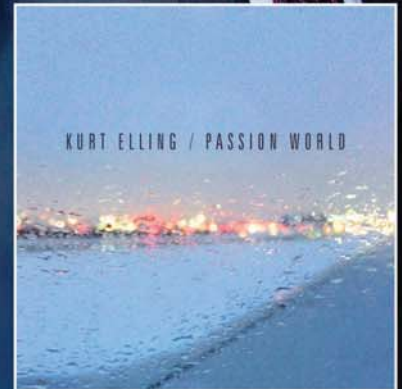
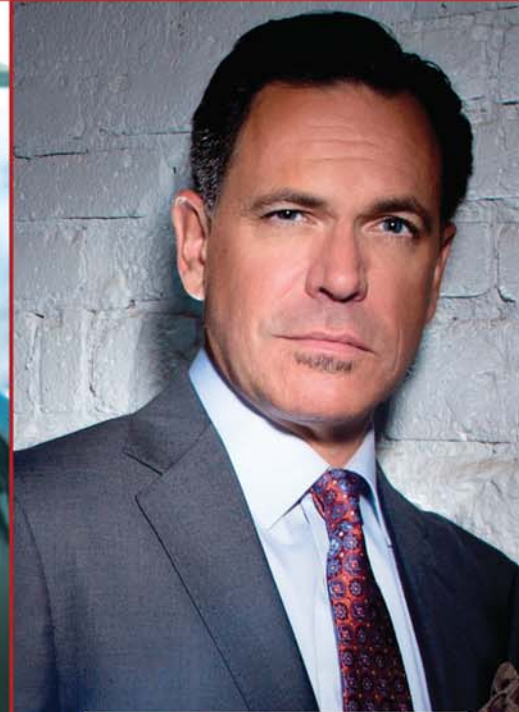
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www.detroitjazzfest.com

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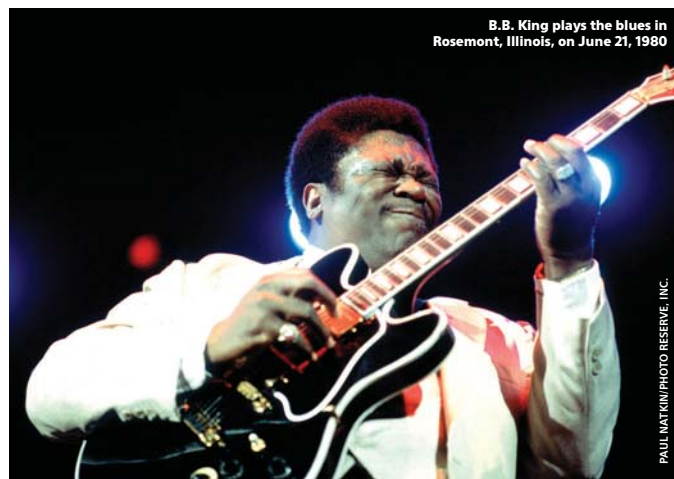
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First Take > BY FRANK ALKYER



Memories of the King

MY LIFE WAS SAVED BY MUSIC. MY FATHER DIED JUST BEFORE I HIT MY teenage years, and my body was filled with anger, angst, rebellion and a bunch of other feelings that I couldn't begin to explain. I could have turned very destructive, and sometimes did. But the Christmas after he passed, my mother gave me an old General Electric AM/FM radio. And that device, as primitive as it sounds today, took me away from that personal teenage wasteland.

I lived to listen to that radio, specifically to WMMS out of Cleveland, Ohio, because there were people singing and playing what I was feeling. It was a rock station, for sure. But it also played jazz and blues and soul. That station and that music introduced me to people and places I could only dream about from my family's little farm out in the sticks.

That station and that radio introduced me to the music of B.B. King.

Late one night, I was looking at the ceiling when all of a sudden violins sang from the three-inch speaker. A Gibson guitar told a story that needed no words. But when the words came in, they came from a voice so true, so pure, that it seemed to bleed about heartache and loss: *"The thrill is gone, the thrill is gone away! The thrill is gone, baby, the thrill is gone away! You know you've done me wrong, baby, and you'll be sorry some day."*

Like it did for so many of us, that song began a lifelong love for the music of B.B. King. Or maybe, for you, it was "Three O'Clock Blues," if you caught onto B.B. very early. Or maybe it was the classic album *B.B. King: Live In Cook County Jail*, or the tune "Riding With The King" with Eric Clapton, or "When Love Comes To Town" with U2—or any other stop along his long musical journey.

His was an amazing life that included induction into the DownBeat Hall of Fame, a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award, induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

On the morning of May 15, 2015, I woke up to a clock radio and a DJ saying Mr. King had gone away. He had passed the night before in Las Vegas at the age of 89. On the one hand, we all knew it was coming. His health had been failing and media outlets had reported that he was in home hospice care. On the other hand, it seemed surreal.

B.B. King is bigger than life.

This is a moment that brings a smile and a tear. Riley B. King lived like few others ever have. He toured the world. He owned a chain of blues clubs. There's a museum in Indianola, Mississippi, that bears his name. He entertained kings and inmates for more than seven decades. People wrote books about him and made films about him.

Even so, he remained a humble bluesman from Mississippi who loved life and his guitar, affectionately known as Lucille. With that guitar, he created a sound you could identify in three notes or less. And if you want to know where he got it, here's what he said in an interview in *DownBeat* in the July 27, 1967, issue: "Well, my favorite guitarists would be three or four guys. Django Reinhardt, for instance, was one. Charlie Christian, Elmore James and T-Bone Walker. These are the four guys, I guess, [who] combined to make B.B. King."

Goodbye, Mr. King. And thank you. *DownBeat* will present a tribute to King in the August issue.

DB



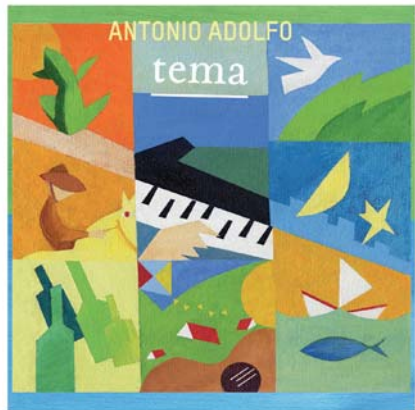
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Monheit's Intelligent Critique

This letter concerns the Blindfold Test with vocalist Jane Monheit in your May issue.

How refreshing it was to read a Blindfold Test where the person being blindfolded actually talked about the music and what she liked or didn't like about it, instead of trying to guess who was playing.

The reader of the Blindfold Test knows who the artist for each track is. Therefore, when most of the comments consist of the person guessing who is playing, DownBeat is wasting everyone's time. I want to know what one professional thinks about another performance without knowing who the other professional is. This is a professional discourse—not a quiz. Thank you, Jane, for realizing that.



Jane Monheit

MATTHEW HOLLER

JOHN BENSON
 EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

Keep Jazz in Jazz Fests

I'm a jazz fan, and it seems to me that when it comes to jazz festivals, there are fewer and fewer actual jazz performances. Other genres seem to be more prevalent lately. I don't want to mention names, but I recently watched a certain "jazz" fest for three days on my local public TV station and most of the performances were by either rock or country acts. Don't get me wrong: I have nothing against rock or country, but let's keep jazz alive by hiring more jazz artists. They need the work!

JOHN ELLWOOD
 MELVINA1947@YAHOO.COM

Memories of Terry in Ohio

On a February afternoon when I was in downtown Middletown, I heard that the inimitable Clark Terry had passed away. I recall going to the Manchester Inn's main ballroom and, with a glass of club soda over ice, sitting down at a front row table to see a superb evening of music by maestro Carmon DeLeone and the Middletown Symphony Orchestra with special guest Clark Terry, who blew me away. It was fantastic! I will never forget that night. Terry will be missed.

THOMAS JAMES GARDNER
 MIDDLETOWN, OHIO

More Negativity

I appreciate being exposed to a wide variety of musical styles and phenomenal musicians, but when 80 percent of the albums included in your Reviews section receive 4 stars or higher, the rating is meaningless.

DANIEL WOOD
 DANIEL.WOOD@NISSAN-USA.COM

Jazz in Austria

I'm from Austria and I was just browsing through the International Jazz Venue Guide in your February issue. It's really great and helps me pick a cool place to go when I'm traveling.

In my opinion, your guide left out a key venue in Austria: Treibhaus in Innsbruck (treibhaus.at). Many international jazz stars and world music artists play there throughout the year. For local residents or people staying in Innsbruck for a longer time—such as exchange students—Treibhaus often offers a season ticket, which allows you to go to almost all the concerts during a period of several months.

ALEXANDER NAGILLER
 ALEXANDER.NAGILLER@GMX.NET

Jazz in South Africa

For your next International Jazz Venue Guide, please consider adding The Orbit in Johannesburg (theorbit.co.za). The Orbit has been going for over a year, and it features jazz six nights a week. It has a good size stage with a baby grand piano, and the atmosphere is terrific. Besides featuring jazz musicians from many parts of Africa, they also present international musicians. The last American band booked there was trumpeter Wallace Roney's group with Buster Williams, Lenny White, Ben Solomon and Victor Goines.

DON ALBERT
 JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA

Correction

■ In the Student Music Awards section of the June issue, the name of a winner in the Jazz Instrumental Soloist category was misspelled: Anton Derevyanko, a tenor saxophonist from Medfield High School in Massachusetts.

DOWNBEAT REGRETS THE ERROR.

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Beat

NEA Jazz Masters Honored in NYC

GIVEN THE PRECARIOUS STATE OF ARTS FINANCING IN Washington, it is a small miracle that the National Endowment for the Arts' Jazz Masters awards have survived, let alone thrived. The fact that the awards, which recognize lifetime achievement, are in good health was made clear on April 20 during a vibrant ceremony streamed live from the Frederick P. Rose Hall at Jazz at Lincoln Center. The honorees were a diverse and active set of musicians—pianist Carla Bley and saxophonists George Coleman and Charles Lloyd—as well as club owner Joe Segal.

The event, hosted with good humor and gravitas by Christian McBride, featured performances by the three musician-honorees.

Bley, a black-clad figure still sporting her signature shock of gray hair, foreshadowed her performance with a video recalling a childhood experience in which her musician father criticized her for an early composition's excess of notes. The critique apparently stuck; aided by her bandmates—Tony Malaby on tenor saxophone, Billy Drummond on drums and her longtime companion, Steve Swallow, on hollowbody electric bass—she went on to render "Ups And Downs," from her and Swallow's 1988 album *Duets* (ECM), with the spare elegance the piece demanded.

Like "Ups And Downs," Lloyd's "Wild Man Dance Suite" offered complexity but in a more extended work, one featuring the synthesis of modernity and antiquity that has come to mark the composer's oeuvre. The piece evoked a sense of timelessness, guided by Lloyd's cues to Gerald Clayton on piano, Joe Sanders on bass and Eric Harland on drums, joined by musicians playing ancient instruments: Sokratis Sinopoulos on the politiki lyra, a bowed lute, and Miklos Lukacs on Hungarian cimbalom, a hammered dulcimer.

Providing a sharp contrast in tone, temperament and form were the turns by Coleman—backed by Eric Alexander on tenor, Harold Mabern on piano, John Webber on bass and Joe Farnsworth on drums, a foursome familiar of late from their work at the club Smoke—and Segal's musical representatives, Jimmy Heath on soprano sax, Ira Sullivan on alto, Stu Katz on piano, Ray Drummond on bass and Jimmy Cobb on drums.

Operating within bebop parameters, Coleman, his failing eyesight necessitating an escort, offered expansive statements undiminished by the years on his own composition "Lo Joe." Sullivan—a Charlie Parker exponent who has been a presence at Segal's Jazz Showcase in Chicago for much of his playing life—was, for a New York audience, something of a revelation on Bird's "Dewey Square."

A kind of house band helped recall the masters who died last year, playing tunes by Charlie Haden and Jimmy Scott. Ingrid Jensen on trumpet, Rudresh Mahanthappa on alto, Helen Sung on piano, Hans Glawischnig on bass and Rudy Royston on drums offered an economical take on Haden's

"Hello My Lovely" as the audience filed in to the auditorium. Later, Sung, Glawischnig and Royston returned during the "in memoriam" portion of the program to back Cécile McLorin Salvant, who saluted Scott with a stunning rendition of "Motherless Child."

Amid all the poignancy, there was some levity, courtesy of masters past and present. Eddie Palmieri good-naturedly milked the audience for applause before introducing Bley, who wryly recalled her beginnings as a girl from Oakland who has "come a long way since I worked in the cloakroom at the Jazz Gallery, hanging up people's coats while straining to hear everything



Pianist Harold Mabern (left), saxophonist Eric Alexander, saxophonist and NEA Jazz Master George Coleman, bassist John Webber and drummer Joe Farnsworth perform at the NEA Jazz Masters awards ceremony and concert at New York's Jazz at Lincoln Center on April 20.

MICHAEL GASTWART

happening on the bandstand."

Lou Donaldson (whom McBride dubbed "the Don Rickles of jazz") told humorous anecdotes and christened Coleman "Danger Man" for the fear he could instill in other tenor players simply by unpacking his instrument.

Kenny Barron, introducing Lloyd, mentioned the saxophonist's iconic, million-selling album, *Forest Flower*, and then noted with feigned jealousy, "I'm still trying to sell a thousand."

Lloyd then appeared at the podium, and the mood shifted. Dressed in a casually untucked shirt and a loose-hanging sports jacket on his thin frame, he called to mind the days when he "hit a wall and began to suffer personally and financially," holing up in Big Sur for the duration.

He returned, of course, and the rest is history. But while the potency of his music has reached a new peak as of late—"Wild Man" registered as a highlight of an evening overflowing with masterly work—Lloyd's history, like that of Bley and Coleman, is still being written.

"There's deeper to still go," Lloyd said.

—Phillip Lutz



Global Journey: Concord will release vocalist Kurt Elling's *Passion World* on June 9. Backed by his working band of keyboardist Gary Versace, guitarist John McLean, bassist Clark Sommers and drummer Kendrick Scott, Elling interprets songs rooted in Iceland (Bjork's "Who Is It"), Ireland (U2's "Where The Streets Have No Name"), France (Edith Piaf's "La Vie En Rose"), Brazil (Dorival Caymmi's "Você Já Foi À Bahia?") and beyond. Guest collaborators include trumpeter Arturo Sandoval, vocalist Sara Gazarek, trumpeter Till Brönner, accordionist Richard Galliano, the Scottish National Jazz Orchestra and the WDR Big Band and Orchestra. Elling will celebrate the release with an engagement at Birdland in Manhattan on June 10–13.

More info: kurtelling.com

Miles at Newport: Fans of Miles Davis are in for a treat this summer, as a new box set—*Miles Davis At Newport 1955–1975: The Bootleg Series Vol. 4*—will be released by Columbia/Legacy on July 17. The four-CD set includes five hours of music, with nearly four hours of previously unreleased material. It consists of live concerts from 1955, 1958, 1966, 1967, 1969, 1971, 1973 and 1975, in Newport, Rhode Island, New York City, Berlin and Switzerland. The release coincides with the 60th anniversary of Davis' debut at the Newport Jazz Festival, and in that spirit, festival founder George Wein has announced that this year's edition (July 31–Aug. 2) will feature lectures, workshops and musical tributes to the trumpet icon.

More info: legacyrecordings.com

Claytons in Cleveland: Pianist Gerald Clayton will share artist-in-residence duties at this summer's 36th annual Tri-C JazzFest with his father, bassist/bandleader John Clayton. In addition to playing at the festival, the pair will perform with students and lead workshops and master classes during Tri-C's two-week camp for young musicians beginning in late June. Tri-C JazzFest runs July 9–11 in Cleveland.

More info: tri-c.edu/jazzfest

On the Beat: Mark Guilliana's Beat Music Productions label will release *Family First*, the debut CD by the drummer/composer's acoustic quartet, on June 4. His quartet with pianist Shai Maestro, saxophonist Jason Rigby and bassist Chris Morrissey will play three sets at New York's Rockwood Music Hall that evening.

More info: markguilliana.com

'Jazz Day' Promotes Cultural Connections

AFTER LEADING A QUINTET through a scintillating rendition of his 1967 composition "The Sorcerer," Herbie Hancock went to the podium at the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris and spoke of the philosophical virtues of International Jazz Day (April 30), co-presented by the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz. The pianist and UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador reiterated the celebration's lofty themes of fostering cross-cultural dialogue, embracing personal and political freedom, and striving for global peace—touchstones that he had eloquently spoken of at the three previous International Jazz Day events.

This year, however, his words resonated with more emotional heft.

"Often, it's just ... inches of earth geographically separating nations that are millions of miles apart philosophically, ethnically, religiously and culturally," Hancock said. "Physically seeing neighbors across borders is easy—but uniting or even comprehending their divergent opinions or beliefs [can] seem impossible, sometimes hopeless, implausible and, unfortunately, often unimaginable."

Considering the deadly terrorist attacks on the staff of the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris in January and the more recent unrest in Baltimore regarding the death of Freddie Gray (who had been in police custody), Hancock's words hung heavy as the audience listened silently.

"International Jazz Day brings a beacon of hope into the mix," Hancock continued, "because through the universal language [of] music, it brings large-scale opportunity to connect while listening to and respecting the intricate challenges facing our fellow man."

The speeches touched upon the themes of unity and understanding, though no one at the event spoke about the *Charlie Hebdo* incident or the Black Lives Matter sociopolitical movement in the States.

Nevertheless, the all-star concert, which celebrated the 70th anniversary of UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), contained some sociopolitical messages intermittently through the music. "UNESCO [is] the house of peace. Tonight, this is the house of jazz," Irina Bokova, director-general of UNESCO, stated earlier in the evening. "Jazz means respecting the rights and dignity of every woman and man; jazz means courage, standing up for freedom, dignity and rights against hatred and discrimination. This is why UNESCO created International Jazz Day."

Following more philosophical musing from Ban Ki-moon, the secretary-general of the United Nations, legendary South African trumpeter and social activist Hugh Masekela brought the house down with one of the evening's more explicitly political tunes, "Mandela (Bring Him Back Home)." The

Grégoire Maret (left) plays harmonica as Dee Dee Bridgewater sings at the International Jazz Day concert in Paris on April 30. (Bassist Ben Williams is in the background.)



KRISTY SPARROW/GETTY IMAGES FOR THELONIOUS MONK INSTITUTE OF JAZZ

celebratory spirit of that performance was book-ended by Nigerian singer and saxophonist Femi Kuti, who performed a riveting take of his song "No Place For My Dream."

Singer Annie Lennox's forceful reading of Screamin' Jay Hawkins' "I Put A Spell On You" (from her Blue Note album *Nostalgia*) brimmed with implied sociopolitical fervor. She has used the song as a vehicle to address domestic violence against women. Vocalist Dianne Reeves followed Lennox's hair-raising performance with a dynamic revisit of "Mista," a howling blues touching on themes of self-empowerment and personal responsibility.

Ideas concerning cross-cultural dialog were put into practice most dazzlingly during the performance of Tunisian singer and oud player Dhafer Youssef's composition "Hayastan Dance." Wayne Shorter joined the fray by blowing skittering rhythms and swirling melodies on soprano saxophone, while Carrington, Cinélu and bassist Ben Williams helped propel the momentum.

The concert's most emotionally stirring moment arrived by way of vocalist Dee Dee Bridgewater's enchanting rendering of Sacha Distel's 1962 song "La Belle Vie," during which she serenaded the audience with French lyrics and masterfully uncoiled the song's bittersweet themes. Grégoire Maret's pithy harmonica commentary provided the perfect counterpoint to Bridgewater's simmering vocals.

Similar to last year's International Jazz Day concert in Osaka, all the musicians gathered for a touching rendition of the John Lennon classic "Imagine" as the grand finale.

At the close of the show, Hancock announced that President Obama had agreed to host next year's International Jazz Day at the White House.

In Paris, bassist and UNESCO Artist of Peace Marcus Miller was asked how musicians could take the philosophical ideals of International Jazz Day and incorporate them into practical, everyday activities. "Music can't solve everything," Miller replied. "But it really has made a big difference. The whole UNESCO thing is about communication. If you keep talking, you can make progress toward peace."

—John Murphy

Dingman Seeks the Sublime

CHRIS DINGMAN'S DEBUT ALBUM, *Waking Dreams*, won raves, landing on many year-end "top 10" lists and helping him win the category Rising Star-Vibraphone in the 2012 DownBeat Critics Poll.

Now the 34-year-old Brooklyn resident has released his excellent sophomore album, *The Subliminal And The Sublime* (Inner Arts). The 60-minute suite, underwritten by a grant from Chamber Music America, took 18 months to compose. Inspired by a 10-day wilderness experience in the American West, it's a hypnotic, mature work that creates sonic landscapes, allows chords to resonate and displays a respect for silence. The music—performed by a sextet with Dingman on vibes, alto saxophonist Loren Stillman, pianist Fabian Almazan, guitarist Ryan Ferreira, bassist Linda Oh and drummer Justin Brown—suggests many influences beyond the jazz world: ambient music, 20th century composers like Debussy and Satie, modern minimalists like Steve Reich, and Indian classical music. The result is something beyond categorization.

There is a quote from the Buddha in your press materials. Do you meditate, and if so, how has your own practice of meditation affected your artistic choices?

Heavily, I'd say. Before I began writing this piece, I did a 10-day meditation retreat in Massachusetts. I wanted to be able to write with as clear a mind as possible. Later that summer, I visited California to do the fieldwork involved with writing the piece: I visited Pinnacles National Park and a redwood forest [in another park]. Surprisingly, when I was in the plane, looking down on the landscape of Nevada, *that* became the inspiration for the last movement.

What was it in the landscape that inspired you?

Specifically, the patterns of water—you could see where water had made its mark on the earth. Something that came up for me in meditation was how patterns of the mind have a similar effect to those of water. When water first trickles over the earth, it doesn't make a big impact. But when it continually runs in the same spot, the earth becomes worn away, and it eventually becomes a huge canyon. Similarly, when you have thoughts that are repetitive, they have that kind of impact on your mind. It's fascinating, inspiring, sometimes even a little scary. That kind of thing is what drives a lot of my creative impulses.

The title *The Subliminal And The Sublime* sounds like a statement of artistic intent. What do those words mean to you?

I liked the fact that they're almost the same word, but they mean drastically different things, "subliminal" being things that are outside of your conscious perception but still affect it; and "sublime" is this overarching feeling of awe and wonder. If I can provoke that kind of feeling with

music—that's my ideal. When I'm listening to music and I feel that awe-struck feeling, *that's* what I'm in it for.

You chose some unusual instruments and effects to perform this music.

Yes, that was fun. We tracked the music as written with the core band ... but, after editing it, I added things to enhance effects that were already there. In "The Pinnacles," for instance, I added tympani and my Tibetan singing bowl. Elsewhere I used an overdubbed choir of bowed vibraphones, some backwards reverb, and a backwards piano chord. In the third and fourth movements, I added [my own] vocals, panning back

and forth. I wanted them to be in there, at least in a subliminal way.

You and your wife, Zaneta Sykes, formed the Inner Arts Initiative, a nonprofit organization, which released the new album. What are Inner Arts' goals?

We created it to help people gain a greater understanding of themselves and the world through art. We hope to demystify aspects of music for the general public through nontraditional musical training, focusing on inspiration and play. The key goal is to create a lifelong connection with music.
—Allen Morrison



Chris Dingman performs during the Jazz & Colors event in New York's Central Park on Nov. 10, 2012.

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European Scene / BY PETER MARGASAK



Dumoulin Expands Palette

The latest album from the Paris-based, Belgian keyboardist Jozef Dumoulin is billed to the Red Hill Orchestra, but nothing is quite what it seems for this musician, who uses familiar tools to explore the unknown. The “orchestra” on the superb *Trust* (Yolk Music) is just tenor saxophonist Ellery Eskelin and drummer Dan Weiss, expertly navigating the leader’s spindly, shape-shifting post-bop compositions, where extended passages of free improvisation and quicksilver give-and-take connect groove-heavy themes. Dumoulin is heard primarily on Fender Rhodes, which, in his hands, has an orchestral range.

The Fender Rhodes has made a remarkable comeback in jazz in recent years. Thanks to keyboardists like Robert Glasper, Uri Caine, Jason Moran and Marc Cary, the Fender Rhodes is no longer a musty throwback, but an instrument well-suited to progressive tastes, particularly as jazz musicians forge new hybrids with hip-hop and modern r&b. But no one plays it like Dumoulin.

Born four decades ago in Ingelmunster, deep in the Belgian countryside, Dumoulin came to jazz in his late teens, after discovering Keith Jarrett and Kenny Kirkland (through his work as a sideman for Sting). Most of his earliest playing took place in church on an acoustic piano, and while he had picked up a Fender Rhodes by the time he was studying jazz in Cologne in his early 20s, he recalled that the keyboard “was actually standing in its case against the wall” for several years.

After completing school, he landed a steady gig in Antwerp, turning to the Fender Rhodes because the venue’s piano was terrible. He began using some effects pedals. “Little by little I was sucked into a different world, and loving all of the possibilities that came with it,” he said. “It was a slow, gradual process that happened to me, more than me just deciding to do it.”

On last year’s remarkable *A Fender Rhodes Solo* (Bee Jazz), which he claims is the first solo recording of the instrument, he reimagined the instrument as a veritable symphony, producing a constantly morphing assemblage of groove, noise and meditation. Deploying a rack of effects

(reverb, chorus, distortion, filters, octaver, loops, bit-crushers), he found a way to radically expand the keyboard’s sound. “It actually feels a lot like a living organism because it rarely reacts the exact same way twice,” he said. “There are always surprises and it keeps evolving even without adding any new effects.” The all-improvised recording was produced at home, in extended hothouse sessions. “I took some time to buy a new amp, to upgrade my cables and so on, and then I sat down and went over every effect that I was using—something I never really did before. I really [studied] the owner’s manual, as if I had never used it. And I practiced every effect separately for a moment. So the preparation was purely technical.” He culled the album’s 16 short pieces from 26 hours of material.

“When a work becomes so much about sound, it’s very hard to find the right tools to compose with—because pitches and rhythms don’t tell the whole story,” Dumoulin said, regarding his choice to stick with improvisation. “Maybe one day I’ll be able to write music bringing more things together, but for now I know that the best way to get in a zone is through improvisation.”

Before making the solo record, he had developed a unique sound for use in other contexts, such as playing in The Bureau of Atomic Tourism—an improvising group led by Belgian drummer Teun Verbruggen featuring saxophonist Andrew D’Angelo, trumpeter Nate Wooley, guitarist Marc Ducret and bassist Trevor Dunn—but the solo album was a game changer for him.

Even as Dumoulin makes plans to assemble an acoustic band, the lessons of the Fender Rhodes experimentation have proven valuable. “Since I made the record, that whole process is still unfolding new connections and layers in my approach to the instrument. When I play solo shows now, I deliberately re-create the energy of certain tunes of the record, but within harmonic, melodic and rhythmic structures that are made up on the spot, often even with a different combination of effects. And there’s new bridges showing up from time to time.”

DB

AACM Members Unite To Celebrate 50th Anniversary

Caught >

THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT

of Creative Musicians, the Chicago-born artist collective celebrating the 50th anniversary of its founding throughout 2015, convened members from across generations and around the globe on April 26 at the University of Chicago's Mandel Hall in a program titled "Together: A Power Stronger Than Itself." The concert became a festive event as AACM founders bonded with emerging members, all looking joyously forward and proudly back.

Five lengthy performances by differently constituted ensembles with more than two dozen soloists culminated in more than 50 musicians onstage adding their voices to a spirited, harmonious din. Each group and every individual subscribed to the AACM's overriding imperative: to create original music, departing from what has come before.

For half a century, that mission has inspired the productivity of Muhal Richard Abrams, Fred Anderson, the Art Ensemble of Chicago, Anthony Braxton, Henry Threadgill, Leroy Jenkins, Amina

Claudine Myers and Wadada Leo Smith, among the 131 other AACM members, living and dead, listed in the concert's program.

None of those first-wave AACM stars appeared. However, the Art Ensemble's Joseph Jarman, who is ailing, was in attendance, and the organization's co-founder Kelan Phil Cohran, 87, played his Frankiphone (an electrified kalimba), then prophesied that the music of the AACM "is going to become so strong that no one can resist it."

Eager to prove it, current AACM chair Khari B, the "discopoet" less than half Cohran's age, was an exultant co-host (with Dr. Carol Adams, former director of the DuSable Museum, which currently houses an exhibit on the AACM). At one point Khari and percussionist Coco Elysses zipped through the aisles on roller skates, inciting the audience to express its merriment.

Onstage, the music began with a succinct, edgy, spontaneous, rubato harp solo by Maia Sonjia Hubert Harper, who then took a seat amid such other emerging talents as trumpeters Corey Wilkes and Ben Lamar Gaye, vocalist Saalik Ziyad, cellist Tomeka Reid, bassist Junius Paul and drummer Vincent Davis. These gifted players were featured in a succession of groups led by AACM stalwarts Ernest Dawkins, Douglas R. Ewart, Ziyad himself, violinist-composer Renée Baker and former AACM chair Mwata Bowden.

Alto saxophonist Dawkins' "Medicine Laughter Is the Best/For Ameen Muhammad" for nonet—the smallest band of the evening—leapt out from a tight, fast horn lick, establishing the urgency of exploration that has defined much of the best from the AACM. By comparison, multi-reedist Ewart's conduction of "Ascending Auditory Communications Migrating" for the 21-piece Ancestors Spiral Galaxies Ensemble was more abstract and ambient.

After intermission, more than 50 players assembled as the Great Black Music Ensemble, led by Ziyad in a multifaceted outing called "Esoteric Intrusive Ness."



AACM member Hanah Jon Taylor performs at the April 26 concert in Chicago to celebrate 50 years of the organization.

MICHAEL JACKSON

The musicians' excitement in their reunion was palpable. Drummer/percussionists Thurman Barker and Reggie Nicholson, pianist Adegoke Steve Colson and his wife Iqua Colson, trumpeter Rasul Siddik, vocalist Rita Warford, flutist Nicole Mitchell and reedists Hanah Jon Taylor and Edward "Kidd" Jordan came from out of town to play. Bassist Leonard Jones flew in from Paris, drummer Alvin Fielder from Mississippi, saxophonists Chico Freeman from Switzerland and Sar Abshalom Ben Shalomo from Israel.

Hometown Chicago was represented by pianist Ann E. Ward, who heads the AACM School of Music, shamanistic vocalist G'Ra, singer Dee Alexander, bassoonist James Johnson, bassist Harrison Bankhead, drummer Avreeayl Ra, saxophonists Ari Brown, Ed Wilkerson Jr., Edwin House and Edwin Daugherty, and drummers Isaiah Spencer and Dushun Mosley.

Many wore African clothing, and hailed the empowerment the AACM provided for African-American artists in many disciplines.

Bowden's "Well Woven Web" ended the show with the musicians and audience members chanting, "It's the 50th anniversary/ Fifty years of Great Black Music!" With more anniversary events upcoming, that chant will resound for months—and could be adapted to incorporate larger numbers going forward.

—Howard Mandel

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Germany's Jazzahead! Fest Showcases French Artists

A FESTIVAL HITTING ITS 10TH ANNIVERSARY MARK CERTAINLY counts as a form of validation. The jazzahead! festival, which took place April 23–26 in Bremen, Germany, has now entered the upper strata of jazz fests. By this point, “institution” status is within reach for this gathering for anyone with business or artistic connections to jazz, and especially for artists from Europe. (All told, this reviewer caught 32 acts over three days.)

The aesthetic highlight of the weekend was a four-and-a-half-hour “ECM Clubnight” on April 26 at the Sendesaal venue, featuring Danish guitarist Jakob Bro and his trio, Norwegian multi-instrumentalist Matthias Eick, Italian pianist Giovanni Guidi and British saxophonist Andy Sheppard (with Norwegian guitarist Eivind Aarset providing additional textures and dialog).

Artists from Latin America made an impact at the fest, including Colombian jazz ensemble fatsO and the Mexican jazz-rock band Troker, who regaled the audience with tricky genre and meter twist-ups.

Canada’s Marianne Trudel Quintet and trumpeter Ingrid Jensen represented North America, while Australia weighed in with the Australian Art Orchestra, one of the country’s most significant ensembles.

Estonian bassist Peedu Kass’ Momentum ensemble served as an exciting and intricately woven remake of the piano trio format, and that format was also given a good showing by Israeli pianist Omer Klein.

Each year, jazzahead! turns a special spotlight on a designated country, and France was in the heralded spot this time. An opening “French night” of eight acts over roughly four hours conveyed the diversity and vitality of the current French jazz scene. As a strong and subtle opening, the dynamic young accordionist Vincent Peirani, barefoot and ready for virtuosic action, was joined by nimble reed player Émile Parisien. Together, they weaved through Sidney Bechet tunes, a tribute to French reedist Michel Portal and other treats from their fine CD *Belle Époque* (ACT).

Other French acts included the impressive Théo Ceccaldi Trio, led by the powerful violinist, along with guitarist Guillaume Aknine and cellist Valentin Ceccaldi. This trio offered a version of “hot jazz” with a 21st-century twist, making musical sense by its own intriguing rules. Veteran bassist Henri Texier led a strong band of up-and-comers in the Hope Quartet. Donkey Monkey, the duo of French pianist Eve Risser and Japanese drummer Yuko Oshima, shook

up the crowd at the Schlachthof with its spicy, kitschy and maverick attitude.

Among the ensembles offering fresh visions of big band culture was the French Orchestre National de Jazz, currently led by guitarist Olivier Benoit. This group demonstrated flexibility and tight machinations, with intricate charts suggesting echoes of Frank Zappa and touches of Raymond Scott in the swirling, mercurial mix.

—Josef Woodard



Vincent Peirani at the 2015 Jazzahead! festival in Bremen, Germany

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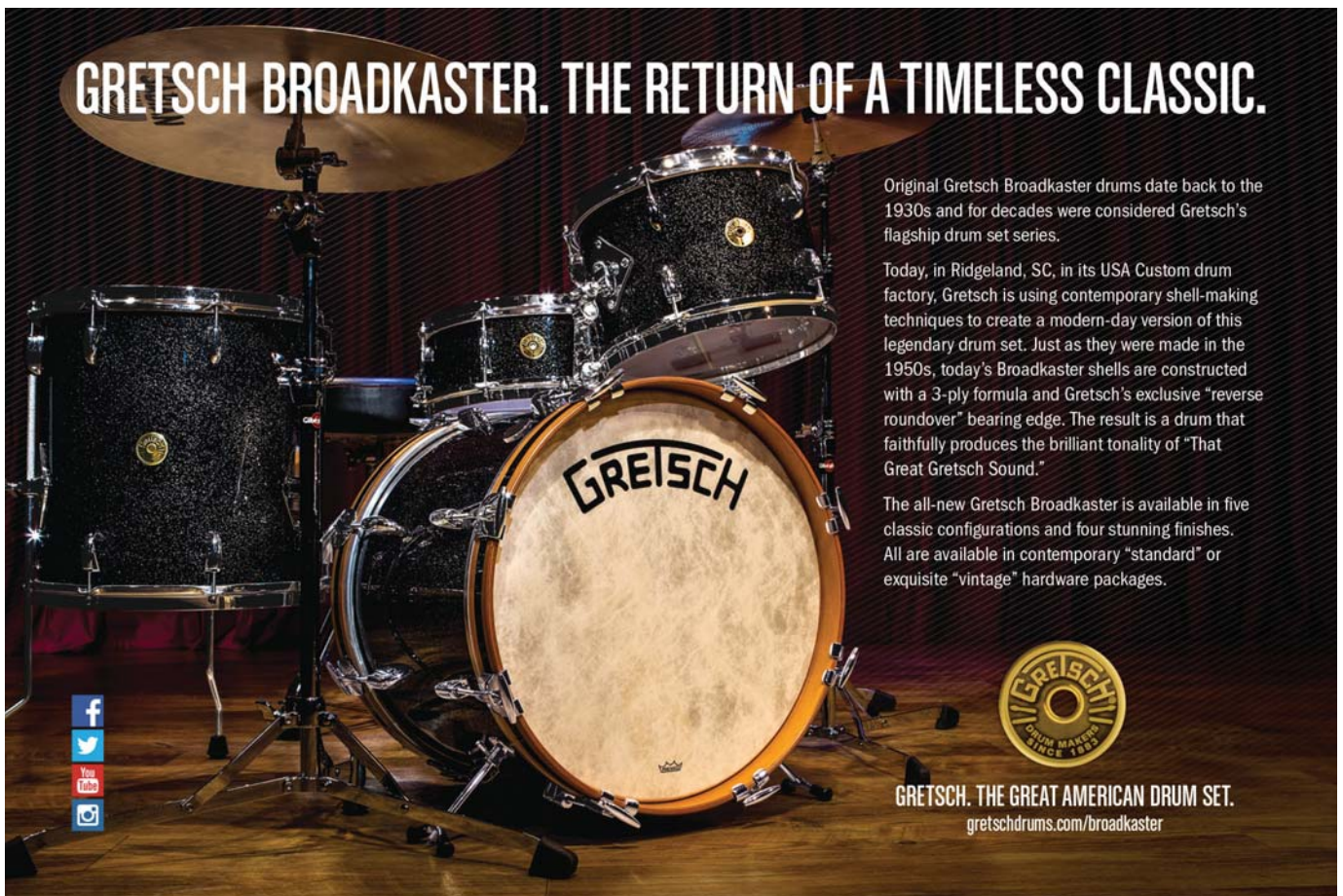
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KAMASI WASHINGTON

Limitless Ideas

MIKE PARK

At age 34, Los Angeles-raised tenor saxophonist Kamasi Washington should be considered more of a veteran than a rookie, but he didn't put out his debut album as a leader until this year. Released on May 5 and titled *The Epic*, the album is a staggering 172 minutes long, spread across three CDs. While many fans of improvised music are just now discovering this bold saxophonist, Angelenos have known about him for decades.

"I haven't taken a proper vacation in 10 years," Washington said, seated at his Inglewood studio's mixing console. "My [former] girlfriend was Turkish and we went to Turkey. It's the only time I've gone somewhere for fun where I had to take a flight. That's it for me."

While he was an undergraduate in UCLA's jazz program, Washington took a hiatus from school to tour the world with rapper Snoop Dogg. After that he became the honking linchpin of Gerald Wilson's big band, bringing audiences and even the wild-haired Wilson into a world of unhinged ecstasy. This also led to stints with Raphael Saadiq, Lauryn Hill and Chaka Khan.

Weeks before the release of *The Epic*, Washington found himself on radios around the world as a contributor to hip-hop artist Kendrick Lamar's acclaimed *To Pimp A Butterfly* (see "Beyond," page 58). Washington was initially brought in to add some strings to the disc, but he ended up contributing horn work throughout. Also featured on that album are his friends Stephen "Thundercat" Bruner and Flying Lotus. The latter also happens to be the boss of Washington's record label, Brainfeeder, which has been offering a balance of mind-bending Los

Angeles-based electronica albums and earnest, modern jazz discs for several years.

"Flying Lotus has a good vision," Washington said. "He uses Brainfeeder to put out music he really likes. With a Blue Note sound, there was an obvious push for something [label executives] wanted to do. Brainfeeder isn't doing that. Lotus isn't going to tell you what to do. He goes out and finds people who do what they like." With that freedom, Washington was able to whittle his initial 45-song output down to 17 tracks.

Charming excess is an essential ingredient of *The Epic*, which features a 32-piece orchestra, a choir of 20 voices and a 10-piece band called The West Coast Get Down (aka The Next Step). The group has worked together since the early '00s, and many of the musicians have known each other since they were kids. The ensemble eschews leadership titles and focuses solely on a collective sound wielding the power of a freight train, doubling up on keyboards, basses and drums.

The band includes not only bassist Thundercat but also his older brother, the celebrated drummer Ronald Bruner Jr. Other members include upright bassist Miles Mosley, keyboardists Brandon Coleman and Cameron Graves and a second drummer, Tony Austin. The core members are sometimes joined by other local players, such as trombonist Ryan Porter.

The heavyweight ensemble got its start in Los Angeles' Leimert Park neighborhood. Washington had booked a gig at the influential (but now defunct) coffeehouse 5th Street Dick's. A scheduling conflict forced the Bruner siblings and Graves to cancel, so Washington called Mosley, Austin and Coleman. They all showed up for the gig. Everyone plugged

in and provided a very intense soundtrack for a handful of coffee drinkers.

Since that fateful gig, the band has been honing its massive sound. Finding a room to shine alongside Ronald Bruner Jr. would be a challenge for any drummer, but Austin has embraced the task. "The real challenge was not only coming up with ideas in the moment, but also coming up with secondary ideas that would be complementary," said Austin. "That way, if we both came upon the same musical idea, one of us could quickly switch to something that complemented it, instead of clashing and taking up the same musical space."

In the hands of some, that sonic configuration would result in a cacophony, but *The Epic* demonstrates that everyone in The West Coast Get Down is on the same page. Tracks like "The Next Step" transition from honking r&b to Wayne Shorter-esque clouds amid the choir and an oscillating organ. Album closer "The Message" has a chirpy drive, bolstered by frenetic percussion and an astounding, fleet-fingered bass solo from Thundercat. The album is incredibly rich, showcasing a seemingly limitless stream of ideas.

The serene, unflappable Washington rolls with life's punches. The track sequence for *The Epic* came to him in a dream. Onstage, melodies emerge from his horn as though predestined. He's eerily calm even when unleashing a fiery torrent. Part of this can be attributed to a deep, intuitive understanding of his own creative process. "You have to let go from music," Washington said. "It comes through you. If you try to control it, you'll never get the real thing. You can't grab water. You have to put water into something. You can't man-handle water or you'll lose it." —Sean J. O'Connell



Players >

PETROS KLAMPANIS

Thriving in NYC

ALINE FOURNIER

Petros Klampanis is a musician who has always spoken from the heart. There is a clear connection between his instrument, mind and fingers. His primary vessel of expression is the acoustic bass. When he performs, he practically throws his whole being into it, bending the strings, drumming percussive beats on its resonant wood frame and frequently exploring the soloing possibilities afforded by various fretboard-tapping techniques.

Klampanis, 33, was born on the island of Zakynthos in Greece. He dropped out of the Polytechnic School in Athens to focus on his burgeoning musical passions. In 2005 he began double bass performance studies at the Amsterdam Conservatory in the Netherlands. With a strong foundation in classical music, he was accepted into the Aaron Copland School of Music at Queens College in New York in 2008. There he studied classical and jazz, leading to his entry into the New York jazz community.

"In Greece, I was introduced to many jazz greats—like Dave Brubeck, Chick Corea, Ella Fitzgerald and Gershwin—by my piano teacher," Klampanis explained. "It was a very small community on the island where I grew up. I knew that if I was going to pursue this music I would have to go elsewhere because the music scene there was practically non-existent."

New York proved to be fruitful for Klampanis as he began to sit in with various ensembles around town. His most significant relationships include his association with saxophonist Greg Osby and meeting the musicians who would become his working band. In 2011 Klampanis released *Contextual*, his first official solo album, on Osby's imprint Inner Circle Music. The album presented the bassist's blend of jazz, classical, Greek folk music and world beat sounds. It also brought together his core accompanists, who have become as important to shaping the music as the

leader himself.

Pianist Jean-Michel Pilc, guitarist Gilad Hekselman and drummer/percussionist John Hadfield helped the bassist craft truly inspired takes on John Coltrane's classic "Countdown" and The Beatles' "Blackbird." The album spotlighted Klampanis' skills as a composer, his acumen for arranging for string quartet, his adventures in solo bass and an aesthetic that incorporated electronic looping and effects.

Klampanis' follow-up, *Minor Dispute* (Inner Circle Music), is a continuation of sorts, but it also demonstrates his artistic growth. "*Contextual* was an album that was very experimental in a lot of ways," he said. "It was more of a compositional work. *Minor Dispute* is more emotional and comes from a different place. It's a more mature musical work."

In his liner notes, Klampanis writes, "My main source of inspiration while composing music for *Minor Dispute* was how we embrace and express the bright and dark aspects of our characters during the process of becoming better human beings. *Minor Dispute* is essentially a study on honesty."

The music reflects that quest for honesty. Among the highlights is the dramatic title track, which was inspired by a dispute with his girlfriend. The tense, frantic "Ferry Frenzy" is a musical examination of Klampanis' stressful recollections of trying to board various boats for transportation between the islands of Greece. The amusingly titled "Monkey Business" is another soul-stirring piece, inspired by the notion that a person's mind can shift from one unfocused thought to another, "like a monkey jumping from tree to tree," Klampanis explained.

"I want people to get enjoyment from my music, for sure," he said. "But, especially with this new album, I'd also like people to discover emotions. And my music is coming from a very emotional place."
—Eric Harabadian



FRANK LACY & MINGUS BIG BAND MINGUS SINGS

SSC 1407 - IN STORES 6/23/2015

This is the first Mingus album devoted entirely to song. Although Mingus compositions have inspired individual lyrics by jazz and pop performers like Joni Mitchell, Elvis Costello and by Mingus himself, the current recording includes thirteen compositions interpreted by Ku-umba Frank Lacy, the prodigiously gifted musician who has played a central role in the Mingus Big Band since the early Nineties. Here he displays his natural ease with Mingus's music.

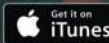
Two Mingus compositions, *Dizzy Profile* and *Noonlight*, are recorded here for the first time. The music for *Noonlight* was discovered recently by musicologist Andrew Homzy while sorting music papers on a train ride from Montreal to New York. Sy Johnson made an arrangement, I wrote lyrics, and Lacy gave it life.

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Players >

CHARENEE WADE

Team Player

In late February and early March, singer Charenee Wade brought her formidable skills to three very different settings in New York City.

One week after a four-night run at the Jazz Standard with Rufus Reid's Quiet Pride project in which she deployed her voice as an instrument in a 20-piece big band, Wade presented a two-night, four-set homage to Betty Carter in the Allen Room at Jazz at Lincoln Center. Joined by seven estimable Carter alumni—pianists Jacky Terrasson and Steven Scott, bassists Curtis Lundy and Michael Boone, drummers Alvester Garnett and Winard Harper, and tenor saxophonist Craig Handy in shifting configurations—and three tap dancers, Wade creatively interpreted a suite of the singer's idiosyncratic originals and rearranged standards with a richly textured contralto. She stretched syllables and bent pitches in ways that illuminated the emotional core of Carter's provocative lyrics for "Do Something," "Ego" and "Tight," as well as "Round Midnight," and concluded the evening with tour de force vocalese on "Sounds."

At The Jazz Gallery the next weekend, Wade previewed her new album, *Offering: The Music Of Gil Scott-Heron And Brian Jackson* (Motéma), for which she arranged 11 songs by the iconic '70s partners. It's fresh material for a 21st century jazz singer. Wade, untethered from thoughts of how her core influences—including Carter, Carmen McRae and Dianne Reeves—might have treated standards from the canon, addresses the program with high craft, erudition and a risk-taking attitude suited to the soul-on-fire messages imparted therein. She distills their language into a personal argot that convincingly portrays Scott-Heron's compassionate, conversational imagery, recontextualized from a female perspective. Signifying upon her statements are Garnett, vibraphonist Stefon Harris, guitarist Dave Stryker, pianist Brandon McCune, bassist Lonnie Plaxico and, on one track, Marcus Miller on bass clarinet.

"I like to work," Wade remarked over lunch at Chez Oscar, in Brooklyn's Fort Greene neighborhood, just a few hundred yards from the elementary and middle schools she attended as a child. "I like doing things that interest me, and I like to expand my skills and musicianship. I like continuous challenge."

A teacher's daughter, Wade—raised and still residing in Bedford-Stuyvesant—recalled having "two separate listeners in my body at the same time" during her formative years. One listener ("an odd duckling") was a devotee of Sarah Vaughan and her mother's soul and r&b albums; the other was drawn to Billy Ocean, Michael Jackson and the quiet storm programming on New York's WBLS-FM. A teacher heard 12-year-old Wade singing "My Funny Valentine" in the hallway and recruited her for stage band.

After developing her skills at LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts, she attended Goucher College in Baltimore (where she pursued a double major in music and math) and then earned a master's degree from the Manhattan School of Music. In 2004, she earned fourth place in the Thelonious Monk International Jazz Vocals Competition; six years later, she came in second, behind Cécile McLorin Salvant.

"I put a lot of pressure on myself, which is not necessarily the best way to walk into a competitive space," Wade said of the 2004 experience. "By 2010, I'd realized that competition doesn't push me to rise to the occasion. I'm a community-oriented artist. I tried to create arrangements with a clear direction, with room for the band members to be expressive, room for organic movement." It's a piece of self-description apropos to the feel of *Offering*, on which Wade's interaction with the grooves and colors engendered by her charts guides the narrative flow of each song.

"Even today, people assume that a female vocalist can't handle writing, arranging and bandleading on the same level as her instrumental counterparts," Wade said, rolling her eyes for emphasis. "It was always important to me to hang with the cats, to make sure I [met] that level of expectation. I noticed how much respect Betty Carter got, and I wanted to be on that level of creativity and musicianship."

"I love the collective spontaneity of jazz—that moment we all go for the same thing at the same time, surprise one another, and then respond to that surprise. That requires everyone to be listening, to be involved, have a say. I make room. It's not about just me. It's about the music." —Ted Panken

Players >

JOHN RAYMOND

.....
Seeking Tension

ERIC RYAN ANDERSON

Three songs into an exuberant set by Orrin Evans' Captain Black Big Band at the New York City venue Smoke on April 27, the leader announced that the ensemble was going to play a composition and arrangement by trumpeter John Raymond. The nine musicians launched into "Onward," with the trombone and saxophones first taking the melodic lead before Raymond and fellow trumpeter Josh Lawrence began their clarion calls. The piece served as a showcase for Raymond, whose soulful, lyrical solo gave the number its spirit and grace.

The next day, Raymond marveled at the set. "We never rehearse, so we're all still learning the ins and outs," he said. "But the most striking point is how Orrin cultivates a sense of community. He has a bigger vision than just the music. He's bringing people together. When he took me on, we hit it off musically and on a personal level. He's become like an older brother, and he gives me a lot of free rein."

Even though Raymond has been a regular in Evans' ensemble the past two years, the Minnesota native has also been finding his own voice. In 2012 he released his rock- and gospel-tinged debut, *Strength & Song*, inspired in part by the music of Kurt Rosenwinkel and Terence Blanchard. Now he's back with *Foreign Territory* (Fresh Sound New Talent), a harmonically and rhythmically advanced adventure teeming with surprises.

Raymond utilized an intriguing approach when writing the material on *Foreign Territory*. "I take a nugget of a song, play through the chords to see what it evokes and improvisationally experiment with it to express it in my own voice," he said. "Like Orrin, I want to push the music forward with a sense of finding the unexpected. We both love that tension."

On *Foreign Territory*, the 29-year-old trumpeter takes the chord progression of the standard "How Deep Is The Ocean" and dives into it to create a new lyrical beauty. Elsewhere, he treats Horace Silver's "Peace" as a jumping-off point for his quartet to deliver a spirited tune titled "Rest/

Peace." Raymond considers the track "Deeper" to be his strongest composition on the album.

Raymond explained that the band he assembled was essential to the project's success: pianist Dan Tepfer, bassist Joe Martin and iconic drummer Billy Hart. "Billy is *totally* reliable," Raymond said. "He's solid and grounded with the time. Every moment playing with him was a huge event. He always knew the freedom to imagine where the music was going."

Raymond's connection with trumpeter John McNeil made *Foreign Territory* jell. "John is a master teacher," he said of McNeil, who produced the album. "He's so adept at getting into your psyche and helping you see certain aspects of your playing that need to be developed. I was feeling harmonically limited by the songs I was writing and realized that I was most comfortable playing off of standards that I knew well. John helped me to re-imagine them."

The reflective, moving original "Chant" was the result of a practice session with McNeil. "I learned from John how important it was to have the trumpet be connected in a vocal way," Raymond said. "We'd do exercises where we'd sing one part, then play it—back and forth. So I learned how to sing through everything. It's earthy; it's very human."

Raymond covers "Mark Time" as a tribute to Kenny Wheeler (1930–2014). Another highlight is "Adventurous-Lee," written to honor Lee Konitz and featuring a charged solo from Hart. "As I listened to Lee Konitz, I [grasped] bebop on an emotional level," Raymond said. "I didn't feel the same way with Bird. The way Lee connects through the changes and his rhythmic and melodic phrasing speaks to me."

The new album illustrates a forward-thinking aesthetic. "I want to keep exploring," Raymond said. "I'm an understated person and not here to play with pyrotechnics. I want to say something that's simple, profound and emotional. I want to make music that's honest." —Dan Ouellette



JOHN HOLLENBECK SONGS WE LIKE A LOT

featuring:
FRANKFURT RADIO BIG BAND
THEO BLECKMANN - KATE MCGARRY
URI CAINE

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How to follow-up a Grammy-nominated album disarmingly called *Songs I Like a Lot*? By broadening the canvas and releasing *Songs We Like a Lot*, of course. John Hollenbeck returns after the triumph of *Songs I Like a Lot*, accompanied again by vocalists Kate McGarry and Theo Bleckmann, with an expanded palette and even more robust sonic transformations, encompassing everything from Burt Bacharach to the poetry of Kenneth Patchen and from Cyndi Lauper to a deconstructed "Get Lucky."

A combination of indelible pop tunes and his own compositions, *Songs We Like a Lot* is propelled throughout by Hollenbeck's creative arrangements for the Frankfurt Radio Big Band.

Looking ahead, the John Hollenbeck Large Ensemble with Bleckmann and McGarry will be appearing at the next Newport Jazz Festival on July 31, 2015, playing selections from this latest recording.



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ANTONIO SANCHEZ FLYING HIGH

BY KEN MICALLEF • PHOTO BY JIMMY & DENA KATZ

Even though Antonio Sanchez is a Grammy Award-winning musician, the recipient of numerous accolades and longstanding sideman for superstar guitarist Pat Metheny, the drummer/composer felt like a fish out of water when attending the Golden Globe awards ceremony in Hollywood on Jan. 11. Nevertheless, Sanchez, accompanied by his fiancée—the powerful vocalist Thana Alexa—worked the red carpet like a pro, chatting up TMZ, glad-handing the press, and later, greeting his table-mates, actors Jeff Goldblum and Paul Rudd (while slyly noticing that Prince was seated nearby).

“The whole thing was very bizarre,” Sanchez said from his home in Queens, New York. “As everybody who is attuned to jazz knows, jazz is the least glamorous music nowadays. Going from jazz to the *most* glamorous thing, which is Hollywood, presented this incredibly strange dichotomy.”

All of this partying was the result of the film *Birdman* or (*The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance*) receiving numerous nominations during Hollywood’s awards season, including many nods for Sanchez’s original drum score. He would ultimately be disappointed in his quest for an Academy Award (more on that later), and though nominated, he didn’t win a Golden Globe. However, Sanchez’s honors for the score could fill a trophy case, as he collected awards from the Austin Film Critics Association, the Broadcast Film Critics Association, the Denver Film Critics Society, the Hollywood Music in Media Awards, the Las Vegas Film Critics Society, the St. Louis Film Critics Association and the International Press Academy.



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The story of Sanchez's Oscar loss—or, rather, his score being deemed ineligible by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences—is one of the worst examples of disrespect in the academy's history. The organization missed an opportunity to recognize one of the most daring and original film scores ever. But Sanchez doesn't dwell on the controversial ruling. After all, his *Birdman* score has been praised around the world, and it inspired two new albums that have elevated him as a composer and bandleader: *The Meridian Suite* and *Three Times Three* (both on CAM Jazz).

"[Hollywood] makes you feel really small—unless you're *huge*," Sanchez said. "The red carpet experience, for example: [At the Golden Globes] we got there early and did some good interviews, but once the stars arrived, the reporters were gone. [The Oscar ineligibility ruling] was a blessing in disguise because the controversy raised a lot of good publicity toward the score itself."

Director Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Birdman* is a tale of Broadway ambition, failure and triumph as seen through the eyes, lunatic rants and flying sequences of Riggan Thomson, played by Michael Keaton. The film won four Oscars, including Best Picture. Sanchez's innovative score—which mirrors Riggan's headlong rush into madness—uses solo drumming to express rage and confusion, action and drama in a way never before presented on the silver screen.

Collaborating directly with Iñárritu, Sanchez achieved something singular. On paper, it shouldn't have worked. Solo drumming for two hours? But once you hear Sanchez's opening notes and lock into the movie's kinetic groove, it makes perfect sense. The score is as stunning as the film itself—and an essential ingredient in its artistic success.

This was apparent in early April, when Sanchez performed the *Birdman* score live, in real time, during a screening of the film at the New York Ethical Culture Society in Manhattan to a sold-out crowd. From the opening drum strikes where Sanchez accents the title sequence that spells out *B-I-R-D-M-A-N*, to his furious free solo eruption over the closing credits, his performance was a tour de force thrill ride that can make viewers reconsider the possibilities and potential of the soundtrack in contemporary film. (Sanchez will perform the score at a *Birdman* screening again on June 13 at the Bonnaroo Festival in Tennessee.)

"I won some great awards, and my overall impression is that the *Birdman* soundtrack received so many nominations because it is daring and different and new," Sanchez said. "But it was too daring and new to actually win a lot of [other] awards: 'Let's nominate it—but still give the award to the usual suspects.'"

In December, Sanchez received a letter from the Motion Picture Academy's music branch stating that the *Birdman* score was ineligible in the Original Score category because the film's soundtrack incorporates pieces of preexisting classical music compositions. The decision hinged on Rule 15, Section II-E of the Awards Rules. The letter stated that the film "contains over a half an hour of non-original music cues that are featured very prominently in numerous pivotal moments in the film [which] made it difficult for the com-

Sanchez's new albums are *The Meridian Suite* and the two-CD set *Three Times Three*.



JIMMY & DENA KATZ

mittee to accept your submission as an eligible score." Sanchez and Iñárritu felt this assessment was patently incorrect, and they made an appeal.

"We did a recount and my original music came ahead by a wide margin," Sanchez explained. "Alejandro and I both wrote letters describing how I was involved from the very start of production. Often, the person who scores the film actually writes to [finished] film [scenes]. But this was backwards: Alejandro shot scenes to my demos. We thought we would win the appeal. They replied and said they disregarded completely the time element—now it's about the idea that original score was too diluted by the classical music used in the film. It was completely subjective."

Sanchez's process for scoring *Birdman* is an epic tale. After being contacted by Iñárritu—whom he had known from his native Mexico City as a popular radio DJ prior to directing such successful films as *Babel* (2006), *21 Grams* (2003) and Sanchez's favorite, *Amores Perros* (2000)—the drummer created demos from which Iñárritu shot the film's early scenes.

"We got together in Avatar Studios and he described each scene to me in great detail," Sanchez recalled. "Alejandro would sit in front of me with his eyes closed imagining the scene and I would imagine it with him. I would play some ideas, and when he raised his hand it would mean the main character opened a door, for instance. This was the demo process. After shooting initial scenes and creating a rough score from my demos, they created a rough cut of the film. Then

I replayed everything on a trashy-sounding drum kit with detuned, taped-up Fiberskyn heads, and cymbal stacks."

So how did Sanchez's work on *Birdman* lead to his two latest albums, *The Meridian Suite* and *Three Times Three*?

"What informed this new music was the

'THE MERIDIAN SUITE SUMS ME UP BETTER THAN ANYTHING ELSE I HAVE EVER DONE.'

'continuous shot' aspect of it," Sanchez explains. "*Birdman* appears to be one long shot from beginning to end. When I realized that I was writing music for one continuous shot, I really tied that into *The Meridian Suite*. I wanted the listener to have this continuous experience for an hour."

The long-form suite is performed by Sanchez's band Migration: Matt Brewer (acoustic and electric basses), Seamus Blake (tenor saxophone and EWI, which in his hands often sounds like a '70s analog synthesizer) and John Escreet (piano, Fender Rhodes), along with Adam Rogers (guitars) and Thana Alexa contributing vocals. *The Meridian Suite* is the most daring work of Sanchez's solo career, and the first to fully exploit his exceedingly wide range of influenc-

es, including progressive rock, fusion, electronic music and Latin rhythms. The album also features some of the most ferocious drumming he has ever recorded.

"This record sums me up better than anything else I have ever done," Sanchez explained. "In 'Channels Of Energy' I'm playing a double bass drum pedal, which in jazz is completely frowned upon. We also compressed the shit out of the drums there so you hear a completely different drum sound. I tuned the drums way down and muffled everything so it would sound more *fusion*. I'm playing both piccolo and soprano snare drums there, too. From there we transition into a free acoustic section ['Magnetic Currents'], then it melts away into this very tender track with

Thana's vocals. Then a tenor cadenza into a 3/4 waltz into a 5/4 trading section with the tenor and piano, then the recurring melodic theme returns."

Sanchez followed an unusual compositional process for *The Meridian Suite*. In addition to creating GarageBand demos complete with melody and harmony lines, he finger-tapped drum parts, assigning a full kit to various keys and using all 10 fingers to play the drum parts, which greatly influenced his drumming during the recording sessions.

"I don't have muscle memory in my fingers to play drums, so often I'm just going for it and I didn't know what was going to happen," Sanchez recalled. "Often, these weird and amazing things will come out when I am tap drumming. When



Sanchez enlisted six collaborators for *Three Times Three*, including Brad Mehldau, John Scofield and Joe Lovano.

JIMMY & DENA KATZ



Sanchez in his role as drummer for The New Gary Burton Quartet at Minneapolis' Dakota Jazz Club in 2013

ANDREA CANTER

I'm playing the drum kit I have all this vocabulary that I have worked on, but with my fingers I don't have any of that so I play things that surprise me. A lot of what I finger-tapped on the keyboard I ended up transcribing and playing on my drums in *The Meridian Suite*.

"Since I studied classical piano [at New England Conservatory of Music], I have enough independence with my fingers that once I know where the sounds are, I just go to them," he added. "Some of the things I do are kind of spastic and I don't know how it's going to turn out. The third balls-out fusion section, for instance, there's licks in there created from my finger tapping that I have never played before on drums. They became part of the tune because I loved how the programming sounded. I tried to emulate a lot of the programmed finger-tapped sections as best I could with the drums."

Sanchez, who graduated from Berklee College of Music and later earned a master's degree at NEC, continues to grow as a composer. His artistic evolution is obvious not only on *The Meridian Suite*, but also on *Three Times Three*, which provides a forum for some of jazz's greatest living improvisers, including bassist Christian McBride.

"I was pleasantly surprised at how much he has developed as a composer," McBride said. "I am sure Metheny's work ethic as far as composing has rubbed off on Antonio. It's great to see these percussionists who are great composers. It's great that he is carrying the torch for all these incredibly talented percussionists."

Three Times Three is essentially a classic blowing session featuring Sanchez in three different trio settings: with McBride and guitarist John Scofield; with bassist Matt Brewer and pianist Brad Mehldau; and with bassist John Patitucci and tenor saxophonist Joe Lovano. Sanchez composed new tunes for each trio, entering the studio without rehearsal. Each trio also tackled a classic from the jazz canon. One standout track is

the Sanchez/Scofield/McBride version of Wayne Shorter's classic "Fall," best known from Miles Davis' 1966 album, *Nefertiti*.

"I've played that tune since [I was a student at] Berklee," Sanchez said. "You can play it so many ways. It's such a Wayne tune. I wanted to create a different world for Sco and Christian and me to go in a different direction. I was hoping Sco would bring all his pedals but I forgot to ask him. But it turned out amazing; he managed to go into this other realm with not that much technology at his disposal."

"We did a blues he wrote that was nice, a blowing tune in the jazz tradition," Scofield said. "Then Antonio wrote a funk tune, another excuse for us to get a funk groove happening. Both of those were really great vehicles to play on. Some people will write an expansive tune and nobody gets to say much. This was the opposite of that—a setup for us to play. He even wrote one of the tunes in double-stops, which I like to improvise on. It was hard to play—I had to work on it."

Sanchez also rearranged the 1958 Miles Davis classic "Nardis" into "Nar-this," for Brewer and Mehldau. Smacking his Yamaha Phoenix (PHX) drum kit and Zildjian cymbals, Sanchez provides a level of firepower Mehldau has rarely been required to navigate in the studio.

"I thought, 'What could happen if we really went for it?'" Sanchez said. "Brad plays his ass off. That trio was the hardest one 'cause I got carried away. I started writing 'Constellations' with multiple sections. I sent Brad 15 pages, which really ticked him off at first, because I had told him this was a blowing session. But we took our time and he sounds amazing."

The trio of Sanchez/Lovano/Patitucci brings the two-CD set to a close with an adventurous reading of Thelonious Monk's "I Mean You."

Sanchez's remark that "jazz is the least glamorous music nowadays" bears closer scrutiny. Who's to blame for jazz's low market share today?

"The musicians are to blame," Sanchez replied. "Of course there are a lot of exterior factors like the media, and the lowest common

denominator aspect to arts in general, and [the public's] short attention span, but it's a vicious circle. If you keep feeding crap to people, they ask for crap. But when there is something that stands out, people always reward it.

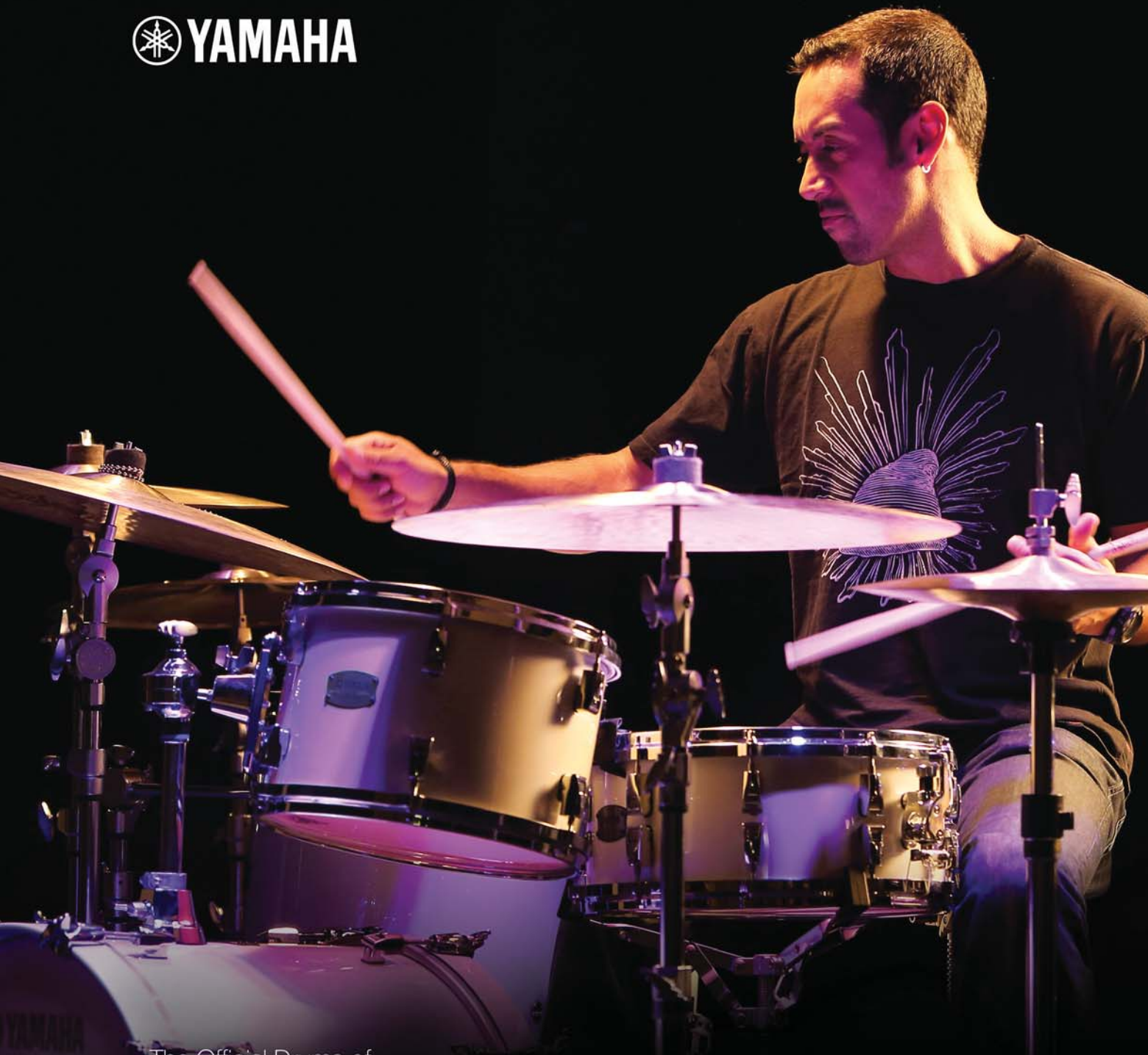
"But the musicians are to blame in the sense that when I go to see some of these shows, I get tired," Sanchez continued. "How do you expect the audience not to get tired if the musicians are just jerking off onstage? These guys playing really long solos, thinking, 'I am such a badass, that should suffice for people to be crazy about my music.' People give up a lot to attend our shows. We owe them a great night out, with great music and great performances."

In addition to his two new albums as a leader, as well as his ongoing work with the Pat Metheny Unity Group, Sanchez will appear as the drummer in Miles Davis' band in *Miles Ahead*, the Davis biopic directed by and starring Don Cheadle. Other musicians involved in the project include Davis' former bandmates Herbie Hancock and Shorter.

With all this flurry of activity, Sanchez must be on top of the world, right?

"Now that I'm trying hard to be a bandleader, I feel anything but on top of the world," Sanchez said. "A lot of people know me thanks to *Birdman* and all my years with Pat Metheny, but when you're trying to do your own thing, it's tough.

"Even if [promoters] know you as the drummer in a bigger gig, they really look at your track record as a leader," Sanchez explained. "When you don't have that track record, they're reluctant to give you a break. They will hire you for a small club at a crappy fee, but from that to the next level is a long way to go. That keeps me inspired, and it keeps me very, very humble. Trying to put tours together and bring my music to people is almost like starting from scratch. When I was starting as a sideman, it was always exciting when somebody new would call me to work. But this is a different challenge—by far my biggest challenge yet." **DB**



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Harold Mabern at the 2013 Litchfield Jazz Festival

HAROLD MABERN

By Ted Panken | Photo by Steven Sussman

‘A MILLION DOLLARS’ WORTH OF EXPERIENCE’

On March 19, the day before he turned 79, pianist Harold Mabern celebrated with a sideman gig with bassist Gregory Ryan. The venue was not a jazz club, but a cavernous Manhattan branch of Hillstone, the steakhouse chain, where the “bandstand” is a narrow 15-foot floor space. The trio of Ryan, Mabern and drummer Joe Farnsworth faced a large oval bar, banquettes and a dozen circular tables packed with raucous Thursday dinner-hour patrons—corporate types cutting loose before the weekend, couples and well-heeled families with small children.

While waiting to be seated, folks milled about the piano, among them a woman bouncing her harnessed baby to the beat of Mabern’s relentless vamp on “You Go To My Head.” Mabern smiled broadly as he reharmonized the

melody, transitioned to a long chordal passage executed in parallel octaves, then, to conclude, switched to rhythmic dialogue with Farnsworth. After stating the verse and melody of “Baubles, Bangles And Beads” as a surging waltz, he shifted to several choruses of block chords over a brisk swing section. An abstract rubato solo introduction morphed into “The Nearness Of You,” reharmonized with voicings evocative of Red Garland. Two little girls had sidled up to the piano, transfixed by Mabern’s huge hands dancing across the keys; he smiled at them benignly while interpolating a long section from “Strangers In The Night” and a Bobby Timmons blues. After a rollicking stroll down John Coltrane’s “Straight Street,” on which he alternated fleet single-line movements with stirring passages of two-handed invention, he closed the set with his own soulfully boppish “Aon” (which premiered on Mabern’s 1968 Prestige album *Rakin’ And Scrapin’*).

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A week or so after this grandmaster class in the art of the trio, Mabern recalled a piece of sage advice he once received from his good friend, the long-deceased alto saxophonist Sylvester "Sonny Red" Kyner: "A little bit of money beats no money any day; a small gig is better than no gig at all." Mabern echoed the sentiment: "Nobody's coming where I live to hear me play. The things I do for my friends, we do for each other. The gig pays \$100, but on the bandstand you get a million dollars' worth of experience, because you always find something you didn't know before."

Two weeks later, Mabern played three nights at Smoke to promote his new album, *Afro Blue*, released on Smoke Sessions Records, the club's imprint. Present from the recording on the opening set were Farnsworth, bassist John Webber and tenor saxophonist Eric Alexander, his bandmates of choice. Vocalist Jean Baylor filled in on short notice for Alexis Cole, one of five singers on the date (along with Kurt Elling, Norah Jones, Jane Monheit and Gregory Porter).

Afro Blue is the first of Mabern's two dozen leader dates to showcase the context in which he worked frequently during the 1960s: accompanying vocalists. Often at Birdland but also on the road, he played with singers Betty Carter, Johnny Hartman, Irene Reid, Gloria Lynne, Dakota Station, Ernestine Anderson, Arthur Prysock, Joe Williams and Sarah Vaughan, in between consequential sideman stints of varying lengths with Roy Haynes, J.J. Johnson, Miles Davis, Wes Montgomery and Lee Morgan.

The idea gestated when Mabern mentioned his experiences with "the singing thing" during an interview for the liner notes to *Right On Time*, a live trio engagement with Webber and Farnsworth that launched Smoke Sessions in early 2014. "We asked Harold if he'd ever made a record with singers," said Paul Stache, the club's proprietor and label head. "He said, 'No, but I always wanted to.'" Stache already had a notion to recruit Porter for a future project after Porter sang Johnny Hartman and other Coltrane-associated repertoire with Mabern's group at Smoke in December 2011.

Stache also knew that during a three-year period when Porter sang at Smoke every Thursday night, Mabern, when in town, attended almost every performance. When Stache later reminded Mabern of the singers idea, the pianist replied, "If you get Gregory, I'm in; I wrote a song that's perfect for him." Stache put together a six-singer wish-list. "Five of them confirmed," Stache said. "Everyone was like, 'Oh, for Harold, yeah.'"

"Gregory reminded me of Joe Williams, who I played with for three years," Mabern said. "Joe could sing anything—what Pavarotti sang, or 'Over The Rainbow' or 'Go Down, Moses'—and Gregory is ubiquitous in his language and selection of songs. I went even when it was Chicago-cold and snowing." Because Mabern does not drive, this meant catching a bus from his apartment complex in Brooklyn and then taking a one-hour train ride to Smoke's 106th Street and Broadway location.

"Harold stayed two or three sets every week," Porter confirmed over the phone. "I was very encouraged by that. He saw everything. One night he said, 'Lou Rawls was like you.' That's cool com-

Mabern recorded his new album, *Afro Blue*, at Sear Sound studios in New York City.



ing from a master of the music. I don't take it lightly. It means more to me than anything."

Once all the singers signed on for *Afro Blue*, Mabern conferred with each on repertoire, then worked out treatments during two days of recording. Both Porter and Elling spoke of Mabern's relaxed, collaborative attitude. "Unlike many sessions you enter as a hired gun, so to speak, Harold asked what he could do to shape the music around me—what tempo, what key," said Porter, who sang

Oscar Brown's lyric of "Afro Blue" and Mabern's "The Man From Hyde Park." The latter title references Herbie Hancock, four years Mabern's junior, reflecting a friendship that developed during Mabern's 1954-'59 residence in Chicago. "Before I went into the booth, I asked Harold to sing it to me at the piano—to give me the melody, the phrasing," Porter recalled. "He sounded so beautiful and tender. It's a letter to Herbie, and it was cool that he allowed me to sing this person-

al message."

"It was super loose in the studio," said Elling, who sings the blues ballad "Portrait Of Jennie," scats on "Billie's Bounce" and interprets "You Needed Me" (a 1978 pop and country hit for Anne Murray). "Harold emailed me to ask for the key; when I arrived, I said, 'OK, let's just do this.' Harold and the guys set up the arrangements on the spot, and we ran it down once. Harold, Webber and Farnsworth are the top of the food chain; they have the real history in their sound."

Mabern initially intended "You Needed Me" as a vehicle for Norah Jones, whom he describes as "a modern-day Billie Holiday, without trying to be, the way she phrases and lays back." Her counter-suggestions were "Don't Misunderstand," a ballad by Gordon Parks that O.C. Smith stamped as his own on the soundtrack for *Shaft's Big Score!* (1972), and the Johnny Mercer song, "Fools Rush In," a 1940 hit for Frank Sinatra with Tommy Dorsey. "I'd played 'Don't Misunderstand' once in the last 20 years," Mabern said. "I said I'd think about it. Then Norah suggested we do it piano and voice. It was bold of her, but I thought we pulled it off. Key of A-flat. We couldn't do 'Fools Rush In' like Sinatra—who is one of my top three vocalists along with Joe Williams and Nat Cole—so I told Farnsworth to lay down the 'Poinciana' beat."

Mabern quoted Sinatra—"If you can't sing in tune, you can't sing"—in explaining his picks for Jane Monheit: "My One And Only Love" (a 1953 hit for Sinatra that was recorded 10 years later on *John Coltrane And Johnny Hartman*) and the

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Oscar-nominated 1938 tune "I'll Take Romance." "I've always liked the pureness and intonation of [Monheit's] voice, that she knows how to treat a ballad and something uptempo," Mabern said. "I figured 'My One And Only Love' would match her; later, she told me it was her wedding song. 'I'll Take Romance' hasn't been done much, and Eydie Gormé had a hit with it."

For Alexis Cole, Mabern selected his stoic, bittersweet "Such Is Life." "I learned to write lyrics from being around Bill Lee," he said, referring to the distinguished bassist-composer to whom he dedicated *Afro Blue*, along with pianists Billy Wallace and Chris Anderson, also deep influences from his Chicago years. Lee befriended Mabern soon after he arrived in town from Memphis, as testified by a Mabern waltz called "Brother Spike," written to mark the birth of Lee's son, the film director, and recorded in 1959 on the eponymous VeeJay album *MJT+3* by the in-vogue Chicago-based combo that gave Mabern national exposure early in his career.

Like Muhal Richard Abrams, his predecessor in the first edition of *MJT+3*, Mabern is a self-taught pianist. Standing by an old upright at a party a few months before his 15th birthday, he watched a girl play a song on only black keys—the title, he learned later, was "I Stuck My Dollar In The Mud"—and then "sat down and played the same song; I just picked it up." Soon thereafter, he learned "The Honeydripper" and "Perdido," and

started "doodling around." Within six months, he was gigging with George Coleman and his brother, alto saxophonist Lucian Adams. Mabern's father, who worked in a lumberyard, "raked and scraped up" \$60 to buy a piano, on which he applied lessons learned from close observation of pianist Charles Thomas, "who played like Bud Powell," and who told him, "If you think I can play, you've got to meet Phineas Newborn."

Newborn, a Tatumesque virtuoso, was then giving lessons in the back room of a Memphis record store and playing in his father's band at Mitchell's Hotel, where B.B. King, Rufus Thomas, Johnny Ace, Frank Strozier, Booker Little and Charles Lloyd cut their teeth. Mabern watched where Newborn placed his fingers, and emulated.

"He'd play like a big band; I watched him orchestrate," Mabern said of his autodidactic learning process. "I had a small band with Charles called the Rhythm Bombers, and I'd pick and choose notes very carefully there. With George Coleman and his brother, I made a dollar a night, which was a lot of money. That was the standard, although B.B. King might have made \$2 to \$2.50. You had to track down Sunbeam [Andrew Mitchell], the club owner, to get that, because he had the money in the cigar box with his .22-caliber pistol." In keeping with his glass-half-full philosophy, Mabern said, "They treated us good there, like family members. Sunbeam's wife, Miss Ernestine, made the best chili you could

find anywhere."

Mabern declined a scholarship to Tennessee State University to join Strozier at the American Conservatory of Music, and moved north in August 1954. "The money got tight, but my sister said I should stay and see what I could do," Mabern said, "It was the best thing that happened to me. I say I got mine from the university of the streets." He joined trombonist Morris Ellis' big band, where "I got my reading together," had private lessons at the conservatory for six months, and embarked on five years of "playing and practicing 12 hours a day."

"I met Bill Lee at the YMCA at 49th and Michigan," Mabern reminisced. "From Bill I learned how to orchestrate, how to rearrange standard songs. I heard him play the most beautiful choruses on piano, which he plays as well as he does the bass. At first, he wouldn't tell me anything, but when he finally gave me the time of day he said, 'There's another piano player named Chris Anderson who can show you what to do—and Billy Wallace.' I couldn't believe how many songs they knew. They were listening to Nelson Riddle's orchestrations for Sinatra. When Charlie Parker played at the Beehive in January 1955, with Norman Simmons, Victor Sproles and Bruz Freeman, he was playing all these standards he learned from Big Nick Nicholas that other guys weren't playing then, like 'Dancing In The Dark' and 'Let's Face The Music And Dance.' Between



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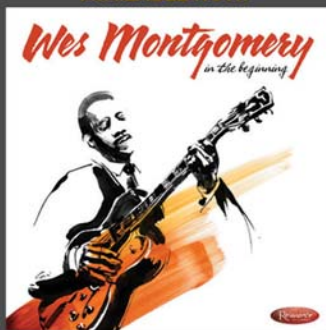
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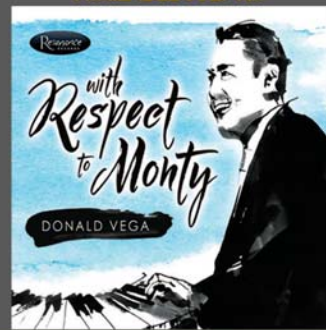
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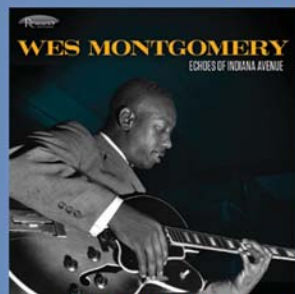
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sets, Bill and Billy and Chris would call out the changes for Norman that Bird might play next.

“Chris influenced Herbie Hancock, as did Andrew Hill. Chris and Herbie and Ahmad are geniuses in voicing chords, and Billy could play the same way, but he’d play a chord for every note of the melody. That’s where my harmonic concept comes from. Watching Billy, I learned to comp; same chords, more space, less busy.”

For his overall attitude to piano expression, though, Mabern cites Jamal, whom he became aware of through Booker Little. “I was as impressed with him as with Phineas,” he said. “I’d never heard anyone play with such command and conceptualize sound like that. ‘Music, Music, Music’ was a corny song. Ahmad said, ‘Not the way I play it.’ Ahmad reintroduced it to us in a stylized, modern way. After ‘Poinciana,’ I knew I wanted to play like that. I tell students that if you approach the piano with anything less than an orchestral mindset, you’re going to lose out.”

A faculty member at William Paterson University since 1981, Mabern has taught, among others, drummers Tyshawn Sorey and Bill Stewart, bassist Doug Weiss and Alexander, who caught his ear on the first day of the 1987–’88 academic year. Twenty-seven years and countless tours and recordings later, Alexander observed that Mabern’s close study of the arranging techniques of Riddle and Don Costa allowed him to “absorb and deeply understand the detailed inner voice movement and potential substitute ideas for all the [Great American] Songbook tunes.” He continued: “Invariably, when we start playing through any tune I bring him, whatever I thought were the best possible changes, he’s got something better. He likes to comp more than solo, and he’s peerless at setting up the horn player to sound good no matter what they’re doing.”

Which is perhaps why so many singers kept Mabern so busy after the spring of 1961, when he came off the road after a year with Lionel Hampton and joined Betty Carter. “I played with Betty at Birdland two, three weeks at a time, opposite Coltrane, Horace Silver, Art Blakey or whoever,” he said. “She taught me the art of playing slow. I also worked opposite Coltrane with Johnny Hartman, who wouldn’t leave home without me. I’m proud to say that’s probably where Coltrane got the idea to record with him. Jimmy Jones and Jerome Richardson recommended me to Joe Williams, which was quite a compliment.” So busy was Mabern that he subbed out singer gigs to then-aspirants Chick Corea and Hancock. “Once I paid Herbie \$18, which was a lot,” Mabern said. “Scale was \$15; I had a \$25 gig.”

In the liner notes for Mabern’s 1993 CD, *The Leading Man*, the late Mulgrew Miller, a close friend, wrote that “under the hands of Mabern, the piano is challenged to ‘live up to’ its formal name—the piano-forte, for Harold dramatically plays the whole range of dynamics.” On *Afro Blue*, as 50 years ago, Mabern recalibrates for singers. “I play from my shoulders, from my whole body, which is why I’m percussive,” Mabern said. “With singers I play with less force, less aggression. I use the soft pedal. You don’t voice the chord with the leading tone. You wait for them to sing a phrase, then fill in the space.”

For all the erudition he brings to any encounter with a piano, Mabern considers himself first and foremost “a blues pianist who understands the philosophy of jazz.” “Coming up in Memphis, we wanted to play bebop,” he said. “But the people had to dance. George Coleman and his brother and I would tell the drummer to keep a shuffle beat for ‘The Hucklebuck,’ and then we’d play the changes to ‘Perdido’ or ‘All The Things You Are.’ That’s how we got over. Gene Harris said, ‘I’m a blues player with chops,’ which is pretty much what I’m saying. I can play what Jamil Nasser called the ‘bone-chillin’ blues,’ I can play boogie-woogie, but I can still play the old ‘Milestones’ or ‘Moose The Mooche.’ I’m never going to stop being a blues pianist.

“I played with Joe Williams at the Half Note. Jimmy Witherspoon came in first set and said, ‘Hey, Joe, sing the blues.’ He said, ‘Spoon, it’s too early for the blues.’ Spoon said, ‘It ain’t never too early for the blues.’ Oh, no. I’m always blues first. As someone said, I am the blues.”

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KIRK WHALUM HIGHER GOAL

BY BOB DOERSCHUK
PHOTO BY ANDREA CANTER

The word “family” resonates with Kirk Whalum, whether you’re talking music or life in general. That’s because he doesn’t really separate these two spheres. Music *is* life, he would insist. Life *without* music is far less than it could or should be. And at the core of each, really the heartbeat of it all, is *family*.

This becomes easy to understand when one examines Whalum’s history. He grew up in Memphis, a city rich in music, as part of a family whose unity was sealed by a love for one another, a love for music and steadfast religious faith. Whalum believes that God’s “radical hospitality” has made it all possible.

It seems inevitable that Whalum would pursue a path that highlights both his musical abilities and his beliefs—almost like a birthright. Just like his father and many of his relations, he is an ordained minister. And, like even more members in his family tree, he is a musician—a craftsman blessed with the gift of conveying emotions unambiguously.

These two strains in his DNA—music and faith, inseparably intertwined—inspired Whalum’s ongoing *The Gospel According To Jazz* project. The first “chapter” in this series, released in 1998, set the precedent for those that would follow, the most recent being this year’s *Chapter IV (Rendezvous)*. Each captures a concert featuring Whalum and an all-star assembly of instrumentalists and singers. Part concert and part revival (made more accessible by cooling the churchy heat with touches of smooth jazz and r&b), this ongoing series presents an invitation to all to join this universal family of faith. And it is, indeed, a family affair: The new album includes contributions from the leader’s brother, Kevin Whalum (vocals), his nephew, Kenneth Whalum III (tenor and soprano saxophones), and another nephew, Kortland Whalum (vocals).



Kirk Whalum at the 2014 Detroit Jazz Festival



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In early April, Whalum, 56, sat in Nashville's Sony Tree Studio A, twiddling with Pro Tools and checking out mixes of a tune cut just the day before, the first track of what will become a long overdue celebration of Whalum and his kin.

"This will be a family record," he explained during a break. "I have an uncle who is 87. His name is Peanuts. He was from Memphis but he got to know Roy Haynes, Miles and all these people after he moved to St. Louis. He really is a tenor player and he plays trumpet, but he ended up doing the piano bar thing for 60 years because he had four kids and an amazing voice. He played with Nat Cole, too, and he was really under his spell, so when you hear him sing, he's got his own style but he can make you think you're sitting in a room with Nat Cole.

"So Peanuts is the example that got me to think, 'Wow, this family actually has a *long* line of musicians,'" Whalum continued. "My grandmother was a very successful music teacher. She taught Hank Crawford! My maternal grandmother was a gospel singer. My grandfather was an orator and a singer. Both of my brothers are musicians. One of them is a pastor, too. Actually, all three of us are in the ministry; just about six months ago, my younger brother accepted a calling into the ministry as well.

"My son Kyle is a country songwriter [and bassist], and he's touring with Billy Currington. My youngest son, Evan, is a rapper, but he studies film and he's a photographer and videographer. Their cousins, my older brother's three boys, are all in music: One of them tours with Bruno Mars; another tours with Ludacris and with Maxwell; and the third one is in New York, trying to make his way in the neo-disco club scene."

Whalum's "family record" is a long time coming. His busy career partially explains that: For 30 years he has recorded prolifically, both as a leader and as an accompanist for Quincy Jones, Barbra Streisand, Luther Vandross and dozens of other artists. (That's his sax soaring on Whitney Houston's "I Will Always Love You.") He has gotten involved in numerous charitable endeavors, including low-profile performances in nursing homes and schools. He has earned his master's degree in arts in religion and launched a podcast, titled *Bible in Your Ear*, in which he devotes

15 minutes each day to reading through the entire Bible, passage by passage.

There's another reason why he didn't tackle the family project sooner. "I'd shied away from that kind of 'Whalum this and Whalum that,'" he said. "I grew up in the *petit royaume*—in French, that means 'little kingdom'—of the church. Your whole life is centered around that church, culturally and socially. You react against that, as preachers' kids do. One way or another, you act out your rebellion to that while enjoying the benefits of it. You're automatically assumed to be either a saint or a sinner—the extreme versions—because you're a preacher's kid. So I never wanted to do that. I never wanted to be a *Whalum*. I wanted to be a person. I wanted to travel and be a world citizen."

Now, at a point when he has complete artistic freedom, Whalum will bring the family project to fruition—not just to showcase his relatives' skills but also to honor a tradition that comes to them from outside the church. "The African spirituality that informs the black church culture is very big on ancestry," he said. "They believe that ancestors are guides and are very much a part of what they do. So when we gathered together for this project, I prayed that we would tap into that. All the indigenous peoples who became Christians brought their spirituality with them."

For Whalum, spirituality is essential in *all* the music he plays, whether it's a gospel tune or secular material. He's got full-blown jazz chops, burished on club gigs in Houston during the 1980s. Eventually, though, he left that scene behind for what would eventually be categorized—and often vilified—as "smooth jazz."

"The smooth jazz format was a lark—somebody's marketing idea," he said. "At the very center of it was music that was conceptualized to be in the format. If you could get airplay there, then you could make a living as an instrumental artist. And I am guilty of writing and recording some stuff to get in there. It was like, 'Hey, good news! We've got a place where we can get our music played.' The bad news is there's some very creative distillation going on inside of that format, where they're architecting for a target audience. Maybe subconsciously, except for a very small sect of people, we all collaborate with ourselves, with the side of us that wants to have a nice home. The other side

says, 'I want to do *my* thing.' So, yeah, when I look back, I can listen to certain things and go, 'I'd kind of like to forget that.'"

Even with this admission, Whalum makes no apologies for his creative decisions. "There's this age-old tension between recording music for the purpose of making art and doing your thing and recording music that will do well commercially," he noted. "I'm not hyper-materialistic, but I want to do well financially. I mean, I like nice things. But I'm not hung up on them; I don't even like the idea of having a huge house because I get mad when I have to go 20 steps to get somewhere—I'd rather it all be right there."

Whalum paused and then offered an illustration of why he has made the choices he has: "I have a [specific] musician in mind, but I won't mention his name because I don't want people to get the wrong idea. I am a huge fan of his. I know him. He makes music primarily in college settings. He'll do the big bands in Germany. He's doing OK financially but nowhere near what he should be making.

"Well, you *could* go down that lane if that's where you feel comfortable. But I like doing well and I love playing music that is more accessible. Who wouldn't want more people to hear your music? If you can hook it in a way people can get their heads around, it's not a bad thing because at the end of the day, you still get to do you. It's about communication. When I put my horn in my mouth, I will ask God to give me the notes and the connection with these people that will accomplish this higher goal."

Whalum cited a track from his 1998 album *For You* as an example. "I recorded 'Ascension (Don't Ever Wonder),' which was a mainstream pop song by Maxwell—and that says we were going for pop airplay," he explained. "But when I got to the studio, I played my heart out. I was trying to connect in the same way that Johnny Hodges tried to connect or Lester Young tried to connect when he did a pop cover with Billie Holiday."

The same certainly applies to the *Gospel According To Jazz* project, which combines accessible music and flashes of virtuoso musicianship, with Whalum keeping each of these elements in balance. The idea for the series goes back to a tour that Whalum undertook in the 1990s with guitarist/vocalist Jonathan Butler, keyboardist George Duke and singer Rachele Ferrell. One night, without warning, Butler disrupted the pop/jazz/r&b playlist by inserting a hymn. The other musicians joined in. At the song's conclusion, the audience responded with a standing ovation. From that point forward, the group added a hymn to the program each night, with similar results.

Whalum decided to do the same thing at his other concerts, inserting one sacred song each night. This went on until 1996, when he received the unexpected news that Columbia Records had dropped him from its roster.

"It was like the wind went out of my sails," he recalled. "But then my wife, my childhood girlfriend, looked me in my eyes and said, 'What can you do today that you couldn't do yesterday, when you were at Columbia?' It came out so clearly, as if she had been pondering it in preparation for this moment. But I don't think she did. I think that

came from God. And my pity party went [*begins whistling*].”

Whalum's drooping whistle indicated that his wife's question steered him immediately toward a more optimistic state of speculation. That, in turn, led to the idea of marrying jazz with a message of salvation in ways that would draw wider audiences than either straight-ahead, post-bop or traditional church music could on its own. His manager came up with the title and the broad vision for *The Gospel According To Jazz*, and it began to take shape.

“The first thing that came to my mind was that people in a quote-unquote secular context were not only willing but were elated that someone had the courage to take that risk [of adding a hymn to the set list],” he said. “It's like, ‘Wait a minute. I paid to hear a concert. I didn't pay to be preached to. If I'd wanted that, I'd have gone to a gospel concert.’ The second thing was that I wanted to pursue that further.”

“The darndest thing is, I get to stretch into all these areas on this quote-unquote gospel record,” Whalum added. “I get to be a jazz arranger. I get to improvise and take risks. Selfishly speaking, the stream that I get to be in provides me with all of these beautiful avenues to pursue. And it all just kind of happened because of being dropped by Columbia.”

Chapter IV reflects that diversity. He opened the program with the classic altar call “Just As I Am,” addressing it to everyone in the audience that night at Brooklyn's Christian Cultural Center and to all who would later experience the event via the DVD or two-CD set. He begins the tune alone on tenor, playing the familiar melody as John Stoddard gradually illuminates it in shimmers of Fender Rhodes electric piano.

Eighteen more songs follow, like a carnival threading through cathedral aisles. After a brief second-line intro, Paul McCartney's “Let 'Em In” embraces all who would accept this invitation. “This is a double entendre for those who would stand at the gate of Heaven as bouncers—Holy Ghost bouncers, Kingdom Banquet bouncers,” he said, smiling. “Because God says, ‘Let 'em in. You're there to say *welcome*, not to check anybody's credentials.’”

After that, *The Impressions'* “Keep On Pushing” oscillates between 5/4 on the verses and 4/4 on the choruses, with Whalum and guitarist Norman Brown stretching out in the solo section. Homage is paid to John Coltrane's spiritual quest on “Un Amor Supremo,” with an extended percussion blossoming into a somewhat Latin-flavored exploration over a bass line based on the saxophone motif from “A Love Supreme.” In one gorgeous interlude, trumpeter Rick Braun steps into the audience to play an unaccompanied “Ave Maria.” This crystalline moment gives way shortly afterward to “Cain't Stay Blue,” from the sacred to the profane.

“King David was arguably the greatest blues writer in history—I mean, the Psalms? Are you kidding me?” Whalum said. “So we get through making this huge statement and now we break, and it's like, ‘Tell us, what's your day been like? What challenges are you dealing with at work? Where is the chaos in your mind?’ There's an educational aspect involved because many times I find myself in front of a lot of church folks or gospel fans who may not know what blues is all about, especially in the context of jazz. And improvisation! They'll hear the lamentations played out in this ethereal way, where you're not speaking a language they comprehend but you can get inside their stories. It's like Dave Brubeck said about jazz: It's about the individual lamentation.”

The gospel message of *Chapter IV* is conveyed with another cover version as the final track, Todd Rundgren's “Love Is The Answer,” which was a pop hit for England Dan & John Ford Coley in 1979. “One morning I woke up with that song on my mind,” Whalum recalled. “Apparently God put it in my head because I'd never thought of that song before. I had never mentioned it to anybody. All of the sudden, in the middle of my writing and arranging process, that song came into my head. So I bought it and listened to it, and I'm like, ‘Dang it, there's a saxophone solo in there!’ So I added it to let people have fun at the end. There's enough heavy stuff on the record.”

Whalum has learned much from the canon of jazz. But does his glossy if soulful approach have something in turn to offer to pure jazz players?

“Maybe it's a nudge that you can be OK with your spirituality,” he said. “It's a further nudge that if you identify with the Jesus of the Bible, then be unabashed about it. There's a way to do that while acknowledging, respecting and celebrating other people's faith traditions. And it's a not-so-gentle nudge that asks, ‘Where do you stand?’ Now, taking a stand will rub some people the wrong way, but that's a good thing. Miles embraced that. So, are you willing to take a stand?”

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John Pattucci in Brooklyn's East Flatbush neighborhood, where he grew up

JOHN PATITUCCI

HOMIE

TURE

By Phillip Lutz • Photo by Gus Cantavero

On a chilly spring afternoon, John Patitucci, Brian Blade and Danilo Pérez—the bass-drum-piano trio that dwells within the Wayne Shorter Quartet—stood together in McCarren Park, a verdant patch of Williamsburg, Brooklyn, where they were being photographed for a forthcoming album by the threesome, collectively known as Children of the Light.

The park is an oasis untouched by the new money that has transformed the neighborhood into a redoubt for hedge-fund bohemians, pushing working-class Brooklynites ever more to the margins. During the shoot, Patitucci, whose everyman demeanor belies the erudition of his musical output, had a few choice words about that transformation. But he also made clear that Brooklyn, to him, is as much a state of mind as a spot on the map. His ideas about the borough inspired his latest release, *Brooklyn* (Three Faces Records).

Brooklyn—his 14th album as a leader, and the borough itself—were both in his thoughts during the shoot; the studio where he cut the record, The Bunker, is hardly more than a solid smack of the spaldeen from the park (as local stickball players might note). In his car after the shoot, winding his way through grittier precincts on his way to points north, he noted how the sights and sounds evoked memories of his youth in the modest corner of Brooklyn known as East Flatbush. It was there, as a baseball-loving 12-year-old, that he bought his first bass, a \$10 Sears Telstar, and never looked back.

“I made a decision that I was going to play the bass,” he said. “That was it.”

“I started listening to the bass parts on r&b on the radio,” he recalled. “That influenced me a lot. Then hearing the jazz records my grandfather brought home, hearing guys walk,

intrigued me. I didn’t understand it, but I loved the feeling of it. The Oscar Peterson records with Ray Brown influenced me. The Wes Montgomery records with Ron Carter freaked me out.”

Since then much has transpired. After two decades in California and widespread acclaim as that rarity—a consummate practitioner of both the electric and acoustic basses, famously with Chick Corea’s Elektric and Akoustic bands—he made a triumphant return to New York. There’s also his celebrated association with Shorter, which has stretched nearly 30 years. All of that, plus deep commitments to faith and family, have brought him to this moment, with a new band and a new ax—still in search of that old feeling.

“I was lucky growing up in the ’60s and ’70s,” he said. “That Brooklyn doesn’t exist anymore—but there are seeds of it in you.”

In an attempt to nurture those seeds, Patitucci, 55, has assembled his Electric Guitar Quartet, forsaking the upright bass for a run at the electric—and recruiting two guitarists of similar vintage, Adam Rogers and Steve Cardenas, as well as Blade. The project, according to Rogers, was hardly a spur-of-the-moment idea.

“John had this concept of doing something with two guitars and an electric bass that he had talked about with me for a few years,” Rogers said. “In my experience with John, something will gestate for quite some time, but it always ends up being realized eventually.”

The realization crystallized with the choice of personnel. Cardenas and Rogers, both veterans with diverse experience, could handle the range of material Patitucci had envisioned. “When you have someone who’s just a stone bebop guitar player,” Patitucci said, “they don’t play r&b rhythm guitar. *These* guys do. They have a wide stylistic thing; they’re both virtuosos.”



Pairing the two made sense. They have known each other for years, and they played together as recently as August, with the Anthony Wilson Guitar Quartet in the well-regarded Maverick concert series in Woodstock.

The choice of a drummer, meanwhile, inevitably focused on Blade. He knew all the musicians, and his simpatico relationship with Patitucci, fostered with Shorter and Pérez, among others, is rapidly becoming the stuff of legend.

"We've felt a connection from the first time we played together," Blade said at the photo session. "It keeps growing deeper."

Patitucci said that Blade had exhibited a heightened sensitivity to the needs of whatever situation he was in. "He allows other people's sounds to be the best they can be. You don't feel like he's drowning you out."

Patitucci added that Blade brought a sense of freedom to the endeavor: "If he's there, anything can happen."

Harnessing that freedom came naturally, as a byproduct of the framework that the Brooklyn theme imposed.

"John said he wanted to echo the music he grew up hearing that inspired him to play," Cardenas said. "He also knew that between all of us, we all like to play different kinds of music: funk, bebop, outer things. It's not like we're putting on different hats. We maintain a similar aesthetic and go to that place in our own way."

With that in mind, Rogers added, "There wasn't a lot of stuff that needed to be discussed. He used people he feels a musical and social bond with, and we'd just go."

The unknown element was Patitucci's new bass (custom made for him by Yamaha), which he unveiled last November at the first rehearsal for the record, in the basement of his home in Hastings, New York. The instrument's potential impact was implied when, sitting in that basement several hours after the photo shoot, Patitucci picked it up and, unamplified, produced a sound resembling a classical acoustic guitar.

"I hadn't made a [leader] record in five years," he said, "and I wanted to see if I could make a statement on the electric bass that would be a little newer for me, to try to expand again. I wanted to see if I could make a record where I could

use the electric bass walking and playing some jazz things and also pay homage to r&b and blues and the rootsy kind of music. Hence that beautiful instrument."

The six-string bass—which was designed by Ken Dapron and Pasquale F. Campolattano—has F-holes like a jazz guitar. It boasts mahogany outside and inside, where a slab of the wood solidifies the instrument's integrity, both structurally and sonically. "It has a big low end that is rich and not too hollow," Patitucci said.

At the same time, "It has a lot of resonance and it's heavy as all get-out," he explained, noting that he hasn't drilled a metal hook for the strap because he's hesitant to stand while playing the instrument. "I might have to get it drilled, but it's easier to sit and play."

The custom design involved some sacrifice. Unlike Patitucci's solidbody six-string, this bass has 24 frets instead of 26, because of the cutaway. "We did that so that the bass would sound better," he said. "Just to get the high notes on this beautiful semi-hollowbody, I have to jump over the cutaway. We didn't want to make it even worse."

Campolattano built just one instrument, which is heard early and often throughout the album. It is the sole bass used on the opening medley, "IN9-1881"/"The Search," which moves from a brief, ringing statement suggested by the rhythm of Patitucci's East Flatbush phone number to an exercise in three-part contrapuntal swing that he said surprised him because it acquired a West African tinge as he played it.

It also is the only bass—for that matter, the only instrument—that appears on the album's closer, "Tesori," a solo chord-melody affair. On it, Patitucci serves up his signature fingerstyle, chords and arpeggiation, turning the bass into what he called a "giant guitar" and showing off the instrument to its fullest effect.

In between, the new instrument is also the only bass used on Thelonious Monk's "Trinkle Tinkle" and "Ugly Beauty," which, with the benefit of Cardenas' presence, reveal the instrument's utility as a medium for interpreting Patitucci's brand of Brooklyn-inflected bebop.

His solidbody basses also get a workout on the album. When matched with the guitars—particularly Rogers' Fender Telecaster and '58 Les

Paul—they lend a dose of funk, filtered through the prism of the Patitucci aesthetic, to "JLR," "Go Down Moses" and "Band Of Brothers."

"The song 'Band Of Brothers' was about the guys on the session," he said, "but it was also about those old records I used to hear that were grooving like that—the Allman Brothers, with the two guitars, or some of the stuff The Crusaders did."

Multiple basses are also part of the mix, strikingly realized on a shimmering "Bells Of Coutance," inspired by church bells Patitucci heard in France, and on "Dugu Kamaliemba," a piece by the Malian singer Oumou Sangare that, following "The Search," forms a kind of African subtheme to the collection. The layering and echo variously employed on the tunes add substantially to the album's sonic diversity.

Patitucci's explorations, which have earned three Grammy awards, have also impressed his peers, including Steve Swallow, who, after giving up playing the upright in 1970, helped pioneer the development of the hollowbody electric bass.

"[Patitucci] makes the acoustic instrument sing in the way it was born to sing, and his electric playing exploits what it is that the electric instrument does really well," Swallow said. "That he's now working with an instrument that kind of resides between the two is really intriguing to me. It's a logical progression to have taken this step."

Patitucci explained that the instrument led him to new sonic territory: "This is the first time in my life when I can walk on an electric bass and even record on it and not feel like, 'Oh, I blew it. I should've used my acoustic bass.' It felt like it worked, and Brian felt comfortable with it."

Despite this excitement regarding the potential of the acoustic-electric instrument, Patitucci was reluctant to offer too much critical perspective.

"I'm just really focused on doing it," he said. "I don't know how it all fits in the grand scheme, but I do know this record is important to me. Something special happened there, and this new instrument is another voice for me."

Patitucci's many voices include that of a teacher. He has an online course that allows him to connect with aspiring bassists by exchanging videos, which can be loaded on a website where those who belong to the program can see them.

Not all of the students who have signed up for the course send videos; some just take advantage of the exercises he provides as part of the coursework. But in his basement, he revealed notebooks crammed with detailed comments on each student's playing.

Patitucci also teaches at Berklee College of Music in Boston. He spends about 20 days a semester on campus, splitting his time between the bass department and the school's Global Jazz Institute (which is headed by Pérez).

It's been a long journey from the streets of Brooklyn to the upper echelon of the jazz world. A photo on the back of the *Brooklyn* CD depicts the bassist with a sly smile, as he stands in his old neighborhood, perhaps reflecting on that journey.

"A kid from Brooklyn with no one whatsoever in the immediate family even remotely connected with the industry," he said. "Who'd have thought I'd have a career?"

An abstract, expressive painting in vibrant colors (blue, red, yellow, green, black) depicting several figures, likely jazz musicians, in dynamic poses. The style is reminiscent of mid-20th-century African American art. The background is a mix of dark and light tones, creating a sense of movement and energy. The figures are rendered with bold, expressive brushstrokes, capturing a moment of intense performance or emotion. The overall mood is one of passion and cultural richness.

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Terence Blanchard E-Collective *Breathless*

BLUE NOTE 0022956

★★★★½

Let's hope the provocative title track of this striking debut by Terence Blanchard's new r&b quintet goes viral. The trumpeter's dramatic spoken-word dilation of Eric Garner's infamous plaint, "I can't breathe," delivered by Blanchard's son JRei Oliver, is brilliant. Other tracks touch on similar themes, while the rest are chill, neo-soul ballads, funky outbreaks or evocative soundscapes.

Opening with Les McCann's 1971 "Compared To What," sung with conviction by Maroon 5's PJ Morton, is a stroke of genius, since it underlines the oft-repeated observation that the travesties of Ferguson and Staten Island sometimes feel like

déjà vu. "Breathless" itself deftly puns on the title, meaning not just asphyxiation but also hopeful, or astonished. "Talk To Me," with words by Cornel West, is a rumination about Martin Luther King Jr.'s predictions of today's troubles, with Blanchard's trumpet driving the point home.

Leaving social commentary behind, the deliberate declarations of "See Me As I Am," the snappy synth-and-trumpet line of "Confident Selflessness" and the dreamy levitation of "Samadhi" suggest stations on the road to personal development. "Everglades," a long, rippling, moonlight-in-the-mangroves excursion by pianist Fabian Almazan, and a brief, whimsical chase, "Tom & Jerry," are nice enough mood-setters, but Morton's bedroom-eyes slowdown of Hank Williams' "I Ain't Got Nothin' But Time" and JRei's ballad, "Shutting Down," could have been cut from an album that is far too

long (nearly 80 minutes).

The album closes with a yearning instrumental version of Coldplay's "Midnight" that would not be out of place on an album by Chris Botti, making this strange combination of political and personal material feel odder still. Are the more personal tracks meant as part of a larger narrative of our times? Or is this a grab bag of mismatched intentions? Either way, it doesn't hang together very well, despite the bracing—and most welcome—political observations. —Paul de Barros

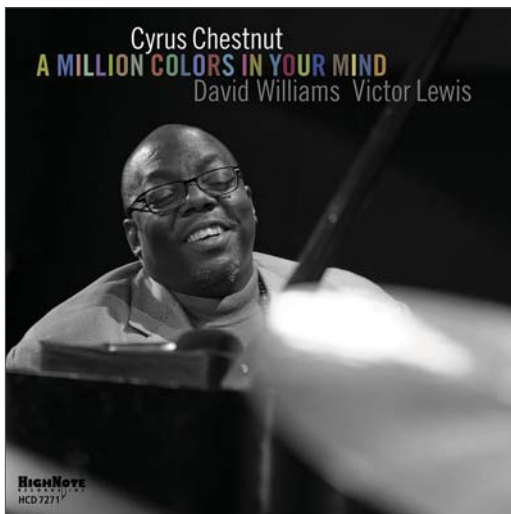
Breathless: Compared To What; See Me As I Am; Everglades; Breathless; Confident Selflessness; Shutting Down; Soldiers; Samadhi; Talk To Me; Tom & Jerry; I Ain't Got Nothin' But Time; Cosmic Warrior; Midnight. (78:00)

Personnel: Terence Blanchard, trumpet; Charles Altura, guitar; Fabian Almazan, piano, synthesizer; Donald Ramsey, bass; Oscar Seaton, drums; PJ Morton Jr., vocal (1, 6, 11); JRei Oliver (aka T. Oliver Blanchard Jr.), spoken word (4, 6, 8, 9), background vocals (6).

Ordering info: bluenote.com



HENRY ADEBONJOJO



Cyrus Chestnut *A Million Colors In Your Mind*

HIGHNOTE 7271

★★★★½

Artists with a fresh CD to offer often feel obliged to accompany it with a purpose, even when the music may be its own best justification, as is the case with Cyrus Chestnut's *A Million Colors In Your Mind*. Chestnut's higher purpose here, he says, is to escape his generation and work with musicians who came before his time, meaning those over 55. At 52, of course, Chestnut has largely become that generation and surely realizes that the 13 years between himself and drummer Victor Lewis barely counts for crackers at this point.

He has selected his repertoire with a similar retro purpose, and this also distinguishes the

Larry Coryell *Heavy Feel*

WIDE HIVE 0325

★★★★

"Let's make a record here," says Larry Coryell before counting in "River Crossing," a chunking acoustic guitar track. That remark gives you a feel for the off the cuff sensibility on *Heavy Feel*, for better and worse. It's got the spontaneity of a single-day session, but it's also marred by some rush-ness and jam-band-esque noodling below the guitarist's caliber.

Coryell's importance need not be dredged up in full—just dig out Gary Burton's *Duster* and *A Genuine Tong Funeral* to hear the originality of his voice. Out of the gate, on "Ghost Note," that beautiful toughness is on display, the distortion-edged sound, the rough timing, the towering rock power, the cool chords and choked phrases. It's still there on "Polished," but already starting to feel a bit more forced in its rock affectations, and by the title track it seems a hollow gesture.

There's a scrappy Decoding Society feel to "Jailbreak," Coryell's lines sharp as barbed wire, drummer Mike Hughes playing it loose as a tipsy marching band. "The Way It Was" is more of a straightforward jazz track on which the guitarist shows his chordal imagination and trademark

present CD from many of his earlier trio efforts. He offers no originals of his own this time and few churchy touches of religiosity, which have been a cornerstone of his music since his Atlantic days. He touches on the work of writers from Richard Rodgers to Scott LaFaro, with a particular eye toward honoring pianist and mentor John Hicks.

Yet, there is nothing at all bygone about the playing. The sparkle that comes from flows of smartly strung notes splashing across currents of a swinging rhythm section do not flow backwards into the past. Chestnut uses the trio format to reaffirm its fundamentals, which may lack the charm of turmoil but offer the reassurance of design.

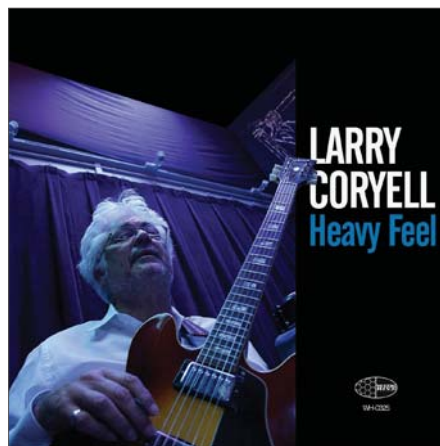
"I've Never Been In Love Before" (from *Guys and Dolls*) alternates a recurring introductory fanfare with gentle melodic variations and a bass solo, setting up an engaging contrast in pacing. "Gloria's Step" finds fresh roads not taken by Bill Evans and LaFaro in the familiar original. "Day Dream" gets a softly colored Afro-bossa rhythmic feel from Lewis, while "Brotherhood" has some blusey Basie-isms tucked between the tremolos and block chords. "Polka Dots" retreats into the privacy of solo solitude where Chestnut often seems at his most thoughtful, though at less than five minutes he never overstays his welcome.

—John McDonough

A Million Colors In Your Mind: I've Never Been In Love Before; Gloria's Step; Hello; From A Tip; Day Dream; Brotherhood Of Man; Yenerja; A Time For Love; Polka Dots And Moonbeams; I Didn't Know What Time It Was. (60:18)

Personnel: Cyrus Chestnut, piano; David Williams, bass; Victor Lewis, drums.

Ordering info: jazzdepot.com



choppy arpeggios. George Brooks contributes soprano saxophone to the proceedings with conviction, though feels less than fully integrated into the band.

—John Corbett

Heavy Feel: Ghost Note; River Crossing; The Way It Is; Polished; Heavy Feel; 2011 East; Sharing Air; Jailbreak; Footh Path To Oasis. (38:48)

Personnel: Larry Coryell, acoustic and electric guitar; George Brooks, soprano saxophone; Matt Montgomery, electric and acoustic bass; Mike Hughes, drums.

Ordering info: widehive.com



Vincent Herring *Night And Day*

SMOKE SESSIONS 1504

★★★

I think of pinball when listening to Vincent Herring. Long known as one of the most fluid saxophonists around, he has earned his sizable rep on the kind of agility needed to flit from idea to idea. Like a player controlling the flippers, he calls the shots when launching a solo's trajectory. Like the ball itself, he revels in the unpredictable bounce created when it comes time to rack up points by careening through the bumpers.

Night And Day boasts several such moments. "The Adventures Of Hyun Joo Lee" is a hard-bop readymade Herring penned for a determined student, and his romp is defined by a controlled mania. It's one of the Herring's signature elements. A dedication to fierce interplay is found in all these tunes—a quality no doubt honed on the bandstand. A previous disc, *The Uptown Shuffle*, was a live date that celebrated jazz's physicality. This follow-up extends that, bringing the fire into the studio with a quintet that's keen on the animated sense of play the saxophonist so casually forges.

A blues lingo primes the pump. Herring is a melody man—he concocts all sorts of little tunes within his solos—but he likes his bedrock vibe to be steeped in the mainstream vernacular that fueled his forebears, like Cannonball Adderley. A case could be made that the blues is leaning toward a curtain call in jazz these days, so it's refreshing when Herring, now in his early 50s, speaks its essence with such authority. With trumpeter Jeremy Pelt egging him on and pianist Mike LeDonne throwing an arm around his shoulder, the conversations are offhand yet hardy. No compositional ground is being broken here—a stylistic myopia is one of the music's foibles. But the band's invention is obvious. It consistently conspires to show us how grace and swag can successfully coexist.

—Jim Macnie

Night And Day: Grind Hog's Day; Night And Day; The Adventures Of Hyun Joo Lee; Walton; The Gypsy, Fly, Little Bird, Fly; Wabash; Theme For Jobim; There Is Something About You (I Don't Know); Smoking Paul's Stash. (62:30)

Personnel: Vincent Herring, alto saxophone; Jeremy Pelt, trumpet; Mike LeDonne, piano; Brandi Disterheft, bass; Joe Farnsworth, drums.

Ordering info: smokesessionsrecords.com

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Critics	John McDonough	John Corbett	Jim Macnie	Paul de Barros
Terence Blanchard E-Collective <i>Breathless</i>	★	★★★	★★	★★★★½
Cyrus Chestnut <i>A Million Colors In Your Mind</i>	★★★★½	★★★★	★★★	★★★
Vincent Herring <i>Night And Day</i>	★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★
Larry Coryell <i>Heavy Feel</i>	★★½	★★★	★★½	★★



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Critics' Comments

Terence Blanchard E-Collective, *Breathless*

Breathless buries Blanchard in a thick and soulless soup of Moogish quicksand and post-production hocus pocus. It comes to life only when he slices through the goo with sharp but rare proclamations of defiance. He hardly takes a serious solo, mostly noodling around in the syrup or doubling with himself. A curious choice for such a talent—maybe a guilty “groove” pleasure to be purged. —John McDonough

Cool ambition, near miss. There’s more exciting neo soul (Bilal, Omar, Van Hunt) and there’s more engaging new jazz-funk fusion. *Breathless* is neither fish nor fowl, but Blanchard’s musical intelligence should push the songs further out of their comfort zone to capitalize on his strengths. —John Corbett

The politics are pertinent and passionate. The groove is convincing but forgettable. The solos are watery and sodden. The music is meh-minus. Sounds like a summer festival touring project. —Jim Macnie

Cyrus Chestnut, *A Million Colors In Your Mind*

A commanding piano trio may sound like an oxymoron, but in Chestnut’s case it’s true, especially with such a silver-bullet rhythm team. Check out Lewis’s distinctive riffs on “Day Dream,” totally inventive. Positive, chipper even, without anything too cute; able to plumb emotional depths with immensity of feeling, as on “A Time For Love.” —John Corbett

The vigor, the bounce, the glide—they’re all staples of the pianist’s approach and they serve him well on yet another program of standards. The trio’s chemistry is impressive, and I could listen to “Day Dream” all afternoon long. —Jim Macnie

The muscular pianist and his perfect companions David Williams and Victor Lewis take a somewhat retro trip to classic piano-trio land, evoking Oscar Peterson, Tatum and others. Chestnut shines on Scott LaFaro’s “Gloria’s Steps,” drops Strayhorn’s “Day Dream” into a spritely 5/4 and waxes tenderly rhapsodic on Johnny Mandel’s “A Time For Love.” Though the tremolos, glisses and swooping flourishes get a bit cocktailish, this is warm, swinging stuff. —Paul de Barros

Vincent Herring, *Night And Day*

Herring helms a tight, bounding, hard-swinging quintet here that barely stops for a reflective breath or leaves anything not to like. LeDonne delivers a propulsive appreciation of Cedar Walton. And Herring sweeps through a ballad like “The Gypsy” or a zephyr like “Fly Little Bird, Fly” with an assured Parker-esque panache. Contemporary bop at its best. —John McDonough

Programmed for pleasurable listening, no erratic moves, straight and fine. LeDonne’s playing adds extra character, nodding openly at Cedar Walton (love the stop-start of his namesake track), and Cannonball Adderley’s spirit is present, recast in a contemporary setting. —John Corbett

How robust, soulful and swinging Herring sounds, with his fat tone, forthright delivery and calibrated-for-color intonation. Love his scampering solo on “The Gypsy,” the inevitable Cannonball tribute, “Wabash,” and the nods to Cedar Walton. —Paul de Barros

Larry Coryell, *Heavy Feel*

Nice mix of acoustic virtuosity (“River Crossing”) to soften the heavier, pelting blows. Coryell and Brooks find brief, quirky intrigues on “Jailbreak,” though its charm is initially crippled by a petulant, hammering rhythm. In the end, the sensibility is fusion, only marginally jazz—a dismissal I will trust my fellow critic colleagues perhaps to temper. —John McDonough

I’ve spaced a bit on the guitarist’s last few albums, so I’m somewhat surprised that this ho-hum potpourri of sounds seems as frenetic as it does. Coryell’s often done well with aggression, and the texture and attack help carry the day, even if the tunes are uneven. —Jim Macnie

Hard to know what the virtuoso jazz-rock guitar hero had in mind here with this undercooked, under-40-minute sprinkling of short, heavy metal jazz impressions, though the title track’s wah-wah rock and the chipper, whimsical “Jailbreak” are attractive. —Paul de Barros

Robert Glasper Covered

BLUE NOTE 0022956

★★★★

Pianist Robert Glasper ruffled some feathers when he stated in *DownBeat* a couple of years ago that jazz needed a “big-ass slap.” His intentions paid off nicely in the form of a Grammy award and heaps of acclaim later that year. This record is more about the intricacies of the fingertips than the brutality of the open palm.

Recorded live last December in Blue Note’s glamorous West Coast offices, the Capitol Records building, the album is a no-frills nod to the purists. The 13-minute “In Case You Forgot” opens with a solo piano intro reminiscent of “Now He Sings, Now He Sobs”-era Chick Corea. Crisp and lightning quick, Glasper doesn’t dwell on any notes for long, flicking daggers before being joined by the rest of the trio (drummer Damion Reid and bassist Vicente Archer).

A few months ago in this section, writer Bradley Bombarder used the phrase “depressingly de rigueur Radiohead cover.” Add Glasper to that strange list of those who drank from the well of Thom Yorke. It’s a shame that with so many smart and interesting r&b covers, Glasper doesn’t look particularly far for a rock song. But he makes amends by covering Kendrick Lamar to close out the affair. “I’m Dying Of Thirst” is an instrumental backdrop to a recording of children reciting the names of black murder victims at the hands of law enforcement. It is a powerful message presented without comment. Glasper isn’t done slapping yet.

—Sean J. O’Connell

Covered: Introduction; I Don’t Even Care; Reckoner; Barangrill; In Case You Forgot; So Beautiful; The Worst; Good Morning; Stella By Starlight; Levels; Got Over; I’m Dying of Thirst. (69:21)

Personnel: Robert Glasper, piano; Vicente Archer, bass; Damion Reid, drums.

Ordering info: bluenote.com



Joe Locke Love Is A Pendulum

MOTÉMA 173

★★★★½

Inspired by Barbara Sfraga’s poem “Love Is A Pendulum,” vibraphonist Joe Locke’s latest album is perhaps his finest, featuring an extremely sympatico quartet that rolls his dexterous music into third and fourth gears. Co-produced by drummer Terreon Gully, *Love Is A Pendulum* is a thematic work that embraces a cerebral vision and empowers it song after song.

Far from a common translation, *Love Is A Pendulum* honors the listener’s intelligence in artfully realized song-craft. “Love Is The Tide” begins in the sky, the quartet’s gritty Afro-Cuban and post-bop flights propelled by Gully’s hard-tack groove and Donny McCaslin’s throaty tenor. Radiohead meets Tuvan throat singing in the intro of “Love Is A Planchette,” a gentle number with a lovely solo from Locke. The title track reintroduces a sense of tension in its downward spiraling melody, broadened by circuitous funk and airy rubato solo sections. Another exquisite Locke solo introduces “Love Is Letting Go,” its ringing vibraphone notes enveloping the listener in a crystalline shimmer. And “Love Is Perpetual Motion,” a galvanic vehicle for a dark melody, encourages full burn improvisations from the quartet. Gifted pianist Robert Rodriguez adopts a steel drum tone for closer “Embrace,” a striking ballad that avoids cloying sentimentality.

—Ken Micallef

Love Is A Pendulum: Variation On Wisdom; Love Is The Tide; Love Is A Planchette; Love Is A Pendulum; Love Is Letting Go; Love Is Perpetual Motion; For Jesse Mountain; Last Ditch Wisdom; Embrace. (66:00)

Personnel: Joe Locke, vibraphone; Robert Rodriguez, piano; Terreon Gully, drums; Ricardo Rodriguez, bass; Rosario Giuliani, Donny McCaslin, saxophones; Victor Provost, percussion; Paul Bollenback, guitar; Theo Bleckmann, vocals.

Ordering info: motema.com



Tim Berne’s Snakeoil You’ve Been Watching Me

ECM 2443

★★★★½

Intensely theatrical yet deliberate, New York-based alto saxophonist Tim Berne’s third ECM album runs quite the emotional and compositional gamut. It spans the clang and sweep of “Embraceable Me,” the oddly groove-rich “Small World In A Small Town” and the querulous “Semi-Self Detached,” and it’s largely a testament—an excellent one—to the long form.

Only “Angles,” a zesty confrontation between bass clarinetist Oscar Noriega and Berne, and the title track, an album-grounding showcase for guitarist Ryan Ferreira, are brief. Otherwise, these tunes are long and programmatic, often starting with group clatter, devolving to brief solos, occasionally winding down to silence before exploding back in joyous caterwaul on their way to fade. The music is demanding and doesn’t seem that accessible. The players often sound at cross-purposes and the electronics can be foreboding, as when they start, then grip, in the spectral, whiplash middle of the strangely martial and haunting “Embraceable Me,” a tune that seems to howl at you.

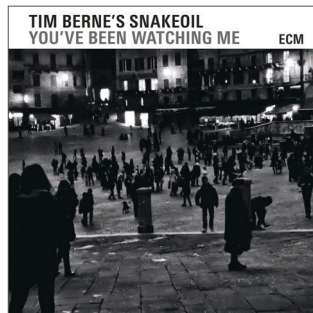
Still, Berne and his ambiguously titled crew—which also includes electronicist Matt Mitchell and percussionist Ches Smith—draw you in and lock you down, concocting musical atmospheres designed to occasionally soothe, but more often, stun. This is a quintet of huge ambition and power that punches way above its weight.

—Carlo Wolff

You’ve Been Watching Me: Lost In Redding; Small World In A Small Town; Embraceable Me; Angles; You’ve Been Watching Me; Semi-Self Detached; False Impressions. (67:34)

Personnel: Tim Berne, alto saxophone; Oscar Noriega, bass and B-flat clarinets; Ryan Ferreira, electric and acoustic guitars; Matt Mitchell, piano and electronics; Ches Smith, drums, vibraphone, percussion, timpani.

Ordering info: ecmrecords.com



Secret Keeper Emerge

INTAKT 249

★★★★

Secret Keeper, the duo of acoustic bassist Stephan Crump and electric guitarist Mary Halvorson, started working together about four years ago and released *Super 8* (Intakt) in 2012. While that disc emphasized their spontaneous inclinations in an atypical duo format, *Emerge* highlights how this musical pairing has evolved together and apart during the past three years.

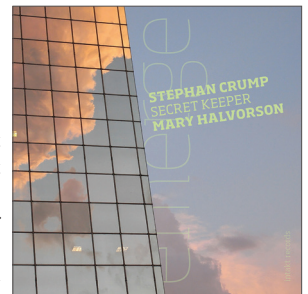
The big advances on *Emerge* are the compositions themselves, all but one of which is a Crump or Halvorson piece. On *Super 8*, mostly brief statements were combined into three thematically linked sections. Here, each tune is more developed, and these structures are ideal for their quietly far-reaching improvisations. But, surprisingly, *Emerge* begins with the duo’s interpretation of Irving Berlin’s “What’ll I Do.” On this opener, Halvorson’s bent notes echo lap steel guitar, but her staccato charge is all her own, as is Crump’s warm tremolo response. Her remarkable sense of dynamics shape “In Time You Yell” and “Bridge Loss Sequence.” She and Crump also emphasize tension, as much as close harmony, and gradually ease into her quietly frenzied solos. While those flights are immediately noticeable when she’s in the upper range, what becomes more striking on repeated listens is how consistently clean her lines are—distortion is not a necessary part of her arsenal. Likewise, even her disjointed strumming on “Turns To White Gold” never loses its adherence to the melody. With Secret Keeper making such a leap between these two discs in such a short time, Crump and Halvorson always sound like they’re planning a few steps ahead.

—Aaron Cohen

Emerge: What’ll I Do; Emerge; In Time You Yell; Disproportionate Endings; A Muddle Of Hope; Bridge Loss Sequence; Nakata; Turns To White Gold; Erie. (49:54)

Personnel: Stephan Crump, acoustic bass; Mary Halvorson, guitar.

Ordering info: intaktrec.ch



World on a String

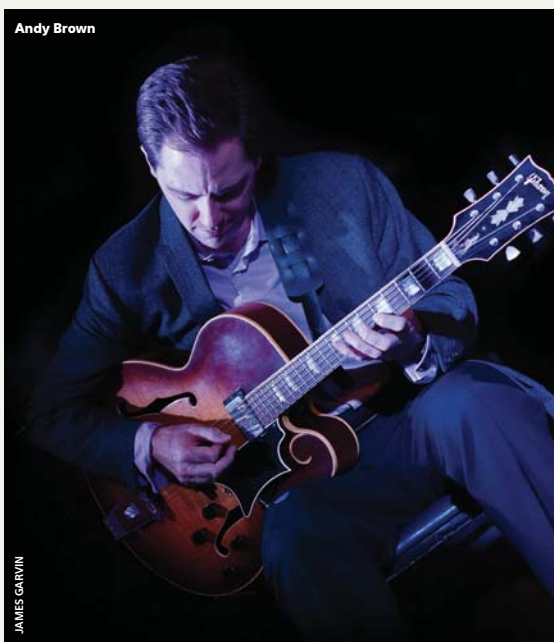
A fixture on the Chicago jazz scene since 2003, **Andy Brown** is a superior mainstream guitarist. **Soloist (Delmark 5019; 65:09 ★★★½)** features an unaccompanied Brown performing 13 standards plus George Van Eps' "Tango El Bongo." In the liner notes Brown cites the inspirations of Kenny Poole, Van Eps and Howard Alden, and one can hear a bit of Joe Pass in his approach. Unlike Pass, Brown only occasionally plays a bass line, emphasizing his single-note runs punctuated with occasional chords. While some of the music, particularly the ballads, can be viewed as relaxing background music, a closer listen reveals plenty of subtle creativity. Fortunately many of the performances are taken at a hotter medium-tempo pace. Other than the tightly arranged Van Eps piece, the playing is fairly spontaneous with the uptempo "Drum Boogie" and a lyrical "Memories Of You" being among the highpoints.

Ordering info: delmark.com

It has become common during the past decade for jazz artists to record and perform pop and rock songs that meant a lot to them while they were growing up. **Bob Shimizu**, a lyrical and thoughtful guitarist, on **Let's Get Together (Signal Strength; 59:31 ★★★★★)** teams up on various selections with his Arizona quartet (keyboardist Lamar Gaines, bassist Mario Mendivil and percussionist Todd Chuba) or a trio with organist Pat Bianchi and drummer Carmen Intorre. His repertoire, mostly dating from the 1960s, ranges from "Icarus" and "Stolen Moments" to Bill Withers' "Grandma's Hands" (which has a guest vocal by Matt Weddle) and "Abraham, Martin & John." Shimizu has a bright and clear tone and he does not waste a note during his well-constructed improvisations. He turns the pieces, no matter what their source, into swinging bluesy numbers and laidback ballads. His lone original of the set, "Black T-Bird," is reminiscent of a Charles Earland groove from the early 1970s. With fine support from his two groups and occasional solos from Gaines and Bianchi, this is an excellent showcase for Shimizu.

Ordering info: bobshimizu.com

Born in Mexico, guitarist **Hugo Fernandez** spent time studying in the U.S. before settling in Spain. **Cosmogram (Origin 82692; 49:05 ★★★★★)** features Fernandez and his international quartet (Cuban Ariel Bringuez on tenor and soprano, bassist Antonio Miguel from Spain and American drummer Antonio Sanchez who also originated from Mexico) performing eight of the leader's post-bop originals. While Fernandez's straightforward guitar solos and Bringuez's mellow tones and adventurous styles on tenor and soprano are ma-



Andy Brown

JAMES GARVIN

ior assets, the most notable aspects to *Cosmogram* are the interplay between Fernandez and Bringuez and the leader's compositions. His songs are generally both catchy and inventive, many of the performances develop in unexpected directions, and the often-episodic frameworks make most of the selections sound like mini-suites.

Ordering info: origin-records.com

Guitarist **Gene Ess' Eternal Monomyth (SIMP 141105; 56:15 ★★★½)** has Thana Alexa singing her lyrics to two songs ("Summer Cantabile" and "Mono-No Aware") and taking several scat solos. But more impressive is the way her voice, singing wordlessly, blends naturally with Ess' guitar in the ensembles of many of the songs. Ess and his quartet (with pianist John Escreet, bassist Thomson Kneeland and drummer Clarence Penn) perform eight of his often-melancholy originals. While none are destined to become standards, they inspire some creative solos by Ess (who has a distinctive modern mainstream style) and Escreet, particularly on "Drakaina," "Blues For Ryd" and the uptempo "Into The New World."

Ordering info: jazzgenemusic.com

Isaac Darche's Team & Variations (Challenge CR73395; 45:44 ★★★★★½) starts out exciting with the passionate "A Winkel In Time" and it never loses its momentum throughout the program of five Darche originals and three standards. Darche has an extroverted and enthusiastic modern style, able to play blazing double-time runs but with each note being easily heard. Tenor-saxophonist Chad Lefkowitz-Brown matches his intensity and the rhythm section (pianist Glenn Zaleski, bassist Desmond White and drummer E.J. Strickland) never lets up. Whether it is Wayne Shorter's "Ana Maria," the leader's "Don't Run Out Of Money," or Darche's feature on a cooking "Nobody Else But Me," this music is stimulating, worthwhile and memorable.

Ordering info: challengerecords.com

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**Christian Muthspiel/
Steve Swallow**
Simple Songs

IN + OUT RECORDS 07588

★★★

The aptly titled *Simple Songs* is/are just that: aired-out, straightforward, unentangled. Steve Swallow the electric bass guitarist and Christian Muthspiel the multi-instrumentalist on trombone, keyboards and flute play 10 Muthspiel compositions plus one that all just seem to float along, carried via Swallow's signature, unadorned and very conversational guitar.

Muthspiel's similarly simple and direct way of express-

ing himself regardless of instrument means both players can speak as little or as much as they want, and never interrupt.

The tunes themselves aren't all that much to shake a stick at (unless that stick happens to be Swallow's bass). The charm, instead, comes from the duo's delivery and the essentially carefree ambience that seems to permeate. From the opening cadences of the gentle waltz "Pas De Deux Tranquille"—a lightly mournful melody where Swallow's simple lines undergird Muthspiel's languid yet mellifluous trombone—the mood is set.

From here, the delicately meditative vibe is extended ever so gradually toward something more playful with Muthspiel on dainty electric piano and, again, Swallow's unassuming musical bottom via another waltz, "Monsieur Satie." It's as if the two are asking us to enter a dream-world where there are no sharp edges and no sudden breaks.

Both melodies have a lullaby-ish ring to them, bereft of drama or any traces of darkness. "Viennese Marketplace" finds Muthspiel's wood flute in constant dialog with Swallow's buzzing-bee bass in this spritely dance that bridges to another slow, almost dirge-like waltz, Muthspiel back on a much more expressive trombone with Werner Pirchner's tuneful "Himmelblau."

"Let My Children Waltz" finally gets things moving with some toy piano and more spot-on bass guitar in a song that includes an arrangement with pauses, as if to provide the dancing children a breather here and there.

The playfulness continues with the whimsical medium-tempo "(F)all Blues," another good example of the duo's casual ease with musical conversation, this time Swallow's playing taking more of the lead with Muthspiel's slightly funky electric piano.

A bit more slow waltz leads to a 4/4 uplift with "Mein! Yours?" based on "Mein!" by Franz Schubert, the two instrumentalists singing back and forth in equal measure. The most expressive number comes with Muthspiel's relatively sultry, Roswell Ruddy-y 'bone blaring across Swallow's bouncing lines with the barroom bray "Is The Moon Still Blue?"

By now one might notice how spare the improvising is, the melody and the interaction serving as the real focal points. The liner notes by Christoph Ransmayr, presented in both German and English, echo the CD's themes of simplicity, innocence and childhood delight in life and nature as well as music.

Along with Ransmayr's commentary are two-color abstract paintings by Muthspiel, not surprisingly simple in design and feel.

—John Ephland

Simple Songs: Pas De Deux Tranquille; Monsieur Satie; Viennese Marketplace; Himmelblau; Let My Children Waltz; Lullaby For Moli; (F)all Blues; Mildred, Bim & Mohamed; Mein! Yours?; Is The Moon Still Blue?; Hymn To Health. (52:55)

Personnel: Christian Muthspiel, trombone, piano, electric piano, toy piano, flutes; Steve Swallow, bass guitar.

Ordering info: inandout-records.com



David Sanborn *Time And The River*

OKEH 506314
★★★★

It is easy to underrate David Sanborn, a crossover saxophone master the jazz police will never endorse. He's so damn accessible, delivering effortless improvisations with a unique blend of smoothness and bite, and he programs his albums to maximize outreach, peppering instrumental originals with choice covers. He's so impure he must be suspect.

Time And The River is impure, indeed, and satisfyingly so. In such originals as "Ordinary People" and the slower, more introspective "Drift," Sanborn seems to speak from some private, painful place; these songs are leisurely, introspective, melodic—and personal. And on Alice Soyler's spirited, funky "A La Verticale" and "Oublie Moi,"

Oded Lev-Ari *Threading*

ANZIC RECORDS 0052
★★★

Composer-arranger-producer Oded Lev-Ari has worked with label mates the 3 Cohens and clarinetist Anat Cohen as well as vocalists Amy Cervini and Melissa Stylianou; he finally tells his own tale on his artist debut, *Threading*. While the title remains ambiguous, *Threading* is a tender, touching album that mines the emotions of heartbreak and loss, when remembrance lingers far past the point of breakup.

That *Threading* is serious in wearing heart-on-sleeve is evident in not one, but two versions of Gordon Jenkins' classic "Goodbye," one of the most tragic and moving torch songs ever written. Bassist/vocalist Alan Hampton informs the first "Goodbye," his knowing, tremulous voice perfectly expressing the song's dark and doomful mood. Lev-Ari's arrangement, performed by an 11-piece chamber orchestra of sorts, steers the song from broken to briefly exclamatory, like Sinatra and Riddle's dynamic thriller, "On A Clear Day." Anat Cohen leads the second "Goodbye." Guitarist Gilad Hekselman's delicate intro establishes the pace, and Cohen's solo makes it ever more wistful and poignant as strings surround her in a soppy swoon. But *Threading* also swings as in the sashaying "Lost And Found," featuring Brian Landrus performing a solo that is pure Coleman Hawkins' fascination, as drummer Matt Wilson stirs the soup with all the majesty for which he is

a tune that begins meditatively and ends in full cry, Sanborn plays as if carried away. He certainly knows how to command a tune—and a band.

His key foil on this addicting album is dramatic bassist Marcus Miller, who also produces. Miller's layered and danceable "Seven Days Seven Nights" is a highlight, sparked by the sharp rhythms of Miller, drummer Marcus Baylor and percussionist Javier Diaz. Don't overlook the leader's own skirls and fills; Sanborn plays through this and all the other tunes, never completely fading out. He's always on the case on the sensual *Time And The River*.

The covers span the D'Angelo-Roy Hargrove "Spanish Joint," Michel Legrand's "Windmills Of Your Mind" and a "Can't Get Next To You" that hews closer to the minimalist Al Green version than the thicker Temptations original. "Spanish Joint" is as dirty, if not as muggy, as the original on D'Angelo's great Voodoo album; "Windmills," interpreted by nimble vocalist Randy Crawford, favors lightheartedness over regret; and "Can't Get Next To You," iced by former Tower of Power vocalist Larry Braggs, features a Sanborn solo of maximum soul and leanness.

Sanborn can play a lot of notes. He also can play very few, very well. —Carlo Wolff

Time And The River: A La Verticale; Ordinary People; Drift; Can't Get Next To You; Oublie Moi; Seven Days Seven Nights; Windmills Of Your Mind; Spanish Joint; Overture (From The Manchurian Candidate). (44:48)

Personnel: David Sanborn, alto saxophone; Roy Assaf, keyboards; Marcus Baylor, drums; Larry Braggs, vocals; Randy Crawford, vocals; Javier Diaz, percussion; Peter Hess, soprano saxophone, tenor saxophone, alto flute, bass clarinet; Marcus Miller, bass; Nicky Moroch, guitar; Justin Mullens, trumpet; Ricky Peterson, Hammond organ; Yotam Silberstein, guitar; Tim Vaughn, trombone.

Ordering info: okeh-records.com



renowned. The buoyant "The Dance" also helps lift *Threading* from its weepy singlemindedness.

An album of doe-eyed reflections expressed in lush arrangements including Israeli folk forms, heartfelt ballads and dewy-eyed swing, *Threading* will find a place in your music library next to Sinatra's *Only The Lonely* and "Here's To The Losers." Bless them all. —Ken Micallef

Threading: Threading; Lost And Found; Goodbye (Feat. Alan Hampton); Voices, Black Crow; E And A; The Dance; Goodbye (Feat. Anat Cohen). (44:20)

Personnel: Anat Cohen, clarinet; Will Vinson, alto saxophone, soprano saxophone; Brian Landrus, baritone saxophone, bass clarinet; Nacjé Noordhuis, trumpet, flugelhorn; Alex Waterman, cello; Yoed Nir, cello; Noah Hoffeld, cello; Oded Lev-Ari, piano; Gilad Hekselman, guitar; Joe Martin, bass; Matt Wilson, drums; Alan Hampton, Jo Lawry, vocals.

Ordering info: anzicrecords.com

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Atomic



Lucidity

Atomic *Lucidity*

JAZZLAND 471 991 8

★★★★½

This Scandinavian quintet has developed its power over the years partly through a strong internal rapport, with each musician forging ineffable connections. That kind of relationship can be torpedoed when one of those members drops out—as drummer Paal Nilssen-Love chose to do last year—to focus more exclusively on fully improvised efforts and his own group Large Unit.

If Atomic was a person, that departure was tantamount to losing a limb. I wouldn't have been surprised if the group had called it quits, but it chose to carry on with a new drummer, the young Norwegian Hans Hulboekmo, who recently made waves as a member of the dynamic trio Moskus,

Matt Criscuolo *Headin' Out*

JAZZERIA 2014

★★★★½

For his sixth outing as a leader, alto saxophonist and New York native Matt Criscuolo is in fine company with veteran drummer and jazz educator Ed Soph, up-and-coming bassist Preston Murphy and guitarist/co-conspirator Tony Purrone, whose chops are so audacious throughout this session that his solos elicit howls of giddy laughter from grown six-string aficionados.

Criscuolo is a hard-blowing improviser whose potent flights often push the envelope toward the outer limits, as heard in his intense solos on hard-driving, free-spirited renditions of Randy Weston's "Little Niles" and Miles Davis' "Sippin' At Bells," the latter featuring saxophonist and guitarist going toe-to-toe in some outre exchanges that culminate in what sounds like a conversation between free-improvisation stalwarts Derek Bailey and Jimmy Lyons.

But Criscuolo is also a brilliant ballad interpreter with a lyrical touch, as he demonstrates on a lovely reading of Billy Strayhorn's melancholy "A Flower Is A Lovesome Thing," which also serves as a showcase for Soph's interactive genius.

Purrone, who enjoyed high visibility in the '70s during his stint with the Heath Brothers and has since made a dozen or more recordings as a leader, is in rare form here. Whether he's delivering Django-esque filigrees, as on Criscuolo's

and on the evidence of the stunning new *Lucidity* he's made a remarkably smooth, effective transition, powering the group in his own way.

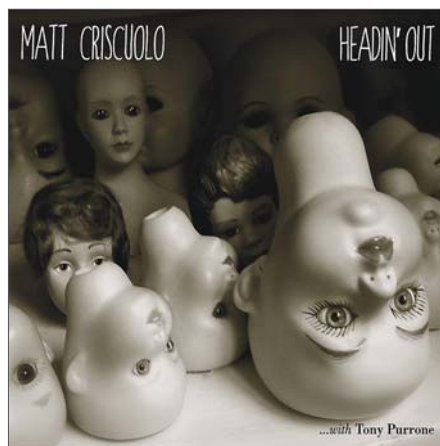
As usual, pianist Håvard Wiik and reedist Fredrik Ljungkvist composed all of the music, creating multipartite marvels that demand serious rigor from each player. It's silly to try to break-down the endless shifts, both fluid and abrupt, in any given piece, but those complex, elegant structures keep each performance bristling with energy and provoke new improvisational paths. Still, it proves instructive to get an idea how much movement is packed into each composition. In "A New Junction," the roughly tactile bass solo from Ingebrigt Håker Flaten is intercepted by a minimalist two-note pattern played alternately by Wiik and horn frontline as well as a clattery series of accents by Hulboekmo, before everyone recedes but Ljungkvist on seeking clarinet—in-and-out of clarion and overblown tonal profiles—and trumpeter Magnus Broo's probing, Harmon muted flurries. The pianist and bassist re-enter the fold, pushing and pulling, before essentially taking control and pushing the performance to its tension-filled conclusion. While the complexity of the writing might come off as fussy in lesser hands, for Atomic in never feels less than charged, with fresh concepts speeding by breathless moment after breathless moment.

—Peter Margasak

Lucidity: Laterna Interfuit; A New Junction; Lucidity; Start/Stop: A MacGuffin's Tale; Major, December. (55:42)

Personnel: Håvard Wiik, piano; Fredrik Ljungkvist, tenor saxophone and B-flat clarinet; Magnus Broo, trumpet; Ingebrigt Håker Flaten, bass; Hans Hulboekmo, drums.

Ordering info: jazzlandrec.com



"Enchanted" or the altoist's bluesy "At Night," dealing in hard-bop territory on a swinging "Centripetal" or wailing with fiery fusion abandon on his "Karma At Dharma," his fretboard feats never fail to amaze.

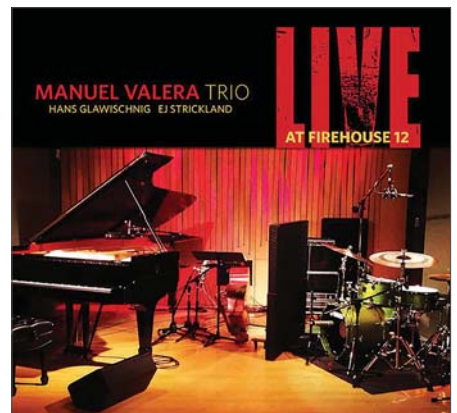
This solidly swinging quartet offering, grounded by a world-class rhythm tandem, is brimming with the sound of surprise.

—Bill Milkowski

Headin' Out: Enchanted; Little Niles; At Night; Sippin' At Bells; Karma At Dharma; R 510 Select; A Flower Is A Lovesome Thing; Centripetal; Renee's Dream. (59:00)

Personnel: Matt Criscuolo, alto saxophone; Tony Purrone, guitar; Preston Murphy, acoustic bass; Ed Soph, drums.

Ordering info: jazzeria.com



Manuel Valera Trio *Live At Firehouse 12*

MAVO

★★★

The Havana-born pianist and composer Manuel Valera has, over the last decade, established himself in the New York scene as someone fluent not only in all variety of Afro-Cuban forms and fusions, but in up-to-the minute awareness of the fluid contemporary jazz scene, working in a wide variety of ensemble sizes and formats, including his New Cuban Express. On this, his 10th album as a leader, Valera scales back to a trio—another superb ensemble, with bassist Hans Glawischnig and drummer E.J. Strickland.

The format gives Valera a chance to stretch out and blow, and over the course of these eight tunes (recorded live at Firehouse 12 in New Haven, Connecticut, in October 2014), nothing comes in under six minutes. Generally, the extra room serves them well. On opener "Spiral" (the longest track here, at 12:10) Valera has fashioned an appealing arrangement with a delicate rubato opening section for solo piano, rhythmic suspense created by a repeated left-hand single-note rhythm and a tuneful main theme that serves as a springboard for various "spiraling" figures and a beautifully focused bass solo from Glawischnig (a long-time regular in Miguel Zenón's quartet). The easygoing asymmetrical swing of "Wayne" is a perfect setup for an impassioned cover of Shorter's "Footprints." "Distancia" is a ruminative ballad-tempo dance spelled out by rich chords. As a pianist, Valera can surprise with double-time runs that burst out of his right hand even as his left holds a steady-slow chord pattern, as on "Lirico," with its tricky out-of-tempo trio passages. At times like this Valera sounds surprised by what his fingers and ears have found.

At other times, however, one misses the varied, complex voicings and explicit Afro-Cuban grooves of last year's New Cuban Express disc, *In Motion* (Criss Cross). And although it's understandable that Valera was attracted to the melodic beauty of the famous "Intermezzo" from Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana*, the swing interpretation of its opening is more distraction than enhancement. Here he's better off when he forgets the tune and takes the chords and rhythms in a new direction.

—Jon Garelick

Live At Firehouse 12: Spiral; Wayne; Footprints; Distancia; En Route; Intermezzo Sinfonico (From *Cavalleria Rusticana*); Lirico; Century. (64:10)

Personnel: Manuel Valera, piano; Hans Glawischnig, acoustic bass; E.J. Strickland, drums.

Ordering info: manuelvalera.com

Out Front

Roberta Donnay, *Bath-tub Gin* (Motéma 166; 63:10 ★★★★★) Stylistic kin to flappers of the anything-goes 1920s, Roberta Donnay has a silky, clean voice that is a small marvel of geniality, rarely dipping into touchy-feely cuteness. She's drawn to material from the canon of American



songs recorded between the two world wars. So, on her fourth album, the San Francisco-based singer and arranger takes the measure of Bessie Smith's risqué "Kitchen Man," the Boswell Sisters' finger-snapping "Put The Sun Back In The Sky," and bonbons associated with, among others, Josephine Baker, Peggy Lee and the unjustly obscure Annette Hanshaw. Donnay's sassy charm also envelopes her own retro-fun compositions, including the swing dance jamboree "Happy Feet." All the while, the well-groomed, jazz-inclined Prohibition Mob Band motors along spiritedly.

Ordering info: motema.com

Charlie Parr, *Stumpjumper* (Red House 283; 54:43 ★★★★★) There's a connecting line, secure like a Gordian knot, extending either side of country blues and old-timey folk music forward to the freshly realized music of Charlie Parr, a fine guitarist and a singer of rare distinction. Recording with a band for the first time, the Minnesotan attains a high level of empathy with the regular folks inhabiting his tunes: a mismatched couple ("Evil Companion"), a man dogged by Death ("Frank Miller Blues") and a murdered teenager in Georgia (traditional song "Delia"). An autobiographical venture ("Stumpjumper") and a nod to the Bible ("Resurrection") have an inspired casualness.

Ordering info: redhouserecords.com

Morgan Davis, *I Got My Own* (Electro-Fi 3440; 58:30 ★★★★★½) Vocalist and guitarist Morgan Davis, based in Nova Scotia, has a welcoming presence. The original songs with a studio group taking up the first half of his ninth album are open-armed invitations to fans and newcomers alike. Best of all is "Heat Wave In Alberta," a languid, oddly attractive weather report from a provincial inferno. Seven more tracks find Davis reaching out to patrons of a Toronto club. Especially enjoyable are his versions of Sonny Boy Williamson's "Help Me" and—surprise!—the Meters' "Cardova."

Ordering info: electrofi.com

Deb Ryder, *Let It Rain* (Bejeb Music 109; 46:54 ★★★★★) Raised up in her stepfather's southern Californian Topanga Corral club, where she opened for Taj Mahal and Etta James, singer Deb Ryder comes to the blues naturally. This sophomore album evidences her secure sense of self and her abundance of musical smarts and lung power. Ryder apparently understands the emo-

tional fiber of lyrics to 11 original songs, covering Koko Taylor-like resolve ("That's Just How It Is"), reconciling secular love complaints with gospel ecstasy ("Cry Another Tear") or following her heart in the jazz-oriented ballad ("Kiss And Dream"). Ryder's West Coast backup team, with first-tier blues guitarist Kirk Fletcher on eight, furnish a solid blend of élan and strength.

Ordering info: debryder.com

Leo Bud Welch, *I Don't Prefer No Blues* (Big Legal Mess 0510; 35:18 ★★★★★) At some point in his long life in the Mississippi hill country, Leo Bud Welch learned how to shake a song down and expose the strong, raw feeling underlying it. Here he and young followers stomp like there's no tomorrow. Admittedly, Welch can stray in an aimless direction, take "Cadillac Blues" for example, but give the 82-year-old his due. "I Don't Know Her Name" has the potent kick of 200-proof moonshine. "Pray On" is real rock 'n' roll.

Ordering info: biglegalmessrecords.com

Greg Nagy, *Stranded* (Big O 2421; 41:26 ★★★★★) An advocate of emotional balm concocted from blues, rock, soul and funk, Michigan's Greg Nagy, on his third album, examines the breakup of his 25-year-long marriage without leaving listeners bored or uncomfortable. Straight-shooting honesty, including some of the heartbreaking type, pushes his above-average singing and guitar playing through a program weighed in favor of originals, three of them composed with able producer-keyboardist Jim Alfredson. But Nagy, settling into a Robert Cray groove, extracts the most gold from Jeff Paris and Rick Whitfield's "Stranded."

Ordering info: gregnagy.com

Tad Robinson, *Day Into Night* (Severn 0065; 53:07 ★★★★★) Blues-inflected soul singer Tad Robinson and the Severn house band have a track record of making good or very good albums. However, their fifth collaboration is a bit disappointing. Smooth complacency has staked roots. Though Robinson's close examinations of modern romance remain perceptive, the material often sounds shop-worn with the Severn regulars trafficking in second-hand soul tropes. The notable exception is bassist Steve Gomes' "Soul Lover," sublime in its construction and execution. **DB**

Ordering info: severnrecords.com

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Kermit Ruffins #imsoneworleans

BASIN STREET RECORDS 0114

★★★★

In recent years, Kermit Ruffins' live performances have developed somewhat of a variety show feel, with the trumpeter's actual playing time cut down by a mix of comic stage banter, extended band solos and sit-ins from singers like Nayo Jones. Some of that comes into play on *#imsoneworleans*, Ruffins' follow-up to the well-curated (if goofily titled) *We Partyin' Traditional Style*, the homage to traditional New Orleans jazz he released in 2013.

Bookended by two iterations of the title track, the disc spans a memorable selection of the tunes

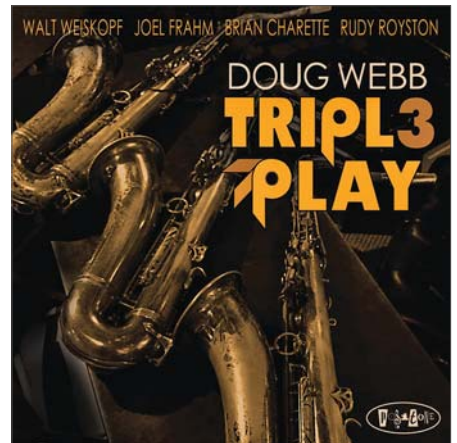
Ruffins performs most Tuesday nights at Bullet's in New Orleans' Seventh Ward. The bubbly opener gives him a chance to name-check members of the New Orleans music community past and present: "Uncle" Lionel Batiste, Danny Barker, Rebirth Brass Band, Trombone Shorty and Germaine Bazzle all get shout-outs. In part two, the titular phrase becomes a point of departure for a spate of one-liners ("I'm so New Orleans I played the Atari game in Fats Domino's house way back in the '70s").

Other high points include the BBQ Swingers' take on Jimmy McHugh's "I Can't Give You Anything But Love," where Ruffins' tone is bright and warm and the band is reliably swinging. "Tipitina," meanwhile, shines a well-deserved light on pianist Yoshitaka Tsuji's close read of Professor Longhair's loping piano style. Things go a bit downhill on contributions from guest vocalists Jones and Kaylin Orleans Ruffins. Jones belies her talent by oversinging "At Last," while the duet from Kermit and his daughter is probably more endearing onstage than on record. It's not among his more adventurous efforts, but *#imsonew-orleans* still entertains overall. —Jennifer Odell

#imsoneworleans: I'm So New Orleans; Tipitina; Mexican Special; At Last; I Can't Give You Anything But Love; Put Your Right Foot Forward; Jock-A-Mo; Somewhere Over the Rainbow; I'm So New Orleans Part 2. (48:39)

Personnel: Kermit Ruffins, trumpet, vocals; Kevin Morris, bass; Jerry Barbarin Anderson, drums; Yoshitaka "ZZ" Tsuji, piano, keyboards; Naya Jones, vocals (4); Kaylin Ruffins, vocals (8); Britney Chauntae, vocals; Haruka Kukuchi, guest artist, trombone; Percy Williams, percussion; June Yamagishi, guitar.

Ordering info: basinstreetrecords.com



Doug Webb Triple Play

POSITONE 8135

★★★★½

Veteran robust-toned tenor man Doug Webb joins with other powerhouse tenor players Walt Weiskopf and Joel Frahm in this swinging hard-bop-flavored session fueled by two rising stars, stellar organist Brian Charette and ubiquitous drumming sensation Rudy Royston.

The three instantly lock horns on Webb's opener, "Jones," a swinger based on "Have You Met Miss Jones." Weiskopf contributes "Three's A Crowd," which also showcases Royston's highly interactive instincts and slick fills on the kit, and the burning "The Way Things Are," based on "All The Things You Are." Frahm contributes the old school organ group swinger, "Jazz Car," which has Charette channeling his inner Jimmy Smith.

They do a nice job of harmonizing the three horns on the head to the obligatory proving ground, "Giant Steps," then burn through "Avalon" at an impossibly fast clip as if collectively shot out of a cannon (dig Royston's precise fills and Charette's organ solo on this giddy romp).

While Michael Brecker, Joe Lovano and Dave Liebman (and later Ravi Coltrane) went for a more freeing, heightened, latter-day Trane vibe in their celebrated Saxophone Summit collaborations, this triumverate is coming at it from more of an early Trane/boppish point of view. And the results are scintillating.

This kind of macho burning harkens back to the days of when Sonny Stitt locked horns with Gene Ammons and Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis. There's a competitive edge to this hard-driving fare that is exhilarating.

But the arrangements, particularly by Randy Aldcroft on "I Concentrate On You" or Aldcroft's own "Your Place Or Mine," adds a modernist touch to that old-school cutting-contest approach.

—Bill Milkowski

Triple Play: Jones; Three's A Crowd; Giant Steps; The Way Things Are; Avalon; Jazz Car; Your Place Or Mine; I Concentrate On You; Pail Blues; Alligator Boogaloo; Triple Play. (59:43)

Personnel: Doug Webb, Walt Weiskopf, Joel Frahm, tenor saxophone; Brian Charette, organ; Rudy Royston, drums.

Ordering info: posi-tone.com

Hayden Chisholm Breve

PIROUET 3081

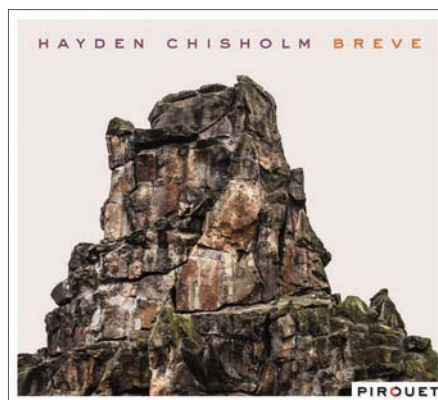
★★★★

When hearing Hayden Chisholm, first or too-casual impressions can be misleading. The New Zealander alto saxophonist brings a cool, soft and distinctly breathy touch to his playing, but closer inspection brings out the deposits of well-placed subtle intensity through his distinctive note choices, musical attitude and harmonic palette.

Chisholm enjoys empathetic company on his new trio record, *Breve*. The cross-boundary threesome, which includes British pianist John Taylor (ever-attuned to the importance of understatement) and American bassist Matt Penman, makes for an ideal prism through which to appreciate Chisholm's musical thinking, pondering and oblique intelligence.

Chisholm's compositions take on characters and musical challenges, piece by piece. "Barely A Moon," true to the title, suggests a sense of something—a celestial object, a melodic idea—glimpsed through a pleasantly hazy scrim, while "Tinkerbell Swing" conjures up a cool, quirky and Lee Konitz-like charm. Penman proves his innate musicality here, as an avid ensemble listener, nimble soloist (on the open, languid turf of his original "The Elf Of Plants") and also as a solid tunesmith. His inviting "Patche" opens the album with inspiringly direct melodic warmth.

Musical about music also figures into the contextual fabric, in the form of Chisholm originals



"Augmented Waltz," a brisk-ish but simmering waltz and the clever "Pass A Cage, Lea," a study in an ostinato-driven *passacaglia*, a 17th-century Spanish musical form. Chisholm's "Inebriate Waltz" wriggles its way into cryptic corners via the saxist's cerebral detours before the album closes with the melancholic "Fly."

Breve amply demonstrates that Chisholm possesses the rare capacity to incite curiosity and contemplation through a musical voice that speaks softly, but in unusual, compelling ways.

—Josef Woodard

Breve: Patche; Barely A Moon; Tinkerbell Swing; The Elf Of Plants; Augmented Waltz; Pass A Cage, Lea; So It Goes; Inebriate Waltz; Fly. (61:08)

Personnel: Hayden Chisholm, alto saxophone; Matt Penman, bass; John Taylor, piano.

Ordering info: prouet.com

Kirk Knuffke *Arms & Hands*

ROYAL POTATO FAMILY 1508

★★★★

Few musicians erase the boundaries, both real and perceived, between jazz's mainstream and avant-garde wings like cornetist Kirk Knuffke, a deeply generous player and devoted student of the tradition. On this superb trio-plus-guests album, he brings together those two sides without a hitch.

It's to the leader's credit, however, that none of this compositions explicitly evoke any singular influence, even if the sinewy alto playing of guest Jeff Lederer invokes Steve Lacy on "Chirp," or a the melody of "Elevator," one of several piec-

es inspired by the Studs Terkel book *Working*, with its Monkish sense of disruption. More often than not the music conveys a lack of obvious reference, as on "Umbrella," with bassist Mark Helias bowing thick, viscous tones and drummer Billy Goodwin splashing and rubbing his kit with brushes to create a droning high-wire for the cornetist's fragile-toned improvisation. He closes the album with a delightfully lurching spin on Ernest Tubb's classic "Thanks A Lot," balancing humor, tunefulness and concision, masterfully pitched. —Peter Margasak

Arms & Hands: Safety Shoes; Bright Light; Root; Pepper; Chirp; Umbrella; Notwithstanding; Next; Arms & Hands; Elevator; Bonderizer; Tuesday; Use; Atezza; Thanks A Lot. (62:21)

Personnel: Kirk Knuffke, cornet; Bill Goodwin, drums; Mark Helias, bass; Brian Drye, trombone (1, 8, 11); Daniel Carter, alto saxophone (2, 14); Jeff Lederer, soprano and tenor saxophone (5, 15).

Ordering info: royalpotatofamily.com



DRKWAV *The Purge*

THE ROYAL POTATO FAMILY 1507

★★½

Give this trio credit: When they decided to go psychedelic, they hired the right help. Co-producer Randall Dunn has not only enabled Six Organs of Admittance and Marissa Nadler to achieve their full mind-altering potential, but has made some powerfully third-eye-opening music in the company of Stephen O'Malley and Oren Ambarchi on the album *Shade Themes From Kairos*.

But *The Purge* betrays both its name and Dunn's best instincts by failing to get to the essence. There's no denying DRKWAV's capacity to come up with good sounds and persuasive grooves. The aura of echo around John Medeski's electric keyboards is probably still illegal in most states, and hip-hop producer Adam Deitch's stuttering snare drum and tension-amplifying pauses on "Shmeeans Kuti" reveal close study of what made Tony Allen's playing with the Egypt 70 so great. But even when they're cooking at a rolling boil, the purposeless busy-ness of Medeski and saxophonist Skerik's playing makes one wish that someone had skimmed off the excess fat. I wouldn't write these guys off, but they will need to exercise sterner discipline than is evident here before they return with music that you'll want to remember after you step off the dance floor. —Bill Meyer

The Purge: Darkwave; Soundtrack; Count Chockulus; Datura; Scars; Hell Bass; Gazzelloni; Shmeeans Kuti. (55:35)

Personnel: Skerik, saxophones; John Medeski, keyboards; Adam Deitch, drums; Todd Sickafoose, acoustic bass; Adam Smirnoff, guitar.

Ordering info: royalpotatofamily.com

Gary Peacock Trio Now This

Marc Copland piano
Gary Peacock double bass
Joey Baron drums



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ECM

Aki Rissanen // Jussi Lehtonen Quartet
with Dave Liebman



Aki Rissanen/Jussi Lehtonen Quartet with Dave Liebman

Aki Rissanen/Jussi Lehtonen Quartet with Dave Liebman

OZELLA 058

★★★★

Dave Liebman may be more than halfway through his 60s, but he shows no sign of slowing down. The saxophonist moves easily from situation to situation, adopting his quicksilver soprano and gruff tenor to suit his environment. Recently he's recorded pop tunes, helmed a big-band salute to Wayne Shorter and accompanied free-jazz poet Steve Dalachinsky; here, he joins forces with three much younger Finnish musicians of varied backgrounds. Pianist Aki Rissanen is a rising star around Europe; drummer Jussi Lehtonen has

Joanna Wallfisch

The Origin Of Adjustable Things

SUNNYSIDE 1405

★★★★½

British singer-songwriter Joanna Wallfisch draws on several traditions. On the one hand you can come up with folk-pop references, from Becca Stevens and Kate McGarry to, of course, Joni Mitchell. Of the dozen songs here, two make that connection explicit: Tim Buckley's "Song To A Siren" and Radiohead's "Creep." And there are jazz standards like Dimitri Tiomkin and Ned Washington's "Wild Is The Wind" and Jay Livingston and Ray Evans's "Never Let Me Go." But Wallfisch also sites plainsong and chant as inspirations (her mother is a baroque violinist, her father a cellist). And, taken as a group, this collection suggests the sung poetry of contemporary art songs.

In that regard, she has a perfect creative partner in pianist Dan Tepfer—who is a regular in Lee Konitz's quartet, has recorded his own improvisations on Bach's "Goldberg Variations," and leads his own adventuresome trio. Though the originals here are all credited to Wallfisch, Tepfer clearly knows her mind, whether elaborating on the 7/8 wordless vocal that introduces album opener "This Is How You Make Me Feel" or finding the perfect jazz chords for "Wild Is The Wind." The additional instrumentation—multi-tracked vocals, Mellotron, Wurlitzer, pump organ—are used judiciously, with acoustic keyboard and Wallfisch's crystalline delivery out front.

played in '70s fusion revival ensembles; and bassist Jori Huhtala has played high-energy fare on his own and with guitarist Raoul Björkenheim.

The quartet finds common ground in the examples of Wayne Shorter's Blue Note sessions and the earlier recordings of the John Coltrane Quartet. This is music that Liebman knows first hand, and it must have been a gas for the Finns to play with someone who can bring that personal history, but their ability to engage with it varies. When Lehtonen opens the throttle, he and Liebman strike sparks. Huhtala provides solid support throughout, but only very occasionally moves beyond that role (though he shines most when he does so, as on the moody "Free Ballad").

Rissanen, who is the date's lead composer, sounds best when he plays least; his sparse interjections on the same track bring mystery, but the lush fullness of his playing at other points turns the music lukewarm, like coffee with too much cream mixed in. Liebman plays with authority throughout.

The record ends on a strong but paradoxically frustrating point. "The Gong Song" uses prepared piano and Liebman's wooden flute to set an exotic atmosphere; one wishes that the quartet had worked more with that broader palette.

—Bill Meyer

Aki Rissanen/Jussi Lehtonen Quartet with Dave Liebman: Scriabin; Three A's; Internal Affairs; Pont Marie; Get Over It; Pansativa (Clare Fischer); Free Ballas (The Quartet); In The Corner; Pastoral; The Gong Song (The Quartet). (53:41)

Personnel: Dave Liebman, tenor and soprano saxophone, wooden flute; Aki Rissanen, piano; Jussi Lehtonen, drums; Jori Huhtala, bass.

Ordering info: ozellamusic.com



The emphasis throughout is on intimacy—the intake of breath before a phrase, the subtle chiaroscuro effects of dynamics, dissonance, or vibrato. "Brighton Beach" conjures the Brooklyn locale with the sound of children's voices and an oompah-pah pump organ. Details like this as well as Wallfisch's gothic lyric touches suggest sepia-tone period pieces that all also resolutely modern. And her focused, serene delivery of those jazz standards will melt any purist's heart. —Jon Garelick

The Origin Of Adjustable Things: This Is How You Make Me Feel; Satin Grey; Satellite; Song to a Siren; Creep; Time Doesn't Play Fair; Anonymous Journeys; Brighton Beach; The Origin of Adjustable Things; Wild Is the Wind; Rational Thought; Never Let Me Go. (49:00)

Personnel: Joanna Wallfisch, voices, piano (8); Dan Tepfer, piano, Yamaha CFX piano Mellotron (3), Wurlitzer (6, 9); pump organ (8).

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com



Bob Gingery

Traveler

FRESH SOUND NEW TALENT 456

★★★

Mike Baggetta's guitar harmonics and Mark Ferber's drum rolls usher in "Second Nature," setting the stage, and the bar, for bassist Bob Gingery's intelligent debut, *Traveler*. The medium tempo tune generates a bluesy groove, marked by solos from tenor saxophonist Jon Irabagon and Baggetta. The two create interesting textures, Irabagon's thick tonalities playing off Baggetta's leaner, more abstract lines.

The eight originals are melodic and nuanced, gaining power in the last three tracks. Gingery doesn't shy from the spotlight. The first of his several solos occurs on the brisk Kenny Wheeler homage, "Wheeling," and the last and most developed occurs on "Cadence," the tune that caps the disk. The album turns cinematic with "Boot Hill." Irabagon's solo is alternately declamatory and yearning, and when Baggetta comes in, angular and demanding, the tension escalates. This is showdown jazz, slammed home by the leader's wiry lines and Ferber's hard drums.

Each tune parses well and serves up a different texture. The key instigator of that variety is Baggetta, who mounts several different sonic attacks. On the rambling title tune, his sound is wide; on "Inland Empire," it's more coiled, befitting the single-note forays that give this tune its romantic flavor; and on the introspective "Past Lives," it's rich, Baggetta bedding his thoughtful lines in unusual chords.

One tune is just plain fun: "Three Legged Dog," a take on New Orleans second line, features Irabagon in full cry. The album seems to swell toward the end, segueing from the languorous "Past Lives" to the longest track, "Cadence." This final tune is airy and aspiring, evoking the wheat-field reveries of early Pat Metheny as Irabagon and Baggetta steer the melody toward improvisation. "Cadence" is not only beautiful, it's free-wheeling. Irabagon soars, Baggetta flexes and spreads, Ferber plays around, atop and behind, and Gingery, a precise anchor, puts it all together.

—Carlo Wolff

Traveler: Second Nature; Wheeling; Boot Hill; Traveler; Inland Empire; Three Legged Dog; Past Lives; Cadence. (53:24)

Personnel: Mike Baggetta, guitar; Mark Ferber, drums; Bob Gingery, bass; Jon Irabagon, tenor saxophone.

Ordering info: freshsoundrecords.com

Grant Stewart Trio

CELLAR LIVE 12215

★★★★

Grant Stewart's new record takes its cues from the sound and style of late 1950s/early 1960s hard-bop and the trio records of Sonny Rollins. Tenorist Stewart has an authoritative tone and a confident delivery, with phrasing that is not rushed and a sense of timing that allows him to get his ideas across and follow them to their conclusion. A natural complement to this style, bassist Paul Sikivie

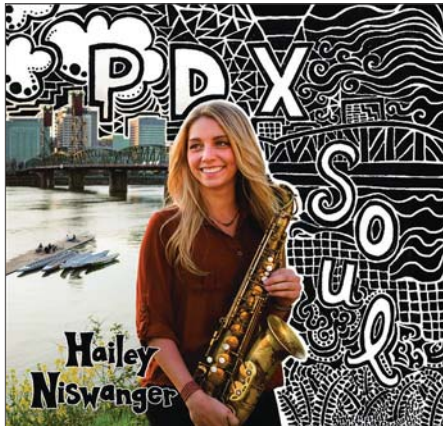
and Stewart's brother Phil on drums provide unobtrusive support when needed. They also step up several times with great exchanges on "Everything I Love" and a great outro on "The Thrill Is Gone." In this day and age, where things have to be new to be noticed, Stewart's trio takes its cues from classic jazz and makes a valid artistic and entertaining statement on this record.

—David Kunian

Cellar Live: A Time To Smile; Everything I Love; I'll Never Be The Same; Everything's Coming Up Roses; The Thrill Is Gone; This Is New; I Surrender Dear; Uranus; Is That All There Is. (54:50)

Personnel: Grant Stewart, tenor saxophone; Paul Sikivie, acoustic bass; Phil Stewart, drums.

Ordering info: cellarlive.com



Hailey Niswanger PDX Soul

SELF-RELEASE

★★

Once an artist makes music in the smooth jazz/funk/soul direction, there's already a staking of a certain territory. If this music is going to sound smooth, it better rise above the rest of the pocket. Hailey Niswanger's *PDX Soul* does not rise above the rest of the pocket. It's more of an album for the linen suit set, getting funky without ever approaching *stank*. This is a departure from her previous, more straight-ahead work, which may certainly be a disappointment to those who have followed the 25-year-old musician's career so far. Yet her desire to come off as accessible ventures toward hokey. If there are any redeeming factors to *PDX Soul*, it's in some of the few more interesting moments of musicianship. Brian Foxworth's drumming at the tail end of the album opener, "I'm Gone," will raise some previously drooping eyebrows. Tahirah Memory's vocals on "Yes, I'm Ready" would sound clearer and much more resounding with better sound mixing. George Colligan plays the keyboard serviceably well on his tracks.

—Anthony Dean-Harris

PDX Soul: I'm Gone; Skytime; Say What It Is; Let A Woman Be A Woman, Let A Man Be A Man; Yes, I'm Ready; You Should Know; Look Out; Take Me to the River. (45:29)

Personnel: Hailey Niswanger, alto and soprano saxophones; Thara Memory, trumpet and vocals (3, 6, 7); Janice Scroggins, keyboard (1-6, 8); Erick Lewis, bass; AG Donnalioia, guitar; Louis Pain, B-3 organ (3, 5-8); Brian Foxworth, drums (1, 3, 4, 6); Israel Annoh, drums (7, 8); Christopher Brown, drums (2, 5); Stan Bock, trombone (3-6, 8); Renato Caranto, tenor saxophone (3-5, 8); Ben McDonald, trumpet (3-5, 8); Andy Stokes, vocals (4); Tahirah Memory, vocals (5, 6); LaRhonda Steele, vocals (8); George Colligan, keyboard (1, 6); Curtis Craft, percussion (2, 6).

Ordering info: haileyniswanger.com



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Paying Dues

The year 2015 finds many hip-hop artists demonstrating their thorough knowledge of the genre's history in their own work, whether it's through album-length themes and motifs, lyrics or musical choices.

Take **Kendrick Lamar's *To Pimp A Butterfly* (Top Dawg/Aftermath/Interscope 0602547270917; 78:51 ★★★★★)**, an album

whose massive length complements the weight of its achievement. The music is a cyclonic storm of jazz, indie electronica,

P-Funk and West Coast G-funk, all played by an ace roster of renowned jazz musicians—including Terrace Martin and Kamasi Washington on horns, Robert Glasper on keys and Stephen Bruner, aka Thundercat, on bass—and produced by L.A. beat maestros such as Flying Lotus and Sounwave. Lamar himself is a syntactic sorcerer whose lyrics on this album accentuate three B's: braininess, braggadocio and black power rhetoric. A political commentary on racism and capitalism in America filtered through a gumbo of 20th- and 21st-century black countercultural music, Lamar's album is more prescient and ambitious than almost anything else out there.

Ordering info: txdx.com

On the opposite end of the spectrum is ***Souvenirs Of Love* (Double Moon 71149; 73:25 ★★★★★)**, the latest LP from French-German pianist, producer and composer **Meeco**. Rooted in jazz, the album nonetheless incorporates elements of hip-hop, spoken word, r&b and soul. Unlike Lamar, the appearance of other musical genres feels out-of-place and incongruous with Meeco's purpose, which is to deliver love songs over a bed of soul-jazz as plush as the emotional content. But when Talib Kweli appears on "Times Have Changed" it feels as if Meeco is saying that the jazz isn't strong enough to stand on its own.

Ordering info: challengerecords.com

Even when their records sample only one artist, Sacramento duo **Death Grips** is fearless. ***The Powers That B* (Harvest 2547120083; 110:00 ★★★★★)** collects two albums: 2014's *Niggas On The Moon*, whose songs all prominently feature chopped samples of the Icelandic singer Björk, and this year's *Jenny Death*. Death Grips' aesthetic is as indebted to noise-rock and experimental music as it is to hip-hop, largely thanks to drummer Zach Hill, a veteran of technically complex noise acts such as Hella and Marnie Stern. Producer Andy Morin keeps Hill's drumming and the samples suitably cluttered, and rapper/hardcore singer Stefan Burnett heaves abstract tirades and slogans into the mix.



Kendrick Lamar

CHRISTIAN SAN JOSE/TOP DAWG ENTERTAINMENT

Ordering info: harvestrecords.com

New Orleans rapper **Curren\$y** isn't doing anything radical musically, but as an MC he's one of the most compelling artists working. ***Pilot Talk III* (Jet Life; 54:05 ★★★★★)** is the third and perhaps best installment of an ongoing series of colorful and charmingly funky records that also mostly feature instrumentals from producer Ski Beatz. Curren\$y is the main draw, a prolific and playful rapper who is stoner rap's Thelonious Monk; his seemingly stream-of-consciousness lyrics are delivered in odd meter, but the execution makes it sound natural.

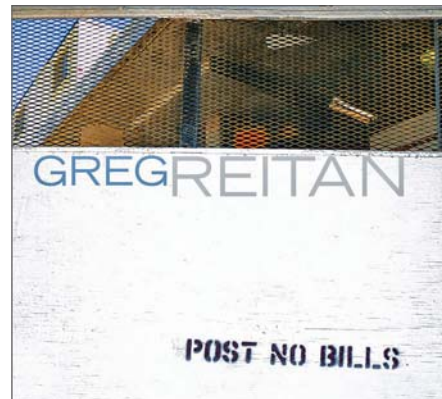
Ordering info: jet-life.com

If Curren\$y's humorous persona were turned up to 11, you might get somewhere close to the unshamed decadence of Queens rapper **Action Bronson**. A bulky MC who recalls gruff New York City rap collectives of the 1990s—Wu-Tang Clan, Boot Camp Clik, D.I.T.C.—Bronson is famous for his literal appetite (he hosts a cooking show for Vice) and his absurd, random aspirational fantasies (such as putting a Jacuzzi on the 7 train). His major-label debut ***Mr. Wonderful* (Atlantic/Vice 549151; 49:18 ★★★★★)** isn't a huge advancement on his mixtapes and underground releases, but thanks to big-time producers like Mark Ronson, Noah "40" Shebib and the Alchemist, the beats signal the feel of classic rock.

Ordering info: atlanticrecords.com

The boom-bap sound of Bronson's album is a throwback to hip-hop beats of the mid-'90s, of which **Pete Rock** is one of the two or three most famous producers. Rock's sampling technique is legendary, and ***Petestrumentals 2* (Mello Music Group 069; 58:33 ★★★★★)**, a loose sequel to 2001's *Petestrumentals*, is a showcase of his signature sound, in which brief sound bites taken from jazz and soul records are expertly looped over taut, unfussy 4/4 drum breaks. Rock wields the sampler with as much expertise as an ace jazz musician; concordantly, his beats convey just as much emotion and skill.

Ordering info: mellomusicgroup.com



Greg Reitan *Post No Bills*

SUNNYSIDE 1395

★★★

It was arguably Bill Evans who opened the door toward reconfiguring trios or quartets so that each member was equal, as opposed to everyone else supporting the leader. Since then, this has become the dynamic behind many a session. It has also encouraged countless improvisers to become more enamored of the freedom they embrace than its potential for reimagining their approach to melody as theme.

This is well illustrated on *Post No Bills*. All three players are obviously gifted. They play freely though always with an awareness of what the others are doing. On most of these tracks, though, they operate somewhat weightlessly, with written content exerting little or no pull. The result is unfailingly listenable and at times exciting but more frequently it feels incomplete.

Reitan's performances encourage this perception. With the exception of a few well-known tunes written with especially bewitching melodies, the material doesn't anchor his solos. And so, on his original waltz "Spring," it's difficult to discern a coherent motif from the top; he seems to be in free flight almost from the first chord change. Here, as on every other cut, Reitan spins out long single lines and supports them with very light chording in his left hand. Even these comps can evaporate for a while, leaving the right hand to soar and dive with finesse but no apparent destination.

When tackling a tune that was conceived for blowing more than singing, Reitan takes that as an invitation to once again swoop and fly. The group takes Chick Corea's "Windows" through some agreeable changes in rhythm and texture, over which the piano's single lines soar hither and yon before settling, like a feather let go by the wind, on a final triad. "Stella By Starlight" takes a different approach. It begins with a bass solo, which is just as free as Reitan's excursions until piano and drums come in at a whisper, insinuating the song and setting the stage for Reitan to build on it by himself and then with Daro and Koba charging in at full steam.

—Bob Doerschuk

Post No Bills: The Mourning Of A Star; One Day I'll Fly Away; Stella By Starlight; Lonely Woman; Spring; I Loves You, Porgy; Windows; After The War; Post No Bills; Solitude. (46:12)

Personnel: Greg Reitan, piano; Jack Daro, bass; Dean Koba, drums.

Ordering info: sunnysiderezone.com



Cory Weeds
Condition Blue

CELLAR LIVE 111214
★★★★★

Club owner, record label head and damn good saxophonist Cory Weeds dedicates the 100th album on his Cellar Live imprint to Jackie McLean. *Condition Blue* seems to be the second in a series of tributes, the first being *Up A Step: The Music Of Hank Mobley*, with the key ingredient in both being the presence of Mike LeDonne, organist extraordinaire.

The decision to transfer the keyboard chair from piano to B-3 signifies that neither project attempts to replicate the the original versions. It also ensures that Weeds has a tremendous soloist

and rhythm player in his quartet.

Condition Blue emanates a different energy than McLean's hard-bop explorations. Weeds and his colleagues play off of each other skillfully and intuitively. All four players know how to listen, to toss ideas back and forth even at full-sprint tempos and to improvise at a virtuoso level, all with the goal of creating a singular intensity. Listening, you notice both their exemplary musicianship and the unity they achieve.

When McLean cut these same titles 50 or more years ago, the idea wasn't to come together as a unit as it was to blow the roof off. Part of this stems from his use of restless, inventive and hard-driving pianists. Organ textures can be like electric blankets, keeping everything cozy and warm. But with guys like Herbie Hancock and Harold Mabern at the piano, every component of McLean's bands was constantly cooking individually, rather than pursuing seamlessness. They were defining a new approach to playing, with all the energy that requires, as opposed to Weeds' more retrospective intentions.

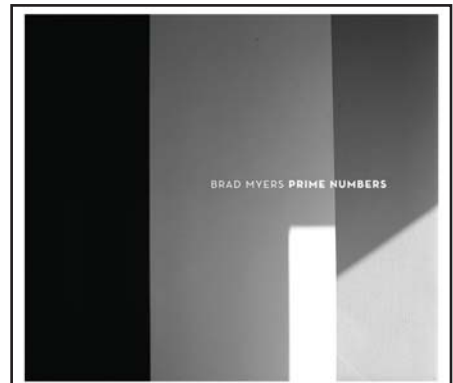
Condition Blue honors both its subjects and its personnel and thus achieves the goal all tribute albums should pursue. But it also shows how difficult it is for even top-level players to capture the spirit that comes from inventing something new.

—Bob Doerschuk

Condition Blue: Condition Blue; Slumber; Capuchin Swing; My Old Flame; Snuff; Marilyn's Dilemma; Das Dat; Jackknife; Bluesanova; Blues In A Jiff. (61:29)

Personnel: Cory Weeds, alto saxophone; Mike LeDonne, Hammond B-3 organ; Peter Bernstein, guitar; Joe Farnsworth, drums.

Ordering info: cellarlive.com



Brad Myers
Prime Numbers

The debut recording on Colloquy Records. Featuring Chris Barrick, Ben Walkenhauer, Peter Gemus, Tom Buckley, Michael Mavridoglou, and Dominic Marino. Myers' compositions are intricate, but never contrived; challenging, but totally accessible; and innovative, but consistently lyrical.

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Kevin Hays
New Day

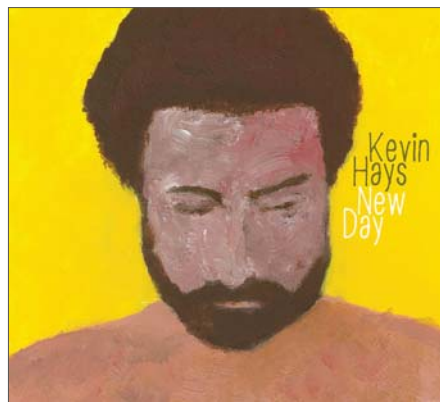
SUNNYSIDE
★★★★★

Chirpy is probably the best way to describe *New Day*, like birds in the trees on a spring morning full of promise. Hays maintains a rootsy quality in his playing and his core trio of Rob Jost on bass and Greg Joseph on drums and percussion fit together like bacon, eggs and Cholula hot sauce.

Hays' vocals throughout aren't anything to write home about, but they're just what these songs need. Hays' soul is in this music, his voice included. Grégoire Maret gives just a soupçon more with his harmonica, and Tony Scherr's guitars give an extra tinge throughout. The folksy Americana touches to this kind of jazz run through Hays' songs here as though they generate their own warmth. In this music, Hays is fulfilling the promise of the album's new day.

"Milton" is a rhythmic marvel. It weaves and noodles. It's easy to get lost in, which is befitting enough for a tribute to Brazilian musician Milton Nascimento. One could try to count all the time signatures in these songs if it's that important. Sure, "Run To The Sun" is in 11/8, but it's also a really fun song that doesn't need all that nerdery to truly enjoy it.

The chirpiness even continues through what feels like a pull from some forgotten Robert Altman film, the old west homage "Waltz For Wollesen", which is inspired but may not be folks' favorite tracks. It's like the interludes from '70s



Joni Mitchell albums. It's a question of taste, but a "hit or miss" assessment is still there.

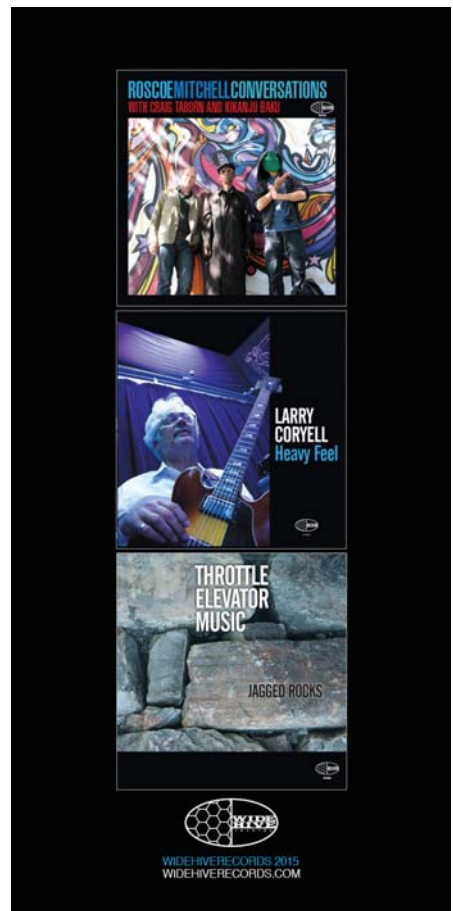
Yet through all its highs and lows in the vibe (but never the quality), Hays, in his first album as a leader in four years, has released a feel good work, exactly the kind of tonal direction that warms the heart and welcomes repeat listens. One can't get tired of the chirpiness of *New Day*, just like one can't get tired of hearing birds singing their songs on spring mornings.

—Anthony Dean-Harris

New Day: Run to the Sun (Instrumental); New Day; Trugder's Paradise; Milton; The Sun Goes Down; Kurtish; All I Have; Sugar Man; Waltz for Wollesen; Highwayman; Time Waits, Run to the Sun (Vocal).

Personnel: Kevin Hays, piano, Fender Rhodes, Wurlitzer, vocals; Grégoire Maret, harmonica; Tony Scherr, electric and acoustic guitar; Rob Jost, electric and acoustic bass; Greg Joseph, drums and percussion.

Ordering info: sunnysidezone.com



Sachal *Slow Motion Miracles*

OKeH 503957

★★★

The best pop singers have timeless instruments, which helps to explain the longevity of great vocalists from Frank Sinatra to Smokey Robinson. Styles change, but the voice transcends.

Singing love songs over layered contemporary electro-acoustic backing, Chicago native Sachal Vasandani sounds hip enough—his conversational, highly percussive delivery paying dues to both hip-hop and singer-songwriters like Paul Simon. But his voice sounds paper-thin on his OKeH debut, devoid of anything approaching true emotion, and his lack of depth is only accentuated by the mechanical-sounding synthesizers and drum machines that saturate songs like “Denim Lines” and “Haystacks.”

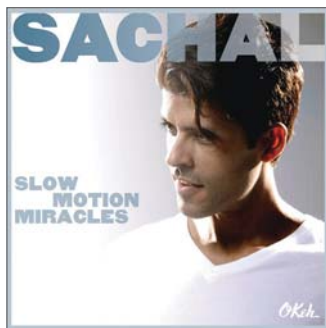
He sounds more authentic on Jim Weatherly’s composition “Neither One Of Us (Wants To Be The First To Say Goodbye).” Here, on the closing song, he recalls a latter-day James Taylor, but it’s too little, too late to counter the saccharine approach of the preceding nine songs. Sachal previously recorded three albums for Mack Avenue, and one might think that a major label debut (OKeH is now a boutique label of its parent, Sony Masterworks) would warrant more than a sub-LP 36 minutes of music. In the end, Sachal fails that essential test a great pop singer must face: Can the voice win you over regardless of the setting or the material?

—James Hale

Slow Motion Miracles: No More Tears; Denim Lights; Marie; Slow Motion Miracles; Haystacks; Can’t Talk; Cover The Water; Afternoon Sun; Waiting On The Roof; Neither One Of Us (Wants To Be The First To Say Goodbye). (36:15)

Personnel: Sachal, vocals, keyboards, electronics; Taylor Eigsti, keyboards, synthesizers; Gerald Clayton, piano; Ryan Scott, guitar; Buster Hemphill, electric bass; David Wong, bass; Nate Smith, drums; Mark Guilliana, drums, drum machine.

Ordering info: okeh-records.com



Mikko Innanen with William Parker and Andrew Cyrille *Song For A New Decade*

TUM 042

★★★★★

The lifeblood of any art form is just that: fresh blood. Finnish saxophonist Mikko Innanen is one of the most compelling new voices on the European improvised music scene with over 40 recordings divided between leader and sideman. Collaborating here with two masters—bassist William Parker and drummer Andrew Cyrille—he further elevates his game to produce an exceptional two-CD outing of improvised music that is joyous, cantankerous, peaceful and funky.

A jovial sense of immediacy fills the eight tracks of Disc One. The shared sense of play is palatable, from Parker’s chattering lines to Cyrille’s somersaulting drums and pattering cymbal conversation. “The End Is The Beginning” mines a thoughtful message; “Karl’s Castle” is gutbucket low-down; “See You At 103” swings like Eric Dolphy and Ed Blackwell rolling dice. Disc Two is a six-part improvisation from Innanen and Cyrille recorded at IBEAM Brooklyn, New York City, and the spirit, while not as powerful as Disc One, is still in the house.

Free/improvised jazz may require more from the listener, but once understood the rewards are consistently in the here and now. Like Wayne Shorter once said, “Everything is always on the one.”

—Ken Micallef

Song for a New Decade: Disc One: Song For A New Decade; The End Is A Beginning; Karl’s Castle; Look For The Red Door, A Morning, A Day, A Night; See You At 103; Blue In Nublu, Small And Big Steps. (58:22) Disc Two: Song 1; Song 2; Song 3; Song 4; Song 5; Song 6. (55:14)

Personnel: Mikko Innanen, alto and baritone saxophones, Indian clarinet, Uilleann chanter, nose flute, whistles, percussion; William Parker, double bass (Disc One); Andrew Cyrille, drums

Ordering info: tumrecords.com



Russ Nolan *Call It What You Want*

RHINOCERUSS

★★★★½

The latest from reedman Russ Nolan is a fine combination of Latin, Cuban and Caribbean rhythms with modern jazz harmonies and lyricism.

On most of the songs the rhythms are less emphasized than the melodies, but both contribute to a greater whole of playing and composition. Compositions such as the title track and “Uncommon Air” have intervals, stops and starts that move into unexpected places, as if Thelonious Monk had written in a more Latin vein. No matter what the intervals, the rhythm section is on with solid vamps that allow the solos to speak rather than simply play. Nolan especially shines on the tune “Mi Remedio,” where his tenor work is sweet and relaxed. Some of the playing here recalls Joe Henderson’s 1960s Blue Note sides. Here the Caribbean beats are more subtle, but at times Nolan’s attack is reminiscent of Henderson. The rhythm section is locked in but never tense. Kudos to percussionist Victor Rendon whose work on various rhythm instruments includes a virtuoso turn on the jawbone of an donkey. Pianist Mike Eckroth and drummer Brian Fishler seem to have a great time pushing the band to play at a higher level. This record is full of good playing, great grooves and great interplay. Both hardcore jazz fans and more casual listeners will be able to hear the virtues of *Call It What You Want* and will be tapping their feet and bopping their heads.

—David Kunian

Call It What You Want: Neruda; My Ship; Disjunction; Call It What You Want; Mi Remedio; Jazz Is A Four Letter Word; Uncommon Air; Cancion Sabrosa; Las Teclas Negras. (52:34)

Personnel: Russ Nolan, tenor, soprano saxophone; Mike Eckroth, piano; Daniel Foose, acoustic bass; Brian Fishler, drums; Yasuyo Kimura, congas, bata drums; Victor Rendon, timbales, bongos, shekere, bata drums, woodblocks.

Ordering info: russnolan.com



Joe Fiedler Trio *I’m In*

MULTIPHONICS 002

★★★★★

In jazz, the preposition “in” is as loaded as its counterpart “out.” People take sides, arguments enliven and/or ruin evenings—you know the scene. Trombonist Joe Fiedler plays both sides on this delightful CD.

Fiedler is a veteran of big and small jazz, rock and Latin ensembles. He’s composed musical cues for *Sesame Street* and, in separate projects, paid tribute to Wayne Shorter and Captain Beefheart. He’s equally facile playing inside and outside, but just as important, he likes and respects both. The trio’s fourth recording marks out a boundary where these elements can cordially coexist, and then throws a party inside that perimeter.

The album opens with “The Grip,” a Latin piece built around a tricky but infectious phrase that confirms from the outset Fiedler’s fluid mastery of his instrument. The absence of a chordal instrument leaves plenty of room for each player to contribute fills and asides; the result is music that sounds like it was as much fun to play as it is to hear. “Erstwhile” follows, establishing the record’s far boundary with a richly textured drone articulated by bowed bass and trombone multiphonics. The mood set by this eerie passage opens up when drummer Michael Sarin’s cymbals and claves introduce another dancing rhythm, and from that point the pleasure resides in hearing them build a groove out of three-way counterpoint. Throughout its duration, *I’m In* yields similar pleasures, rewarding rigorous examination and casual appreciation.

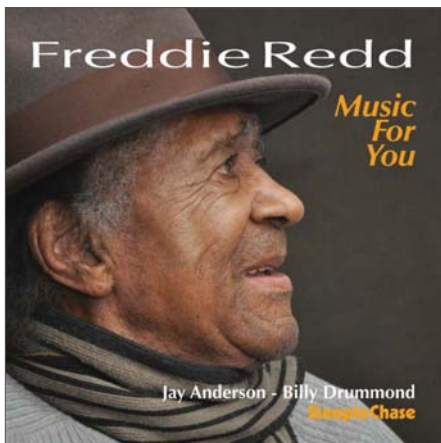
—Bill Meyer

I’m In: Grip; Erstwhile; In Walked Cleo; Moving In Silence; The New Denizens; I’m In; Completely Peccable; The Box; Tensegrity. (55:47)

Personnel: Joe Fiedler, trombone; Rob Jost, bass; Michael Sarin, drums.

Ordering info: joeiedler.com





Freddie Redd *Music For You*

STEEPLECHASE 31796



As one of the last of the hard-bop pioneers still standing, pianist Freddie Redd is a significant participant in jazz history. Sixty years have passed since Prestige released *Introducing The Freddie Redd Trio*, his debut recording as a leader. So, in a sense, this new trio session adds a pleasing symmetry to his story.

Music For You presents Redd in an autumnal light. He chooses his sidemen well; bassist Jay Anderson and drummer Billy Drummond provide gentle empathy, always adding just enough swing to keep things moving but never overwhelming Redd's fragility. Their accompaniment is the most impressive achievement here: With not much left of Redd's youthful percussive, driving attack and restless propulsion, they scale their parts back, stepping out only when Anderson takes a chorus or Drummond trades fours.

Eight of these nine tracks have been standards for generations, and the trio renders them traditionally. One states the tune at the top, the leader solos on the second verse, everyone else take a turn on subsequent verses up to a penultimate back-and-forth between the leader and the drummer and then you recapitulate the first verse at the end. There's nothing wrong with following the formula, though doing so reinforces the point that *Music For You* is about looking back, maybe a little wistfully.

The problem is that Redd exerts almost none of the gravity that leaders need to bring to the studio. He plays very sparsely, sounding at times a bit lost. "Cherokee" offers a painfully cautious solo piano intro; Drummond's entry on the second verse brings things immediately into focus but also highlights Redd's lack of assertion. His fills during the other guys' solos distract rather than enhance. Without the support provided by his colleagues, it's difficult to imagine that we could discern even the faint reminders of his legacy—which, rather than this effort, is what we honor.

—Bob Doerschuk

Music For You: There Will Never Be Another You; Blues For You; How High The Moon; All The Things You Are; Cherokee; Round About Midnight; Perdido; Lover Man; I'll Remember April. (73:58)

Personnel: Freddie Redd, piano; Jay Anderson, bass; Billy Drummond, drums.

Ordering info: steeplechase.dk

Historical / BY BRIAN ZIMMERMAN

A Star Is Born

Like all luminaries who have left an indelible imprint on jazz, guitarist **Wes Montgomery** didn't start out a legend. He earned that title. Born in 1923 to a musical family in Indianapolis, Montgomery didn't pick up a six-string guitar until he was 19 years old, and even then, received no formal training on the instrument. As an adult, he worked eight-hour shifts at a radio-parts factory to support his seven children, gigging at night and getting just four hours of sleep before doing it all again the next day.

That he would go on to become a standout guitarist in Lionel Hampton's band from 1948–'50



is a remarkable feat, a testament to his natural talent. That he would still be committed to his grueling schedule in 1959, when he was signed to the Riverside label by Cannonball Adderley and Orrin Keepnews, is a testament to his endurance. That he would later become one of the most recognizable figures in jazz, developing a musical style that would influence guitarists for years to come, is a testament to his genius. But all legends have to start somewhere.

In The Beginning (Resonance; 60:10/60:07 ★★★★★), a phenomenal collection of previously unreleased material recorded between 1949 and 1958, captures the start of Montgomery's career as it has never been captured before: with all of its creative energy and raw passion intact. The two-CD set, assembled by producer Zev Feldman, compiles some of the earliest recordings ever made of Montgomery and his musical brothers, pianist Buddy and bassist Monk.

Of the 26 tracks, 17 come from performances at Indiana venues The Turf Club and The Missile Lounge, as well as from a jam session at the home of Montgomery's sister Ervena. Five others were unearthed from a 1955 recording session run by Quincy Jones for the nascent Epic label in New York City. A recording of Wes and saxophonist Alonzo "Pookie" Johnson at a Chicago jazz club in 1957 and three recordings from a Spire Records session in 1949 round out the compilation.

Though the quality of these recordings is excellent, the live tracks still retain a raw, unpolished edge. *In The Beginning* is not without its share of

audience chatter, flubbed notes and the occasional rushed measure, but these blemishes only add to the charisma, painting a very real picture of the loose-knit, try-anything environment in which Montgomery would refine his sophisticated touch. From the Turf Club recordings, an early take on "Brazil" finds the young Montgomery employing his now familiar octaves over a frenetic drum beat by Sonny Johnson, while on "After You've Gone," the guitarist burns through single-note runs alongside "Pookie" Johnson. "Six Bridges To Cross," with its lazy, in-the-pocket melody, prefigures the easygoing swing-feel Montgomery would adopt in his later years, while on "I Should Care," the guitarist proves himself a tender, evocative accompanist next to vocalist Debbie Andrews.

From the Epic recordings—much cleaner in terms of audio quality—Montgomery and his brothers navigate the tight turns of "Love For Sale" and "Undecided" with unrivaled cohesion. On "All The Things You Are" from the Chicago recording, one can hear Montgomery testing the waters of the single-note/octave/chord formula that would define his legacy. And while Montgomery might be the only guitarist on this recording, it's impossible to not detect shades of Pat Martino, Pat Metheny, Emily Remler and Russell Malone.

In The Beginning portrays Montgomery as an innovator, a man slowly composing the grammar and syntax of a jazz dialect that would in time become a universal language. The compilation is bundled with insightful essays by authors Ashley Kahn and Bill Milkowski, photos from Duncan Schiedt and an excerpt from Buddy's unpublished book. It also includes reflections by producer Quincy Jones and guitarist Peter Townshend, both of whom note that Montgomery was famous not only for his musicality but also for his kindness and upstanding character.

To this day, that influence can still be felt. The legend of Wes Montgomery may have begun in a small club in Indianapolis, but it has yet to end. **DB**

Ordering info: resonancerecords.com

Andrew Drury Content Provider

SOUP AND SOUND 50001

★★★★½

Sometimes all you need is a good band, and Andrew Drury has assembled just such a thing to make *Content Provider*. Briggan Krauss and Ingrid Laubrock are highly simpatico saxophonists, capable of maintaining close formation through any number of conventional and otherworldly arrangements. And Brandon Seabrook is a master at bridging novel textures and stark, loadbearing figures that alternately shadow the horns or leave them free to craft elaborate figures in space.

Seabrook's strengths match Drury's merits as an instrumentalist. Sometimes his drumming looms over the rest of the music like suspension bridge towers, but on the album's sole cover, Clifford Brown's "Daahoud," he swings with deliciously decadent laziness. On other occasions he limits himself to scraped skins, which set off ballooning low-end resonations that fully occupy the space where the bassist might be in another band.

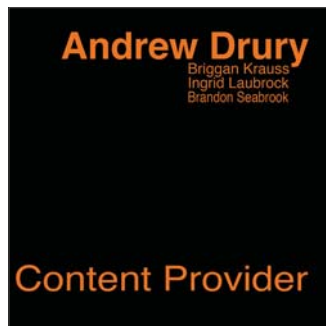
Drury's composing does not consistently match the quality of his playing. While the epic title track successfully juggles melodic expressions of humor and grandeur, fascinating textural explorations and woolly free-jazz tangles, other tunes frame the improvisations so prosaically that one wishes they'd simply play free. One hopes that a record of such an endeavor is already being considered.

—Bill Meyer

Content Provider: Keep The Fool; El Sol; Content Provider; Ancestors Friends Heroes; The Commune Of Brooklyn; Daahoud; The Band Is A Drum Set. (57:53)

Personnel: Andrew Drury, drum set, composer; Briggan Krauss, alto saxophone; Ingrid Laubrock, tenor saxophone; Brandon Seabrook, guitar.

Ordering info: andrewdrury.com



Lisanne Tremblay Violinization

INNER CIRCLE 042

★★★★

Despite fast-rising stars like Regina Carter and Christian Howes, and a legacy of creative pioneers like Stephane Grappelli and Leroy Jenkins, the violin remains a rare lead instrument in jazz. When a new voice like Lisanne Tremblay emerges, it's not hard to stand out. By the same token, it's impossible to avoid close scrutiny.

A native of Quebec, Tremblay can take the heat. She has technique in abundance. Her tone is impressively pure, she displays superb articulation and she's not afraid to use the full range of her instrument.

As fresh a voice as she has, her skills as a composer don't measure up. Many of her nine compositions are excessively vertical in nature, without much linear development. This type of structure provides a good showcase for Tremblay's instrumental prowess—including numerous scalar acrobatics and impressive rhythmic devices—but it doesn't create much variety or give her sidemen much to work with. Often, bassist Rémi-Jean Leblanc and drummer Philippe Melanson are left to comp rather than move things forward.

There is no mistaking the aptly named *Violinization* for anything but a debut recording by a virtuoso anxious to showcase her skills. While she is unquestionably talented enough to carry an hour of music in the spotlight, this would have been a stronger first outing had she taken a step back and aimed at creating a more measured, collaborative effort.

—James Hale

Violinization: Violinization; Change; Corde Sensible; Hoppelaye; Hacker; Tag; Ataraxie; Stellar Coincidence; Cubanisada; Con Toda Palabra. (59:15)

Personnel: Lisanne Tremblay, violin, vocals; Rafael Zaldivar, piano, percussion; Rémi-Jean Leblanc, bass; Philippe Melanson, drums.

Ordering info: lisannetremblay.com



Walking Distance Neighborhood

ROPEADOPÉ 260

★★★★★

Count the young, open-spirited band Walking Distance as an impressive contender in a new crop of ensembles representing the contemporary acoustic jazz aesthetic. It's a group that implicitly asks the musical question: Who's afraid of the avant-garde? On their debut album, these adept New Yorkers—

alto saxophonist Caleb Curtis, tenor saxophonist Kenny Pexton, bassist Adam Cote and drummer Shawn Baltazor—make a strong impact and take inventive routes in the format of a "chordless" quartet.

Nothing is as straight as it seems in this band's agenda. "Clockwork," the opening track, moves mercurially from rustling, simmering energies to a bold, declarative unison line. Humor is a part of the conceptual package, in subtle ways and attitudes, and via the inclusion of a tipsy, post-modern circus version of "I Could've Danced All Night." Bowing to the long-range influence of Ornette Coleman, they lay into the avant-swing thicket of "Dewey's Circle." Similarly, "Cartoon Element" is a restless freebop sketch of a melody tucked into a track just over a minute long. As another sly twist, the title track, "Neighborhood," is a 26-second freakout moment, before settling into the more sonorous and serious business of the glowingly balladic "April 10."

By turns adventurous and emotionally grounded, anarchic, tuneful, new-swinging and focused, Neighborhood announces the arrival of a creative firebrand of a band worth hearing and following.

—Josef Woodard

Neighborhood: Clockwork; The Following; I Could Have Danced All Night; Cartoon Element; Dewey Circle; Neighborhood; April 10th; B.B.; Singing in Circles; Willoughby Greene; Cartoon Element (reprise). (45:49)

Personnel: Caleb Curtis, alto saxophone; Kenny Pexton, tenor saxophone; Adam Cote, bass; Shawn Baltazor, drums.

Ordering info: ropeadope.com



The George Robert All-Star Quartet New Life

GPR 1008

★★★★½

In his liner notes to *New Life*, Swiss alto whiz George Robert alludes to a recent serious ailment, dedicating one tune on this live album to his older brother, "who saved my life during the final stages of my illness." No further clarification is offered, but whatever the problem was, not a trace of it lingers in his performance.

With the opening track recorded in Ascona, Switzerland, and the rest at another Swiss jazz venue in Thalwil, Robert dishes up seven original tunes. The group includes the Italian pianist Dado Moroni, whose presence and playing emphasize an inspiration from Cannonball Adderley's band when it featured keyboardist Joe Zawinul, who fed Adderley deep dishes of gospel funk.

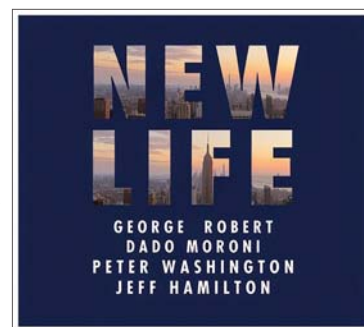
That's more or less how this quartet works, too. Again and again, Moroni calls up the old church-bred figures, the Bobby Timmons voicings, the crunched minor thirds, the flat-five bluesy falloffs. Though familiar, his contributions are exhilarating, especially for Robert, who responds exuberantly and inventively. And when Robert takes his turn, his command is complete. Along with a tendency to squeak out short upward glissandos to cap particularly bluesy phrases, he combines a resonant tone, taste, velocity and a full grasp of harmony. I didn't know he had been sidelined for a while, but it's great to have him back.

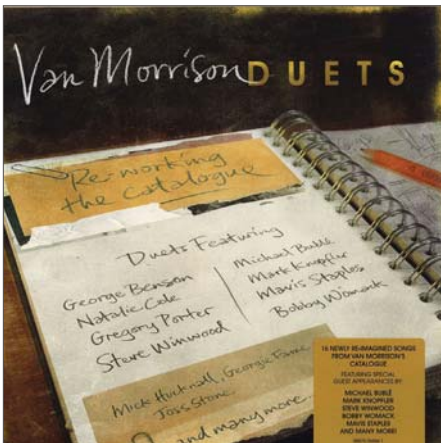
—Bob Doerschuk

New Life: Blue Ray; Dr. John's Calypso; Florence, Clouseau; Cannonball; Japanese Garden; Hammer's Tones. (50:30)

Personnel: George Robert, alto saxophone; Dado Moroni, piano; Peter Washington, bass; Jeff Hamilton, drums.

Ordering info: itunes.com





Van Morrison
Duets—Re-Working the Catalogue

RCA 88875-06844
 ★★½

Since he started his career in the mid-1960s, Van Morrison has been one of music’s most distinctive, instantly recognizable singer-songwriters, with his combination of working class Irish blues, American r&b and brooding, Celtic mysticism. His keening, soulful tenor is, probably, as strong today as when he recorded early hits like “Brown Eyed Girl” and “Moondance.”

Since making the groundbreaking *Astral Weeks* in 1969 with help from jazz legends Richard Davis and Connie Kay, Morrison has collaborated with artists from diverse musical genres, including John Lee Hooker, Mose Allison, Georgie Fame, Tom Jones and the Chieftains.

On his 35th studio album, co-produced with Don Was and Bob Rock, he revisits lesser-known songs from his extensive repertoire, singing duets with a terrific group of collaborators. This proves a lot more interesting than the more typical duet strategy of famous pop stars re-hashing their biggest hits. And if there’s nothing quite as catchy as “Domino” or “Jackie Wilson Said” in this set, there are some true gems that have been overlooked, in crisp arrangements that are sometimes better than the originals.

“Streets Of Arklow” (from 1974’s *Veedon Fleece*) is truly haunting, with a heavenly pairing of two blue-eyed soul greats, Morrison and Mick Hucknall. Another great rediscovery is the 1991 ballad “Carrying A Torch,” beautifully rendered here with exquisite help by British jazz singer Clare Teal. Elsewhere, Mavis Staples brings a healthy dose of church to “If I Ever Needed Someone” from 1970; Bobby Womack brings his unforgettable raspy voice and energy to “Some Peace Of Mind” (one of his last performances before his death in 2014); and there are star turns by Michael Bublé, Joss Stone, Gregory Porter and Steve Winwood.

Best of all is the album’s closer, the blues “How Can A Poor Boy?” from 2008’s *Keep It Simple*, sung with joyful abandon by Morrison and Taj Mahal. Unlike many a duet album by aging pop stars trying to stay relevant, *Re-Working The*

Catalogue enriches and illuminates its creator’s body of work.
 — Allen Morrison

Duets—Re-Working The Catalogue: Some Peace Of Mind; If I Ever Needed Someone; Higher Than The World; Wild Honey; Whatever Happened To P.J. Proby?; Carrying A Torch; The Eternal Kansas City; Streets Of Arklow; These Are The Days; Get On With The Show; Rough God Goes Riding; Fire In The Belly; Born To Sing; Irish Heartbeat; Real Real Gone; How Can A Poor Boy? (76:16)

Personnel: Van Morrison, vocals, guitar, alto saxophone; Bobby Womack (1), Mavis Staples (2), Joss Stone (4), P.J. Proby (5), Clare Teal (6), Gregory Porter (7), Mick Hucknall (8), Natalie Cole (9), Geor-

gie Fame (10), Shana Morrison (11), Chris Farlowe (13), Michael Bublé (15), vocals; George Benson, guitar and vocal (3); Steve Winwood, Hammond and vocal (12); Mark Knopfler, guitar and vocal (14); Taj Mahal, harmonica and vocal (16); Paul Moran, piano, Hammond, flugelhorn; Dave Keary, guitar; Bobby Ruggiero, drums, percussion, backing vocals; Chris White, tenor saxophone; Alistair White, Mark Nightingale, trombone; Mike Osborn, Abass Dodoo, Lilliana de los Reys (3), percussion; Paul Moore, Stanley Banks (3) bass; Jeff Lardner, Khari Parker (3) drums; David Garfield, piano (3); Chris White, tin whistle; Alan Chang, piano (15); Josh Brown, Nick Vayenas, trombones (15); Marcel Camargo, Ryan Lerman, guitar (15); Jean Caze, Justin Ray, Jumane Smith, trumpets (15); Marion Felder, drums (15); Craig Polasko, bass (15); Jacob Rodriguez, baritone saxophone (15); Jake Saslow, Rob Wilerson, alto saxophone (15).

Ordering info: rcarecords.com

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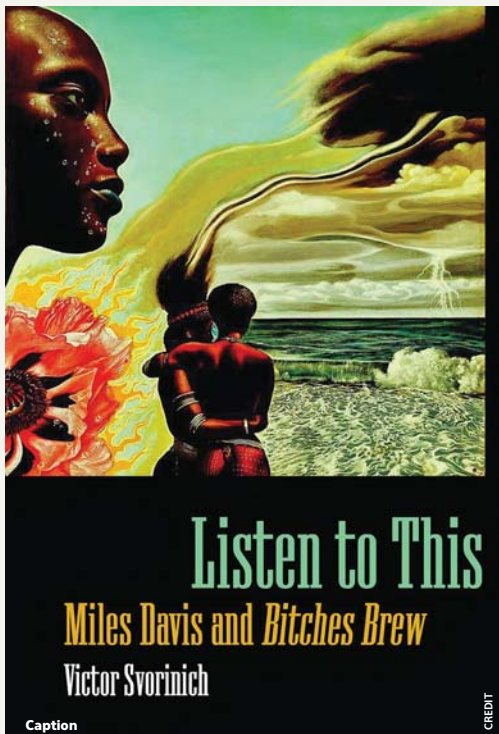
Strange Brews

With precision, laser-like focus, writer **Victor Svorinich** zooms in on the events leading up to the recording of a fusion landmark in *Listen to This: Miles Davis and Bitches Brew* (University Press of Mississippi). A guitarist, music educator and owner of the New Jersey-based Guitar Academy, Svorinich was a self-described Kiss fanatic before stumbling across a worn copy of *Bitches Brew* as a teenager. His thorough, scholarly approach to analyzing this important recording in Miles' massive discography leaves no stone unturned. From the four-color reproduction of surrealist Dutch painter Mati Klarwein's original African-meets-Tibetan album art on the book's glossy hardcover (front and back) to xerox copies of contracts, receipts and interoffice memos between Clive Davis, Bruce Lundvall, Teo Macero and Miles along with missives from other key players in the making and marketing of Davis' first bona fide rock album, this book tells all.

Svorinich carefully lays the groundwork for the forces that were set in place for the fruition of this seminal fusion project—the emergence of rock gods Jimi Hendrix and Sly Stone along with the black consciousness raps of James Brown on “Say It Loud—I’m Black and I’m Proud” and “Talking Loud And Saying Nothing” converging with racial unrest, social upheaval and the dawning of the Age of Aquarius at the Woodstock Music Festival of 1969. And he gives full credit to Miles' second wife, scenester Betty Mabry (she of the Hendrix-influenced “Mademoiselle Mabry” from 1968’s *Filles De Kilimanjaro*), along with the Moroccan clothiers Colette Mimram and Stella Douglas from the East Village boutique near the Fillmore East that Miles frequented, for recasting his look from Brooks Brothers to nouveau hippie and exposing him to the cutting-edge sounds of rock from that very potent time.

Incorporating revealing testimony from principal players culled from liner notes, previously published magazine articles and interviews he conducted for this project, Svorinich runs down (in excruciating detail) the three days of recording that culminated in Davis' first Gold Record while providing insightful annotation on each individual track. And he underscores the importance of producer Teo Macero to the outcome of this pivotal session in Miles' career, likening his input to George Martin's all-important role with The Beatles.

Along the way, there are inside anecdotes about Joe Zawinul's struggles to retain composer credit on “Pharaoh's Dance,” the inability of either Lenny White or Jack DeJohnette to cop the right feel on “Miles Runs The Voodoo Down” (his ode to Hendrix), the percussionist Don Alias' ultimate shifting to the kit and recreating a groove he had heard down in New Orleans during Mardi Gras, and the executive decision by Columbia Records



brass to emphatically push *Bitches Brew* as a rock album. As Lundvall wrote in an April 1, 1969, memo: “Once again, I feel we should place a few ads in the underground press for Miles Davis' Lp product. What Miles is doing on records and in his live appearances now will certainly be listened to with interest by serious Rock buyers. Can we plan some small space ads that aim Miles at the Rock audience?” Or as Clive Davis writes to Fillmore impresario Bill Graham in a Nov. 17, 1969, memo: “Historically, Miles Davis would not be of much interest to you for the Fillmore. However, I believe Miles is well on his way to really breaking out of his jazz bag. The ‘underground’ is ready for Miles. His sales have measurably increased and I have finally softened him to play the Fillmore type emporium. I would appreciate it if you could express interest to him.”

Or, more to the point, as Miles himself said in a 1969 interview: “I could put together the greatest rock and roll band you ever heard.”

And so he did, with John McLaughlin on guitar, Joe Zawinul, Chick Corea and Larry Young on keyboards, Jack DeJohnette and Lenny White on drums, Dave Holland and Harvey Brooks on bass, Wayne Shorter on saxes, Bennie Maupin on bass clarinet, and Don Alias, Badal Roy and Jumma Santos on percussion.

Ten years after he made jazz history with 1959's *Kind Of Blue*, Miles Davis made history once again with *Bitches Brew*. Read all about it in Svorinich's informative tome. **DB**

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Jon Regen *Stop Time*

MOTEMA 167

★★★★½

After topping Billboard charts in 2013 with the all-instrumental *Change Your Mind* (a Dr. Mitch Gaynor collaboration), pianist Jon Regen returns to the vibe of his earlier sound, giving his sharp songwriting skills top billing on *Stop Time*.

The disc's 10 artfully crafted originals feature spare arrangements shot through with the kind of upbeat blues sensibility that informs Randy Newman's work. And Regen clearly thrives in the trio setting, thanks in large part to his chemistry with sidemen Davey Faragher and Pete Thomas, two of Elvis Costello's Imposters.

Lyrical, Regen tackles themes of love, vulnerability, optimism and devotion in terms that alternate from wistful to humorous, all set against a backdrop of groove-laced swing.

On “Morning Papers,” his glowing tenor cradles simple yet moving lyrics about the moments when life's joys seem to boil down to our connection with the person we love. (“Every night when I go to bed,” he sings in a bright, register-climbing melody, “I think of all the things that still need to be said so when I wake up I can tell them all to you.”)

The title track, a highlight, merges the best of his talents as a vocalist and player, ushering a hooky, rhythmic chorus over a shuffle with piano lines that reverberate with soul.

Like a lot of love-centric pop, *Stop Time* has a few cloying moments; the vocals on “Run To Me” border on pained and “These Are The Days” might benefit from a slightly scaled back degree of sentimentality. In the end, they're minor concessions given the degree to which Regen's music shoots from—and directly into—the heart.

—Jennifer Odell

Stop Time: I Will Wait; Morning Papers; Run To Me; Borderline; Stop Time; Walk On Water; Annie; Home Again; Chapter Two; These Are the Days. (38:15).

Personnel: Jon Regen, piano, vocals; Davey Faragher, bass; Pete Thomas, drums.

Ordering info: motema.com



SFJAZZ Collective
Live: SFJAZZ Center 2014: The Music Of Joe Henderson And Original Compositions

SFJAZZ RECORDS
 ★★★★★

For the majority of its 12-year history, the SFJAZZ Collective has chosen a composer (or, in the case of Stevie Wonder, a songwriter) to spotlight each season. Its eight members each arrange a piece from the honoree's repertoire and pen an original for the group as well.

In the past, SFJAZZ has paid tribute to composers Chick Corea, Thelonious Monk, Herbie Hancock and Ornette Coleman, among others. On their most recent release, the San Francisco-based ensemble celebrates the music of saxophonist Joe Henderson, a prolific composer whose 1963 album, *Page One*, launched a number of jazz standards. Henderson, who was born in Lima, Ohio, and who earned his reputation in Detroit, moved to San Francisco in 1971 and became an active teacher of the city's young jazz players.

One should take an old-school approach to this live recording, which was captured last October at the SFJAZZ Center, and re-sequence a newer-school playlist so that the arrangement of Henderson's works are heard first followed by the Collective originals as B-sides or deep cuts.

The late saxophonist's compositions that are arranged and performed span the years 1963 ("Recorda-Me" and "Jinrikisha" from *Page One*) to 1980 ("Y Todavía La Quiero" from *Relaxin' At Camarillo*). It's an impressive reminder of Henderson's considerable body of work.

"A Shade Of Jade" was originally recorded with a sextet that featured vibraphonist (and founding Collective member) Bobby Hutcherson; its interpretation here is thus closest in instrumentation to the original. Edward Simon's arrangement showcases the cohesion that the horn players have developed over three years of playing together.

Avishai Cohen's take on "Inner Urge," in turn, is less driving and more explorative than the original version, thanks in part to vibraphonist Warren Wolf's dreamy comping and Simon's ethereal solos. And thanks to Robin Eubanks' arrangement, "Black Narcissus" maintains its simmering sense of mystery and longing.

If the album has a potential "hit single," it'd have

to be drummer Obed Calvaire's heart-achingly melodic "Absolvents." Written as an apology to the mother of his four-year-old daughter, it's instantly memorable and very well may be played by others for years to come. Alto saxophonist Miguel Zenón's ambitious three-part "Synthesis Of A Band" suite takes advantage of the octet's format and was inspired by his three of frontline mates.

Tenor saxophonist David Sánchez's elegant "Eternal Wait" opens with those four instrumentalists regally playing a cappella before being joined by delicate support from the augmented rhythm section. An explorative solo by bass-

ist Matt Penman pierces the tranquility and is buoyed by Calvaire's fluid toms and cymbal work. —Yoshi Kato

The Music Of Joe Henderson And Original Compositions: Disc 1: Recorda-Me; A Shade Of Jade; Big Tent; Little Tent; Cross Currents; Inner Urge; Four Stars From Heaven; Eternal Wait; Fire. (65:38) Disc 2: Y Todavía La Quiero; Afro-Centric; Synthesis Of A Band, Part 1; Synthesis Of A Band, Part 2; Synthesis Of A Band, Part 3; Black Narcissus; Locura; Evolution; Absolvents; Jinrikisha. (63:22)
Personnel: Miguel Zenón, alto saxophone; arranging (Disc 1, track 1); David Sánchez, tenor saxophone, arranging (Disc 2, track 1); Avishai Cohen, trumpet, arranging (Disc 1, track 5); Robin Eubanks, trombone, arranging (Disc 2, track 6); Warren Wolf, vibraphone, arranging (Disc 2, track 10); Edward Simon, piano, arranging (Disc 1, track 2); Matt Penman, bass, arranging (Disc 2, track 2); Obed Calvaire, drums, arranging (Disc 1, track 8).
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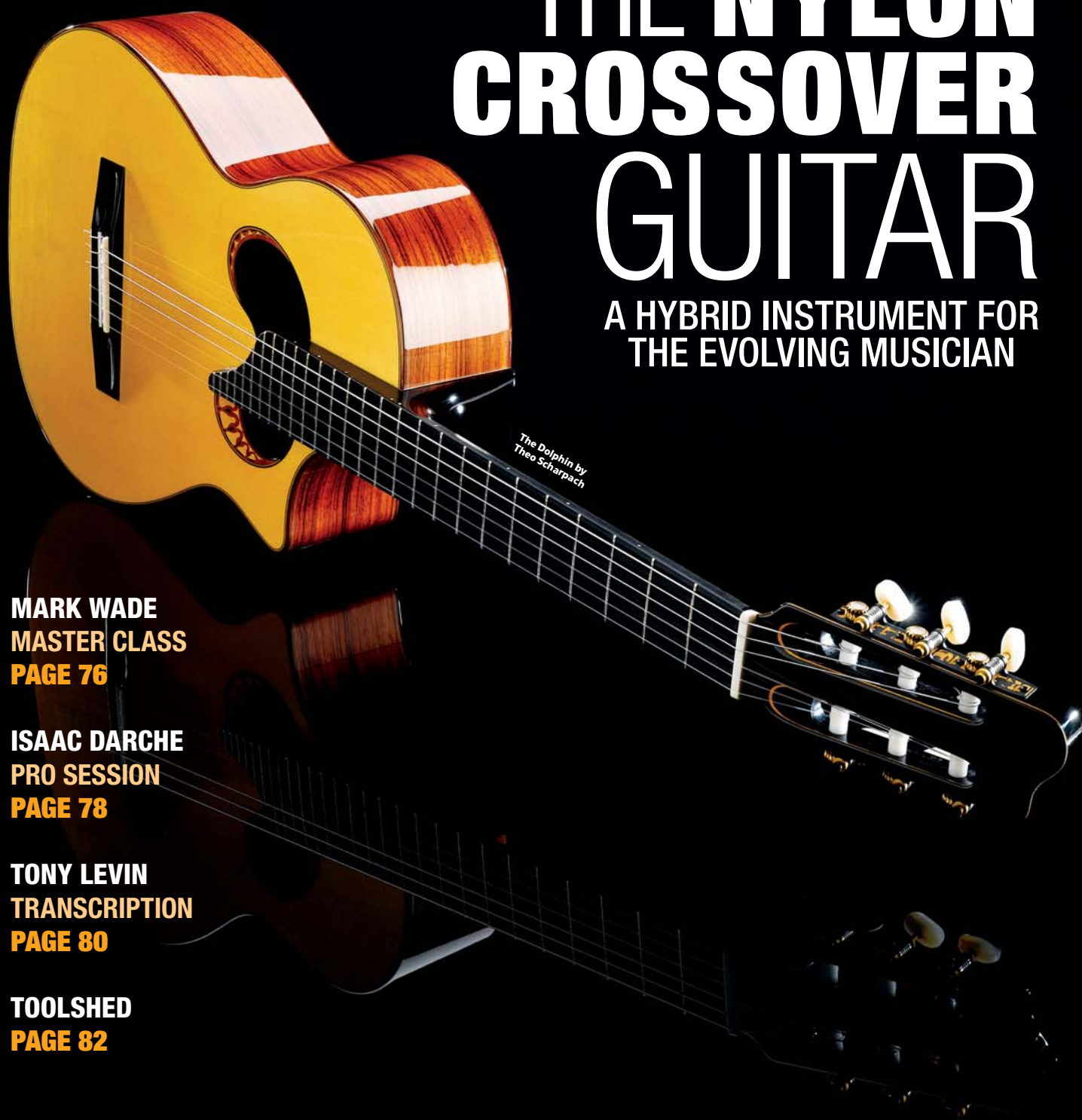
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THE NYLON CROSSOVER GUITAR

A HYBRID INSTRUMENT FOR
THE EVOLVING MUSICIAN



The Dolphin by
Theo Scharpach

MARK WADE
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GUITAR SCHOOL

THE NYLON CROSSOVER GUITAR

A HYBRID INSTRUMENT FOR THE EVOLVING MUSICIAN

BY KEITH BAUMANN

The acoustic guitar has an ancestry that dates back thousands of years and includes contributions from numerous cultures throughout the world. However, the birth of the modern classical guitar is generally credited to Spanish luthier Antonio de Torres—who, in the 1850s, introduced many of the design concepts and construction techniques that would become the blueprint for all classical guitar makers to follow.

Prior to Torres' innovations, guitars featured small, shallow bod-

ies and strings manufactured from animal gut, which resulted in very low projection. Torres increased the body size and reconfigured its shape, developed a fan bracing system and added a new bridge design to create a more efficient instrument and to maximize the volume created by the gut strings. In the United States, a German immigrant named Christian Fredrich Martin was developing his own plans for the guitar, and his innovations would forever split the guitar world into two distinct camps.

Martin, founder of the Martin Guitar Company, understood the unique demands of the American market. In the early 1900s, he realized the need for a guitar capable

of increased volume that could compete alongside the banjo and mandolins that were at the height of popularity at that time. His solution was to utilize the same steel strings used on those instruments on his guitars. The radical difference in string tension between gut and steel required some design alterations, and Martin developed the X-bracing system to handle the increased pressure. This was an extremely significant milestone in guitar evolution.

With the guitar world now divided between gut and steel strings, there was much debate over the benefits and disadvantages of each. Each of these instruments produced a drastically different sound and even required different techniques to play. The largely European classical music world remained firmly planted in the gut camp, and the mainly American folk and popular music players went with steel. In the



Archangel by Murray Kuun

Taylor 812ce-N

mid-1940s, a shortage of gut due to the surgical needs of World War II prompted the changeover to a newly developed material called nylon. Quickly realizing its advantages—such as increased volume and better tuning stability—nylon soon became the standard for classical guitars.

Over the years, many non-classical musicians have been drawn toward nylon, finding that it offers a depth of expression and sensitivity not available with steel. Particularly well suited for fingerstyle, many folk and jazz players have adopted nylon-string guitars. In fact, it is the preferred choice in much of South American jazz. Unfortunately, steel-string and classical guitars feature some basic ergonomic differences that present a real challenge to players who seek to transition between the two types of instruments. Most notably, the wider nut width of the classical along with the flat fingerboard and lower string tension represent a serious frustration to musicians moving from steel to nylon. Also, the lower volume of an unamplified classical guitar makes them difficult to play in ensemble or live-performance situations. However, there is a solution, and it can be found in the “hybrid” or

“crossover” guitars that offer the nylon-string experience to the steel-string player.

Simply put, a hybrid or crossover guitar is a nylon-string instrument that is constructed using many of the design elements of a steel-string instrument. Common elements include cutaway bodies with a radiused fingerboard, longer scale lengths and the narrower nut widths common to steel-string guitars. Most also feature some type of onboard piezo amplification. (Magnetic pickups will not function with gut strings.) The hybrid concept actually goes back to 1932, when Selmer introduced its Maccaferri-designed instrument. Popularized by Django Reinhardt, it was a cross between a flamenco and a jazz guitar and was strung with special copper-wound strings. Although no one knows for sure when the first nylon hybrid appeared, one of the earliest examples was the solid-body Gibson Chet Atkins Classical Electric Model introduced in 1982. James D’Aquisto also built an acoustic crossover nylon in 1982, and Bob Benedetto entered the game in 1994 with his Renaissance II Fiorentino nylon-string archtop.

Until now, there has been a slow yet steady following for these instruments. Hybrid enthusiasts remain a relatively small segment of the market—many attribute this to a simple lack of awareness compounded by insufficient exposure of players to decent quality hybrids. There is no doubt that today the availability of nylon hybrid/crossover guitars is rapidly expanding, with several major companies and hand-builders providing offerings in acoustic, semi-hollow, solidbody and even archtop designs. But will this increased production result in a new generation of hybrid players? To answer this question, we talked with several luthiers and guitar manufacturers that offer hybrid models to find out why they make them, how they build them and who is playing them.

Dake Traphagen

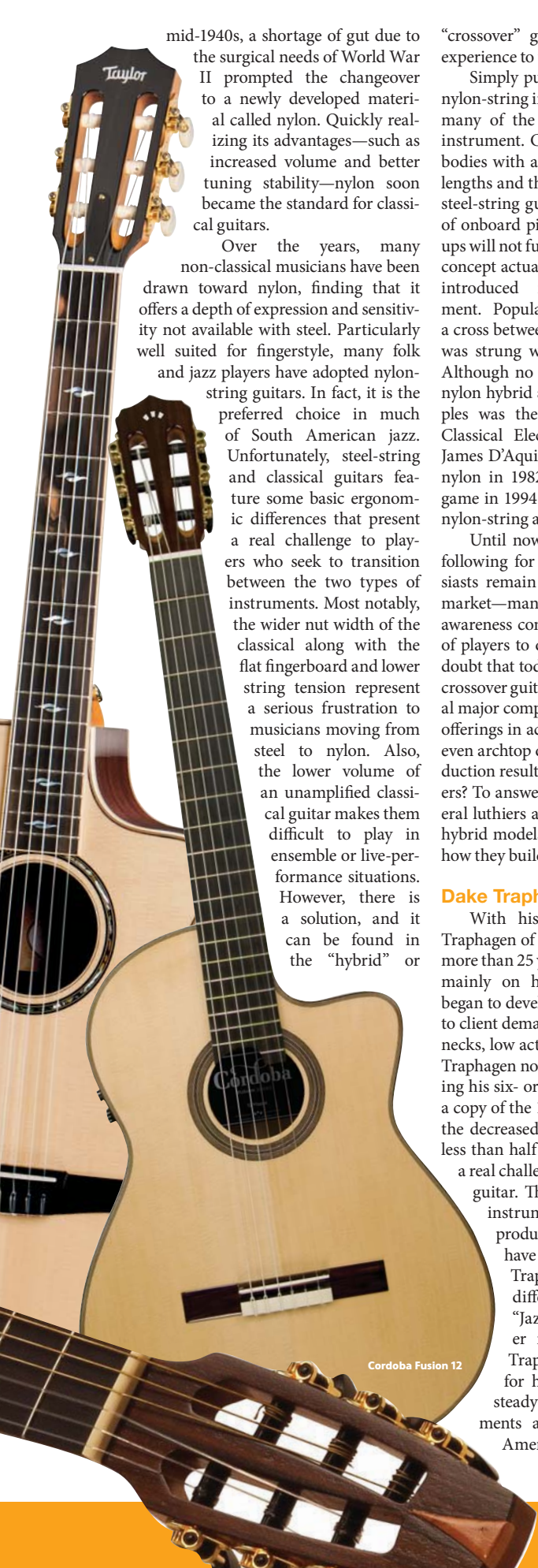
With his roots in violin making, Dake Traphagen of Traphagen Guitars is a luthier with more than 25 years of experience who has focused mainly on handcrafting classical guitars. He began to develop his crossover guitar models due to client demand for nylon guitars with narrower necks, low action and the ability to be amplified. Traphagen now offers two hybrid models, including his six- or seven-string Nylon Jazz, as well as a copy of the 1982 D’Aquisto guitar. He feels that the decreased tension of nylon, which produces less than half the string energy of steel, presents a real challenge in producing a truly responsive guitar. The delicate nature of a low-tension instrument makes it extremely difficult to produce, and even the slightest changes have a significant impact on the sound. Traphagen’s hybrids are voiced very differently than his classical models. “Jazz players are looking for a quicker response with less sustain,” said Traphagen, who noted that the demand for hybrid guitars has remained fairly steady over the years and that the instruments are more accepted among South American jazz musicians.

Taylor Guitars

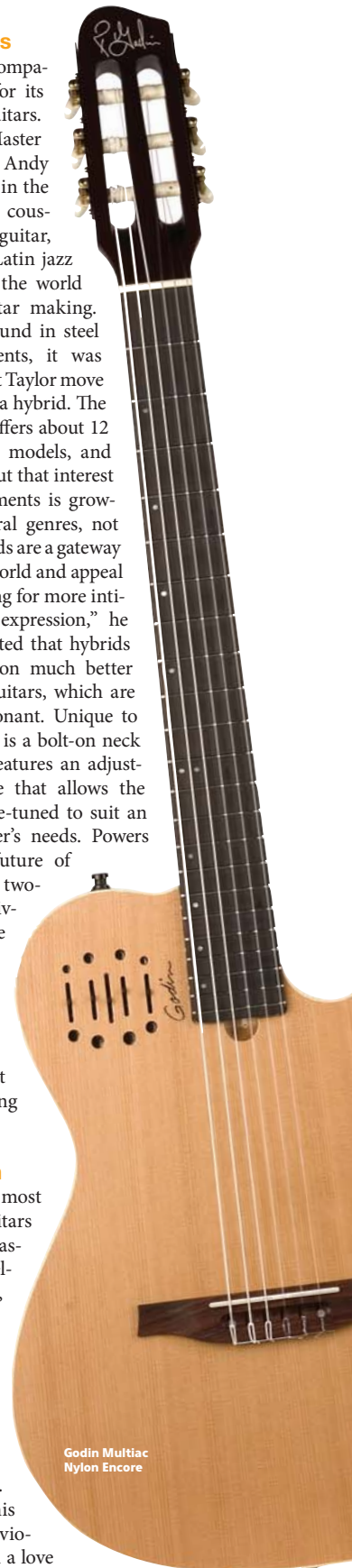
Taylor is a company best known for its steel-string guitars. According to Master Guitar Designer Andy Powers, interest in the ukulele, a close cousin to a nylon guitar, plus a love for Latin jazz drew him into the world of classical guitar making. With a background in steel string instruments, it was only natural that Taylor move into developing a hybrid. The company now offers about 12 different hybrid models, and Powers points out that interest in these instruments is growing across several genres, not just jazz. “Hybrids are a gateway into the nylon world and appeal to players looking for more intimacy in their expression,” he said. Powers noted that hybrids take amplification much better than classical guitars, which are usually too resonant. Unique to Taylor’s hybrids is a bolt-on neck design, which features an adjustable neck angle that allows the guitar to be fine-tuned to suit an individual player’s needs. Powers said that the future of the hybrid is a two-way street driven by both the skill of the guitar builder and the creativity of the player. “Slow, steady evolution is what sticks in the long run,” he said.

Murray Kuun

Whereas most crossover guitars are a hybrid of classical and steel-string flat tops, South Africa’s Murray Kuun has taken the road less traveled by offering a unique nylon-string archtop guitar. Combining his experience in violin making with a love for classical guitar, Kuun has developed the Archangel model, which combines traditional archtop design with a nylon instrument. Murray Kuun said he feels that the sound of nylon strings is perfect for jazz and



Cordoba Fusion 12



Godin Multiac Nylon Encore

noted that some of the advantages of the hybrid are its 14-fret neck and cutaway body. Interestingly, he builds his guitars to be played purely acoustic, without a pickup system. Kuun builds several classical models and points out that any of these can be offered as a hybrid. When asked to comment on why more jazz players have not adopted the hybrid, Kuun offered a one-word response: "Tradition."

Ari Lehtela

Ari Lehtela of Lehtela Guitar Craft began his career building semi-hollow electric guitars. With a desire to build an instrument for Latin jazz

players and inspired by Benedetto's nylon arch-top, he created the Violão carved-top nylon guitar. Lehtela, who has never been interested in building traditional classical guitars, noticed the lack of carved-top nylon instruments in the market, prompting him to develop his own arch-top design. He noted the difficulty of building a low-tension carved instrument. "The challenge is to find the right balance between strength and resonance," he said. "Character of sound comes first, and volume and projection are second." He also pointed out that although his guitars are amplified, piezo technology is still lacking and often the electronics are not capable of truly capturing the

tone of the wood in a guitar. "The music itself is just as much of a hybrid as the instruments being built to meet the players demand," he said. "Often, the music dictates the need for something not built to any specific tradition."

George S. Leach

George S. Leach of the Phoenix Guitar Company has been building guitars for 25 years and first had the idea of a nylon hybrid in 1967. "I wanted a crossover guitar for myself because the transition between classical and steel-string was difficult," he said. Frustrated by a lack of availability, Leach introduced his first OM hybrid in 1994.



Phoenix Nylon String OM



The Domette by Daniel Siaman



The Dolphin by Theo Scharpach



Toru Nittano
Model-T Jazz

He noted that producing a responsive hybrid took quite a bit of experimentation, since nylon strings generate a lot less energy, making it a challenge to get a good tone. Leach is one of the select few builders who designs his hybrids specifically for acoustic use, and his extensive experience with concert classical guitars has given him a unique perspective. In commenting on the acceptance of

these guitars, Leach said that classical players are very conservative and resistant to change, but he finds that jazz players are more open to the concept. "If you play a wide range of music, then you will probably be drawn to a hybrid guitar," he said.

Rick Turner

Rick Turner of Rick Turner Guitars comes to



The Violão
by Ari Lehtela

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the hybrid table with strong credentials in the rock world. Starting his career building solidbody electrics and winding his own pickups, Turner has worked for Gibson, Alembic and even the Grateful Dead. Turner introduced his first nylon thinline electric guitar in 1991 and now offers a hybrid version as part of his Renaissance line. His philosophy is that amplification and construction are absolutely locked together and can't be separated. "My instruments are vehicles for the amplification system, and players are using my hybrid guitar to produce a hybrid tone," he said. Turner designs his own pickup systems, unlike many builders who rely on after-market amplification. He said

that hybrid guitars make nylon more accessible to a wider range of players, but due to a conservative market and lack of familiarity, he does not see them becoming a fad anytime soon.

Daniel Slaman

Daniel Slaman of Slaman Guitars in the Netherlands built his first nylon-string guitar at age 19 and has been hooked ever since. Slaman cites his love for music along with a fascination for wood as his driving forces as a luthier. Slaman's Dome hybrid is a truly unique instrument in that it features a top made of thin wood that is slowly forced into the arched "dome" shape by a bracing

system. "I had the archtop jazz player in mind when designing this instrument, which feels just like a 16-inch steel string archtop and not like a classical," he said. The Dome, and the smaller Domette, are designed to respond well both acoustically and with amplification, and most players use a mix of the two when performing. When asked about the future of hybrids, Slaman responded, "I am pretty confident that we will hear more nylon-string guitars in jazz in the future."

Godin Guitars

The hybrid concept is nothing new to Godin Guitars. Since the very beginning, Godin has focused on building instruments that work well on stage, and the company's very first guitar, the Acousticaster, was a crossover between a solidbody electric and steel-string acoustic. Godin introduced its first nylon electric back in 1990 and now offers 11 distinct hybrid models in its Multiac line. According to Mario Biferali, sales and marketing manager, the line grew out of necessity and the challenges of amplifying a classical guitar for stage use. "Nylon is not limited to classical players anymore, and amplification has opened the door," he said. Godin's hybrids have found a nice middle ground and will appeal to both electric and acoustic players. In terms of the market, Biferali pointed out that it is exploding for Godin, with nylon Multiacs actually outselling steel. "Our hybrid guitars are being used for hybrid music," he concluded.

Cordoba Guitars

Cordoba Guitars was founded with both feet firmly planted in the classical guitar world and with a mission to provide an affordable yet playable classical instrument. According to Kim White, who's in charge of national accounts, sales and marketing for Cordoba, the company entered the hybrid market in 2008 with its Fusion series, which has grown to include six models and is geared toward the gigging musician. "Our mission is to make the nylon-string easier to play and more accessible to players used to steel-string acoustic or electric guitars," White said. She pointed out that there are more steel-string players migrating over to nylon hybrids than classical musicians, who tend to be resistant to the concept. White also pointed out that the appeal of hybrids is growing, with more professional guitarists looking for expanded options. "Nylon strings change the way you play and that changes the way you make music," she said. "It opens up a whole new world of possibilities."

Toru Nittono

Toru Nittono of Nittono Guitars began his career in Japan building solidbody electric guitars. After relocating to the United States in 1981, he began moving into hollow and semi-hollow instruments and later branched out into archtops and flattops. When asked what motivated him to build a hybrid, Nittono responded, "I always liked nylon tone, but I couldn't find a comfortable guitar, so I built one." Nittono's Model-T Jazz electric nylon was released in 2005 and features a semi-hollow chambered body with an arched top. Basically a cross between a nylon and electric gui-

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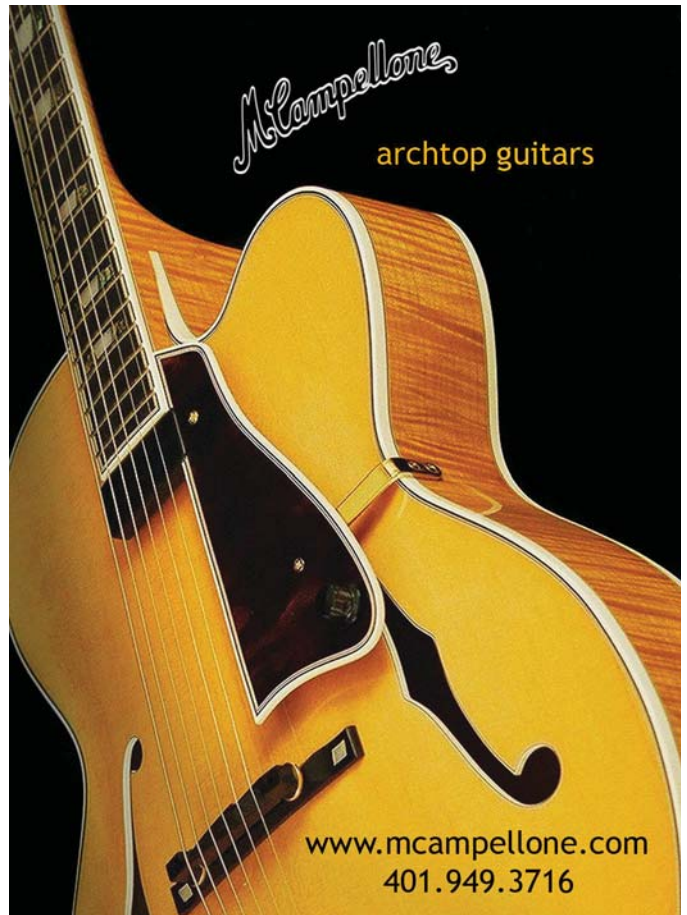
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Dake Traphagen
Nylon Jazz



tar, these hybrids are designed for the specific purpose of producing tone through an amp; they are not intended to be played acoustically. Described as an electric guitar feel with nylon tone, Nittono's guitars have caught the interest of jazz fusion players. He finds that his clients utilize both fingerstyle techniques and picks on his guitars, and an internal midrange adjustment actually allows the guitar to be fine-tuned to each player's specific preference. In terms of the market, Nittono said he believes that demand for hybrids is improving but it still represents a small portion of the overall market.

Mario Beauregard

Montreal's Beauregard Guitars has been into jazz and archtop guitars since the very beginning. Mario Beauregard, who considers himself to be an acoustic guy first, pointed out that there are two types of builders: assemblers and acousticians. His offerings include a line of standard jazz boxes as well as flattop acoustics and thinlines. Setting out to design a nylon guitar for professional jazz players, Beauregard started to develop his Nylon Jazz hybrids in the late 1990s and began building them in the early 2000s. Beauregard pointed out that voicing was the most critical consideration for his instruments, as he felt that other electric acoustics sounded a little nasal. Commenting on the transition from jazz guitars to flattops, he said, "You are always dealing with physics, and archtops, which rely on down pressure, are very different from flattops, which utilize pull pressure and tend to be more fragile." Beauregard offers three distinct versions of his Nylon Jazz hybrid, including a full-bod-

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Renaissance Hybrid by Rick Turner

ied acoustic arched-back design and two thinline versions. Beauregard noted that on nylon instruments the balance of factors can be very tricky and he is constantly defining the limits and then pushing them while still maintaining as much control as possible. Beauregard said that interest in hybrids is growing, particularly among younger players, but added that nylon has a very specific voice and is not for everyone. "When the musicians tell me that the instrument inspires them

to go somewhere else in a musical sense, I know I have done my job," he said.

Theo Scharpach

Theo Scharpach of Scharpach Master Guitars has always held a love for nylon instruments. Inspired by the Netherlands' thriving South American music scene of the 1970s, he began building nylon guitars as well as several traditional South American instruments such as the cha-

rango and the vihuela. It was the playing of virtuoso musicians who used nylon guitars in a non-classical setting that prompted Scharpach to build his first hybrid, which he prefers to call a crossover. "I was inspired by the music of Duck Baker, Laurindo Almeida and Charlie Byrd," he said. "I just loved their way of playing the nylon string guitar that was different from the classical guitar music. Duck Baker especially played that guitar in a unique way. That the strings were buzzing the frets would be unacceptable for a classical player, but it became almost a trademark of Duck Baker, and part of his recognizable style." Scharpach's Dolphin concert model is the end result of years of experimentation and features a fully acoustic design with many unique elements like its unusual soundhole design and an extended fingerboard that allows for a 27-fret neck. Scharpach describes the Dolphin as a nylon-string guitar that fills the gap between a classical and a steel-string. He noted that it is often delivered with an amplification system using a high-end pickup and/or internal mic for performing live concerts. "It is made for those that are not from a classical background and gives you the brutal sound of a flamenco but with enough sweetness to play any Brazilian bossa," he said. "It is an easily accessible guitar for those who did not study for five years to develop the correct left- and right-hand technique. Therefore, we offer custom neck dimensions, playability and custom string heights when taking orders." Scharpach also adds that a high-end crossover instrument like the Dolphin should sound good when played fingerstyle or with a pick, something that not all nylon guitars are capable of. When asked about the demand for these instruments, he said, "It has always been there."

When considering the wide range of luthiers and manufacturers that offer nylon hybrid instruments, it becomes obvious that their influences, philosophies and backgrounds are just as much of a hybrid as the guitars they build. Most seem to agree that interest in these guitars is growing, but certainly not exploding, and that market awareness combined with increased availability will help drive demand in the future. To many open-minded players, the hybrid represents an exciting new voice that expands their creative potential and takes them to an entirely new place.

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JESSE WINTER

How To Write for the Double Bass

IF YOU DON'T ALREADY PLAY THE DOUBLE BASS, WRITING PARTS that “work” on the instrument can be a bit of a challenge. The bass is often the least-explored voice when writing for an ensemble, and, as such, composers often aren't exactly sure what they should or shouldn't ask of their bass player. Bandleaders often have a limited amount of rehearsal and studio time, so writing parts that are as idiomatic as possible for any instrument helps to make the most of the time available. Writing for the bass is no exception.

So, what to write for the bass? The bass can be an expressive instrument just like any other in the ensemble. Since jazz is an art of individual expression, there is no exact standard for what the bass can play. Different players will have different skill sets, so always know who you are writing for. The best source of knowledge is bass players themselves. Show your parts around to different players and have them demonstrate on the instrument why the parts do or don't work. Anything is possible; however, not everything is probable.

There are a few general points to keep in mind when writing for the bass. Start by ensuring that the part is written in the right octave. The bass is a transposing instrument. Bass notes sound one octave lower than written. Pianists are used to reading several ledger lines below the staff, but bass players generally are not. The standard printed range for the bass goes from the E natural below the staff in bass clef to the G three ledger lines above the staff.

Constructing walking bass parts is an art unto itself. When in doubt, writing out chord symbols and leaving it in the hands of the player is always a safe bet. If you do want to write out a specific part, look to create a smooth linear line without lots of large interval jumps or octave displacements within the line. Most people write for the bass at the piano where it's easy to jump within or beyond the octave. This kind of writing doesn't always translate well to the bass (see Example 1a). That's not to say you can't write a bass part with a large interval jump, as long as the majority of the line includes more stepwise and smaller intervallic motion (see Example 1b). By just changing one note, the part can go from easy and sight-readable (see Example 2a) to a less-comfortable and less-idiomatic line (see Example 2b).

One of the characteristics of the bass that composers can take advantage of is the use of open strings. In fact, this is something unique to all string instruments. These are the four pitches a bassist can play without fingering a note with their left hand on the fingerboard (see Example 3). The open strings have a certain ring to them that is a very recognizable sound. Incorporating these into your bass part will take advantage of the natural resonant sound of the instrument. You can hear an example of this sound on Ron Carter's intro to “Joshua” on the Miles Davis album *Seven Steps To Heaven*. Open strings also give the player time to easily shift to the next note or move to a different part of the fingerboard entirely with much greater accuracy. The passage in Example 4a utilizes the open A string to allow the line to expand up the fingerboard. Here, the player only needs to shift once. In Example 4b, by changing the A to an Ab, the open string is taken away and the player is forced to shift awkwardly, making it a much more difficult line to play. Of course, without an intimate knowledge of the fingerboard, it is hard to look at any particular bass part and know where a shift is difficult. Just keep in mind that notes that can be played as open strings in a passage will make any large interval jump much easier for the bass player.

Another sound that composers like to explore on the bass is the use of double stops, that is, playing two notes at the same time. Due to the way the notes lie on the instrument, any interval between a minor third and a perfect fifth is comfortable for a player to play. Larger intervals are possible as well, but because they do not occur on adjacent strings, both notes aren't usually attacked at the same time. The player can start each note separately but sustain both to create the effect of the double stop. This works fine as long as you aren't looking for a sharp attack for both notes. Beyond the octave, an interval of a major 10th is possible; otherwise, the larger intervals are generally out of reach. You can get around this by using open strings. Having one of the notes of a double stop be an open string makes a huge range of options possible. No doubt you have heard many examples of bassists playing a low note and sustaining it while they play other notes on top of it. This is a classic example of

how this idea can be put into action. A helpful hint for vocalists who like to sing with just bass accompaniment: If you have a choice of which key to sing in, pick a key for the song that will allow the bassist to use those open strings' pitches as the root of the chord. This will help your bass accompanist fill out more of the harmony for you while the open string holds down the root of the chord and generally creates more of a color palette for you to sing to.

Looking at the double bass, you will see that as you move to the higher positions on the bass, the neck ends but the fingerboard continues. To access the notes in the higher position, the bassist must move their hand around the neck and bring their hand on top of the fingerboard. This is called thumb position, because now the thumb is used to finger the notes as well. This different playing technique starts at the G three ledger lines above the staff in bass clef. These higher notes have a singing quality to them that can help to bring out a solo line. How high can you write for a bass player in this position? It depends on the player. Some bassists play world-class music without ever spending much time in thumb position, while others play there with comfort and ease. The notes fall much closer together in thumb position than in the lower positions on the instrument, so if the player is comfortable with thumb position, more intervallic lines may be possible. Practically speaking, any notes above the G two octaves above the staff don't sustain very much unless they are played with the bow.

Writing bowed bass parts is another way to get a different sound from the bass. The advantage with the bow is that it adds volume and presence to the part. As with writing in the upper register, what you can write will have a lot to do with who will be playing the part. Some players have extensive classical training, while other players may not even bring their bow to the gig. Certainly writing an expressive melodic line is fair game, although when played through an amp the quality of sound is always compromised as compared to recording the instrument acoustically. If you do have a part that switches the player between arco (bowed) and pizzicato (plucked) notes, it helps to write in a rest to allow the player time to either pick up or put down the bow.

If you are looking to study how to write bass parts further, I recommend reading Mike Richmond's *Modern Walking Bass Technique* (Ped Xing Music). It is a great illustration of what is possible on the instrument.

Using some of these ideas can help to add a different color to your ensemble writing and take advantage of some of the unique characteristics that give the double bass its signature sound. These ideas are just guidelines, and there are certainly exceptions to these examples. Try your hand at expanding your writing for the bass and see what you come up with.

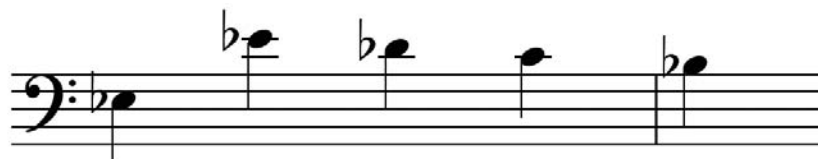
DB

Bassist Mark Wade's debut album, *Event Horizon*, was released in February. He served as an artist in residence at Flushing Town Hall in New York City from 2013 to 2014. Wade has worked with a diverse array of artists and ensembles including Jimmy Heath, James Spaulding, Stacey Kent, the Janacek Philharmonic, the Key West Symphony and Neil Diamond. He is also a New York Pops Teaching Artist. Wade is the founder and director of New Music Horizons, an arts organization dedicated to promoting the work of emerging jazz and classical composers. Find him online at markwademusicny.com and newmusichorizons.org.

Example 1a



Example 1b



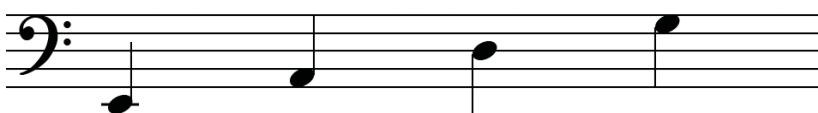
Example 2a



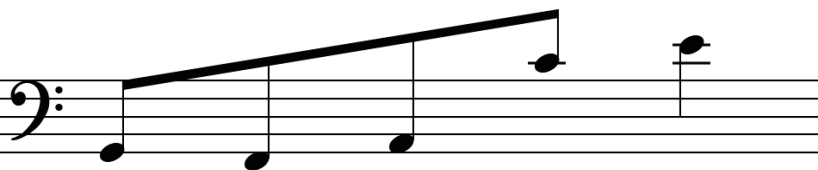
Example 2b



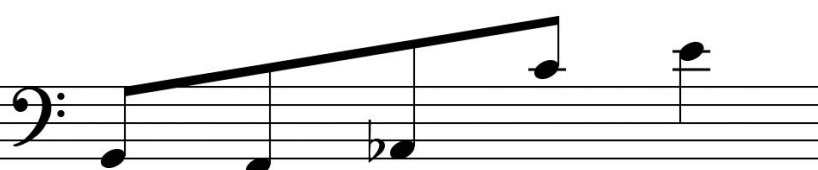
Example 3



Example 4a



Example 4b



Adapting Drum Rudiments to Picking Exercises

I LOVE THE DRUMS. THERE IS SO MUCH A good drummer brings to the music: groove, feeling, texture, dynamics, atmosphere, color, swagger, fire, imagination, touch, group cohesion, interplay, contrast, excitement, balance and rhythmic complexity. Many of my favorite moments playing music have been with great drummers. There's just something they do to elevate the music to another level. One way that drummers develop this magic is by practicing rudiments.

Rudiments are small sticking patterns that form the basic elements of drumming. I believe they are a really good way to learn music. Here's why: They cover all of the fundamental mechanical motions. They can be mastered one by one. They stress right and left hand independence, coordination and strength. You can tweak the difficulty level in gradual and controllable ways. They focus the mind on essential qualities of music such as touch, feel, consistency, sound, clarity, control, speed and balls. OK, maybe those last two aren't essential qualities of music, but you get the idea.

I have a drummer friend who used to live in New York's East Village, back when young musicians could afford to live in the East Village. He was studying with the great drummer and teacher Michael Carvin. He invited me over to play, but his apartment was so small that we could only use an unamplified guitar and a drum pad. "What do you wanna shed?" he said. I shrugged my shoulders. "How about these drum rudiments I'm working on?" "Cool." So we spent an afternoon playing drum rudiments in unison. And that's how I got the idea to apply drum rudiments to guitar picking.

Rudiments can be applied to guitar picking somewhat easily. You simply replace Right and Left (R and L) with Down and Up (D and U). They translate to guitar simply as alternating strokes (DU) or doubled strokes (DD or UU). Don't be thrown off by the simplicity. Think like a drummer: tone, clarity, control, rhythmic precision.

Practice each of these patterns one time through at a slow tempo, then stop. Repeat. After you become comfortable playing through the pattern once, play it in a continuous loop. Once you can play the pattern in a continuous loop, increase the tempo. You will have to adjust your technique as the tempo increases. It is very hard to maintain tone, clarity, control and rhythmic precision through drastic tempo changes. That is the point of the exercises I've provided.

Single Stroke Roll

This translates to guitar as DUDU, also known as alternate picking. (See Example 1a.) I like to play this on one note, on one string. Start at a slow tempo and play DUDU quarter notes in unison with a metronome. You can increase the tempo. Better yet, increase the subdivision that



you play at the same tempo: quarter notes, then quarter-note triplets, then eighth notes, then triplets, then 16th notes, then sextuplets.

While this exercise works great playing a single note on a single string, you can get some interesting variations by playing two notes on two adjacent strings, the first receiving the D and the second receiving the U. If you start on a lower-pitched string and go to a higher-pitched string, you will have to reach past the higher-pitched string to do an upstroke. (See Example 1b.) I refer to this as "outside" picking. If you start with a higher-pitched string and go to a lower-pitched string, you can keep the tip of the pick in between the two strings for both strokes. (See Example 1c.) I refer to this as "inside" picking.

Single Stroke 4s

This is a 16th-note triplet followed by one eighth note, giving you four notes per beat played DUDU. (See Example 2.) Play this rhythm on a single note on a single string, in 4/4 time.

Single Stroke 7s

One sextuplet followed by one quarter note played DUDUDUD. (See Example 3.) This pattern gives you a total of two beats. Repeat it once for one full bar in 4/4 time. Play it as a single note on a single string.

Double Stroke Roll

This is two D's followed by two U's. Play a single note on a single string DDUU. These also work on two adjacent strings. Play a D on a lower-pitched string and then another D on the adjacent higher-pitched string; then play a U on that same string and finally another U on the original string. I refer to these as "sweeps." When repeat-

ed, the double stroke roll gives you a continuous loop of sweeps and alternating strokes. You can increase the tempo. Better yet, increase the subdivision that you play at the same tempo: quarter notes, then quarter-note triplets, then eighth notes, then eighth-note triplets, then 16th notes, then sextuplets. See Examples 4a and 4b.

5 Stroke Roll

DDUUD. (See Examples 5a and 5b.) It's the same as a double stroke roll, but you end with one additional down, for a total of five notes. Play this as four 16th notes followed by one eighth note. If you play two consecutive 5 stroke rolls, you get a total of three beats. Practice this pattern in 3/4. Better yet, repeat it eight times in 4/4 and you get a three-over-four polyrhythm that repeats every three bars.

6 Stroke Roll

DUUDDU. (See Examples 6a and 6b.) One eighth note followed by four 16th notes followed by one eighth note for a total of two beats. Drummers often play this double-timed as one 16th note, four 32nd notes and one 16th note. Play as a single note on a single string. Here's how it works on two strings: Play D on a lower-sounding string, then play an "outside" U on a higher-sounding string, then sweep back and play another U on the lower-sounding string, then D on that same string, then sweep another D on the higher-sounding string and finally a U on that same string.

Paradiddles

DUDDUDUU. (See Examples 7a and 7b.) Play this as eight eighth notes, one note on one string. Two-string version: Play DUD on a lower-sounding string, then sweep a D on a higher-sounding

Example 1a: Single Stroke Roll

D U D U D U D U

Example 1b: Single Stroke Roll on 2 Strings ("Outside Picking")

D U D U D U D U

Example 1c: Single Stroke Roll on 2 Strings ("Inside Picking")

D U D U D U D U

Example 2: Single Stroke 4s

D U D U D U D U D U D U D U D U D U D U

Example 3: Single Stroke 7s

D U D U D U D U D U D U D U D U D U D U

Example 4a: Double Stroke Roll

D D U U D D U U

Example 4b: Double Stroke Roll on 2 Strings

D D U U D D U U

Example 5a: 5 Stroke Roll

D D U U D D D U U D

Example 5b: 5 Stroke Roll on 2 Strings

D D U U D D D U U D

Example 6a: 6 Stroke Roll

D U U D D U D U U D D U

Example 6b: 6 Stroke Roll on 2 Strings

D U U D D U D U U D D U

Example 7a: Paradiddle

D U D D U D U U

Example 7b: Paradiddle on 2 Strings

D U D D U D U U

string, then play UDU on the higher-sounding string, then sweep a U to a lower-sounding string.

NOW, IF YOU REALLY WANT SOME FUN, PLAY ALL OF THE ABOVE patterns with inverted strokes. For example, instead of DUDU, you would play UDUD. Instead of DDUUD, you would play UDDU, etc.

If you want even more fun, try alternating from one rudiment to another. For example, you could play one bar of single stroke rolls, one bar of 6 stroke rolls.

Notes on picking technique: There is no right or wrong way to hold the pick. Adam Rogers, Mike Moreno, Pat Metheny and many others all hold the pick in completely different ways. What may work well for one person's hand and finger shape might not translate to someone else. We are all different. However, there are some principles to keep in mind when you are working on these exercises.

1) Sound is most important. Use your ears to tell if you sound good or not. Sounds bad to you? Good! That means it's time to not just keep doing the same thing over and over.

2) Embrace change. You can change small things: Try a different pick material, shape or thickness. Get your guitar set up. Get a new effects pedal. Stick your pinky out when you pick. Or, you can change big things: Use a different guitar entirely. Change your picking technique entirely. In the long run, the pain of making the same mistakes over and over will be greater than the pain of changing now.

3) Practice with an amp turned up loud so you can hear the mistakes. Wes Montgomery was a big fan of this method.

4) If you can play the same thing two ways and one of the ways requires

less finger/hand/wrist/arm/body tension, go with the way that requires less tension.

5) Stability is key. Once you find the minimum motion necessary to play a note, figure out how to use the other parts of your arm, wrist and hand to help stabilize that motion and the guitar.

6) Imitate, with reasonable expectations. A good way to improve is to copy the technique and the music of someone you admire. Do this in the most detailed way possible. If they are still alive, take a lesson with them, or get their instructional video. However, remember that these are masters. They are naturally talented guitarists who honed their craft over decades playing with the best musicians of their generation. You're not going to sound like them just by rearranging your fingers to look like theirs. Also, if you copy someone's technique, you will probably be able to play what they play and not play what they don't play. Don't expect to rip blazing Allan Holdsworth lines using Wes Montgomery's thumb technique. Don't expect to play Mike Moreno's fluid phrases using Jonathan Kreisberg's picking technique.

7) Work on the left (fretting) hand. The stronger your left hand, the less the right hand has to do.

These are great picking exercises, but they are by no means an exhaustive list. In addition to helping you hone your guitar skills, they might make you more aware of what drummers are playing and practicing.

DB

Guitarist Isaac Darche lives in Brooklyn, New York. His second CD, *Team And Variations* (Challenge Records), features saxophonist Chad Lefkowitz-Brown, pianist Glenn Zaleski, bassist Desmond White and drummer E.J. Strickland. The exercises in this article will appear in Darche's forthcoming book on guitar technique. Contact him at isaacdarchemusic@gmail.com or visit him online at isaacdarche.com.

ALLPARTS

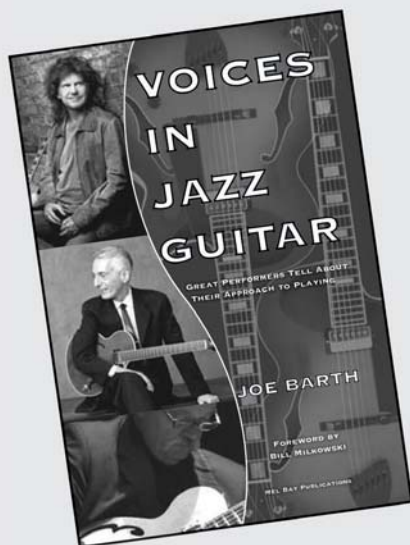
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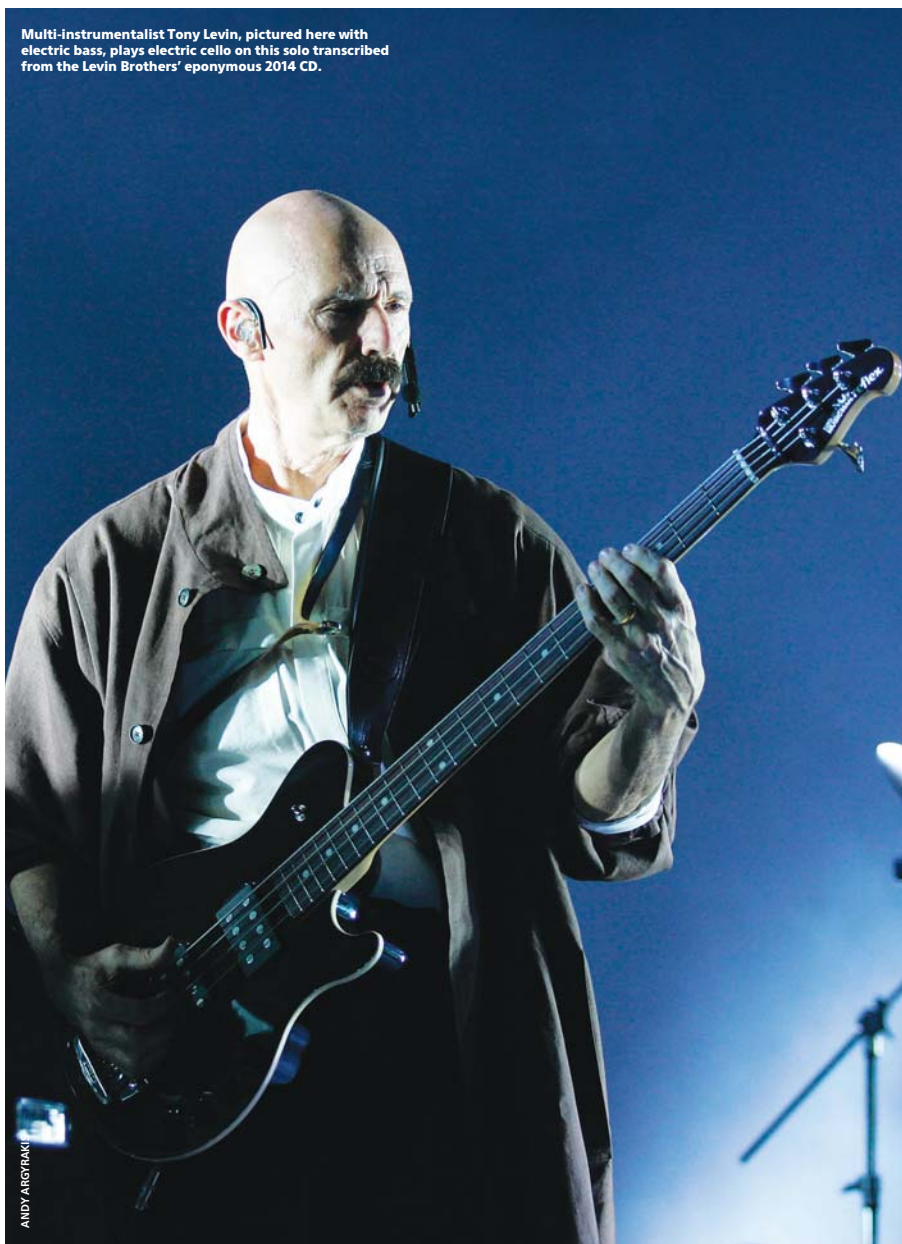
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GUITAR SCHOOL Woodshed > **SOLO**
BY JIMI DURSO

Multi-instrumentalist Tony Levin, pictured here with electric bass, plays electric cello on this solo transcribed from the Levin Brothers' eponymous 2014 CD.



Tony Levin's Melodic, Singable Electric Cello Solo on 'Havana'

TONY LEVIN HAS CERTAINLY EARNED HIS place in the ranks of progressive rock giants, demonstrating his talents on bass guitar, electric upright bass, keyboards and Chapman stick. For decades, he has performed and recorded with a diverse array of artists. So should it be any surprise that last year he and his brother (keyboardist Pete Levin) put out a jazz album, and that for many of his solos Levin chose to play a five-string electric cello by NS Designs? There are many examples of Levin swinging on *Levin Brothers* (Lazy Bones), but here we present his cello solo on the Latin composition “Havana.”

Levin's playing on this number is very melodic. It's so singable that he even doubled the solo with his voice, à la Slam Stewart and Major Holly. He ideas are consistently presented in two- and four-bar phrases, but he often creates rhythmic interest by not starting or ending precisely where the harmonic phrases begin or end. Notice how often he begins phrases with pickups. Measures 4, 8, 10, 12, 16, 24, 26, 32 and 36 all contain pickups into the next measures. And these anacruses have lengths ranging from a single eighth note to two-and-a-half beats. Levin even has a few licks (bars 21, 23 and 29) that start after the downbeat (on the

“and” of 1). In fact, the first phrase is the only one that starts squarely on the downbeat.

This variety is also evident in how Levin ends his lines. Generally, his ideas spill into the next measure, as in bars 3, 7, 15, 20, 22 and 27. There are also instances where he anticipates the downbeat (before measures 10, 12 and 24), ending his phrase on the “and” of 4. Like his beginnings, ending right on the downbeat seems to be the exception rather than the rule (measures 18, 31, 35 and 39 being the only cases). It is curious that with all this anticipation and delay, his first phrase started on beat 1 and his last phrase ends on the 1, bookending his solo.

Another thing that makes Levin’s playing so melodic are his note choices. Every single phrase ends on a chord tone. He mostly stays within the A aeolian mode; his use of chromaticism is limited, and it’s almost always used to bring out the sounds of chords that contain notes outside this scale. For instance, B7 has D# as its third, which

is not part of A aeolian. Levin resolves to this tone in bars 3 and 35, and anticipates the downbeat of bar 11 with it. In each case, it emphasizes a characteristic of this harmony that separates it from A natural minor.

Another note that does a great job of this is G#. We hear this pitch in measures 5, 29 and 38, always on an E7 chord. Here it is also the third, and serves to bring our ears out of aeolian. In bars 5–6 and 29–30, Levin leaves the rest of the scale the same, creating an A harmonic minor scale (equivalent to E phrygian dominant, also known as “freygish” or “ahava rabbah”). Curiously, at the end of his solo he leaves out the F natural and puts in a C# (measures 36–38), creating a sound more akin to E mixolydian. Since this scale has the major third of the key we’re in, it makes the solo’s conclusion sound suddenly brighter—a nice way to end it. **DB**

Jim Durso is a guitarist and bassist based in the New York area. Visit him online at jimidurso.com.



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Jim Triggs St. Croix Archtop

Tone Worth Waiting For

In an age where overseas manufacturing has become the standard, and the term “Craftsman” is a trademarked brand name, it is nice to know that there are still highly skilled artisans like Jim Triggs who take pride in the fine instruments they build. With nearly 600 custom guitars already under his belt, Triggs has recently introduced the St. Croix archtop, a stunning tone machine with an impressively strong acoustic voice. It’s the first new Triggs model to be offered in nearly 11 years.

Triggs began his career as a luthier specializing in mandolins, which are actually a close cousin to the archtop guitar. After building his first instrument in 1977, others began to take notice, and requests for orders landed Triggs firmly in the custom mandolin business. Triggs’ skills eventually caught the eye of Gibson’s Charlie Derrington, who brought Triggs to Nashville in 1986 to help fine-tune the production of the company’s F5 mandolins. While at Gibson, Triggs also spent time running

the custom shop, overseeing artist relations and eventually becoming involved with the archtop guitar line. Leaving the company in 1992 to open his own shop, Triggs cites his experience at Gibson as an invaluable resource toward his development as a luthier.

With a focus on building instruments customized to each player’s individual needs, Triggs has built numerous Stromberg and D’Angelico style guitars and is considered to be one of the top authorities on these larger-bodied instruments. He also created his own San Salvador model in 2004, featuring a more traditional-style 17-inch archtop design. With 11 years passing since the introduction of the San Salvador, and sensing a trend from players and the market in general, Triggs decided it was time to develop a new model, the St. Croix.

According to Triggs, the St. Croix evolved from the San Salvador. The San Salvador features a fingered tailpiece, and after requests to put the heavier Stromberg-style tailpiece on a San Salvador, Triggs noticed an immediate increase in acoustic volume. “I realized it sounded great,” he said. “The increased mass gave the guitar more tone and sweetness.” The inclusion of a Stromberg-style tailpiece was not the only change Triggs made in designing the St. Croix; he also tweaked the guitar’s rim depth to 3.25 inches to enhance its resonance. According to Triggs, tailpiece mass and body depth are two of the most critical factors in acoustic tone. The last significant design change was a redesigned peghead.

As an owner and player of a Triggs San Salvador model, I can safely say that the changes made on the new St. Croix have resulted in a significant difference between the two models. Although they share many features, the St. Croix sings loudly with its own unique voice, producing a noticeably deeper, richer and louder acoustic punch when played unamplified. I love that Triggs has built the St. Croix to be an acoustic instrument first, with the ability to be amplified via the option of a floating pickup. It’s a true old-school guitar whose tone Triggs describes as “an in-the-pocket ’40s and ’50s archtop sound.” I love playing this guitar, which had no problem cutting through a full big band with its chunky rhythmic punch. Dialing in the pickup for solos, the guitar produced a warm, fat, silky tone on chord lines, with just enough cut to carry the single-note passages over the top of the band. Aesthetically, the guitar is gorgeous with its German spruce top and Eastern maple back and sides, all attractively bound to create that classic look.

Triggs and his son Ryan are building some truly great guitars, and the addition of the St. Croix—available for \$6,995 as an acoustic and \$7,245 with pickup—will definitely satisfy their most loyal customers as well as attract some new fans to their impeccable work.

—Keith Baumann

Ordering info: triggsguitars.com

AER Compact XL

Acoustic Powerhouse

German manufacturer AER has updated its line of advanced acoustic combo amplifiers with the Compact XL, a two-channel amp with herculean power designed to present the acoustic guitar's natural tone without any coloration. Boasting 200 watts/8 ohms of dynamic muscle from its power amp through the dual-cone single speaker, this is the most powerful compact acoustic amp I've ever played through.

The amp design is smart and utilitarian. A 12.6- by 12.9- by 11.1-inch cube weighing 23 pounds, the Compact XL features a Finnish birch plywood cabinet in black spatter finish. Its white-cream-colored channel strip and back panel allow for easy viewing of knobs, inputs and controls in the darkness of clubs and on-stage performance.

Channel 1 is a dedicated instrument channel with a quarter-inch input jack, gain level knob, standard low/mid/treble control knobs and a high/low attenuation switch to temper line-level input. A "colour" switch is also included—I found that it's best utilized with acoustic guitar to cut some low-mids while adding a treble boost for more brightness. Channel 2

employs a dual-socket XLR microphone and instrument cable input with bass and treble knobs.

The Compact XL's effects section has a single toggle knob to select one of four presets: short reverb, long reverb, 320ms delay and chorus. A separate effects level and pan knob allow control of the amount of "wet" effect applied. While the included effects do not allow any variable adjustment, I found the reverbs to be fairly standard, the delay to have a serviceable slap-echo effect and the chorus unobtrusive. The back panel includes all the ins and outs a professional player could want, including DI out with line level control, stereo jack in with level control, speaker line out, headphone in, aux out, effects send out, footswitch in, tuner in and phantom power for mics.

I first played an acoustic guitar with a built-in undersaddle Fishman piezo pickup through the Compact XL and found complete accuracy in the tone replication and sufficient headroom to push the volume without any breakup or unwanted distortion. The "colour" selector added a crisp brightness and presence without compressing the guitar at all. I also tried an acoustic with an inserted LR Baggs pickup and noticed that the amp provided the transparent sound of the varying pickups in true form. The warmth and accuracy of sound of the acoustics is achieved at both low and muscled-up loud volumes. I then played a couple of arctops, using both round and flat-wound strings. After rolling off some mids and treble and adding a bit more bass, I achieved a faithful jazz tone that was smooth and powerful.

This amp's greatest feature is its flat accuracy of sound for unadulterated acoustic tone with headroom to spare. With a street price of \$1,899, the Compact XL is a first-rate professional amp that's capable of providing all of the clean, simple power needed for performance in any small, medium or large room setting.

—John LaMantia

Ordering info: aer-amps.com



Magnatone Twilghter Stereo

Amplifier Vibrato Revival

Magnatone's Twilghter Stereo guitar amplifier is an example of how to resurrect the best of the old while raising the bar for quality, innovation and performance. The Magnatone name dates back to 1937, and its evolution was fraught with changes of ownership and focus. However, the company did produce some great tube amps in the late '50s and early '60s. One of Magnatone's defining features was pitch-shifting vibrato, which the company invented in 1956. It used a non-moving part to create rapid shifts in pitch, in contrast to alterations in volume as utilized by competitors' tremolos.

Following its demise in 1969, the Magnatone brand lay dormant until Ted Kornblum, whose family founded St. Louis Music (an early distributor of Magnatone), discovered the trademark had been abandoned and purchased the rights to it. Kornblum assembled a dream team of engineers to develop a line of professional guitar amps that represent the pinnacle of modern design and engineering while maintaining the original Magnatone vibe, and in 2013, the new Magnatone was launched. Critical to the endeavor was the vibrato circuit, which was painstakingly re-created by engineer Obeid Khan. The company's first offering, the Single V, is the crown jewel of the Traditional Collection models. Magnatone now features several lines of amps, all U.S.-made (except tubes).

The 22-watt-per-channel Twilghter Stereo is Magnatone's first stereo amp. With two 12-inch speakers, it's also the first model to offer true stereo vibrato. Its retro vibe and layout are based on the Custom 280 model of the late 1950s, which got its stylish look from the skilled furniture designers employed during Magnatone's Etsy Organ period. The cabinet covering is cotton-backed book-binding material, and the handle is Amish-made leather.

Switching the Twilghter Stereo on, I was struck by its clean, in-your-face presence. Every note sparkles, and the tube-driven long pan spring reverb fills out the tone beautifully. This amp excels with electric guitar, both solidbody and semi-hollow. It's clean, with tons of headroom, but will overdrive nicely when



pushed to higher gain levels. The pitch-shifting vibrato generates sounds that recapture the vintage guitar tone we all love. Along with speed and intensity controls, you can select stereo mode or mono mode, or apply the vibrato to each speaker individually. It offers a choice of "FM" or "AM" to toggle between true pitch shifting and standard tremolo. An included footswitch turns reverb and vibrato on and off; an optional expression pedal allows control of vibrato speed.

The new Magnatone has done an amazing job of striking a balance between reviving the glory of the past while maintaining a focus on the future. At \$3,199, the Twilghter Stereo amplifier is a modern-age classic.

—Keith Baumann

Ordering info: magnatoneusa.com

1. Stringers in Print

Recent jazz guitar and bass publications from Hal Leonard include *Best of Tal Farlow* from the Guitar Recorded Versions series, as well as *Ray Brown: Legendary Jazz Bassist* and *Best of Herb Ellis* from the Artist Transcriptions series. Notated in exquisite detail, all three books are designed to expand players' jazz repertoire and vocabulary.

More info: halleonard.com

2. Boutique Strings

Black Diamond Strings, a company that has been serving the music industry for 125 years, offers high-end boutique strings for acoustic guitar, electric guitar, bass guitar, classical guitar, resonator guitar, pedal steel guitar, ukulele, banjo, mandolin, violin and upright bass.

More info: blackdiamondstrings.com

3. Universal Tuner

The NS Micro Universal Tuner from D'Addario features a reversible, multi-color tuning display and metronome in a small, compact design. Its dual-swivel, clip-on mount allows for multiple viewing angles and quick application and removal on any instrument—not just guitar—while the extendable arm provides clear, unobstructed views of the screen. The NS Micro Universal Tuner offers quick note response and tuning accuracy and features a wide calibration range of 410–480Hz.

More info: daddario.com

4. Life Extension

La Bella Strings has taken a new approach to extended-life strings. Thanks to a sophisticated Ionic Vapor Process developed by Acoustic Science, Vapor Shield strings are protected from grime, tarnishing and oil residue. Playing life is extended significantly without flaking or compromising tone. The entire surface and full length of all Vapor Shield strings are treated with a nucleated polymer vapor that doesn't require any spraying or dipping. The strings are available for electric guitar, acoustic guitar and electric bass in multiple gauges.

More info: labella.com

5. Orange Cables

George L's now offers high-end instrument cables and patch cables in orange—the number-one requested color by customers. The anti-stat cables have a clean, clear sound with no line loss. When used in pedalboards, they won't hum, buzz or crackle. The cables are available in multiple sizes and are great for use on stage, at home or in the studio.

More info: georgelstore.com



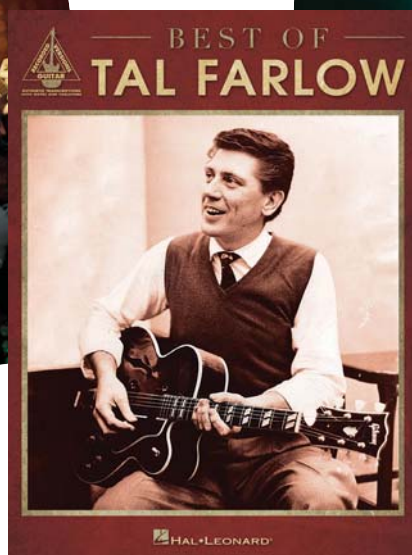
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Milton Academy Jazz Students Tour South Africa, Explore Cultures

IN MARCH, A GROUP OF 28 student musicians from Massachusetts' Milton Academy (along with eight adults) toured South Africa for 17 days, visiting schools and giving performances at institutions as well as jazz venues. This was the 10th time that I had taken students from Milton Academy on tour in South Africa.

The origin of these tours goes back to 1991, when Milton Academy was fortunate to host South African pianist Abdullah Ibrahim at our school. When Ibrahim heard our students perform his music, he was brought to tears and enthusiastically invited us to tour his homeland. Our first tour occurred in 1992, when many apartheid policies and practices were still in place. It was powerful to see firsthand the movement for racial equality and learn the significant role that music played in the struggle for political and social freedom. South African society was in a historic transition, moving toward the nation's free democratic elections in 1994.

Over the course of these 10 tours, we have established meaningful, ongoing connections with several South African musicians and school programs, especially the Music Academy of Gauteng (MAG) near Johannesburg, founded by Johnny Meko. A day's visit to MAG provides a forum for students from both schools to perform together, teach one another and learn from one another. It's a profound cultural exchange that always ends in a joyful jam session that makes all the differences in student backgrounds disappear.

Another long-term connection is with Cape Town's Amy Biehl Foundation, which highlights a remarkable story of reconciliation and forgiveness. Amy was a Fulbright Scholar from California who wanted to make a difference in South Africa. In addition to registering South Africans to vote, she worked with members of the African National Congress at the University of the Western Cape's Community Law Centre, researching gender issues to help influence the content of the nation's new Constitution.

On Aug. 25, 1993, Amy was murdered in Cape Town in an act of political mob violence. Through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Amy's parents requested amnesty for four young men who had served four years of their 18-year prison sentences in connection with Amy's death. These men were released because they convinced the panel their crime was a part of the political process against apartheid. The Biehl family then established a foundation to weave a barrier against violence in Cape Town townships by providing arts and athletic opportunities for disadvantaged youth.

Among the Amy Biehl Foundation's administrators are two of the men who served jail time for Amy's death. I have gotten to know these men very well. In fact, one of them, along with Amy's mother, spent a week at our home in Milton, and we can attest to the genuine bond and love that exists between the family and these two men. Milton Academy is most fortunate to be closely connected to this foundation. Since 2001 we have delivered thousands of dollars of donated materials to support their music program, and our students have been featured at several Cape Town Human Rights Day Township Jazz Festivals, which are sponsored by the foundation.

Milton students, like most young musicians, love to tour. Besides playing at numerous conferences and European jazz festivals, we've performed in California, Florida and Montreal, as well as twice visiting the White House.

During Milton Academy's recent tour, students directed by Bob Sinicrope (center) performed with students from Groote Schuur High School in Cape Town, South Africa.



The benefits of touring are immeasurable. The musical growth that occurs during the tour is often remarkable. The excitement preceding the tour and the performance experience is unbeatable. While we're "on the road," we pursue opportunities to increase students' social awareness. Last but not least, touring is fun for the students and it creates lasting bonds within the group.

An extended tour can, however, be an expensive endeavor. In addition to our fundraising efforts, parents help finance these trips (based on the individual family's ability to pay). Additionally, our school is fortunate to have connections with companies that allow our students to act as "goodwill couriers," delivering donated materials (such as books, instruments and supplies) to music programs that are in desperate need. Over the years, we have delivered more than \$170,000 worth of donated materials and donations to South African music programs. We are most grateful to the music companies and individuals who give us the privilege of delivering donated materials on their behalf.

Our students also travel closer to home and interact with residents in Milton. After all, students needn't travel long distances to experience the benefits of touring. Milton Academy has developed ongoing relationships with a local school for autistic children, as well as residential centers for senior citizens. Visits to these institutions have provided invaluable ways to expand our students' horizons. Interacting with people of diverse backgrounds offers opportunities to learn about inclusion and to develop compassion and acceptance.

Over the years, I have found that jazz education conferences have been a great resource for finding opportunities for student groups to tour. There are some wonderful tour companies who exhibit at the Jazz Education Network (JEN) conferences, and I have made some amazing friendships and connections at these gatherings.

I strongly encourage music teachers to take their students "off campus"—even if it is merely a trip down the street—so that kids can reap the priceless benefits of performing away from school. —Bob Sinicrope

Bob Sinicrope founded Milton Academy's jazz program in 1974 and continues to direct it. He is the president of the Jazz Education Network (JEN) and the recipient of the inaugural John LaPorta Jazz Educator of the Year Award as well as a DownBeat Jazz Education Achievement Award. Email him at bob_sinicrope@milton.edu.

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Ben Wolfe

Ben Wolfe's new album, *The Whisperer* (Posi-Tone), matches the high standards the bassist has set on his previous six leader releases over the last two decades. A swinging, idiosyncratic generator of quarter-note bass lines on gut strings, Wolfe is also one of the most accomplished combo composers of his generation.

Mark Dresser Quintet

"Not Withstanding" (*Nourishments*, Clean Feed, 2014) Dresser, bass; Rudresh Mahanthappa, alto saxophone; Michael Dessen, trombone; Denman Maroney, hyperpiano; Tom Rainey, drums.

It reminds me of Steve Coleman and Dave Holland with Marvin "Smitty" Smith in the '80s, but a different quality. Obviously, like-minded musicians who know how to play, and have a way they play together. The drums were covering up the bass, so it was hard to hear, except for the solo, which was interesting. But I like the sound. Interesting, but it doesn't hold me because of the lack of melody. I like the loose vibe; it's not overly clean—kind of sloppy, in a good way. It didn't sound like the bass player's record; that's a compliment if it is his. 4 stars.

Stanley Clarke Trio

"3 Wrong Notes" (*Jazz In The Garden*, Heads Up, 2009) Clarke, bass; Hiromi, piano; Lenny White, drums.

They're clearly in separate rooms. The tom-toms sound separate from the rest of the drum set. The snare drum is interesting. It has some history; the beat isn't forced. The big vibrato, that singing quality, reminds me of Eddie Gomez. Stanley Clarke used to play with that Eddie Gomez influence, but I don't think it's him. He played up high a lot during the solo, when he sounds more interested than when he was playing the bass lines. He plays the instrument very well, clearly knows the music. I'm assuming it's his tune—changes to "Confirmation" with the bass melody written over it, like Sam Jones would do, but Sam did it with a certain humor. 4 stars for the snare drum.

[after] I'd rather hear Stanley play Stanley Clarke stuff. Jazz is where he came from and what he can do, obviously, but it isn't a part-time art. When Stanley was playing jazz more, that's how he played. When musicians take decades off from something [and then] resume, they're in the same place.

Dave Holland's Prism

"The Empty Chair" (*Prism*, Dare2, 2013) Holland, bass; Kevin Eubanks, guitar; Craig Taborn, piano; Eric Harland, drums.

Soul-jazz pop. These musicians have a good pocket. The tom-toms are recorded too loud, which is distracting. It takes away from the subtlety of the groove, how the guitar and bass are playing. This person probably likes D'Angelo a lot, as I do. I haven't heard Ben Williams' records, but it could be him; he likes to record poppish tunes, and this reminds me of a way he plays on a certain area of his bass. Ben plays with a lot of personality, and although this bass player has lots of ideas, I don't really hear his personality in his sound, even in the solo. It's interesting—the band is playing louder; the tom-toms are softer, more compressed. I hear the D'Angelo influence, but not that behind-the-beat, Questlove thing that usually goes with the cats who play that way. These aren't the Robert Glasper cats. 3½ stars. [after] Dave Holland clearly is a great bass player. He does things that are amazing and difficult, but I don't feel him in his sound. I hear him in his great ability and in his rhythms.

The Bad Plus

"You Will Lose All Fear" (*Inevitable Western*, OKeh, 2014) Reid Anderson, bass; Ethan Iverson, piano; Dave King, drums.

Odd-sounding. The bass is buried. Ah, *there* it is. I'm waiting for the tune to start. It's kind of rolling, landing on these chords. I think they're about to land. It sounded like two tunes, two striking views of sound. The beginning



part was a lot of information, like scribbling on a page. I had no idea where it would go. Then this ending vamp, very clear, the bassist playing the part, interesting melodic notes with good rhythm, which I liked. I'm not sure how they're connected other than the contrast.

I figure it's the bassist's composition, but the pianist was running the show. 3½ stars. [after] It's a good example of pop-based jazz, but not r&b pop. The love of Radiohead shows up, which to me is a strange thing.

Christian McBride Trio

"Cherokee" (*Out Here*, Mack Avenue, 2013) McBride, bass; Christian Sands, piano; Ulysses Owens Jr., drums.

A walking bass line—a rarity in jazz today. They're doing the Ahmad Jamal half-time 3/4 bridge on "Cherokee," which I like. There's that several-room thing where the bass and drums are separated; they're not moving and turning corners together—just playing the same song at the same time, going for the excitement. With the piano player there's no breath; it's like the bass and drums are just trying to stay with him. [bass solo] That's Christian. No one can play that fast, with such clarity—all these amazingly impressive things. I don't know why it didn't sound like him at first. A handful of people have that immense natural gift. It's always fascinating how they use those tools. 3 stars—but 4 for Christian. I like him on Jeff Watts' [2009] record *Watts*.


Agustí Fernández/Barry Guy

"Annalisa" (*Some Other Place*, Maya, 2009) Fernández, piano; Guy, bass.

The way this pianist and bassist play together sounds like Jean-Michel Pilc and François Moutin, who don't play this outside. What caught my ear and threw me was how accurately these cats went into that melody—the composed section—together, after playing so free.

I was trying to think, "Who can play major-seven chords on the bass like that?" Oscar Pettiford played the exact same thing on "Stardust" once, though it's such a different context, and this sounds completely different. They're playing real wild and free, but the principles of art still apply. You have to listen and hear what's going on. You don't have to play constant. You can leave space. It's got to breathe. They had their moments. 3½ stars. **DB**

The "Blindfold Test" is a listening test that challenges the featured artist to discuss and identify the music and musicians who performed on selected recordings. The artist is then asked to rate each tune using a 5-star system. No information is given to the artist prior to the test.

A black and white photograph of saxophonist Greg Osby. He is wearing a dark pinstriped suit, a black fedora, and sunglasses. He is sitting on a rough, stone ledge, leaning forward as he plays a silver saxophone. The background is a cloudy sky. A thin white diagonal line runs across the image from the top left to the bottom right.

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