



## Etienne Charles

*Carnival: The Sound of a People, Vol. 1*  
(Culture Shock)

On his latest release, Trinidadian trumpet wizard and emerging composer Etienne Charles has found a way to make the pre-Lenten festivities of Carnival last year-round. Charles' guiding philosophy, that Caribbean music and jazz intrinsically intertwine, is evident as he masterfully melds a modern, cool jazz lexicon and polyrhythmic grooves with Afro-Caribbean street music traditions and the musical nuances of the West Indies.

In preparing for the album, Charles immersed himself in the revelry of Trinidad's Carnival and field recorded much of it. He then composed a suite around the whole experience as the centerpiece to his album, a method that imbues the music with equal parts raw authenticity and interpretive reflection.

The album's euphoric opener, "Jab Molassie" — an homage to a mythical slave, who, according to lore, was burned to death in a vat of molasses — provides a conduit into a cacophonous street scene, evoking colorful images of Carnival. The track features the group 2001 Jab Molassie playing on the streets of Trinidad, as Charles' jazz septet permeates their vocal and percussive performance with a pliable melody. Crisp and mellifluous, Charles' trumpet cuts through the rhythmic rustle of biscuit pans and Ben Williams' pulsating bass.

"Dame Lorraine" paints an elegantly

modern portrait of another carnivalesque figure that embodies colonial French aristocracy as well as African culture disseminated through slavery. Likewise, Charles' mix of highbrow and lowbrow results in a distinct sound that is at once exuberant and sophisticated. On his five-movement "Echo Suite," the bandleader utilizes a panoply of traditional Trinidadian percussion to build on unconventional harmonic ideas. Charles' tantalizing trumpet solos segue into layered ensemble passages, while Sullivan Fortner's invigorating piano phrases dart through a mélange of sounds, some of which are supplied by alto saxophonist Godwin Louis, drummer Obed Calvaire and guitarist Alex Wintz. Closing track "Freedom" reaffirms the session's jubillance as percolating skin drums introduce fiery

ensemble interplay in anticipation of yet another Carnival season.

— Lissette Corsa

## Johnathan Blake

*Trion*

(Giant Step Arts)

You're setting expectations high when your trio partners are tenor saxophonist Chris Potter and bassist Linda May Han Oh, two of the jazz world's more versatile and dynamic improvisers. Drummer Johnathan Blake certainly meets those standards on this riveting two-disc live set.

The chordless lineup results in a concentrated energy. On the surface, a nearly 17-minute take on The Police's "Synchronicity 1" seems like overkill. But Potter's snaking lines, Oh's melodic solo and the charging, flexible rhythmic drive



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