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DOWNBEAT

AUGUST 2026

VOLUME 93 / NUMBER 8

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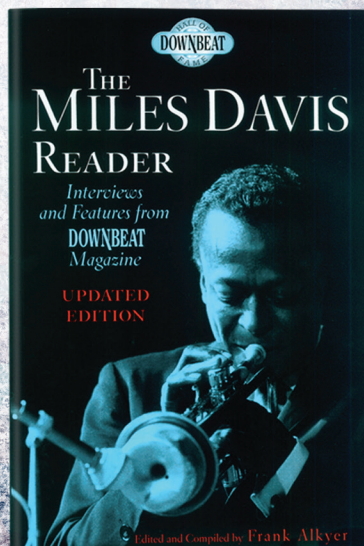
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POSTMASTER: Send change of address to: DownBeat, P.O. Box 11688, St. Paul, MN 55111-0688. **CABLE ADDRESS:** DownBeat (on sale July 28, 2026) Magazine Publishers Association.

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AUGUST 2026

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**Artist, Group
& Guitarist of the Year**

BY MICHAEL J. WEST

Mary Halvorson marks her 10th consecutive Guitarist of the Year win, as well as the critics' choice for Artist and Group of the Year. Her Amaryllis sextet with trumpeter Adam O'Farrill, trombonist Jacob Garchik, vibraphonist Patricia Brennan, bassist Nick Dunston and drummer Tomas Fujiwara is on a roll!

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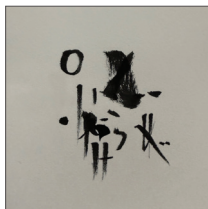
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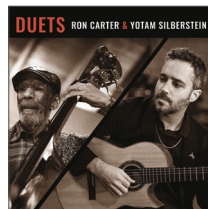
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"Being rewarded with this recognition makes me happy," says Patricia Brennan, garnering her second consecutive Album of the Year award as well as honors for top vibraphonist and Rising Star Group. "In a way it seems the mainstream is acknowledging the evolution of the instrument, not just pushing it aside."



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Sonny Rollins

Classic Blindfold Test



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First Take > BY FRANK ALKYER



JIMMY KATZ

Sonny Rollins at the Williamsburg Bridge in 2005. It should be renamed the Sonny Rollins Bridge.

Sonny Rollins, The Bridge

WHEN SONNY ROLLINS PASSED ON MAY 25, there was a moment of silence and reflection around the DownBeat offices, a sense of not just losing one of our greatest living artists and thought leaders, but also closing one of the most important chapters of jazz history. After all, Sonny Rollins was a living connection to a golden age of heroes in their prime: Miles, Monk, Max, Clifford, the list goes on and on. He was the last living member of "A Great Day In Harlem," perhaps the most famous photograph in all of jazz, and had given so much to audiences small and large around the globe with a big, open-hearted tenor sound that seemed to come from beyond this realm.

The timing of his passing also created a conundrum at DownBeat — and we thought and overthought what to do. It was press time. We had our July issue completed and ready to ship to the printer. If we tore up the issue, it would go out very late. If we waited until the August issue, the one you hold before you, it would be five or so weeks after Sonny's passing. These are the challenges of publishing a printed magazine in 2026.

We chose the latter, posting Howard Mandel's thorough, thoughtful tribute online. I scrapped my First Take column for the July issue to offer a short tribute and promise more on Sonny in this issue.

Then came the question of what to do with the cover. The DownBeat Critics Poll is, in my opinion, the most important issue of the year. We had to choose between putting Artist of the Year Mary Halvorson on the cover or Mr. Rollins. It wasn't fair.

I wondered, "WWS?" What would Sonny do? And the answer kept coming back that he would share the stage, just as he did with scores

of younger artists over the decades, serving as a human bridge between those heroes of the golden age and the music of today.

The Critics Poll is the perfect issue to honor Mr. Rollins. He dominated it over the decades. The first time he won was 1957, just as he was about to turn 27. He was named the New Star Tenor Saxophonist. Second place went to someone else who's just a bit familiar in jazz circles: John Coltrane. Mr. Rollins also came in second place in the overall Tenor Sax category behind Stan Getz and ahead of Coleman Hawkins, Lucky Thompson and Lester Young. His last Critics Poll win as Tenor Saxophonist of the Year was in 2012, the year he officially retired, edging out Joe Lovano, Branford Marsalis and Chris Potter. In between, he was heralded with so many honors in both the Critics and Readers polls, especially Album of the Year, Artist of the Year and, of course, Tenor Saxophonist, too.

One of the more important of those honors came in 1962 after Sonny released his landmark recording *The Bridge*. The critics didn't vote on albums back then, but Sonny was named Tenor Saxophonist of the Year with editor Don DeMicheal noting his "comeback after two years' absence from the jazz scene was one of the more remarkable jazz events of the past 12 months."

One of the best ideas I've heard since the passing of Mr. Rollins came from composer and multi-instrumentalist Ned Rothenberg, who in a guest column for The New York Times said the Williamsburg Bridge in New York City, where Mr. Rollins retreated and woodshedded during his legendary hiatus, should be renamed the Sonny Rollins Bridge.

Let's get it done! Meanwhile, we hope you enjoy the issue.

DB

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YVETTE YOUNG

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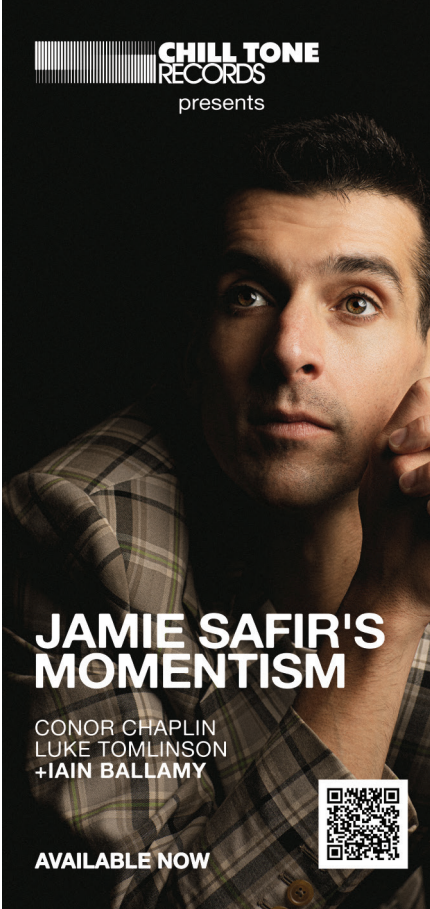
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...whew
:)
-Apollo Picks



Illuminating Miles

I have read countless articles about Miles Davis over the years, so I approached "Miles Davis @ 100: Love for a Complicated Genius" (May 2026) expecting another retrospective of a familiar legend. Instead, I found something much more valuable: a conversation that reminded me why Miles still feels so alive.

What stayed with me was the repeated idea that Miles never stopped searching. Marcus Miller's observation that Miles wasn't really changing, but searching, resonated deeply.

Too often we describe artists in terms of periods — the cool Miles, the modal Miles, the electric Miles — as if they were separate people. This discussion made me think that the common thread was not style but curiosity.

The quote from Art Blakey, "You ain't Miles. Find your own shit to do," struck me as the perfect summary of Miles's legacy. It is also a challenge to listeners. We often say we admire innovation, but many of us secretly want our favorite artists to keep making the same record over and over again. Miles refused to do that. He was willing to disappoint people in order to remain honest in his search.

I was especially moved by the stories about his openness to new music and his refusal to become a monument to his own past. The discussion reminded me that *Kind Of Blue* was not an endpoint for Miles. It was simply one moment in a lifetime of exploration. The tragedy is that some listeners wanted him to stay there forever. The miracle is that he didn't.

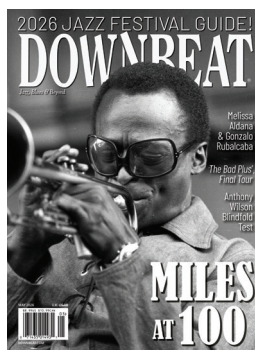
The roundtable participants succeeded in portraying Miles not as a saint or myth, but as a complicated human being whose greatest gift may have been his willingness to move forward when everyone else wanted him to stand still. Thank you to Ashley Kahn and all the participants for one of the most thoughtful and illuminating discussions of Miles Davis that I have read in years.

FEDERICO FORNI
LONDON

Halvorson Is Everywhere!

Love the magazine — been subscribing for four-five years and always a pleasure to be exposed to new artists as well as hearing about the seasoned veterans as well.

I wanted to toss out an idea for a Blindfold Test. It seems everywhere I turn, Mary Halvorson is on yet another album! I'd like to suggest her as a candidate for that segment. Among the many [tunes] that could be played for her, a curveball that might not be expected would be George Freeman's solo work on "Til There Was You" off his album *Man & Woman* (Groove Mer-



chant). "Squeeze Me" is another option off of that album.

MATT FEAREY
DENVER, COLORADO

Editor's Note: Mary Halvorson is everywhere, including the cover of this Critics Poll Issue. So, we'll have to wait a bit for that Blindfold Test. By that time, we hope she'll forget about the George Freeman spoiler.

The Bad Plus Juiciness

Jim Macnie's "finale" piece on The Bad Plus in the May issue was juicy and fun and hard-hitting and sad. Loved it! And it makes me so look forward to the guys' Santa Fe gig in September. This is an artistically gritty band with lots to say, lots of the best of what the writer calls "the seminal jazz task of unearthing new sounds while personalizing the past."

PAUL WEIDEMAN
SANTA FE

Sorting Out the Stars

Have a quick question regarding album reviews and your star ratings. Does the reviewer award the stars or the editors? Your most recent issue [June] had an album (Shalosh's *What We Are Made Of*) described by reviewer Brian Morton as "near-perfect," yet it received only 3.5 stars. I have not yet listened to the record, but am wondering about the disconnect. Have noted other similar occurrences in the past, but have never asked about it.

DAVE LACKEY
VIA EMAIL

Editor's Note: Each critic delivers their own star rating. Brian Morton thought the album was near-perfect, but also suggested it was "a sublime joke." Beyond that, some critics are more stingy with stars than others.

Rudy Rumors

I have read numerous statements that Rudy Pompilli, who played with Bill Haley & His Comets, was named 1957 Sax Player of the Year by DownBeat. I find this extremely difficult to believe, and reliable sources I've seen cite the 1957 sax winners as Stan Getz (tenor), Gerry Mulligan (baritone), Paul Desmond (alto, Readers Poll) and Lee Konitz (alto, Critics Poll). Can you tell me whether Rudy Pompilli ever was named Sax Player of the Year by your magazine?

GEORGE EDMONSON
VIA EMAIL

Editor's Note: Thanks, George. It even shows up on Mr. Pompilli's Wikipedia page. But we have no record of Rudy winning or placing.

Have a Chord or Discord? Email us at editor@downbeat.com or find us on Facebook and X (formerly Twitter).



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"I've always wanted to make something bigger than just my own music and that can relate to my father's legacy," Ibrahim Maalouf says of playing his father's invention, the four-valve trumpet.

Ibrahim Maalouf Spreads His Father's Legacy

For the past 20 years, Ibrahim Maalouf has been on tour. Traveling the world with his celebratory jazz and Arabic-inspired music, the 45-year-old Lebanese-French artist has been on a mission to spread the sound of his unique instrument: a four-valve trumpet designed by his father, Nassim. "I love touring because it makes you feel connected with the entire world and with the basis of humanity in every place," he says. "It's a great lab to test out new music in front of people but, more importantly, it's a way to showcase the beauty of this special instrument and to connect our Western and Arab cultures. It's bringing the music of the world back to the trumpet."

While a typical three-valve trumpet is capable of playing full tones and semitones across

octaves, Maalouf's father invented one that allows the brass instrument to play the quarter-tone notes integral to Arabic maqams and thereby opens it up to a range of different musical traditions. Since the release of his 2007 debut *Diasporas* (Mister Ibé), Maalouf has been exploring the bounds of this unique instrument, incorporating it into everything from hip-hop to West African music and classical orchestrations. With the release of his latest project, the multi-volume *Trumpets Of Michel-Ange* (Mister Ibé), Maalouf sets out to celebrate the unique trumpet like never before.

"I've always wanted to make something bigger than just my own music and that can relate to my father's legacy," Maalouf says. "I want to create a project that can make his dream come true

of having everyone play this trumpet around the world. That's why *Trumpets Of Michel-Ange* is more than just an album; it's a multi-volume project, it's an international trumpet academy where I teach people how to play the instrument and it's the formation of a new brand based on my father's invention."

Indeed, Maalouf's four-valve T.O.M.A trumpet is currently available for sale, and upon purchasing buyers can attend a master class with the artist to learn how to correctly work the instrument. "It's a completely different way to play and another way to blow and to express each note," he explains. "It's the same difference between a trumpeter playing baroque and Louis Armstrong. My father was the first one to play this way, and then I transformed it for myself,

Final Bar >

Clive Davis, 1932–2026

CLIVE DAVIS, ONE OF THE music industry's most powerful and outspoken executives, passed on June 22 at his home in Manhattan. He was 94.

Davis, whose last position was chief creative officer of Sony Music Entertainment, had a profound effect on the world of music and helped shaped the careers of pop stars and landmark jazz artists alike over the course of decades working in the business.

After rising to the position of president of Columbia Records in 1967, the Brooklyn-born Davis was directly responsible for signing Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock, Weather Report and Tony Williams Lifetime. He figured prominently in shaping career turning points for these artists and numerous others on the Columbia roster before departing the label in 1973 and publishing his book, *Clive: Inside The Record Business*. The following year, he founded Arista Records and hired Steve Backer to lead Arista Novus, a jazz-focused imprint that gave a major boost to the careers of progressive jazz artists Anthony Braxton, Muhal Richard Abrams, Oliver Lake, Steve Lacy, Larry Coryell, Henry Threadgill and numerous others, including smooth-jazz superstar Kenny G.

—Ed Enright



James Blood Ulmer, 1940–2026

JAMES BLOOD ULMER, THE innovative guitarist, singer and composer, passed on June 3 at the age of 86.

Ulmer left home at 18 and migrated to Pittsburgh, where he married, had two children and found work accompanying doo-wop groups like the Del Vikings on guitar. He soon began touring throughout the United States and performing in Europe. Ulmer moved to Columbus, Ohio, and later relocated to Detroit and had a third child. For the next five years, he stayed off the road and taught music while playing local clubs with drummer Doug Hammond in Focus Novii. After receiving the cold shoulder from his hero, Wes Montgomery, Ulmer began developing his own musical language, determined to sound like no one else.

In 1971, he moved to New York, and caught the ear of legendary avant-garde jazz saxophonist Ornette Coleman. He soon joined Coleman's harmolodic funk band, Prime Time. Ulmer's discography includes more than 25 genre-bending albums, including *Are You Glad To Be In America?* (1980), *Free Lancing* (1981), *Black Rock* (1982) and *Odyssey* (1983). More recently he returned to singing roots music with *Memphis Blood* in 2001 and *Bad Blood In The City*, which was nominated for a Grammy in 2007.

—Frank Alkyer, based on a tribute offered by the family of James Blood Ulmer



and I want that journey to continue." In terms of the project's music, the first album of the *Trumpets Of Michel-Ange* series was released in 2024, featuring collaborations with the late Malian kora player Toumani Diabaté and New Orleans stalwart Trombone Shorty, and the second volume was released this year with nine tracks of ebullient live takes alongside guests pianist Jon Batiste, Palestinian singer Nai Barghouti and Cuban pianist Gonzalo Rubalcaba.

Recorded entirely in live takes with Maalouf's 10-piece band in the room together for each composition, the result is irrepressibly energetic and freeform, ranging from the New Orleans-style fanfares of opening number "Bring The Light" to the mournful maqam melodies of "Oui, Je Le Veux," the ululating polyrhythms of "Layla's Wedding," the frenetic, folk-influenced phrasing of "Chasing The Sun" and the Indian classical motifs of "Gulham."

"The concept of these records is that it's a huge wedding party," Maalouf says. "The first volume is the wedding and the second is what happens just after you say 'I do' — it's the party. And if the record is going to be an all-night party, I needed my friends there to play with me. It was really important to have everyone live in the room together, rather than a studio session, since it's the difference between talking to a mirror versus talking to people, and I prefer people. They are the source of all my creativity."

Growing up in Lebanon with his musician father, Nassim, and pianist mother, Nada, Maalouf was surrounded by music from a young age. "In a musical family, your first language is song, which means that I've been composing all my life," he says. "Ever since I can remember, I've been composing music in my head and when there's a melody that sticks and won't go away, then I dig into it to flesh it out further."

First taking trumpet lessons from his father at 7 years old, by age 8 Maalouf was already playing to audiences at weddings and local gatherings. By 16, he was teaching other young students how to play his father's four-valve trumpet. Initially performing classical repertoire with his father, it was the release of his 2007 debut album that saw Maalouf begin to formulate his own modern fusion, drawing together everything from a chromatic version of Dizzy Gillespie's "A Night In Tunisia" to hip-hop swing on the woozy track "Hashish."

The record brought Maalouf into international notoriety and upon relocating to Paris, he soon became an in-demand instrumentalist as well as bandleader in his own right, subsequently playing with the likes of Sting, Archie Shepp, Juliet Gréco and Amadou & Mariam. In 2017, he was spotted by Quincy Jones at the Montreux Jazz Festival and went on to be managed internationally by the producer, while in 2022 he became the first Lebanese instrumentalist to be nominated at the Grammy Awards for his collaborative album with singer Angélique Kidjo, *Queen Of Sheba*. He has released 20 albums under his own independent imprint, Ibé, because "no one wanted to sign me when I needed their help, and when I was already big enough and had people working for me, then they arrived," he laughs. *The Trumpets Of Michel-Ange* seek to bring him back to his roots through the lens of his vast experience.

"It's all in the title, since when I was a child, and I heard stories of my father moving to Paris as a refugee and staying in a little church there, he would tell me about practicing his trumpet in the sacred space and drawing designs for the four-valve version," he says. "I imagined him like Michelangelo, drawing these beautiful designs across the church as if it was the Sistine Chapel. I realized that was the perfect way to name the instrument and to capture its poetry."

With a third volume in the works as well as "at least six albums of material" already recorded and awaiting release, it seems there is no slowing down Maalouf on his mission to spread the beauty of his distinct instrument to the world. "My father is 86 years old and he lives in the Lebanese mountains," he says. "He brought the world's music back into the capabilities of the trumpet, and so it's my duty to ensure everyone knows about its existence."

Up first, though, is the prospect of his largest show to date and one of the largest instrumental jazz shows in history: a headline date at the 45,000-capacity Paris La Défense arena in April 2027. "This show is the result of a lifetime of struggle, since I've never been playlisted on mainstream radio and no one has ever said instrumental music could have such a large appeal," Maalouf says. "But after this show, no one can say that anymore. I had to do something symbolic to show the industry that things have changed. I wish someone like Miles Davis had the chance to play a show this large as it certainly would have encouraged me on my path, but I'm doing it for the people waiting behind me, to encourage them onwards. It's a message to the world to embrace this music in all its forms."

—Ammar Kalia



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Seamus Blake has taken a deep dive into the music of Eddie Harris. "The more that I listened to him, the more I appreciated and recognized the diversity of his kind of talent."

KATE IZOR



Seamus Blake's Electrified Tribute to Eddie Harris

THE LONDON-BORN, VANCOUVER-RAISED

Seamus Blake, a role model for a generation of aspiring tenor sax players in Canada, recalls the moment he first plugged in. "I started playing with effects in 1995," recalled the 1992 Berklee grad and longtime New Yorker, who currently resides in Cologne, Germany. "I went to 48th Street with my buddy Chris Cheek, a great saxophone player. We had a band together then, and we went to Sam Ash just to buy microphones, but the guy there was such a great salesman that we ended up buying a whole bunch of other stuff. His pitch was, 'It would be really fantastic if you tried this Jimi Hendrix Crybaby wah-wah pedal and maybe this Boss pitchshifter/delay, which has got a lot of fantastic effects. Try it out and see for yourself.' So we took our microphones and we hooked them up to these effects pedals and started making bird noises through that and playing with the delay. And it was like, 'Wow, this is a whole universe of sound that we had no idea existed until now.'"

"The thing with electronic effects," he continued, "is when you first discover them it's a bit like dabbling in drugs. It's like, 'Ooh, wow! I had no idea flanger could make me feel so alive.'"

Shortly after that trip to Manhattan's old Music Row, Blake and Cheek began experimenting with effects in their band, The Bloomdaddies, eventually releasing their electrifying 1996 self-titled debut on the Criss Cross label. Soon after, Blake began hearing the comparisons. "People would come up to me after gigs and say, 'Yeah, that reminds me of Eddie Harris.' Now, I knew

about 'Exodus' and 'Listen Here' and 'Compared To What,' and I remember liking that John Scofield record that he played on [1994's *Hand Jive* on Blue Note], but I hadn't really checked out that much Eddie, particularly his electronic stuff. So I was actually a little bit late to the party."

It was around 2010, after Smoke jazz club co-owner Paul Stache had suggested honoring Harris on his birthday (Oct. 20) that year that Blake began investigating his music.

"That's when I took a deep dive into Eddie," he said. "And the more that I listened to him, the more I appreciated and recognized the diversity of his kind of talent, the uniqueness about him and the ways in which he was kind of ahead of curve in so many ways."

Fifteen years later, Blake finds himself going deeper than ever on *The Electrifying Seamus Blake Plays The Music Of Eddie Harris: EH!* (Cellar Music), his 24th as a leader or co-leader. A tip of the hat to the innovative saxophonist who passed in 1996, it's a direct nod to Harris' groundbreaking 1968 outing, *The Electrifying Eddie Harris* (Atlantic). In the company of Hammond B-3 organist/keyboardist Sam Yahel, electric bassist Tim Lefebvre and drummer Corey Fonville, with contributions from soulful singer Dawn Pemberton on funkified reimaginings of "Compared To What" and "I Need Some Money," Blake delivers on electrified tenor sax, EWI and even vocals (on the gentle ballad "Illusory Dreams" from Harris' *A Tale Of Two Cities*, recorded in May 1983 at Joe Segal's Jazz Showcase in Chicago).

The 2002 Thelonious Monk International Saxophone Competition Award winner explained his gradual evolution into electronics: "I started with classical music actually, playing violin until I was about 15, which is when I switched to saxophone. At Berklee I was pretty much a jazz nerd, just deeply into straightahead jazz. After college I began checking out more things divergent to mainstream jazz: rock, folk and funk music and all the different stuff that is out there. It was a gradual process but it snowballed pretty quickly."

By the time he and Cheek formed The Bloomdaddies, the conversion to electronics was complete. "We were into as many effects as we could possibly carry: harmonizers and different envelope filters like the Mutron and the whole deal. And when I go back and listen to some of Eddie's earliest records where he's playing with the Varitone (an early electronic pickup and effects unit introduced by Selmer in 1965 and introduced by Harris on 1966's *The Tender Storm*), I feel like the kind of discovery process for him was probably very similar to how we experienced it, just by trial-and-error. Eddie tended to use effects with groove music. But for us, they also opened doors of a color palette."

Blake became so gung-ho about electronic effects that he was bringing all his pedals out on his sideman gigs. "Victor Lewis was one of my regular gigs in the '90s, and he loved the psychedelic aspect of the effects," he recalled.

John Scofield invited Blake to jam with him around 1996, just to suss out their blend before going out on tour in support of the guitarist's gorgeous acoustic album that year, *Quiet*. "I remember he wanted to just jam," Blake recalled. "So we went to a Midtown Manhattan studio, and I brought my whole rig along. I actually had more gear than him, and I was like this eager beaver with the effects. Afterwards, John said, 'Sounds cool, man, sounds great! So I'll see you at the airport next week. And, oh yeah, you can just leave all those pedals at home. You don't need to bring that stuff.'"

Blake — who will be taking out an Eventide H90 harmonizer, Line 6 HX Stomp effects processor and TC Electronics Dynamic digital delay pedal when he tours in support of *EH!* — noted, "I think the goal in doing this album was not necessarily to meticulously copy all Eddie's techniques and effects, because you end up feeling like you come up short if you go that route. For me, it's more like creative inspiration and finding ways to showcase his music while also being yourself doing it."

"Sometimes people just want to hear it the way it was. You know, 'Give it to me straight, just like the original. Don't mess with it too much.' But then sometimes straight gets boring, so I might do little things to try and improve it a little bit — maybe put a new ending or an intro or just try to put something else on it like that. I think it's always good to have little surprises in there."

—Bill Milkowski

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– SEAMUS BLAKE



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"When we get together to play, to improvise, we're just trying to make something something fresh and all those influences and experiences that everybody has just comes out in a natural way," says Jeff Parker of his ETA IVtet. From left, Josh Johnson, Jay Bellrose, Ana Butters and Parker.



Jeff Parker's Sonic World

GUITARIST JEFF PARKER SURPRISED HIMSELF when he saw his smile in the photo that became the cover of *Happy Today* (International Anthem/Nonesuch), the recent concert recording with his ETA IVtet. Never one to grin for cameras, Parker's performance also took place during a troubling time. Ultimately, the brightly resilient image and the ensemble's music highlight an ideal response to adversity.

As Parker spoke over Zoom from Berlin while on tour with Flea, he described how last year's wildfires displaced his family from their home in Altadena, California, for eight months. He also condemned such outrages as the ICE raids, particularly in Southern California. In the midst of such situations, his quartet's onstage dialog and the audience's response became a message of emotional resistance.

"It was a difficult time and then the concert was a beautiful moment," Parker said. "The band hadn't played for a while and we had developed a dedicated following of people in Los Angeles. We were playing in a bigger space and it was a joyous night in many ways, the community that the music can create of people coming together and celebrate this experience of this collective thing. There was a lot of positive energy in the room that night."

That energy flows in surprising directions throughout *Happy Today*. Nuance guides two extensive pieces with bits of subtle funk punctuating minimalist shifts. Loops, drones and electronic effects serve to enhance the group's resolutely human sound. An accompanying film by Charlie Weinmann documents the concert with unconventional angles that

accentuate the ensemble's emphasis on spontaneous composition.

"When we get together to play, to improvise, we're just trying to make something something fresh and all those influences and experiences that everybody has just comes out in a natural way," Parker said. "Nobody's a revisionist, trying to recreate anything. We're trying to make something new, and the goal is you don't really know what it is."

The ETA IVtet grew out of sessions Parker led at the (now closed) Enfield Tennis Academy venue after he moved to the Los Angeles, from Chicago, in 2013. At first Parker sought commercial work, seeing as the city is an entertainment hub. But around 2016, he reconnected with an old friend, drummer Jay Bellrose, who wanted to get back into playing jazz. He then invited bassist Anna Butters and saxophonist Josh Johnson who, like Parker, embraces new technologies. Gradually, each musician's distinctive personalities emerged.

"Josh's way of incorporating electronics into his saxophone sound is so flawless, creative and profound, it's super inspiring and a marvelous thing to witness," Parker said. "Anna's ears are huge, they hear everything. When we would play the weekly gig at ETA, the only thing we would ever talk about is, 'Are we going to play tunes or improvise?' If I'd say, 'Let's play tunes,' Jay would come with a standard bebop kit, but if I said, 'We're going to improvise,' you'd never know what he would come with. He might bring a 30-inch bass drum, percussion instruments with built-in echo chambers and really thin cymbals that would sound like thunder."

With that shared mindset, the group built an audience for continuously developing open-ended improvisation. Parker released *The Way Out Of Easy* (Nonesuch) two years ago. *Happy Today* shows how much further the quartet has developed from their initial impulses.

"We just settled into this intentional way of improvising that was a natural evolution of the band," Parker said. "We started out probably for the first four or five years of our residency playing standards over time, the kind of playing over song structures and that stuff kind of weeded itself out and we decided to focus on improvising. Which also is us exploiting these technologies, at least for myself and Josh. We use looping pedals where we can create drones and play off each other and create these atmospheric spaces that do set a mood and it is about seeing how long we can sustain a mood in the music."

These moods also resonate throughout Parker's California albums in different formats. The sense of open space on *Happy Today* connect to the home studio experiments on his 2021 solo guitar album *Forfolks* (International Anthem). Similarly, the beats on the new live album sometimes reference the R&B influences on his 2020 New Breed recording, *Suite For Max Brown*. But rather than representing a break from his time in Chicago during the 1990s and early 2000s, Parker describes those years as foundational and ongoing. That was where his experiences ranged from playing jazz with other members of the Association For the Advancement of Creative Musicians to his work with the rock band Tortoise. He is currently writing pieces to perform in Chicago for a concert at Symphony Center next February.

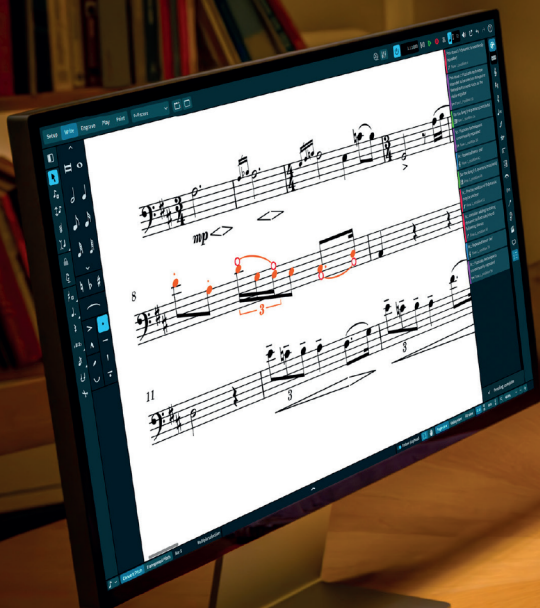
"Chicago, culturally and musically, all that it had to offer and me having to exist within the culture of the city molded me and made me into what I'm doing now," Parker said. "I was fortunate that I had a 25-year career as a creative musician coming up in the richness of the Chicago music community behind me."

Looking back on Parker's own albums from about 20 years ago also indicates how much of his musical philosophy has remained steadfast. His 2003 trio release *Like-Coping* (Delmark) and 2005 quartet outing *The Relatives* (Thrill Jockey) convey the same concentration on minimalism and low-key dynamics as his recent work.

"I can draw a pretty consistent line through most of the music that I've made under my own name as a leader or kind of a collaborative," Parker said. "I'm trying to invite the listener into, kind of, this sonic world. That's what I like about making records: You can use that medium to create a sound world where it's not so much about capturing a performance but you're more thinking about it in a much broader way — like it's a way to present one's vision of sound itself."

—Aaron Cohen

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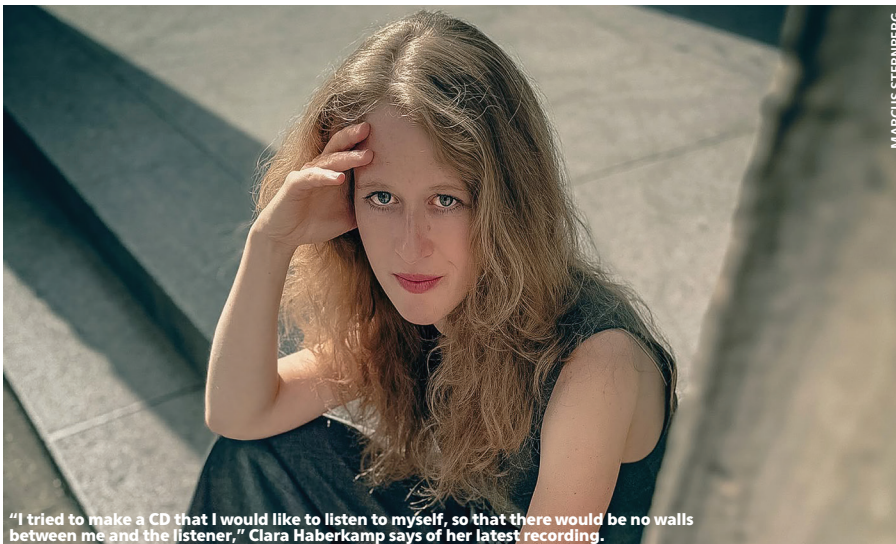


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"I tried to make a CD that I would like to listen to myself, so that there would be no walls between me and the listener," Clara Haberkamp says of her latest recording.

Clara Haberkamp's Multi-Directional Joy

AT THE 2022 JAZZAHEAD! EXPO, THE young pianist Clara Haberkamp played as one of about 35 showcase artists during the festival in Bremen, Germany. Amidst the blur, and the inspiring embarrassment of potential riches in the dense weekend program, Haberkamp's half-hour trio set was a minor revelation, marking her as a promising artist on the jazz map well worth keeping an eye on.

Four years later, Haberkamp's musical journey continues to emerge, moving from the artful singer-songwriter ethos of her 2018 album *Neon Hill* (Traumton) through the 2024 trio outing *Plateaux* (TYX Art) and now with the release of her distinctive new solo album *Love Maps* (TYX Art). Also on her rangy resume is the completion of a Ph.D. thesis about accompaniment.

On *Love Maps*, Haberkamp's natural diversity becomes her. She manages to carve out a cohesive conceptual throughline with her central jazz persona leading outward into improvisational and reinventive takes on Bach and Beethoven and the pop song turf of Phoebe Snow's "Never Letting Go" and David Bowie-covered standard "Wild Is The Wind," with her glowing vocals in tow. It all comes together, as a cogent portrait of an artist of broad, but highly discerning, musical tastes and skill sets.

From her home in Berlin, Haberkamp explained the impetus and game plan for *Love Maps*, the title of which stems from "an idea by John Gottman, who was a psychologist. And he said you can have a map for each person you like or you love. You know the fears of this person, but also what or also tiny bits of their personality. This CD is like a map.

"I like complexity and that you have different directions at the same time. You don't need to be one thing but can be a lot of things. I integrated

pop melodies, for example, with Bach's 'Air' and Beethoven's 'Waldstein' sonata. I also wanted to get with the listener and not to create distance or walls to the listener. There were some compositions of my own, and 'Butoh And Ballet' is quite avant garde, I think.

"I tried to make a CD that I would like to listen to myself, so that there would be no walls between me and the listener. This was the aim. In the end, I just chose what I liked."

Bringing her fine singing voice into the equation was a measured proposition: "Wanting to sing again was also a natural decision. I didn't feel pressure from anyone. I just wanted to do it. I didn't sing so much in the last years because the piano was getting too much in the background."

Although she reinterpreted standards early in her career, Haberkamp has in her more recent years taken to unorthodox subjects for jazz treatments, such as "Ich bin von Kopf bis Fuß auf Liebe eingestellt" — also known as "Falling In Love Again," made famous by Marlene Dietrich in the 1930 film *Blue Angel* — and Gordon Lightfoot's "If You Could Read My Mind." But she noted, "I love being spontaneous with re-harmonization. I can also write it down, but I love to do it in the moment because it's all in the concert or on the recording. I have the feeling that the situation I'm in gives me so much energy that I cannot have in my own room at home. There are things coming out I have never dreamt of."

Haberkamp came from a richly musical household, the child of two renowned classical saxophonists, including her mother, Ilona, who wrote the biography of famed pianist Jutta Hipp. Clara grew up studying piano and composition and now teaches in Berlin.

Of her various musical avenues, she noted

that "I was always singing, but the main thing was the piano. I studied classical music until I was 19, and at 11 started to play jazz, too. At 19, I had to decide what I wanted to do. I wanted to do jazz, but was never really comfortable with my colleagues not practicing. Classical musicians practice a lot, and [my jazz friends] were saying, 'Hey, why do you practice so much? Just chill.'" [laughs]

Stylistically, Haberkamp brings her own personal voice to the general world of jazz pianists who combine lyricism with virtuosity, classical colorations and improvisatory impulses — a world whose standard bearers include Jarrett and Mehldau. Does she feel connected to that school?

"Yes," she says, "I see myself in that group. These are the pianists I grew up with and listened to the most. Fred Hersch came a bit later, because he did contrapuntal things. Polyphony is now a new chapter that I would like to get more into. But Keith Jarrett was the main thing for me. There are some pianists that are very energetic, too. Clare Fisher is also interesting for me."

Another ongoing project in Haberkamp's musical world currently is Duo Azadi, a project with the accomplished Iran-born cellist Atena Eshtiaghi, whom Haberkamp met while living in Hamburg. In the duo, which has recorded an album (in search of a label at present), the musicians clearly exhibit a clear empathetic bond on musical material that can range from lyrical jazz aspects to classical maneuvers and moments of free improvisational abandon.

"She's a great person," Haberkamp says of her musical partner. "She's a film composer and has won a lot of prizes. We fit together very well and are very close, even though she's from a totally different place on the earth."

On more sizable expressive canvases, Haberkamp has written for large ensembles, in and beyond standard jazz big band contexts. She explained that her large ensemble work was "also like a phase. There were some great projects in 2021 and 2024. What I'm interested in is cross-over stuff, not the usual big band, but to write for different disciplines, different genres and then create an orchestra. I did it a few times. It worked very well, and I will do that in the future."

Keeping options and future moves open has been a matter of artistic course for Haberkamp, who looks back on her career so far with circumspection. Along the way, she says, "It was natural that I had to put everything out in order to find my style. There were some ways that were maybe not so direct, but it was necessary to do it. You could always say, 'Why did you think so much? Why did you overthink everything?' But that's my character. That's me. So why shouldn't I do that? That's why I play this way, too, so I think I shouldn't regret that."

Does she connect with the concept that an artist's work is never done and that the true artist is ever a work-in-progress? She laughed, paused and firmly answered, "Yes." —Josef Woodard

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— Conner Eisenmenger

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Photo by Steve Korn



Sonny Rollins photographed at the Williamsburg Bridge for a September 2005 cover article in *DownBeat*. His classic 1962 album *The Bridge* (RCA) drew its inspiration from Rollins famously woodshedding on this span connecting Manhattan to Brooklyn.



SONNY STORIES

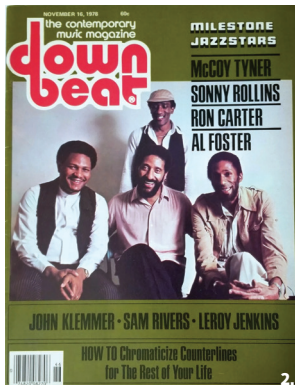
A Tribute to Sonny Rollins

COMPILED BY FRANK ALKYER PHOTO BY JIMMY KATZ

When Sonny Rollins passed on May 25 at the age of 95, there were very few of his contemporaries left to mourn him. That's what happens when you live a long, full, rich life.

There were plenty of acolytes, those who learned at the bell of Mr. Rollins' tenor saxophone. And that, too, is the result of a long, full and rich life. DownBeat ran a memoriam online and a brief tribute at press time in last month's issue, but in the weeks that followed, the outpouring of love for the Saxophone Colossus flowed like one of his marathon solos. So, to honor Mr. Rollins, we present some of those stories as well as some historical comments from artists who have passed.

When speaking of contemporaries, the Maestro Ron Carter, an ageless 89, posted beautifully on social media several times about his friend. Here's just one special passage:



1. Early '60s Sonny with his classic Mohawk (courtesy Prestige Records). 2. McCoy Tyner, Sonny, Ron Carter and Al Foster (standing) grace the Nov. 16, 1978, cover of *DownBeat* as the Milestone Jazzstars (Jim Marshall/courtesy Milestone Records). 3. From left, Rollins, Clifford Brown, Richie Powell, Max Roach and George Morrow in the cover photo of the album *Three Giants!*, part of the Prestige Historical Series, Original 1956 Recordings.

"In 2015 [Jazz Foundation of America] presented Sonny with a Lifetime Achievement Award at our 'Great Night in Harlem' gala at the Apollo Theater. Sonny made his final public performance in 2012 and officially retired two years later due to pulmonary fibrosis.

"At the gala, without his horn, he commanded the stage and riveted the audience the same way he always did: with the incomparable strength of his spirit, humanity and creative spark. In his remarks, he recited a litany of musicians who inspired him as a young man and throughout his life, culminating with the statement: 'What we call jazz — that's keeping the world in equilibrium. I don't care what kind of music you like out here today, it all comes from jazz.' No truer words have ever been spoken.

"Sonny was, is and always will be the philosopher king of music and a guiding light in the search for self-actualization, harmony among all living beings and transcendence beyond our perceived reality. Rest in peace, Sonny, and thank you for the eternal motivation to improve oneself in the service of others."

After Mr. Rollins' passing, long-time contributor Ted Panken was reminded of, and recommended, several interviews he did in preparation for a 2005 cover article in *DownBeat* that have now been collected on his Substack. One was with pianist Stephen Scott, who played in Rollins' band at the time. When asked what it was like to solo after Sonny Rollins, Scott replied, "Oh, man. What's it like playing before-after-during Sonny Rollins?

Well, I'll put it this way. People have asked me about the gig over the last couple of years. And I was a great fan of Sonny Rollins, way before I ever got a call from him. ... I never expected to be on the same stage with him. There have been nights where he's soloing during the show, and I'll start comping, and I'm listening, 'Oh, OK, Sonny, I hear you, I hear you.' And I'm comping and I'm comping, 'Oh, yeah, my God, yes Sonny.' And then I'll turn and look at him and say, 'Man, Sonny Rollins, wow, he's playing, oh, man!' And I'll realize that I haven't played for two choruses because I'm such a fan. So maybe that will give you some indication of how ... it's like getting an opportunity to play one-on-one with Michael Jordan or something."

In that same set of interviews, the late drum legend Jack DeJohnette was asked to compare Rollins to, say, Miles Davis as a band leader.

"Well, you just have to stay on your toes with Sonny," DeJohnette said. "He wants to be able to change gears sometimes, and he expects the musicians to be able to read what he's doing. Sometimes that's not always easy. In that case he'll stop and say, 'Listen, you know what I was trying to do there?' I think he's been able to be more articulate in stating what it is he's looking for — to communicate it verbally. Miles and Sonny and Max Roach came up in a time where the musicians really had to be able to sort of have an ESP about the music. It wasn't so much talked about or intellectualized. I mean, there were basic things that were talked about. But the ability to be able to read one another, and a minimum was spoken about

the music. Sonny is still basically like that. I mean, there are times when he wants a certain thing, and he can articulate that. Miles was like that. He didn't say much, except when he wanted something specific he would say certain things. But he really chose the musicians that could think for themselves, and therefore, when he went somewhere, could support wherever he went."

There was always talk of Rollins' great tenor battles, especially in the city of Chicago. Panken connected with saxophonist/composer Henry Threadgill to recall a classic that happened at McKie's Disc Jockey Show Lounge on the South Side of Chicago back in the 1960s with the great Gene Ammons.

"Yes, they played together a week on the same [bill] at McKie's in the Strand Hotel, the Sonny Rollins Quartet with Gene Ammons," Threadgill said. "It was quite incredible. I mean, I was a great fan of Sonny Rollins when I was growing up. He was one of my idols besides Gene Ammons. Now, you can often hear things live that will never get on record. I remember the last night that they played, the Sunday night, McKie's locked the doors of the club around 2:30 or 3 o'clock, and they wouldn't let anybody else in. They played until the next morning, and Gene Ammons was really ... I had no idea he could play like that. He was playing pieces up in the harmonic section of the saxophone, the altissimo of the tenor saxophone, and never played below that. Very high notes, played all of these melodies like an octave higher than Sonny Rollins. It was really quite impressive. I didn't



1. Rollins and Thelonious Monk at the Five Spot in New York, 1957 (DownBeat Archive, photographer not credited). 2. Sonny captured in his pre-show weight-lifting ritual at the Apollo Theatre in 1962 by photographer Steve Schapiro. It's part of a new coffee-table book of Schapiro's photography called *Jazz* (ACC Art Books), capturing many of the giants of the music. 3. Sonny doing some yard work in Oslo, 1971, at Norwegian jazz critic Randi Hultin's home (photo by Randi Hultin).

even know he played up there on the saxophone! It was quite a lesson.

"But those two players were two totally different styles. Sonny Rollins had some Chicago roots, too, because he had a lot of family there and had spent a lot of time, so he knew quite a bit about the Chicago style of playing. I'm sure he was struck with Gene Ammons' playing. There were very few tenor players of that age who were not struck by Gene Ammons and Dexter Gordon coming out of the Billy Eckstine Orchestra."

Chicago. Rollins did spend a good amount of time in the Windy City, and had an affinity for "the Chicago sound." One of his longtime bandmates, guitarist Bobby Broom, also has deep Chicago roots. His latest recording, *Notes Of Thanks* (Steele Records), serves as a timely tribute to Rollins, one that came out shortly before the maestro passed.

"I might have asked my parents to buy my ticket [to a Rollins concert at the Berklee Performance Center]," Broom told contributor Aaron Cohen for an article in the July 2026 issue of *DownBeat*. "I remember sitting in the audience and having two strong sensations: 'Don't have an aneurysm,' because Sonny was so intense; and, the next overwhelming feeling — which made me go to my dorm room to gather myself [afterwards] — was, 'I want to play with him. I want to play in his band.' It was overwhelming. I had to get myself together to watch the rest of the show, and then I found my way backstage. We spoke then, and then he called again a few years after that. I guess he was

watching me."

The Chicago-based writer, photographer and saxophonist Michael Jackson also had a long-time relationship with Mr. Rollins. He had interviewed, photographed, even designed T-shirts for Rollins. And then there was the time Jackson sent Sonny his new CD.

"Over the years he'd graciously cooperate with cover stories for London's *Jazzwise* and interviews for *New City* and *The Chicago Sun-Times*, but at one point he requested I call him," Jackson said. "I'd sent him a copy of my CD on which I'd dedicated a composition, 'Sonny The Squirrel,' based on the changes to one of his calypso vehicles. On the outro to the cut I played the 'Everywhere Calypso' he played on *Next Album* (Milestone, 1972) instead of my head, to declare the contrafact. We cycled it through a few keys in the studio at the end in tribute to Sonny's improvisatory modulations.

"I figured Sonny would never listen — hell, he didn't even listen to his own music. To my delight he checked the record out and was complimentary about my playing, however he was not happy with the segue at the end. I'd suspected the Saxophone Colossus objected to the diminutive squirrel comparison but, a nature lover, he scoffed, 'You know me better than that!' The issue was my appropriation of the melody he had given notoriety. We got into a debate — was it permissible for Dizzy Gillespie to, for example, play out a jam on 'Hothouse' after the introductory head of 'What Is This Thing Called Love?'

"As with many legendary musicians, the

victim of countless bootlegs and borrowings, Sonny was adamant: 'Don't make me come after you, Michael.' So I respectfully faded the outro before I released the recording."

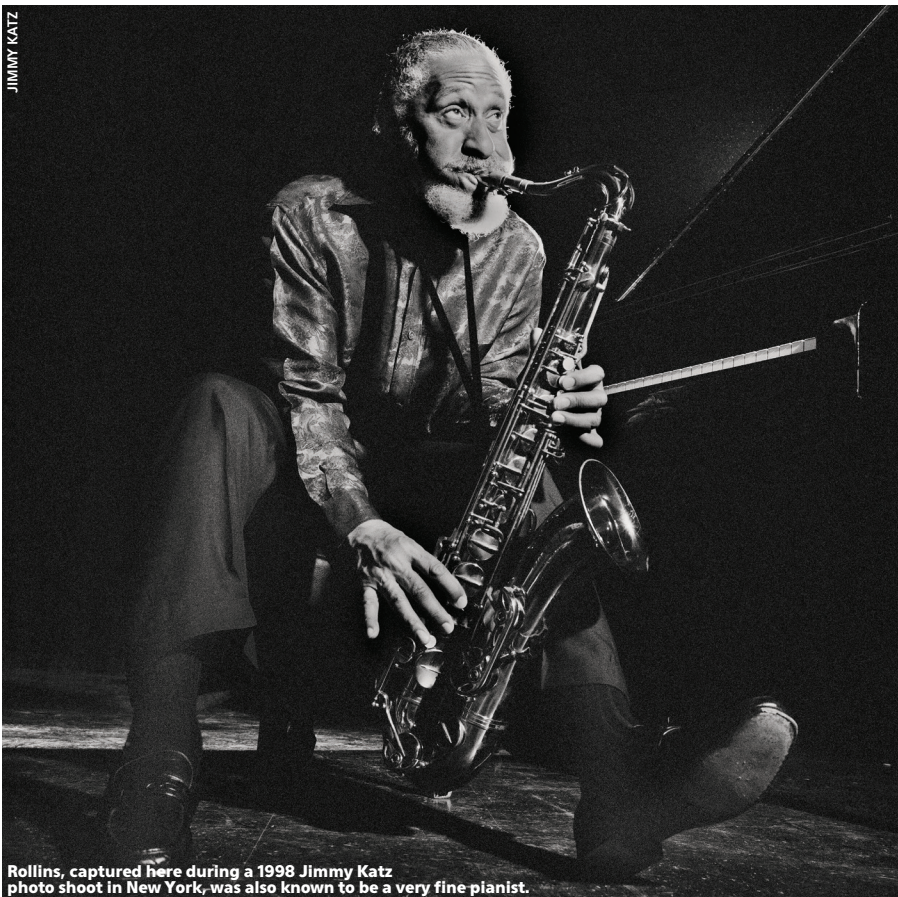
You don't want to piss off Sonny Rollins!

For the June 2011 cover of *DownBeat*, this writer interviewed T.S. Monk about growing up the son of Thelonious Monk. T.S. has always had a way with stories, but this one about Mr. Rollins remains near and dear.

"You had these guys coming through the door," Monk said, noting that famous musicians like Miles Davis would drop by the house and wait for an audience with his famous father. "I distinctly remember Sonny Rollins coming through the door. He had a Mohawk hairdo. Already, that was wild. But then he had his tenor saxophone in one hand, and he had like a 35-pound dumbbell in the other hand. And, of course, this was because the old tenor saxophone cases were these big heavy boxes, and he felt like it was jammin' him up by carrying it, so he had to balance himself out by carrying that 35-pound weight. But I have to tell you, at 6 or 7 years old, this guy coming through the door with these weights in his hand and a Mohawk hairdo was ... [laughs] very strange."

Upon request, Aidan Levy — author of *Saxophone Colossus: The Life and Music of Sonny Rollins*, the most comprehensive biography of Mr. Rollins' career — offered one of his favorite Rollins stories.

"When I first proposed my biography to



Rollins, captured here during a 1998 Jimmy Katz photo shoot in New York, was also known to be a very fine pianist.

Sonny Rollins, he stipulated one condition: The book had to foreground the landmark 1958 album *Freedom Suite* and his contribution to the civil rights movement. Fortunately, the working title for the book was *Freedom Suite: The Life and Music of Sonny Rollins*.

“When Sonny was the captain of his neighborhood stickball team, the Edgcombe Avenue Aces, W.E.B. Du Bois, who lived down the block, would shoot them a look of disapproval on his way home from work. Little did Du Bois know, Sonny would internalize his message and amplify it through his music.

“W.E.B. Du Bois said that if you ever get to have any prominence in any field of endeavor that you engage in, always remember where you came from — remember who you are,” Sonny told me in 2022. I’ve never forgotten that. So when I got a chance to record and make records and all that, I always mentioned something about the Black struggle — always.

“On March 7, 1958, Sonny, Max Roach and Oscar Pettiford recorded *The Freedom Suite*, an insistent, nearly 20-minute, four-movement masterpiece for piano-less trio. Sonny pored over the epigrammatic 53-word liner notes text to get the rhythm and the message exactly right. The album directly inspired Roach and Abbey Lincoln’s *We Insist! Max Roach’s Freedom Now Suite* three years later. ‘He seems to possess a rare gift which enables him to play whatever comes to his mind and make it sound good,’

wrote Benny Golson in his review of the album. To Sonny, jazz exemplified freedom in its purest form — but what you do with that freedom is up to you.

“With *The Freedom Suite*, Sonny was motivated by the discrimination he faced leasing a New York apartment, even after winning international critics’ polls in this magazine and others. ‘It was like two different worlds,’ Sonny told me recently. ‘Fortunately, I was able to get involved with the music part of it — different completely. I had to go through some things ... but, you know, that’s OK. It’s all right, man. Charlie Parker and company straightened everything out.’”

Finally, a few more stories from those who worked with Mr. Rollins.

“I played Carnegie Hall with Sonny Rollins,” said Terence Blanchard during a taped panel discussion conducted as part of his role as executive artistic director of SFJAZZ. “Yeah. Dude, let me tell ya. ... And here’s the wild part, just to give you guys [an idea], what’s wild about the gig with Sonny Rollins. A pianist named Bruce Barth, I’m at a rehearsal at his house, in Brooklyn, and his wife goes, ‘Terence, Sonny is on the phone for you.’ And I go, ‘Sonny?’ And, you know, a lot of people always imitate his voice. So, I thought someone was playing a joke on me. So I pick up the phone. [imitates Rollins’ voice] ‘Um, Terence? Sonny here.’ And I was like, ‘Yeah, whatever, man.’ And then he said, ‘Paul

told me all about you,’ which was Paul Jeffries, who was my instructor at Rutgers, who was his best friend.

“So, as soon as he said that, I was like, ‘Shit, this is Sonny Rollins.’ And I remember I told Branford [Marsalis], I said, ‘Branford, man, Sonny called me to do a gig.’ And Branford goes, ‘Go get your ass kicked like everybody else.’ [laughter] And it was true because, you know, we got to the gig. In rehearsal, Sonny was like really friendly. We got to the gig, man, he didn’t speak to me. And we got out there and the first couple songs, he took it easy on me, you know what I mean? And then the third song, we played a blues, minor blues. And he did like this [waves his fingers] for me to trade with him. Dude, I played everything I knew three times. And he just kept goin’ and goin’ and goin’. I was like calling for my momma on stage. [laughter] That was embarrassing.”

Terri Hinte, Rollins’ long-time publicist, knew him not only as an innovative musical artist, but also as a person, and a writer.

“Sonny Rollins practiced the lost art of letter-writing,” she said. “He was a diligent correspondent, and his words, always handwritten in his tall printed script, carried weight. The pianist Joe Alterman recently recalled a letter he received years ago from Sonny, who wrote: ‘We all have to use adversity as an opportunity to find a way. So, keep a strong mind throughout this short existence.’ Joe has carried that message with him ever since.

“About 10 years ago, Sonny mentioned to me that he’d just heard Barbara Boxer was retiring from the Senate. He’d met Boxer and her husband, Stewart, in 2011, when Sonny was honored at the Kennedy Center. Boxer revealed that she and Stewart had courted to Sonny’s music, and they were thrilled to grab a quick photo with him.

“As for Sonny, he was an admirer of Boxer’s work, and I suggested that he write her a letter and tell her so. Which he did. And he received a handwritten response from her.

“In December 2016, Barbara Boxer gave her farewell address to the Senate, and in conclusion, she read Sonny’s letter into the record. Her voice caught as she recounted receiving the letter, ‘in longhand,’ and she read, with palpable emotion: ‘So, so sorry that we are not going to have you for us anymore.’ Sonny wrote of his interest in politics, of marching for civil rights as a 6-year-old with his grandmother. ‘It has been a joy and inspiration,’ he continued, ‘knowing that Barbara Boxer was there for us. You will be missed, and we all love you.’

“Those words went straight to her heart, right on the Senate floor.

“Because of his rare musical gifts, Sonny met kings and presidents throughout his career. He received all the honors, deservedly so. His music changed lives. His words had that power, too.” **DB**

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ARTIST OF THE YEAR
GUITARIST OF THE YEAR
GROUP OF THE YEAR

MARY HALVORSON

BY MICHAEL J. WEST PHOTO BY ELENA OLIVA

The first time Mary Halvorson won a DownBeat Critics Poll category, taking Guitarist of the Year for 2017, she was seen as something of dark horse — not least by herself.

“I don’t feel like I’m the best guitarist,” the 45-year-old Massachusetts native self-effacingly told DownBeat back then. The jazz critics obviously felt differently. Moreover, that year, they also gave Halvorson nods in three Rising Star categories: Composer, Jazz Group (for her trio) and Jazz Artist.

This year it’s safe to say that her star has risen, across that board and beyond. Halvorson marks her 10th consecutive time winning Guitarist of the Year, and that’s just for starters. She is also the critics’ choice for 2026’s Artist of the Year, as well as Group of the Year for her Amaryllis sextet with trumpeter Adam O’Farrill, trombonist Jacob Garchik, vibraphonist Patricia

Brennan, bassist Nick Dunston and drummer Tomas Fujiwara. That band’s latest album, 2025’s *About Ghosts*, is in the No. 2 slot for Album of the Year. Halvorson is also runner-up for Composer of the Year.

Her latest undertaking, *Canis Major* — with trumpeter Dave Adewumi, bassist Henry Fraser and Fujiwara — puts her back in the top 10 of Rising Star Jazz Groups. Impressive, considering the quartet has yet to put out a record (they went into the studio in June). However, *Canis Major* has played around New York frequently, as well as touring Europe and the U.S., where the band made a splash at this year’s edition of the Big Ears festival in Knoxville, Tennessee.



Mary Halvorson's Amaryllis, from left, Nick Dunston, Adam O'Farrill, Patricia Brennan, Jacob Garchik, Halvorson and Tomas Fujiwara. Of note, Brennan recently left the band, with pianist Yvonne Rogers stepping in.



ERNEST STUART

Even as the accolades for Halvorson outdo themselves (no small accomplishment for an artist who won a MacArthur “genius” grant in 2019), the guitarist herself — speaking on the heels of Canis Major’s three-week European tour — remains as wide-eyed and humble about it as ever.

“There’s so many artists on those lists that I would’ve chosen above myself,” she insisted. “But I do know that I’m really grateful for it. I play music to make music, and then if you’re able to reach people with it on top of that, it feels like a bonus. Playing music that’s a little bit left of center, I never really expect to get recognition.”

Halvorson, unrecognized? Impossible. She has perhaps the most instantly recognizable guitar sound this side of Jimi Hendrix. Barbed, percussive notes that sometimes converge into abrasive, punkish chords; dissonant phrases with their own kind of off-kilter lyricism; and her trademark, severe, careening pitch bends (done with the assistance of a Line 6 floor pedal) that make her guitar tone seem to ricochet like a bullet around reinforced steel walls.

Is this a nod to microtonal music, or other genres that deal in alternate tonalities? Not at all, she said. “It’s funny, I often get people asking me what tuning my guitar is in. It’s standard tuning; in fact, I never *don’t* have my guitar in standard tuning. So it’s still very much in that system. The pitch bends are just little ornamentations on the notes, that’s how I see it.”

Her compositional style is also idiosyncratic. She builds richly melodic tunes on unique, angular structures that can on a whim shift key, tempo and time signature, thus creating a constant aura of suspense. It’s not so much that she defies conventional form as that she doesn’t bother with it at all.

“Mary’s music really gets to the heart of a

personal sense of self-expression,” Fujiwara said. “There’s an immediacy to it; there’s an intensity to it; there’s a passion behind it that feels very personal, very true to herself. There are a lot of references, so it’s very rich in terms of the layers of musical language that she’s using, but it never feels like a tour through her different sonic inspirations. It’s this really interesting mix of influences that produces a singular sound.”

“I try to go as much on intuition as I can, and turn off my brain,” Halvorson said of her approach to writing. “I also try to not go in with any overarching structural ideas. I write very quickly, so I just start writing and then see what happens, and I kind of form the shapes and everything in the moment. And then after I’ve done that for a while, I step back — and then go in and fine-tune it.”

Halvorson also tailors her compositions to the musicians she intends to play them; thus her ensembles are as immediately recognizable as her playing. Between her early trio and Amaryllis, she also led a quartet, a septet, an octet and two quintets (the instrumental Mary Halvorson Quintet and Code Girl, featuring the vocals of Amirtha Kidambi). Amaryllis and Canis Major, however, represent the first time Halvorson has juggled two separate bands (albeit sharing drummer Fujiwara) at the same time.

“I haven’t led a group smaller than five people in many, many years,” she remarked. “I was kind of missing that small-group interaction and wanting to compose again for a small group, just to see what that would look like now. It’s also for practicality: Canis Major is the first time that I’ve had a group where everybody lives in New York in I don’t know how many years. So it’s a group that can play a lot.

“But I don’t intend for that to replace



NICHOLAS ALBRECHT

Halvorson’s duet projects are many, including this year’s collaboration with trumpeter Ambrose Akinmusire.

Amaryllis,” Halvorson added. “My intention is to really keep both groups going at the same time and see how that goes. So I’m still doing Amaryllis, and I’m gearing up for another chapter of that project.”

Indeed, the sextet has undergone a significant change in personnel: Patricia Brennan, the band’s vibraphonist from its self-titled 2022 debut through *About Ghosts*, has left to concentrate on her own burgeoning solo career. (It’s obviously paying dividends, with Brennan placing second behind Halvorson for Artist of the Year and edging out the guitarist for Album and Rising Star Group of the year). Rather than replace the inimitable musician with another vibraphonist, Halvorson has brought in Yvonne Rogers on piano and synthesizer to fill out Amaryllis.

“The first gig with Yvonne will be at the

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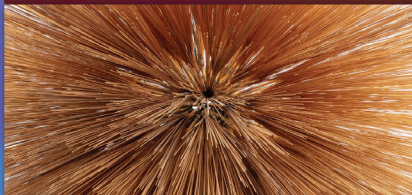


GROUP OF THE YEAR

Mary Halvorson: *Amaryllis*

FEATURING

Adam O'Farrill (BM '16), trumpet
Jacob Garchik (BM '98), trombone
Patricia Brennan (MSM faculty), vibraphone



ALBUM OF THE YEAR

Patricia Brennan (MSM faculty)
Of The Near And Far



LARGE ENSEMBLE OF THE YEAR

Maria Schneider Orchestra

FEATURING

Nadje Noordhuis (MM '05),
trumpet/flugelhorn
Tony Kadleck (BM '89), trumpet/flugelhorn
Ryan Keberle (BM '01, MSM faculty), trombone
Jay Anderson (MSM faculty), bass



TRUMPETER OF THE YEAR

Ambrose Akinmusire
(BM '05)



BASSIST OF THE YEAR

Linda May Han Oh
(MM '08, HonDMA '24)



VIBRAPHONIST OF THE YEAR

Patricia Brennan
(MSM faculty)



ARRANGER OF THE YEAR

Darcy James Argue
(MSM faculty)



RIISING STAR ARTIST OF THE YEAR TRUMPETER ARRANGER

Adam O'Farrill
(BM '16)



RIISING STAR SOPRANO SAXOPHONIST TENOR SAXOPHONIST

Nicole Glover
(MSM faculty)



RIISING STAR KEYBOARDIST ORGANIST

Gerald Clayton
('05)



RIISING STAR DRUMMER

Marcus Gilmore
(PC '01)



RIISING STAR LARGE ENSEMBLE

Webber/Morris Big Band

FEATURING

Anna Webber (MM '10), tenor
saxophone, flute, conductor
Jay Rattman (MM '11),
alto saxophone, soprano
saxophone, clarinet, flute
Nolan Tsang (BM '16), trumpet
Tim Vaughn (MM '09), trombone
Jeff Davis (MM '01), drums



RIISING STAR COMPOSER

Anna Webber
(MM '10)

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Mary Halvorson's latest project? *Canis Major*, a brilliant new quartet with, from left, Halvorson, Tomas Fujiwara, Henry Fraser and Dave Adewumi.



Bone Bells, Halvorson's collaboration with pianist Sylvie Courvoisier, received high critical praise in last year's poll.

VERONIQUE HOEGGER

'I think it's rare to find an improviser that all goes and nothing has to go at all.'

—Ambrose Akinmusire on Halvorson

Blue Note in Tokyo, which we're doing in August," she said. "Adapting older pieces for piano instead of vibraphone has been really fun. I'm also writing some new music for that group, specifically for piano. I've never had a pianist in one of my bands before, which is kind of strange. And then having the option to also have synthesizer, it's actually opened up quite a lot of possibilities in the music, and I think it's going to be really cool."

As one might expect, *Canis Major* is a much leaner outfit: With one horn and rhythm section there's more space, less concern with dense harmony and counterpoint than the many-voiced *Amaryllis*. However, it retains Halvorson's sense of melody, angularity and surprise turns. What's more, in improvising, she and Adewumi often end up in counterpoint, anyway — but then again, sometimes they don't.

"In both *Amaryllis* and *Canis Major*, she's not predetermining solos," Fujiwara said. "So everyone has to be ready to improvise on any tune, at any time, and we feel it out right in the moment. We've had times where two people jump in and take the lead; any number of things can happen. It's really about the shape of a piece from beginning to end, and what are you contributing to that big picture."

Yet Halvorson doesn't restrict herself to her own "big pictures." She is a serial collaborator. She initiated her career in Anthony Braxton's bands, as well as a duo with violist Jessica Pavone, and logged serious time in bands led by O'Farrill and drummer Tom Rainey as well as Thumbscrew, a collective trio with Fujiwara and bassist Michael Formanek (currently on hold with Formanek having moved to Portugal), among others.

"I think each person brings a slightly different thing out of you," she said. "Each probably pushes me into a slightly different zone than if I had been playing with somebody else." Of the highest value, she adds, is "a welcomeness to experimentation, where I don't feel like anything I'm gonna do is gonna be wrong, or too weird, or something like that."

Among her other current endeavors are ongoing work in the quartet of cellist (and fellow MacArthur grantee) Tomeka Reid, drummer Ches Smith's Clone Row and pianist Myra Melford's Fire and Water Quintet, which is scheduled to record a new album in the fall. She also does occasional duo work with guitarist Marc Ribot (with whom she did a secret show at Big Ears, another much-talked-about moment at this year's festival) and pianist

Sylvie Courvoisier (their joint 2025 release *Bone Bells* was, alongside *About Ghosts*, one of last year's most acclaimed). On the album *Slo-Mo Neon Luminate Hoverings*, released in June on Nonesuch Records, she documented a 47-minute tete-a-tete with trumpeter and long-time friend Ambrose Akinmusire.

"I think it's rare to find an improviser that all goes and nothing has to go at all," Akinmusire said. "It's rare to feel like you don't *have* to do anything and you *can* do anything. And that's what I love about playing with Mary."

With artistry that cuts such a deep and wide swath, the only real question as to Halvorson's Artist of the Year honor — among all the others — is why it didn't happen sooner. As she acknowledges, however, hers is a "left-of-center" music. It takes a leap from the straight-ahead jazz tradition, and it can be challenging at first contact. The rewards, however, are many.

"It's potentially music that might take some time, might take a certain commitment for some listeners," Fujiwara said. "But I also think it's empathetic and inviting. And I think listeners can feel and hear that empathy, and that it's directed toward them as well, and that that allows them to be patient and to connect to Mary's music."

DB

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AMBROSE
AKINMUSIRE

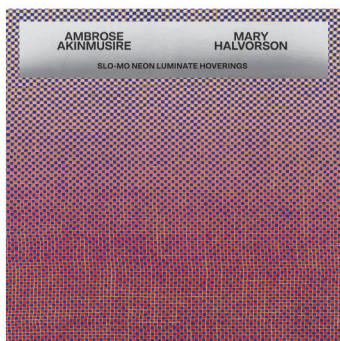
TRUMPETER
OF THE YEAR



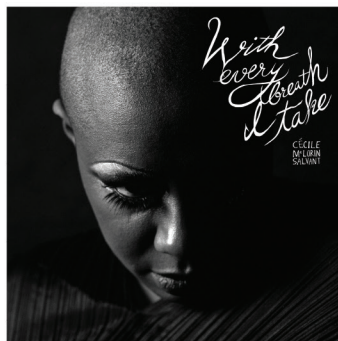
MARY
HALVORSON

GUITARIST
&
ARTIST
OF THE YEAR

RECENT RELEASES



AMBROSE AKINMUSIRE
MARY HALVORSON
Slo-Mo Neon Luminare Hoverings



CÉCILE MCLORIN SALVANT
With Every Breath I Take
FEMALE VOCALIST OF THE YEAR



JEFF PARKER
ETA IVTET
Happy Today



FLEA
Honora



MAKAYA MCCRAVEN
Off the Record

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HENRY THREADGILL
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Fifteen



Sheila Jordan was one of the first vocalists to fully internalize the language of bebop and transform Charlie Parker's pioneering musical ideas into a vocal art form all her own.



SHEILA JORDAN

The Voice of Bebop

By Suzanne Lorge Photo by Andy Freeberg

As a singer, Sheila Jordan stood at the vanguard of jazz revolution: She was one of the first to fully internalize the language of bebop and transform Charlie Parker's pioneering musical ideas into a vocal art form all her own.

When she passed away last year at age 96, she had been sharing this musical gift with global audiences and new generations of singers for more than seven decades. This year she enters the DownBeat Hall of Fame for her peerless contributions to vocal jazz.

Jordan was born Sheila Jeanette Dawson in Detroit on Nov. 18, 1928. Her early upbringing was tough on her: Her father had abandoned her and her mother, and as a young girl, she was sent to live with relatives in the small town of Summerhill, Pennsylvania. Many of Jordan's caregivers struggled with alcoholism, and she was often mocked by peers — both for her impoverished family situation and her unusual, high-pitched singing voice. But Jordan already had a keen musical mind, and she would escape into singing. By 8, she was singing publicly on amateur radio shows and at local events.

In her teens, Jordan rejoined her mother in the racially diverse Detroit — landing at the center of one of America's most vibrant jazz communities. She came of age listening to recordings from the emerging bebop movement, held rapt by the complex musicianship of horn play-

ers like Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie.

Parker's influence would become crucial to Jordan's artistic development, and she soon began to work with the musicians in his orbit. These associations eventually brought her close enough to sing for Parker, on one of his own tunes. "You have got million-dollar ears, kid," he remarked. The praise remained a touchstone throughout her life.

By the time Jordan first sang for Parker, she was working in a vocal trio with Leroy Mitchell and Skeeter Spight. Together, these vocalists were expanding ideas about what jazz singers could do, as they handily crafted sophisticated scats to match instrumentalists' solos and wrote their own lyrics to popular bebop heads.

In the early 1950s, longing to immerse herself more in Parker's exciting musical world, Jordan moved to New York. It was there that she married Parker's pianist, Duke Jordan, and in 1955, their daughter Tracey was born. A few months later, Duke, struggling with heroin addiction, left his new family, and by 1962, he and Jordan had divorced. Forced into working part-time at an office job, Jordan still managed to maintain a solid gigging schedule, and

her reputation continued to grow among New York's top jazz musicians. Even so, widespread recognition eluded her.

Her career got an important boost in 1962 with the release of her first solo album, *Portrait Of Sheila* (Blue Note), a project developed with significant input from composer and jazz theorist George Russell. This record captured the earliest full statement of Jordan's talent: her advanced phrasing, precise intonation and deeply emotive way with a lyric. And while she didn't scat on the album, its quiet, confident spontaneity reveals how fully she had absorbed the language of the horn players she idolized.

Her debut was an artistic success. It's considered a classic today, but at the time, *Portrait Of Sheila* did not bring commercial reward, and it would be 13 years before Jordan would release another solo album.

Jordan's profile rose significantly in the 1970s. Increasingly, critics and musicians cited her as one of the most authentic voices connected to the original bebop tradition, and by the time she released her second album — 1975's *Confirmation* (East Wind) — Jordan had become a prominent figure in New York's creative jazz community.

By the end of the '70s, Jordan had established significant collaborations with major artists such as Steve Kuhn, Lee Konitz and Roswell Rudd. She had appeared as a lead or guest singer on several seminal bop albums. And she had claimed the rarely heard bass-voice duo as her signature style, playing in this exposed configuration most often with bassists Harvie Swartz (aka Harvie S), Arild Andersen and Cameron Brown.

Jordan also emerged as one of the few singers to teach vocal jazz as a solo art form. Her work as an educator began with a small vocal jazz workshop at City College of New York in 1978, but demand for her teaching grew over the years, and by the time of her passing, she had become a leading figure in jazz pedagogy.

However, it wasn't until the new millennium that Jordan's accomplishments received the highest institutional honors. In 2007 she received the International Association for Jazz Education Humanitarian Award, in 2008 the Mary Lou Williams Award for a Lifetime of Service to Jazz and in 2012 an NEA Jazz Masters Fellowship. She was named Female Vocalist of the Year in the 1963 DownBeat Critics Poll and went on to receive nine more DB Critics Poll awards for Talent Deserving Wider Recognition.

Jordan may be best remembered as one of Parker's foremost protégés. But her greater achievement was in proving that bebop could be a singer's language, too. As she told biographer Ellen Johnson, "I just want to show you how I learned jazz, how it came into my life, and how important it is for me. ... I just want to keep this music alive by inspiring other people to love it as much as I do."

DB

Jaki Byard teaching at the Mark Levine Workshop in 1991. "He could crack jokes, but when he sat down, it was serious fun," says pianist Fred Hersch, a former student.



JAKI BYARD

Creator of Serious Fun

By Aaron Cohen Photo by K. Gypsy Zaboroskie

When Jaki Byard played the piano he commanded its entire history through his fingertips. He may not have been not the only jazz legend with such omniscience, but no other drew on that continuum in often hilarious forays within a single solo — and then started playing saxophone.

While Byard was resolutely individualistic, crucial bandleaders relied on his contributions. His numerous accomplished former students continue to adore him. This year, Byard's stature became enhanced a bit more with his induction into the DownBeat Hall Of Fame, honored by the DownBeat Veterans Committee.

Byard's lifelong calling began early. He was born (as John Arthur Byard) in Worcester, Massachusetts, on June 15, 1922, the son of a baritone horn player. As a child, he had some piano lessons but his true education came from seeing his heroes up close, particularly Earl "Fatha" Hines. His own professional gigs started when he was a teenager.

An Army stint briefly interrupted Byard's burgeoning career but also gave him the chance to add instruments to his repertoire (including trombone). Upon returning, he freelanced and studied such modern composers as Arnold Schoenberg. During the 1960s, his versatility helped shape myriad landmark albums: Rahsaan Roland Kirk's *Rip, Rig And Panic*, Charles Mingus' *Black Saint And The Sinner Lady* and Eric Dolphy's *Far Cry*, which includ-

ed Byard's tributes to a bebop hero, "Mrs. Parker Of K.C. (Bird's Mother)" and "Ode To Charlie Parker." At a time of divisive jazz factionalism Byard's embrace of the music's full scope — from stride to the avant-garde — mocked expectations. His intent was not ironic.

"I don't play tongue-in-cheek, and I hate to hear people say this about me," Byard told Dan Morgenstern for a DownBeat feature in the Oct. 21, 1965, issue. "I think hardly any of us can be completely ourselves, pianistically, what with all the people that have been before us, so I try to go into each phase of the piano with respect. If you're going to do it, do it all the way."

A dozen albums that Byard recorded as leader for Prestige in the 1960s emphasized how absorbing a century's worth of idioms fueled his exciting compositions. A few were experiments without a fixed key ("Trendstition Zildjian" on *Sunshine Of My Soul*). Others were pure swing ("To My Wife" on *Here's Jaki*) or ballads ("Hazy Eye" on *The Jaki Byard Experience*). Trumpeter Jimmy Owens, who worked on his *On The Spot!* album, said Byard's complexity never got in the way of a good time.

"Playing off of those chords was a challenge," Owens said. "The music had chords that

moved in different ways than usual; they had melodies that hit different parts of the instrument, low, middle and high, and that's what Jaki Byard was about: When he improvised his melodies were all over the place and that's one of the things that made him great."

Byard also co-led a piano duo album with Ran Blake, *Improvisations*, which was recorded at the time of their 1981 Italian concerts. Their idiosyncratic responses to each other on "Tea For Two" make this rendition of the standard so distinctive. Blake remembered Byard as a "fabulous genius" and recalled how his colleague was celebrated in Italy.

"We were both liked but when he did solos, he got thunderous applause," Blake said. "I was tolerated but, really, Jaki was the standout star. It was such a miracle to be chosen to play with him."

Perhaps Byard's most formidable challenger was himself. His solo albums highlighted how his deep command of the music's legacy fueled his evolving virtuosity. Juxtaposing arpeggios with single-note angular phrases became a trademark, yet he always found ways to make these shifts surprising. Byard mixed everything from standards and recent pop songs to his own thoughtful extended works. The quietly majestic title track of *To Them-To Us* in 1982 honors Duke Ellington, Paul Robeson and Mary Lou Williams while echoing contemporary artists through sudden tonal changes. Ten years later, he closed *At Maybeck* with his sprawling "Family Suite," which travels from low-register rumblings to upbeat stride: from introspection to ebullience.

As a professor, Byard's influence equaled his prominence as a musician. His most impactful years were at the New England Conservatory, beginning in 1969. Byard primarily taught arranging, composition and led the Apollo Stompers, a big band of NEC students that played at Boston's Michael's Pub. Sometimes he led the group on saxophone while a promising young musician would be on piano. Legions of his students went on to build names for themselves, including pianists Fred Hersch and Jason Moran, multireedist Marty Ehrlich and bassist/guitarist Jerome Harris.

"Jaki's stuff was absolutely about swinging," Harris said. "If you weren't playing the changes, making the harmony structures, he'd say, 'You're lying! You're lying like a dog!'"

Byard's vivacity made his death especially shocking. On Feb. 11, 1999, his body was found in his Queens, New York, home with a bullet wound to the head. The case remains unsolved. Ultimately, this ending will never be the lasting memory of Byard. Hersch, among many others, will always focus on his determination to bring the best parts of life to music.

"Whatever was going on in his face, when he sat down, it was all locked in," Hersch said. "He could crack jokes, but when he sat down, it was serious fun."

DB



ALBUM OF THE YEAR
VIBRAPHONIST OF THE YEAR
RISING STAR GROUP OF THE YEAR

The band from Patricia Brennan's Album of the Year, from left, John Hollenbeck, Michael Nicolas, Modney, Pala Garcia, Kyle Armbrust, Brennan, Miles Okazaki, Sylvie Courvoisier, Kim Cass and Eli Greenhoe. Not pictured is Arktureye.



PATRICIA BRENNAN

Rhythm Of The Stars

By Jim Macnie Photo Courtesy Patricia Brennan

When last we left Patricia Brennan — just a tad over a year ago, actually — she wasn't only thinking about the cosmos, she was documenting it. Amazed by the heavens, the vibraphonist had begun to get serious about astrophotography in hopes of appreciating the "balance and symmetry" of the stars. No easy feat.

The results of such deliberations helped conceive last October's *Of The Near And Far* (Pyroclastic), her fourth title as a leader, and DownBeat's 2026 Album of the Year. The 41-year-old Brooklynite enjoys swooning to the majesty above us all, and of course she's not alone.

"What about the sky, MacIntyre?," queries Burt Lancaster from his Texas observatory in Bill Forsyth's 1983 film *Local Hero*. "The sky here is amazing," reports Peter Riegert from a Scottish phone box. "There seems to be a lot happening in it all the time."

Ditto for Brennan's Milky Way music. As the follow-up to the bandleader's *Breaking Stretch* (Pyroclastic), the deeply graceful *Of The Near And Far* is a bit more demure, yet no less active — there's a lot happening in it all the time. Subbing strings for horns, its magic comes from the fact that it sustains the lush voicings and pulsing interplay often marking her ensemble work — perhaps two of the reasons why the critics ranked it so high.

Our writers corps didn't stop with Best Album. Brennan was also voted Vibraphonist of the Year, and she leads the Rising Star Group

of the Year (with her septet) voting as well — triple honors that place her in the spotlight once again (she received a similar set of accolades in 2024's poll). Back then, she was shooting the sky with an iPhone. Since, she's been gifted a smart telescope, which ups her astrophotography game, making things clearer, deeper, more vivid. Those descriptives can also be used to chart the progress of her elaborate scores. They seem to get more singular and poetic with each new project.

Last year Brennan said that prep for *Of The Near And Far* found her designing a notation system that turned "the shapes of the constellations into pitch collections" that guided her compositional direction. Her choice of using a string quartet integrated with an ensemble of guitarist Miles Okazaki, bassist Kim Cass, electronics dazzler Arktureye, pianist Sylvie Courvoisier and drummer John Hollenbeck delivered a program of intricacy, each player called on to provide exacting moves that nurture an ever-shifting whole.

The swirl of strings that opens "Lyra" is a good example of a climate that allows for complexity while still making room for choice

melodic motifs. Brennan says she gives her charges "lots of duties," and as "Lyra" blossoms into participation by the full ensemble, it sustains a tenacious poise.

"*Of The Near And Far* is a little bit of a left turn from [my previous work]," she explains. "Partially, I wanted to show another aspect of myself, which is my past as a new music percussionist. Percussion ensemble music is like a machine that has all these different rhythmic gears, you know? So for 'Antlia,' literally, that was the vision: You have the inner workings of a watch or clock and then there's these gears changing. Everybody is a rhythmic element, including the strings."

Brennan's music studies as a youth in Veracruz, Mexico, included piano and percussion, and there's a smile on her face when she shares the fact that she wrote her first arrangement for strings at the age of 14. Her stint at Philly's Curtis Institute solidified a classical vocabulary while time spent digesting various New York jazz lingo wooed her toward the intrigue of improvisation. A blend of the two has personalized her art.

"One of Patty's biggest developments is the

emergence of a very personal musical voice,” offered Hollenbeck in a text exchange. “Early on she was absorbing a tremendous amount of information and influence. Over time, she’s become increasingly confident in trusting her own instincts, and her playing now has an identity that’s immediately recognizable.”

“I really like her rhythmic sense,” says Courvoisier. “It’s so strong and sophisticated. You can hear her Mexican roots in the writing but there’s also room for the contemporary side. There’s always a clave, but it’s not obvious.”

Brennan uses strings in several ways. On “Aquarius,” she says they’re making “a texture throughout the whole piece, you know, like water [flowing]. That kind of thing was inspired by minimalist composers like Philip Glass. He writes for strings in a way where it’s not just the classic melodic counterpoint, but a textural sound.”

Hollenbeck says he and Brennan share some similar beliefs. “Rhythm is one of the primary ways music communicates feelings. Something can be rhythmically intricate, even highly structured mathematically, and still be emotionally direct. The listener doesn’t need to understand how something is constructed in order to feel its momentum, tension, release and sense of movement. Patty gets that!”

A key tip Brennan got from Hollenbeck was using a conductor. “One of my first gigs was with John’s big band, and I learned that conductors aren’t just there to keep the beat. They can also remind us of certain cues. ‘When You Stare Into The Abyss’ sounds ethereal, but everything is through-composed. There’s so much going on, it needs guidance. Our conductor Eli Greenhoe is a composer himself. He knows the deal.”

Other big news in Brennanville? She’s started her own record label, Antlia, named after *Of The Near And Far’s* opening track, which in turn was named after a constellation in the southern celestial hemisphere. In an Instagram announcement of the launch, Brennan mentions that the non-profit imprint would be a home for artists unafraid of “taking risks, evolving and redefining their sound.” It’s a move she’s had on her mind for some time. The first Antlia recording is the recently released *Talamanti*, a duo outing with Courvoisier.

With David Breskin producing again, the album’s dazzling rapport supports pieces both abstract and melodic. Brennan says it follows in the tradition of Sun Ra and Walt Dickerson’s *Visions* as much as Chick Corea and Gary Burton’s *Crystal Silence*. “The Time We Spent” is deeply romantic. “Disparate Chase” is more animated. As the program shifts, catchy themes share quarters with aggressive flurries.

“It’s a combination,” says Courvoisier. “If we want to extend the sound of our instruments, we can do it. But we don’t need to do it. We also play some very simple stuff, very tonal. Patty’s

music always feels like a dance.”

Brennan recalls hearing Courvoisier’s 2007 solo album, *Signs And Epigrams*, during her college days. “I was like, ‘How is she getting those sounds? That’s what I want the vibraphone to sound like.’ When we finally played together, we found we had this really cool chemistry.”

The two also unite in Courvoisier’s Amalthea foursome with Thomas Morgan and Dan Weiss. Brennan’s attraction to the pianist’s approach was immediate. “Playing with Sylvie is easy. She knows what she wants every time she plays. I’ve learned by watching her and listening to her. She arrives with a purpose. Sometimes

[our work together] feels like one giant instrument that hasn’t been invented yet.”

That glimpse-of-the-future notion suits this diehard experimentalist’s wish list. She’s perpetually curious about the vibraphone’s possibilities.

“Being rewarded with this recognition makes me happy,” Brennan concludes. “In a way, it seems the mainstream is acknowledging the evolution of the instrument, not just pushing it aside. The idea for the new label is to branch out. I’m interested in artists sharing my vision of taking risks. If so, there’s a home for them at Antlia Records.”

DB

ADAM O'FARRILL Rising Star Artist of the Year
Rising Star Trumpeter of the Year
Rising Star Arranger of the Year
Album of the Year - ELEPHANT (#21)

TOMEKA REID Beyond Instrumentalist of the Year
Album of the Year - dance! skip! hop! (#5)

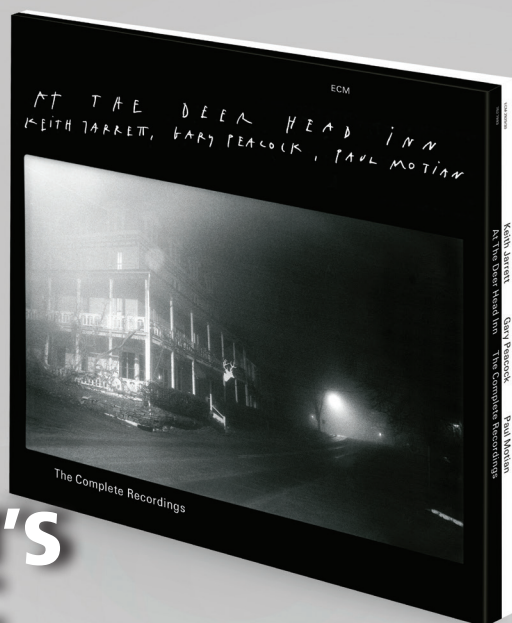
ANNA WEBBER Rising Star Composer of the Year
WEBBER/MORRIS BIG BAND Rising Star Large Ensemble of the Year
NICK DUNSTON Rising Star Bassist of the Year
BRANDON SEABROOK Rising Star Guitarist of the Year

AND ALL THE OTHER OOH ARTISTS WHO PLACED IN THE POLL!

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KEITH JARRETT'S CLASSIC



At the Deer Head Inn: The Complete Recordings

By Gary Fukushima

The first half of the last decade of the last century could be considered “peak Jarrett” to those who became hopelessly enamored with that particular pianist up to that point.

At *The Deer Head Inn* was maybe the third or fourth album of Keith Jarrett’s that this writer had purchased when it was released in 1994, and to this day it remains one of my favorites. So in 2024, when ECM unveiled *The Old Country*, featuring eight additional selections from Jarrett’s one and only recorded appearance at the little jazz club outside Allentown, Pennsylvania, my only thoughts were: 1) Wait, there was more music from that gig? and 2) Why on earth has it taken 30 years for us to listen to it? Of course, it’s infinitely better late than never, and ECM has rewarded the long wait with a good thing: a boxed set of both albums across four LPs, a monumental work that has been recognized as such.

By any metric this album qualifies as historical, but for Jarrett it is also unusually biographical. He was born and grew up in Allentown, and at age 16 he got the call to sub for the regular pianist, Johnny Coates, at the Deer Head, essentially his first gig as a professional. Jarrett became a regular fixture at the club, often playing drums in Coates’ trio as well as piano and other instruments (he recounts in the original liner notes for *The Deer Head* that Stan Getz once offered him some work after hearing him sit in on gui-

tar). It was not long after when Jarrett first heard the Bill Evans Trio at the Jazz Workshop in Boston. The rhythm section for that show featured Paul Motian, the indelible drummer from Evans’ most famous band, and a young bassist by the name of Gary Peacock. And the ensuing years saw the interweaving of the careers of these three unique jazz artists: Jarrett would start his own trio in 1966 with Motian and bassist Charlie Haden, while Motian and Peacock, after their time with Evans, found themselves in a trio with another pianist: Paul Bley, an important influence on Jarrett. And then Peacock, along with Jarrett and drummer Jack DeJohnette, eventually became the longstanding trio that has carved out its rightful place as one of the most acclaimed and beloved piano trios in all of jazz.

The backstories are what make Jarrett’s September 1992 benefit gig at his hometown club with Peacock and Motian rather poignant and nostalgic. And yet, it was also something entirely new, for the three of them, for all their shared history, had never actually played together in the same group. And ultimately, the evening proved to be something exquisitely rare: the only instance that trio would ever

play together, made absolute by the passing of Motian in 2011 and Peacock in 2020. Jarrett himself has retired from public performances after suffering a series of strokes in 2018. But the complete Deer Head recordings serve to sustain the spirit of these exceptional musicians.

Perhaps that gig Jarrett once saw of Evans with his two bandmates came to mind that evening. The original album began with Miles Davis’ “Solar,” one of the signature pieces of the Evans Trio from 1961’s *Sunday At The Village Vanguard* (Riverside). Hearing Motian’s wispy ride pattern behind Jarrett’s later rendition certainly evokes the former. In similar fashion, the new release includes two more Evans staples: Cole Porter’s “All Of You” and “Someday My Prince Will Come,” recordings on which Motian also played. It’s surely not a coincidence all three tunes are also linked to Davis, the erstwhile bandleader to both pianists.

It also seems like Jarrett might have been reminiscing about his own history with Motian, especially in light of the fact they had not played in 16 years. In what must surely be an homage to their reunion, Jarrett launches into a spirited solo intro of another Porter tune, “Everything I Love,” something that he recorded with Motian and Haden on *Life Between The Exit Signs* (Atlantic, 1966), their very first trio album.

As the pianist eases into one of his trademark chorales at the end of “I Fall In Love Too Easily,” the drummer continues to play, unfazed by the custom of ceding the spotlight solely to Jarrett in that moment. Other times Motian is almost minimalist in his approach, not swayed by the wide range of Jarrett’s demonstrative inspiration, locking instead into Peacock’s quarter note with laser precision that seems to allow Jarrett to flow with abandon in and out of that ultra-clean pocket, astutely interjecting with some impeccably timed drum fills or unexpected breaks. This works to perfection on Jarrett’s original blues, “Chandra,” and on “The Old Country,” where Motian and Peacock could not be more in sync or swing harder. The latter tune was a reprise from Jarrett’s first live recording with Peacock and DeJohnette, this time less expansive and more intimate, ultimately creeping into a feel-good ending vamp à la Ahmad Jamal.

The new tracks and reissue have been a splendid chance to revisit my own favorite personal moments from the initial release: Jarrett’s “Looney Tunes” quote near the end of his solo on “Solar,” his slow descent into free-jazz madness on “Chandra,” his headlong plunge into the solo on “You And The Night And The Music,” his puckish rewrite of the second half of the melody to “Bye Bye Blackbird.” These are the moments that made me a Keith fan, and here’s hoping this new addition and reissue can help others hear — as Jarrett so mused in his liner notes — “what jazz is about.”

DB



WINNER
RISING STAR ARTIST OF THE YEAR
RISING STAR TRUMPETER OF THE YEAR
RISING STAR ARRANGER OF THE YEAR

"I feel like most of my music is more classical music than jazz," Adam O'Farrill says. It's both and more.



ADAM O'FARRILL

A Rising Star Triple Crown

By Phillip Lutz Photo by Steven Sussman

Adam O'Farrill carries the weight of expectations lightly. The 31-year-old trumpeter, composer and bandleader pays little heed to family determinists who expect him to match the estimable achievements of his father, Arturo, and grandfather, Chico.

And he outright discounts the cultural nativists who expect him to reject the cosmopolitanism those forebears instilled in him.

"I'm a New Yorker," he said between spoonfuls of oatmeal at a diner near his childhood home in Brooklyn. "I grew up around a lot of different people, a lot of different cultures, and that includes my Cuban background, my Mexican background, my Jewish background, my Irish background. And I feel lucky to be multiracial because this country tends to look at everything in black-and-white, and I feel that being multiracial shields me a little bit from that black-and-white perception."

Compared with his father — who noted that he metaphorically had to "put on a poncho and sombrero" to get his foot in the door — O'Farrill has arguably been less pressured to conform to a stereotype. And he has fashioned an aesthetic accordingly, eschewing strokes of black-and-white for bursts of color, texture, tone and timbre assembled with a pluralistic sensibility.

To be clear, O'Farrill's aesthetic does not shun the Latin influence. Though he is not writing mambos, the dexterity and drive of the Latin montuno — even when filtered through his genre-defying mindset — is more than suggested in motifs like the oddly accented ostinato in 7/4 time that propels "Curves And

Convolutions," the opening tune on *Elephant* (Out of Your Head), his magnificent quartet album released in March. The album's closing track — an open-hearted rendering of Ryuichi Sakamoto's "Bibo No Aozora" — likewise evinces the Latin influence. "That probably unconsciously comes from when I spent time in Cuba," O'Farrill said.

No matter how the Latin influence is expressed in his music, it is merely grist for O'Farrill's imagination: a fertile playing field in which visual images yield sonic counterparts realized in cinematic style. If that style tends toward the surreal, it is no accident; O'Farrill likens his approach to that of director David Lynch and, according to his father, he has toyed with the idea of becoming a filmmaker himself.

The style is evident all over "Sea Triptych," a series of dreamlike soundscapes off *Elephant* that emerge as corollaries of scenes coaxed from his subconscious. In the triptych's first two sequences, watery images come into focus as O'Farrill's trumpet glides effortlessly atop the waves near Havana's famous esplanade ("Along The Malecon") and on Lake Merriewold in upstate New York ("The Three Of Us, Floating"). It is the calm before the storm.

The storm comes in the form of "Iris Murdoch," in which angry currents thrash the rocky shore of a seaside English village. Inspired

by the character dynamics of Murdoch's novel *The Sea, The Sea*, "It's nature and man being on the same plain and fighting with each other," O'Farrill said. "I wanted to have a moment of that with the band, very prickly and combative."

The interplay is combative but controlled, with O'Farrill the composer yielding center stage to O'Farrill the player. Allowing himself to stretch as an improviser, he readily conjures seemingly new techniques without which one suspects that he could not give adequate voice to the surfeit of ideas and emotions emanating from one of the most ingenious minds and most capacious hearts in jazz. But to tag him as a "jazz player" would contradict his self-image. "I feel like most of my music is more classical music than jazz," he said, with good reason. Though he can negotiate changes with alacrity, his is more a linear approach given to theme-and-development as an organizing principle.

O'Farrill's classicism hit a kind of peak last year with the release of *For These Streets*, an octet outing that presents freeform improvisers like Mary Halvorson, Patricia Brennan and Tomas Fujiwara in a tightly formatted interpretation of 1930s musical voices. Uncompromisingly modern, it harks back to the compositions of O'Farrill's grandfather, who took what the grandson deemed a "symphonic approach."

"I was definitely influenced by his sense of creating a melodic pathway," he said, citing Chico masterworks like *The Aztec Suite* and *The Afro-Cuban Jazz Suite*. "That was a big thing I was trying to do with this music. I may be old school in that regard, but there's something very old school in me."

Arturo seconded the old-school sentiment, with context. "We're proud jazz musicians," he said of the O'Farrills. "But it's just an entry point. Adam is smart enough to see that the conversation is always expanding and growing. His art is informed by the world. Both Chico and I tried to expand the conversation beyond the category we were thrust into. For Adam that's less of a challenge because he's always been cast into very many different settings." Arturo compared Adam's work in bands led by others — Halvorson, Brennan, Hiromi and Vijay Iyer — to his early-career experience with Carla Bley. "That was my introduction to 'Hey, there's a bigger world out there than what I know.'"

Adam O'Farrill practices an expansive art, not just as an end in itself but as a tool to counter the forces, now ascendant, who seek to reduce artistic identity to a set of preconceived qualities and force artists they perceive as noncompliant into a poncho-and-sombrero-wearing cultural ghetto. Scooping up the last of his oatmeal, he ventured a word on the shaping of an image in such perilous times.

"It's the responsibility of Latin artists," he said, "to challenge people's understanding of what that can be."

DB

CRITICS CAPSULES

We asked our participating voters to elaborate on several of this year's Critics Poll honorees. They offered plenty of high praise!



Brian Blade Drummer of the Year

I come from Molde/Oslo in Norway, and we of course look upon our part of the globe as a jazz hotbed. We have some of the most influential musicians not far from the North Pole. Among them are the the big four: bassist Arild Andersen, drummer Jon Christensen, saxophonist Jan Garbarek and guitarist Terje Rypdal. The incomparable Jon Christensen has left us, but before that happened, I knew Brian Blade would be the drummer to keep a close ear and eye on. Blade has shown a musicality, personality, dynamism and ability to listen I haven't heard since Christensen. Whether with his Fellowship band or as a sideman with Wayne Shorter, Bob Dylan, Joshua Redman, Joni Mitchell or in guitarist Wolfgang Muthspiel's trio, Blade has always given the music something special. In Oslo we are very lucky. During Oslo Jazz Festival in August, Blade will be the artist-in-residence and play with, among others, the Sami vocalist Mari Boine and keyboard maestro Bugge Wesseltøft. Blade is the man!

—Tor Hammerø



Kris Davis Pianist of the Year

While I'm sure I had seen her play previously, I remember the first time I truly heard pianist Kris Davis. It was at Vancouver's funky Ironworks, and she was performing in bassist Eric Revis' trio. They kicked off a tune, maybe halfway through their set, and I heard her — playing that made my arm hair spike. It was like she'd hit a switch in my psyche and suddenly appeared as singular a pianist as McCoy Tyner or Keith Jarrett. Unforgettable!

Since then, I've caught her numerous times, interviewed her, even hosted her on a remote telecast during the COVID lockdown. And yet, I've never been able to imagine what she might do next. As she once told me: "Everyone I work with is mixing and matching different styles and influences. It feels like a free-for-all, and I find that refreshing." She seems, still, to be a work in progress; searching for new forms of expression. She reminds me of something baritone saxophonist David Mott once told me: Improvisers who play at the highest level are able to completely eschew ego and channel something outside themselves. By creating an unmediated flow of ideas, these artists channel something approaching the divine.

Kris Davis constantly works at that level.

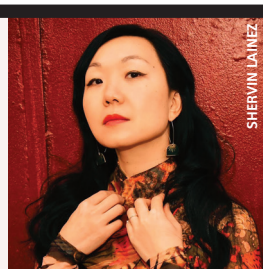
—James Hale

Linda May Han Oh Bassist of the Year

Watching Linda May Han Oh's career unfold has been a rare, rewarding experience. I met her at the 2017 Pittsburgh International Jazz Festival, during my early years writing for DownBeat. There is something captivating about following the work of artists who are your contemporaries — a personal investment in their growth, not because of friendship or familiarity, but because you are watching a generation define itself. Over the years, Oh emerged as one of music's most distinctive voices on bass. Her pedigree is stellar — Pat Metheny, Terri Lyne Carrington, Joe Lovano, Vijay Iyer and more — but most impressive is her refusal to be defined solely by those associations.

Oh combines technical precision with an innate sense of lyricism and atmosphere. She anchors an ensemble with authority while creating unexpected pathways. That balance is especially apparent on her *Strange Heavens*, one of the year's more compelling jazz releases. Alongside Tyshawn Sorey and Ambrose Akinmusire, Oh presents herself as a veteran artist fully in command of her voice and vision. Linda May Han Oh stands among the musicians shaping the future.

—Shannon Effinger



Craig Taborn Keyboardist of the Year

Craig Taborn, a brilliant surrealistic pianist, is also a bold explorer of the electronic side of the keys. It's been a banner year for Taborn, beginning with the engaging, otherworldly *Trio Of Bloom* (Pyroclastic) with guitarist Nels Cline and drummer Marcus Gilmore. It's got grit and beauty, and it covers originals by the band as well as deep dives into Wayne Shorter ("Diana") and Terje Rypdal ("Bend It"). Then there's the adventurous *Dream Archives* on ECM with cellist Tomeka Reid and drummer Ches Smith. In addition to Taborn originals, the band connects to Geri Allen's "When Kabuya Dances" and Paul Motian's "Mumbo Jump." Taborn muses, rollicks, slices angles as an absorbed storyteller.

He's become — since his 1994 debut *Craig Taborn Trio* (DIW) — a pioneer of modern jazz steeped in the classical rock, punk and metal worlds. Classic example: his 2017 ECM album *Daylight Ghosts*, where he plays pensive, playful, mysterious, searching, electronics-edged tunes. "To listen to it and get a close experience with it," he said at the time, "you really have to crank up the volume on a good sound system and get lost in it. You definitely have to put yourself in that sound world."

—Dan Ouellette





Tal Wilkenfeld

Rising Star Electric Bassist of the Year

Australian-born bassist, vocalist and songwriter Tal Wilkenfeld has dazzled since she burst onto the music scene at age 19, performing with early mentors Jeff Beck and Herbie Hancock. With ferocious technical command and a deep, compositional approach, Wilkenfeld is a fiercely original jazz musician and singer-songwriter. Her debut, 2007's *Transformation*, showed a preternatural grasp for modern jazz-rock fusion. In 2019, she released her sophomore record and vocal debut *Love Remains*, a collection of tender, assured songs that had been brewing since she first started on guitar at 14 years old.

The delay between records was largely due to a packed schedule. She's spent the last decade collaborating with the likes of Steven Tyler, Buddy Guy and John Scofield, as well as budding and mid-career artists like H.E.R., Scary Pockets and Brandi Carlile. Since the release of *Love Remains*, the spotlight has been on Wilkenfeld as she toured with her own band. She lives in Nashville, where she continues to carve a niche as an in-demand session player. All the while, she embodies the creativity and harmonic sense of a genre-defying jazz great. —Alexa Peters



Webber/Morris Big Band

Rising Star Large Ensemble of the Year

If the big band format has long become economically unviable, it is heartening to see musicians and composers still willing to take a shot at it. Canadian composers, arrangers, tenor saxophonists and flutists Anna Webber and Angela Davis have joined the ranks.

Following a promising debut, *Both Are True* (Greenleaf Music), they deliver a major breakthrough with *Unseparate* (Out Of Your Head). This recording grabs you from the first notes.

The constantly shifting harmonies and motifs, the intertwined voices, the rock energy that propels the 19-piece ensemble, the layers one can dissect at leisure — all contribute to creating a magnificent maelstrom that Webber and Morris masterfully keep tidy.

Emerging and rising talents are brought to the fore. Trumpeters Ryan Easter and Nolan Tsang or trombonist Tim Vaughn are shining throughout. Overall, what transpires from this album is the evident pleasure the musicians take being part of this magnetic and gripping project.

On a final note, *Unseparate* is also the opportunity for Webber to apply to the big band format her research on a tuning system called just intonation. And you do not need to possess this to fully enjoy this most rewarding recording. —Alain Drouot

Willy Rodriguez

Rising Star Percussionist of the Year

Hearing Willy Rodriguez's *In The Unknown (I Will Find You)* (Sunnyside) for the first time was an experience akin to learning that a friend speaks fluent Cantonese or can bake a perfect chocolate soufflé.

The percussionist/drummer/composer's surprising sophomore album as a leader features the atypical bass-free instrumentation of tenor saxophone (courtesy of Ingrid Laubrock, another ace composer and 2026 Critics Poll winner) and piano/Hammond Rhodes (from Rodriguez's longtime collaborator Leo Genovese) plus spoken word from Allan Harris. The son of a timbalero, Rodriguez initially extended the family "business" in his native Puerto Rico before adding drum kit to his arsenal during high school. While his 2024 debut, *Seeing Sounds* (Coucs Music), explored free improvisation mostly in a traditional trumpet-saxophone quintet setting, *In The Unknown* expands the openness through his compositions that address his mother's passing from cancer. He's recorded with alt-rockers The Mars Volta and contributed both percussion and drums to albums by Chilean-Mexican singer-songwriter Mon Laferte.

—Yoshi Kato



Tyreek McDole

Rising Star Male Vocalist of the Year

Singer Tyreek McDole's 2025 debut *Open Up Your Senses* is that rare achievement: a first album that connects with power, soul and maturity. Scoring four-star reviews



in both DownBeat and Jazzwise, what captivates is the authority and warmth of McDole's voice, a resonant baritone with impeccable phrasing and mastery of emotion and dynamics, qualities that earned him the Outstanding Vocalist Award as a student at the Essentially Ellington Competition in 2018 and first place at the Sarah Vaughan International Jazz Competition in 2023.

The talented Haitian-American vocalist studied at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music with mentors Gary Bartz and Sullivan Fortner and has worked with Terri Lynne Carrington, Nicholas Payton and Theo Crocker. His debut album includes carefully curated repertoire: from the Horace Silver title track and Monk's "Ugly Beauty" to spirituals, blues and the socially conscious compositions of Pharoah Sanders and Leon Thomas. Throughout, McDole immerses himself, bringing each song vividly alive in the moment. His sole original composition, "Love Is A Four-Letter Word," suggests lyrical riches to come.

With roots in the jazz tradition, McDole nonetheless firmly faces the future: "It's about the search to find your true artistic voice — to try to achieve that at the highest level and also to use it as a vehicle to express and challenge the world at large," he said last summer. And that's exactly what he did in November fronting a 44-piece jazz orchestra at London Jazz Festival's "Jazz Voice" concert. A vital voice to stir emotions in these turbulent times.

—Jon Newey, editor in chief, Jazzwise



COMPLETE RESULTS



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Melvin Gibbs



James Brandon Lewis



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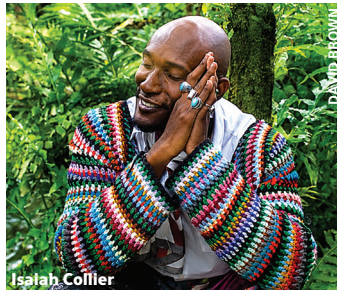
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ISABEL GONZALEZ

Kalia Vandever



DAVID BROWN

Isaiah Collier



EBRO YILDIZ

Nicole Glover



COURTESY PYROCLASTIC RECORDS

Marcus Gilmore

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James Brandon Lewis	49
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Vijay Iyer	47
Satoko Fujii	46
Wadada Leo Smith	42
Tomeka Reid	42
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Satoko Fujii	70
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Alan Broadbent	62
John Hollenbeck	50
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Arturo O'Farrill	47
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Vince Mendoza	44
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Larry Klein	42
Robert Glasper	37
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Taj Mahal	120
Shemekia Copeland	100
Christone "Kingfish" Ingram	95
Gary Clark Jr.	72
Cedric Burnside	68
James Blood Ulmer	68
Robert Cray	58
Eric Bibb	53
Joe Bonamassa	51
Samantha Fish	50
Keb' Mo'	42
Marcia Ball	34
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Corey Harris	25
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Corey Harris/Alving Youngblood Hart/Guy Davis, <i>Fight On! True Blues, Vol. 2</i> (Yellow Dog)	62
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Joe Bonamassa, <i>Breakthrough</i> (J&R Adventures)	25

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Tinsley Ellis, <i>Labor Of Love</i> (Alligator)	11
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Kendrick Lamar	50
Thundercat	44
Jacob Collier	44
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Butcher Brown	37
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Lucinda Williams	36
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Bettye LaVette	32
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Tigran Hamasyan	75
Paul Cornish	67
Micah Thomas	64
Nubya Garcia	60
Simon Moullier	56
Theo Croker	55
Veronica Swift	53
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Rachel Therrien	79
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Milena Casado	57
Jawwaad Taylor	34
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Marius Sjøteland Neset	50
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David Leon	48
Morgan Guerin	44
Yuma Uesaka	43
Alfredo Colón	42
Abdias Armenteros	37
Luigi Grasso	34
Nicola Caminiti	29
Chris Oatts	29
Jeremy Powell	29
Ben Solomon	28
Audrey Welber-Lafferty	27
Jasmine Lovell-Smith	26
Neta Raanan	25

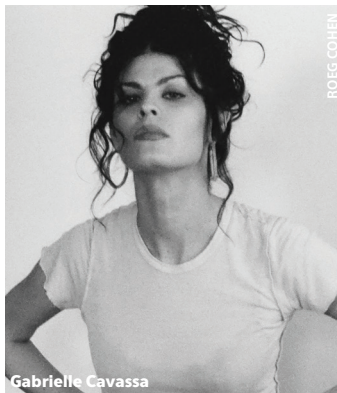
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Aurora Nealand	101
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Jasmine Myra	54
Rachel Cohen	53
Alfredo Colón	53
Nicole McCabe	51
Nick Mazzarella	47
David Leon	45
Alex LoRe	40
Luise Volkmann	37
Francesco Cafiso	35
Hailey Niswanger	35
Nicola Caminiti	33
Owen Broder	28
Luigi Grasso	28
Erena Terakubo	28
Patrick Bartley	26
Danny Janklow	18
Devin Daniels	17



EDU HAWKINS

Alexander Hawkins



ROEG COHEN

Gabrielle Cavassa



MACIEK JASIK

Val Jeanty



TXUS GARCIA

Michael League

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Stacy Dillard	55
Abraham Burton	47
Trish Clowes	47
Binker Golding	40
Morgan Guerin	35
Linda Sikhakhane	35
Cecilie Strange	32
Emilio Modeste	31
Ben Solomon	30
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Jason Sharp	25
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Doreen Ketchens	79

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Jeremiah Cymerman	63
Marius Sjøteland Neset	54
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Daniel Cohen	43
Nico Gori	39
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Andre 3000	77
Naissam Jalal	60
Laura Cocks	58
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Itai Kriss	46
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Josh Johnson	42
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Lex Korten	64
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Isaiah J. Thompson	51
James Francies	50
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Cameron Graves	24
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Alexander Hargreaves	27
Jorge Amado	26
Bernadette Kellerman	26
Zara Zaharieva	23
Johanna Burnheart	22
Eva Slongo	20

Rising Star Drummer of the Year

Marcus Gilmore	293
Justin Faulkner	126
Savannah Harris	125
Jonathan Barber	96
Mark Whitfield Jr.	90
Joe Dyson	89
Sun Mi-Hong	84
Leslie Mok	75
Yussef Dayes	67
Moses Boyd	65
Jeremy Dutton	51
Sarathy Korwar	47
Jamison Ross	45
Jeremiah Collier	44
JD Beck	36
Domo Branch	30
Yissy Garcia	30
Jonathan Pinson	29
Kweku Sumbry	29
Justin Tyson	28
Curtis Nowosad	27
Allan Mednard	25
Sofia Goodman	22

Rising Star Percussionist of the Year

Willy Rodriguez (TIE)	119
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Kweku Sumbry (TIE)	119
Rajna Swaminathan	116
Sarathy Korwar	110
Bex Burch	103
Tomoki Sanders	82
Victor Garcia	72
Amaury Acosta	64
James Maddren	51
Gabriel "Gabo" Lugo	39
Manolito Rodriguez	38
Al Murray	34
Emil Karlsen	31
Negah Santos	20
Giancarlo Anderson	20

Rising Star Vibraphonist of the Year

Yuhan Su	217
Chien Chien Lu	202
Carolyn Trowbridge	85
Bex Birch	65
Keita Ogawa	54
Jalen Baker	48
Sae Hashimoto	43
Lewis Wright	43
Peter Schlamb	37
Thaddeus Tukes	36
Victor Garcia	35
Smith Dobson	34
Mike Pinto	30
Lolly Allen	29
Wayne Williams	27

Rising Star Beyond Instrumentalist of the Year

Val Jeanty (turntables/ sound sculpture)	167
DoYeon Kim (gayageum)	155
Shabaka (Shakuhachi)	134
Vincent Peirani (accordion)	109
Alexa Tarantino (alto flute)	94
Aurora Nealand (accordion)	93
Nils Økland (hardanger fiddle)	93
Caleb Wheeler (Stritch)	81
David Virelles (celeste)	80
Daniel Herskedal (tuba)	78
Alina Bzhezshinska (harp)	66
Melinda Sullivan (tap dance percussion)	54
Ben Rosenbaum (accordion)	45
Jacqueline Kerrod (harp)	40
Chris Combs (pedal steel guitar)	36
Valentin Ceccaldi (cello)	33
Steven Lugerner (bass clarinet)	33
Mariam Rezaei (turntables)	33
Vincent Ségal (cello)	32
Yvonnick Prené (harmonica)	29
Jeremy Rose (bass clarinet)	26
Joao Barradas (accordion)	25
Joseph Tawadros (oud)	23

Rising Star Female Vocalist of the Year

Gabrielle Cavassa	143
Elina Duni	94
Champion Fulton	80
Nicole Zuraitis	68
Camille Bertault	60

Lady Blackbird	55
Ganavya	54
Brittany Davis	53
April Varner	49
Christie Dashiell	48
Ekep Nkwelle	44
Bria Skonberg	44
Daymé Arocena	42
Sarah Elizabeth Charles	41
Alyssa Allgood	40
Jo Lawry	40
Carmen Souza	40
Zara McFarlane	38
Michelle Lordi	38
Laufey	37
Aubrey Johnson	37
Amirtha Kidambi	36
Hilary Gardner	35
Sasha Masakowski	33
Vanisha Gould	30
Buika	29
Natalie Cressman	28
Lucy Yeghiazaryan	24
Alicia Olatuja	23
Melanie Charles	20

Rising Star Male Vocalist of the Year

Tyreek McDole	185
Kassa Overall	88
Samora Pinderhughes	86
Doug Wamble	77
Milton Suggs	64
Peter Cincotti	55
Ola Onabule	53
Fred Moten	50
Braxton Cook	48
Chief Adjua	48
Dean Bowman	48
Jeremy Davenport	40
Vuyo Sotashe	40
Jeff Denson	38
JD Walter	33
Steven Herring	31
Billy Valentine	26
Tom Misch	24
Jordan Rakei	24
Alex Samaras	21
Alan Hampton	20

Rising Star Composer of the Year

Anna Webber	136
Melissa Aldana	131
Miho Hazama	101
Joel Ross	91
Makaya McCraven	83
Marta Sanchez	76
Angel Bat Dawid	61
Jihye Lee	61
Ches Smith	58
Yazz Ahmed	58
Etienne Charles	53
Marquis Hill	45
Remy Le Boeuf	44
Petter Eldh	42
Eve Risser	42
Fabian Almazan	38
Jonathan Finlayson	38
Amina Figarova	37
David Virelles	36

Walter Smith III	30
Greg Ward	30
Tia Fuller	28
Nick Dunston	26
Joel Harrison	25
Meg Okura	24
Kevin Sun	21
daoud	21
Samora Pinderhughes	20

Rising Star Arranger of the Year

Adam O'Farrill	160
Makaya McCraven	134
Remy Le Boeuf	119
Allison Miller	119
Jihye Lee	92
Ben Wendel	85
Jacob Collier	82
Ulysses Owens Jr.	80
Michael League	77
Nubya Garcia	64
Jonathan Finlayson	61
Noah Preminger	60
Miles Okazaki	56
Amina Figarova	53
Steven Feifke	42
Kassa Overall	42
Carlos Henriquez	40
Christian Sands	34
Obed Calvaire	32
Lauren Elizabeth Baba	30
Michael Leonhart	30
Chris Crenshaw	22
Brian Carpenter	20

Rising Star Producer of the Year

Michael League	102
John Corbett	89
Jimmy Katz	84
Spike Wilner	77
Kassa Overall	76
Fabian Almazan	75
Nate Wooley	75
Ryan Truesdell	68
Myra Melford	67
Liberty Ellman	66
Taylor Ho Bynum	64
JD Allen	64
Dezron Douglas	57
Josh Johnson	55
Ryan Keberle	54
Geof Bradfield	47
Cory Wong	47
Ulysses Owens Jr.	45
Moses Boyd	43
Terrace Martin	38
Aaron Parks	37
Sara Gazarek	32
Henry Kaiser	32
Lage Lund	32
Michael Leonhart	30
Derrick Hodge	29
Chad McCullough	29
Marta Sanchez	28
Emma-Jean Thackray	28
Pedro Costa	25
Jesse Zubot	23
Sun Chung	22
Leo Feigin	20



THE CRITICS

Below are the 226 critics who voted in DownBeat's 74th Annual International Critics Poll. The second highest in poll (and jazz) history! According to the rules, critics distributed up to 10 points among up to three choices in each category, with no more than 5 points going to any single artist or group. They voted for both Established Talent and Rising Stars.

S. Victor Aaron: Something Else! Reviews

Rui Miguel Abreu: Expresso, Antena 2, rimasebatidas.pt, We Jazz

Paul Acquaro: freejazzblog.org

Frank Alkyer: DB

A.D. Amorosi: JazzTimes, Variety, SPIN, Flood

Rudolf Amstutz: Jazz 'n' More

Rick Anderson CD HotList: New Releases for Libraries

Mirian Arbalejo: La Cesión de las Voluntades, Ditirambo

Glenn R. Astarita: All About Jazz

Hrayr Attarian: Jazziz, All About Jazz, Free Jazz Collective

Mark Bacon: Jazz Rio, Jazz Mosaic

Chris J. Bahnsen: DB

Robert Baird: Qobuz, Stereophile

Michael Barris: DB

Alberto Bazzurro: Musica Jazz, All About Jazz Italia

Bill Beuttler: Boston Globe, Boston Magazine, DB

Dan Bilawsky: JazzTimes, All About Jazz, Music & Arts, Dark Blue Notes

Larry Birnbaum: Stereophile

Jason Bivins: Dusted, Point of Departure

Edward Blanco: All About Jazz and WDNA Radio

Ross Boissoneau: Local Spins, Something Else! Reviews, Northern Express

Philip Booth: JazzTimes, Jazziz, Culture Pop (Substack)

Fred Bouchard: NYCJR, Boston Musical Intelligencer

Herb Boyd: DB, NY Amsterdam News, IBW21st Century

Rainer Bratfisch: Jazz Podium, www.rockradio.de

Jon Bream: Minnesota Star Tribune

Marcela Breton: Freelance

Pawel Brodowski: Jazz Forum

Stuart Broomer: Musicworks, New York City Jazz Record, Point of Departure

Daniel A. Brown: The New York City Jazz Record

Bill Brownlee: Plastic Sax

Enzo Capua: Musica Jazz

Henry Carrigan: DB, Living Blues, No Depression, Folk Alley

James Hussein Catchpole: Tokyo Jazz

Jeff Cebulski: chicagojazz.com, The NYC Jazz Record, All About Jazz

John Chacona: All About Jazz, PostGenre, let's call this

Aaron Cohen: DB

Matt Collar: Allmusic.com

Troy Collins: Point of Departure

Thomas Conrad: Stereophile, JazzTimes, The New York City Jazz Record

J.D. Considine: DB

Mark Corroto: All About Jazz

Raffaele Costantino: Rai Radio 2

Francisco Cruz: sondumonde.fr

Luis Cubells: QFm Radio, La 99.9 Valencia Radio and Distinta Fm

Paul de Barros: DB, Earshot

Thierry De Clemensat: Bayou Blue Radio, Paris-Move

Coen de Jonge: Jazz Bulletin nja, JazzNu

Anthony Dean-Harris: DB, KMHD Jazz Radio

Fanny Delsol: Apple Music

Stuart Derdeyn: Postmedia news

Ralf Dombrowski: Jazz Thing Magazine (Ger), Süddeutsche Zeitung, Münchner Feuilleton

Laurence Donohue-Greene: The New York City Jazz Record

Alain Drouot: DB, Citizen Jazz, The New York City Jazz Record

Ken Dryden: The New York City Jazz Record, Hot House

Alex Dutilh: Aligre FM, FIP Radio

Tina Edwards: WeJazz, Everything Jazz, Freelance

Shannon J. Effinger (Shannon Ali): shannon-ali.media

Michael Elves: UMFM 101.5

Lacaze Emmanuelle: France Musique

Ed Enright: DB

John Ephland: DB, All About Jazz

Steve Feeney: ArtsFuse.org, Portland Press Herald

Sascha Feinstein: Jazziz, Brilliant Corners

Mike Flynn: Jazzwise Magazine

Philip Freeman: DB, The Wire, Stereogum, Burning Ambulance

Filipe Freitas: JazzTrail

David Fricke: MOJO, Liner Notes, Sirius XM Radio

Takao Fujioka: WAY OUT WEST

Gary Fukushima: DB

Jon Garelick: Boston Globe, Arts Fuse, Jazziz

Dustin Garlitz: JazzTalent.com, Sage Encyclopedia of Music and Culture

Richard Gehr: Relix

John Gilbreath: KEXP, KBCS, Earshot Jazz

Ted Gioia: The Honest Broker

Jeff Golick: WFMU / D:O Radio

Héctor Martín González: Canción a quemarropa, La Radio Canaria

Jerome Gordon: WPRB, WPRB.com

Kurt Gottschalk: The Wire, NYC Jazz Record, JazzTimes

Spencer Grady: Jazzwise / Songlines / Metal Hammer

David A. Graham: The Atlantic

Stephen Graham: Marlbank

Ludovico Granvassu: All About Jazz, All About Jazz Italia, Radio Free Brooklyn

Mike Greenblatt: thejerseysound.com, theaquarian.com, goldminemag.com

George Grella: Red Hook/Village Star-Review, Brooklyn Rail, Bandcamp, Kill Yr Idols

Frank-John Hadley: DB

David Hajdu: The Nation

James Hale: DB, SoundStageXperience.com

Andy Hamilton: The wire, jazz journal, down a bit

Tor Hammerø: Nettavisen - Tor de Jazz

Eric Harabadian: Aoide Magazine, DB, Music Connection, Media News Group, Geoff Wilbur Music Blog, Big City Rhythm & Blues Magazine

Kazunori Harada: Jaz In Magazine (formerly Jazz Japan)

George W. Harris: jazzweekly.com

Selwyn Harris: Jazzwise

Kazune Hayata Hayata: JAZZ LIFE

Chris Heim: KMUW

Andrey Henkin: Stereophile, JazzWise, QwestTV, WeJazz, Point of Departure, Squid's Ear,

Tom Henry: The (Toledo) Blade

Tony Hillier: Rhythms magazine Australia

Geoffrey Himes: JazzTimes, Chamber Music, Hard Rain & Pink Cadillacs

Rob Hoff: WQLN, WETF, JazzErie

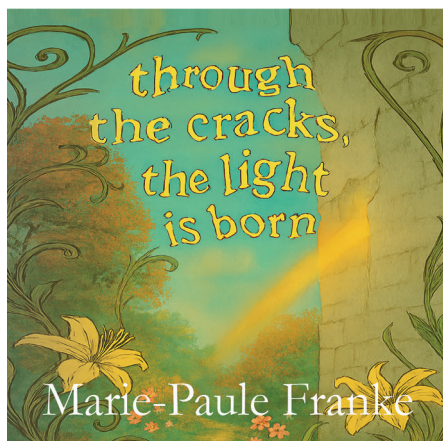
Eugene Holley, Jr.: DB, Chamber Music

Larry Hollis: cadence

Guenter Hottmann: Preis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik (PdSK)
C. Andrew Hovan: All About Jazz, DB
Tom Hull: tomhull.com
Peter Hum: The Ottawa Citizen
Tom Ineck: KZUM Community Radio
Michael Jackson: DB, Jazzwise, Chicago Reader, Chicago Sun-Times, Jazz Podium
Willard Jenkins: DB, JazzTimes, Independent Ear (openskyjazz.com)
Martin Johnson: Wall Street Journal, NPR Fresh Air
Trevor Jose: EP Mag (Idp)
Mike Jurkovic: All About Jazz, lightwoodpress.com
Ammar Kalia: The Guardian, The Observer, DB, Jazzwise
Richard Kamins: Step Tempest Steps Out/Substack
Wolf Kampmann: several media
George Kanzler: Hot House, NYC Jazz Record
Yoshi Kato: DB, San Francisco Classical Voice
Larry Kelp: The Absolute Sound
Brian Kiwanuka: PostGenre
Reuben Klein: The Ear.net
January Kobrzynowski: Jazzthetik Magazine
Reinhard Köchl: Jazzthing, Die ZEIT, Augsburger Allgemeine, Main Post
Elzy Kolb: Freelance
David Koperhant: TSF Jazz, Jazz News
Stuart Kremsky: Mr. Stu's Record Room
Makeda Krish: Folded Wing Production Company
Jeff Krow: Audiophile Audition
David Kunian: DB, Offbeat
Tim Larsen: Jazz Views
Martin Laurentius: Jazz thing
Christopher Laws: Culturedarm
Will Layman: Popmatters.com, Big Butter and Egg Man: Layman on Jazz and Culture (Substack)
Angelo Leonardi: All About Jazz Italia
Mark Lomanno: JazzTimes, Rhythm of Study
Martin Longley: DB, Jazzwise, Songlines, All About Jazz, QwestTV, The New York City Jazz Record, The Brooklyn Rail
Suzanne Lorge: DB, NYC Jazz Record
David Lührssen: Shepherd Express
Phillip Lutz: DB
James Macnie: DB
Peter Margasak: DB, the Wire, Chamber Music, Nowhere Street
Thomas Mau: WDR, DLF, ARD
Jeff McCord: KUTX
John McDonough: DB
Kerilie McDowall: All About Jazz, In the

Zen on Substack and kerilie.com/blog
Peter McElhinney: Style Weekly, Richmond Magazine
Jackie McField: Hot House
Paul Medrano: bestofjazz.org
William Meyer: DB, The Wire, Chicago Reader, Dusted, Magnet, New York Jazz Record
Ken Micallef: Stereophile, Analog Planet, New York Times
Virgil Milhau: DB, Steaua/JazzContext, JJA News, JAM Montenegro
Bill Milkowski: DB, Absolute Sound, Jazzthing (Germany)
Roz Milner: Dusted Magazine
Mel Minter: Musically Speaking (mel-minter.com), Albuquerque The Magazine
Ralph A. Miriello: Notes on Jazz Blog
Chris Monsen: Musikkmagasinet, Jazznytt, chrismonsen.substack.com
John Moore: Jazziz
Allen Morrison: DB, JazzTimes
Brian Morton: DB, Tablet, others
John Mulvey: MOJO
John Murph: DB, JazzTimes, Washington Lawyer Magazine, History.com
Jez Nelson: One Jazz, Jazz FM UK
Ron Netsky: City Magazine, Rochester N.Y., Author of Jazz Snapshots
Jon Newey: Editor in Chief, Jazzwise
Pommaret Nicolas: France Musique, Radio France
Sean J. O'Connell: Westways, Eastbound
Jennifer Odell: Gambit Weekly
Piotr Orlov: Dada Strain
Dan Ouellette: DB, Medium, Sag Harbor Express, Jazz & Beyond Intel
Terry Perkins: DB
Lawrence Peryer: The Tonearm
Alexa Peters: KNKX Public Radio, DB, Freelance
Giuseppe Piacentino: Musica Jazz
Sergio Piccirilli: El Intruso
Karin Plato: The Absolute Sound
Chad Radford: Atlanta Magazine, Flagpole, RadATL
Andrew Read: Jazz In Europe Magazine
Bobby Reed: DB, Chicago Sun-Times, Block Club Chicago
Howard Reich: DB, Gramophone
Lee Rice Epstein: Free Jazz Blog, But Does It Swing?
Derk Richardson: The Absolute Sound
Enrico Romero: Controradio
Chrys Roney: Hot House Jazz
Filip Roshauw: Jazznytt
Rob Saffer: WGXC 90.7 FM (Hudson Valley, N.Y.)
Bret Saunders: Denver Post
Ronald Schepper: textura.org

Alan Scherstuhl: New York Times
Sebastian Scotney: UK Jazz News, The Arts Desk, JAZZTHETIK
Gene Seymour: BookForum, The Nation
John Shand: Sydney Morning Herald, Harper's Bazaar
Adam J. Shatz: London Review of Books, New York Review of Books
Rob Shepherd: PostGenre Media
Ken Shimamoto: stashdauber.blogspot.com
Constantin Sieg: Jazz-Zeit @ Radio Unerhört Marburg
Jeffrey Siegel: Straight No Chaser podcast
Jackson Wade Sinnenberg: CapitalBop, WAMU
Stewart Smith: The Wire, The Quietus, We Jazz, The Guardian, Bandcamp Daily
Eric Snider: JazzTimes
Daniel Spicer: Jazzwise, The Wire
Mal Stanley: ABC Jazz Presenter-Australia
Thomas Staudter: DB, New York City Jazz Record, The (Croton) Gazette, River Journal
Mark S. Stryker: JazzTimes, DB
Otakar Svoboda: Czech Radio — Vltava
Jean Szlamowicz: Down Beat, Spirit of Jazz
John Szwed: Wire, Gagosian Quarterly
Joseph L. Taylor: SoundStage! Xperience
Hobart Taylor: All About Jazz
Nina Terruzzi: Battiti Radio 3
Rolf Thomas: Jazz Thing, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ)
Christof Thurnherr: Jazz'n'More, Sound Matters
Michael W. Toland: Austin Chronicle, The Big Takeover
Greg Turner: The Absolute Sound
Michael Ullman: Fanfare, ArtsFuse
Tilman Urbach: Stereo, Jazzthetik
Sébastien Vidal: TSFJAZZ
Chris Walker: LA Jazz Scene, JazzTimes, California Tour & Travel
Charles Waring: MOJO, Record Collector, Jazzwise
Ken Waxman: Jazzword.com
Ken Weiss: Cadence
Michael J. West: DB, Washington City Paper
Sean Westergaard: All Music Guide
Jeff Wilson: The Absolute Sound
Jerome J. Wilson: All About Jazz
Josef Woodard: DB, Santa Barbara Independent, Jazziz, Los Angeles Times
Chris Wright: "Giant Steps" — RTRfm Perth, Western Australia
Scott Yanow: DB, NYC Jazz Record, Syncopated Times, LA Jazz Scene, Jazz Rag, Haute Fidélité



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SARAH SLOVER

MONIKA HERZIG'S TRANSPARENT JOURNEY

German-born pianist, composer and educator Monika Herzig has always placed advocacy and humanitarianism at the center of her work.

Over her three-decade career, she has released dozens of records, authored books and performed at major festivals, but she is most proud of her social justice musical efforts. So, it wasn't surprising that her latest recording, *Transparent*, highlighted the real struggles within the transgender community.

As anti-transgender rhetoric has intensified across the United States and debates surrounding gender identity increasingly make headlines, Herzig found herself confronting the issue from a deeply personal perspective as the parent of a transgender son. Instead of just watching the hate unfold, she chose to tell her story through music rather than activism alone.

"At the beginning, that's how it came about: to put it from the parents' perspective, too," says Herzig from her home in Vienna. "Because my first inclination was, let's just do some awareness raising and help the community."

"And then one of my friend's sons who is in the gay community, I talked to him about the ideas, and he said, 'Sometimes we're a little tired of the old white ladies coming in and shouting with a loud voice.' I get it, I get it. It's not authentic. I'm not part of it. So, I thought about what my authentic voice is, what I can contribute. And that's where I was thinking, I was part of the journey as a parent. I can talk from the perspective of other parents and what it would be like. So let me do that. That's the voice I can share."

Transparent, perhaps Herzig's most personal project to date, addresses transgender

identity, family, acceptance and transformation through the lens of instrumental jazz.

Herzig devoted time exclusively to composing, supported by a 2025 Jazz Road Creative Residency sponsored by South Arts, as well as funding from the Doris Duke Foundation and the Mellon Foundation.

For a musician accustomed to balancing performance, teaching, recording and administration, the experience proved to be transformative, she says. Instead of writing songs between obligations, Herzig immersed herself completely in a single creative vision.

The themes within the record came about through a series of focus groups Herzig organized with parents of transgender children. She listened carefully as families shared stories about identity, transition, fear, growth and acceptance.

What emerged surprised Herzig. She expected to hear about the experiences of transgender children. Instead, she discovered how the experience changed the parents. "The stories were similar," she says. "But what became clear was that the parents go through a transformation just as much [as the children do]. We learn, we adapt and we change."

"It was more finding this community sense, that this is not an outlier, it's just like nature, this one percent of the population where your genes are just turned around in your brain in terms of what your brain thinks your gender is and what your body looks like. So, I mean one notion that's pretty clear, is this is not a choice in a fashion."

That realization ultimately shaped the en-

tire project. The compositions each focus on a specific aspect of the transgender journey. The opener, "Look Out," reflects the force of a strong personality emerging into the world. The upbeat "Melody Erased" explores the emotional complexity of a name change. "Etch-A-Sketch" takes inspiration from a metaphor shared during one of the focus groups, comparing transition to shaking an Etch-A-Sketch clean and beginning again.

Herzig composed all the music except for an intimate version of Elton John's "Your Song," one of her son Zachary's favorite vocalists. Herzig pulls heartfelt blues into this gift to her child.

The project was also deeply collaborative as guitarist Peter Kienle, Herzig's husband of nearly 40 years, played a critical role in shaping the arrangements. While Herzig brought the compositions to the piano, Kienle helped refine them through experimentation.

The reaction has been positive. Focus group members attended the album release concerts, and Herzig's son played a role, performing aerial silks routines inspired by the music.

Rooted in advocacy, Herzig has spent much of her career creating greater opportunities for women in jazz. Her acclaimed *Sheroes* project, an all-female band formed in 2014, emerged from experiences navigating a jazz world with few women in leadership roles.

In 1987, Herzig came to the U.S. from Germany. The pedagogical institute in Weingarten, Germany, awarded her a scholarship for a one-year exchange program at the University of Alabama. She stayed in the States, completed a doctorate in music education and jazz studies at Indiana University, and taught there for 30 years.

When Herzig started playing professionally, female instrumentalists were rare. She was often the only woman on stage and quickly learned she had to create her opportunities.

"The stereotyping is really deep in us, where we have a certain picture of how a jazz band should look on stage. You have the singer in front and then the boys," she says. "Part of the work is changing those perceptions."

The success of *Sheroes* has helped spotlight a generation of female jazz musicians and contributed to broader conversations about representation in the music. Herzig says the rise of bands like Artemis proves the music continues to evolve.

Today, whether composing, teaching, performing or advocating, Herzig approaches work through a similar lens. For her, music is communication, community and, most importantly, an opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the evolution of jazz.

"Music is a way of putting a mirror in front of your face and saying, 'Look what it looks like. Look what it feels like,'" she says. "Especially with instrumental music, you're reaching people in a unique way."

—Veronica Johnson



FRANCESCO GARGIULLI

"One day, it just hit me — I wanted to record an album," said clarinetist Harry Skoler, 18 months after a medical emergency sidetracked his music career.

HARRY SKOLER TRANSFORMS TRAUMA INTO ART

In January 2018, shortly after Harry Skoler was appointed interim chair of the Woodwinds Department at Boston's Berklee School of Music, he fell ill suddenly while conducting auditions for applicants.

"It was before the first person came in; I was seated at the piano, and my heart started racing like crazy," the clarinet virtuoso, com-

poser and jazz educator said recently over tea and cookies in the living room of his comfortable home near the New Hampshire border.

He left the room and sat at a table where other Berklee staff gathered round him. At first he thought it was his heart; he had had a history of heart problems. "Let me just take some medicine, don't call an ambulance, I remember saying." Lucky for him his colleagues ignored that advice. "They rushed me to Brigham and Women's [Hospital]. My blood pressure was very low, and I had already lost half the blood in my body. I had a ruptured stomach artery."

That was only the beginning of Skoler's ordeal. As he lay on the operating table, the doctors determined they needed to stop his anesthesia, for fear of stopping his heart before they repaired the burst artery.

"I was fully awake, suddenly, intubated, but I couldn't move anything. I couldn't tell them I was awake. I couldn't ask them any questions. I went to take a breath, but my diaphragm was paralyzed. I kept saying the same sentence in my head, over and over: 'I want to see tomorrow.'"

He ultimately made a full recovery and credits the doctors with saving his life. But the trauma changed him profoundly. "For the next year, I was shaky, I was terrified," he said. He went back to serving as interim chair of the Woodwind Department but had no interest in music. "I was proud of the work that I did, but I didn't want to listen to music; I didn't want to play."

About 18 months later, after regular therapy sessions, he had an epiphany. "All of a sudden, one day, it just hit me — I wanted to record an album." It would be different from anything he had recorded earlier in his career.

Anyone who has heard Skoler's early albums might be surprised to hear his recent work, especially since the medical trauma. He had suffered other traumas in his youth — especially a devastating episode from his teenage years involving the suicide of his best friend and subsequent efforts by his family to keep news of the tragedy from him. He channeled that and other traumas of his youth through his instrument for decades.

"I didn't really regain my equilibrium until I reached my mid-50s," he said. "That's when I finally started to get a sense of peace. Or at least learn how to hold both, the dark things and the bright things at the same time, instead of trying to change one into the other."

He recorded a string of albums in the 1990s that reveal a plaintive tone and beautiful technique; they are largely swing-based and influenced by an earlier generation of clarinet giants like his idol Benny Goodman. Following the medical trauma and his subsequent revelation, however, he began composing in earnest, driven by a burning desire to express himself and tell his story through his music. The material became denser, stranger and filled with moments of haunted inspiration.

Walter Smith III, the celebrated saxophonist and composer, in 2019 succeeded Skoler

as department chair at Berklee. "I loved Walter's playing, and I knew he produced," Skoler said. "So I had a meeting with him. I gave him a really bad sales pitch! I said something like, 'I know you're busy, and maybe this isn't what you want to do.' And then I explained what I wanted to do. He looked at me and started laughing. He has a great laugh. He said, 'I'd be honored to produce a record for you.'"

They started out of the gate with a bang — *Living In Sound* (Sunnyside), a tribute album to an early Skoler hero, Charles Mingus, that attracted international attention during the Mingus centennial year in 2022. "When we first talked about the Mingus thing, it was a 180 for him," Smith said. "We surrounded him with musicians who were going to bring different things out of him. I would suggest a few people, and he would buy all of their records and listen to them for a week." Smith recruited Kenny Barron on piano, Christian McBride on bass and other A-list players like Johnathan Blake, Nicholas Payton and Jazzmeia Horn, as well as a string quartet and a trio of brilliant arrangers: Ambrose Akinmusire, Darcy James Argue and Fabian Almazan.

The next album, 2024's *Red Brick Hill* (Sunnyside), also produced by Smith, is a suite of original music in the form of a narrative about the death of his friend, recorded with an all-star band including vibraphonist Joel Ross, bassist Dezron Douglas and drummer Johnathan Blake.

Echoes, his latest album and first self-release, is "about the encounters that I had with my heroes that validated me as a human being." Producer Smith brought back Douglas and Blake as well as guitarist Bill Frisell to anchor the band. Nine tracks are dedicated to great jazz musicians whom Skoler met as a younger man: Bill Evans, James Williams, Rahsaan Roland Kirk, Marian McPartland, Teddy Wilson, Benny Goodman, Jimmy Giuffre, Lionel Hampton and Miles Davis. The CD package includes brief autobiographical sketches about these meetings, ranging from brief encounters to, in the case of Giuffre, the great clarinetist and saxophonist, a mentor relationship.

"All of these encounters had to do with validating me as a human being. ... James Williams having lunch with me was life-changing; Benny Goodman walking off the stage and coming to talk to me when he wouldn't grant anybody else an autograph was life-changing. They all helped me gain the confidence to be able to live and to play."

Skoler studied reeds and composition with Giuffre at New England Conservatory in the 1980s; the two became friends. "Much of what I ended up using for the rest of my life came from Jimmy's wisdom and brilliance," he says. Once he asked Giuffre what expression was all about. "Jimmy said: 'There's a sea of feeling. Then you step into it.'"

—Allen Morrison



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Matt Knoegel (left), Matt Dwonszyk, Josh Bruneau, Tabor Gable and Jonathan Barber outside the Side Door Inn.

MATT DWONSZYK'S SIDE DOOR EXCURSION

There's inevitably trepidation involved in doing anything for the first time. But in preparing to record his first live album, bassist Matt Dwonszyk had a guidebook in the form of the albums he'd grown up listening to.

"I'm definitely coming out of hard-bop," Dwonszyk explained, speaking by phone during a busy day: driving between hosting a radio show at the University of Hartford in his native Connecticut, playing down the road in Greenwich with the veteran saxophonist Bennie Wallace, then heading to a late gig in New York City that night.

"I was trying to check the boxes for everything an Art Blakey or a Horace Silver album might have," he said. "I knew I had to do at least one uptempo tune, a ballad, a 3/4 tune, some blues. I also like stuff that gets a little 'out,' so I wanted something modal and free-wheeling. It's really just a mix of music that I like to listen to, filtered through my mind."

There was never a question in Dwonszyk's mind as to where the date would be recorded. *Live At The Side Door* captures a spirited evening in June 2024 at the intimate club in Old Lyme, Connecticut, opened in 2013 by Ken and Chris Kitchings. The bassist has a history with the Side Door dating back almost to its opening, though he missed the opportunity to play one of its earliest shows.

"[Bassist] Nat Reeves called me to sub on one of the opening nights," Dwonszyk recalled. "But I was young and dumb and had another gig, so I didn't make it. But it's defi-

nately become a special place in Connecticut. The audiences are great and it's a good place to do a live recording."

It was also obvious who Dwonszyk would call for the session. The quintet featured on *Live At The Side Door* hadn't played together before in that configuration, but there was a web of history linking the members that runs deep. Dwonszyk met trumpeter Josh Bruneau, pianist Tabor Gable and drummer Jonathan Barber when all were students at the Artists Collective, the Hartford arts institution founded by Jackie McLean. Tenor saxophonist Matt Knoegel entered the picture a little later, but all five have worked together in a variety of contexts.

"We were lucky when we went to college," said Dwonszyk. "We all played a lot together and developed chemistry. I talk to students now and they go to these schools but they don't play with each other. It's kind of a lost art form, which is a shame, but I'm grateful that we did that."

Dwonszyk's two-decade friendship with Barber dates back to when they were both 15 years old. The bassist has since become part of Barber's band Vision Ahead, along with Gable and Knoegel, and the rhythm duo has also anchored bands led by saxophonists Ju-

lieta Eugenio and Jovan Alexandre and guitarist Tony Davis. Dwonszyk and Gable joined Bruneau on his 2015 album *Bright Idea*, and the trumpeter recorded alongside Dwonszyk for dates by percussionist Ed Fast and vocalist Sylvia Mims.

"Jonathan and I learned how to play music together," Dwonszyk said. "I'm grateful because he's such a talented drummer, he knows my playing so well and can adjust to the way I play to make me sound the best that I can."

The album kicks off with the hard-charging "Morning Dreams," the horns blaring a Blakey-style fanfare over the crashing waves of Barber's drums. The crowd's enthusiasm is audible throughout, solos being met with whoops, shouts and applause that make the space another member of the band. The calypso-tinged "Much Fernet" conjures a party atmosphere immediately dispelled by the bassist's solo rendition of the elegiac classic "Gloomy Sunday."

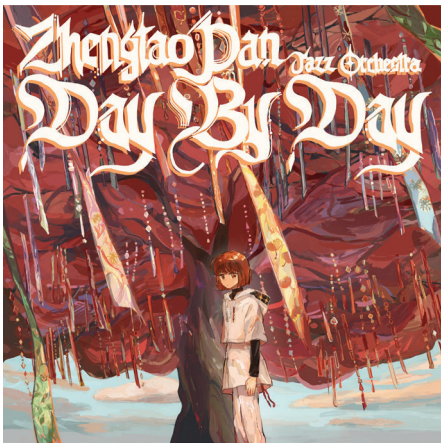
That piece leads into the tender "Ms. Smith," a tribute to Artists Collective co-founder Cheryl Smith, who died in 2021. She was not the only mentor from the institution to receive a dedication: Rene McLean gets a nod on the angular "Mode For René." While he originally knew the younger McLean as a teacher, Dwonszyk says they've reconnected on a different level more recently.

"I've gotten really close with René over the past three years," he says. "He had a kidney transplant and coming back from that was an uphill battle, so I tried to help him where I could. He's doing great now. He's [almost] 80 and a great friend who loves telling jokes and not taking life so seriously. He has great stories as someone who grew up in the music, who met John Coltrane and Charlie Parker when he was a kid."

As these tributes attest, Dwonszyk has become a booster for the Hartford jazz scene since returning home. Like so many musicians, he made the inevitable move to Brooklyn in 2015 but was forced out by COVID in 2020. He spent another two-and-a-half years living in Astoria post-pandemic before heading back to his home town once again.

In addition to recording at the Side Door, Dwonszyk also knew that he wanted to release the album independently. He put out his 2019 debut, *Wonderful World*, and a 2024 tribute to pianist Don DePalma via the Curtis brothers' Truth Revolution imprint, but struck out on his own with 2022's *A Year And A Day*.

"I self-released that one because I was curious to see what it entails," Dwonszyk explained. "I recognize that this is a tough business, but I like experimenting, and I was curious what the difference would be if I do this on my own. Is it going to be more successful? Less successful? What even is successful these days?" —Shaun Brady



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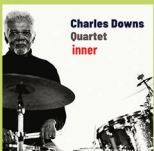
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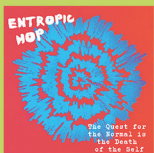
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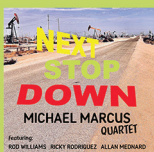
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Reviews

Masterpiece ★★★★★ Excellent ★★★★ Good ★★★ Fair ★★ Poor ★



Terri Lyne Carrington assays America's current sociopolitical landscape on *Trip The Night Fantastic*.

Terri Lyne Carrington & Social Science *Trip The Night Fantastic*

CANDID

★★★

One glance at the personnel block here will tell you how extensive Terri Lyne Carrington's musical and narrative vision is as she and the three core members of her Social Science band survey the zeitgeist of Donald Trump's America. While the album's name and the popping bass line of the opening "Riddim Song" promise joy, the overall effect is far gloomier.

The assemblage of 44 instrumentalists, singers, rappers and poets delivers commentary on racial, spiritual and environmental issues. Although ICE is only mentioned once — ironically on the sole piece that cites countries

other than the U.S. — the specter of a clamp-down is everywhere. "Identity Song," with vocals by Carrington and four others, focuses on women controlling their own bodies. "Pet Song" embraces the warmth of non-questioning companionship in troubling times. "Abolition Song" celebrates overcoming racial brutality. "Solidarity Song," with a snarling guitar by Marc Ribot, takes the toughest line, with dialogue that expresses a "me first" working-person's survivalist emotion.

Ribot's cameo and Morgan Guerin's aforementioned bass line on "Riddim Song" are the only instrumental parts that grab the spotlight; others flow subtly, then ebb away. The leader's lithe drumming provides a consistent undercurrent, setting the table to showcase the lyrical content.

Heard from outside the U.S., in a nation threatened by the unquenchable greed of

POTUS, *Trip The Night Fantastic* feels like a solipsistic bummer, one more reason to turn away and wait him out.

—James Hale

Trip The Night Fantastic: Riddim Song; Identity Song; Autonomy Song; Climate Song; Children's Song; Step Song; Forest Song; Solidarity Song; Prayer Song; Abolition Song; Pet Song; Blues Song (These Poems); Reckoning Song. (68:47)

Personnel: Terri Lyne Carrington, drums, percussion, turntables (11); keyboards (1, 2, 6, 11-13), vocals (3, 5-9, 11); Morgan Guerin, woodwinds (1, 3-7, 12), EWI (3, 6, 7, 11), guitar (6), keyboards (1-4, 6, 7, 9-13), organ (1, 2, 11, 12), bass, drums (1, 9, 13), percussion (1, 5), vocals (7, 8); Tyler White, baritone saxophone (1); Milena Casado, trumpet; Brian Urra (4, 5, 7), Bengisu Gokce (4, 5, 7), Maya Liebowitz, violin (6, 11); Sarah Zohorodni, viola (4, 5, 7); Peter Sumner, cello (4, 5, 7); Brandee Younger, harp; Matthew Stevens, guitar, bass (8), vocals (7, 8); Marc Ribot, guitar (8); Aaron Parks, piano, keyboards; Ian Mitchell, keyboards (8, 11), vocals (11); Larry Goldings, organ, vocals (8); Simon Moullier, vibes; Rashaan Carter, bass (9); Riley G, drums (6); Brenda Navarette, percussion (1, 6, 12), vocals (1, 7); Fatoumata Diawara (1), Debo Ray (1, 3, 5, 8, 10, 11, 13), Michael Mayo (2), Ledi (3), Devon Gates (4), Christie Dashiell (5), Lizz Wright (5), Ian Michael (5), Imani Rouselle (6), Angélique Beener (6, 11), Vuyo Sotashe (7), Melvis Santa (7), Miki Howard (8), Arooj Aftab (9), Safa (12), Kokayi (1, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 13), Nappy Nina (2), Tarriona "Tank" Ball (3), J. Ivy (3), Sanaa Cadet (5), Buck Elvis (8), Moor Mother (9), Angela Davis (10), Khemist (11), Aja Monet (12), vocals; Kassa Overall, DJ (10).

Ordering info: candidrecords.com



Charles Lloyd *Sangam & Friends*

BLUE NOTE

★★★★½

Born in Memphis but a citizen of the world, Charles Lloyd recorded the original *Sangam* live for ECM in 2004. It was the only release of Lloyd's work with tabla virtuoso Zakir Hussain. Drummer Eric Harland made it a trio, which adopted the Indian name *Sangan* for its single Santa Barbara performance. With the death of Hussain late in 2024, Lloyd offers *Sangam & Friends* as an homage to a brief but important partnership.

Micah Thomas *Lucid*

INDEPENDENT RELEASE

★★★★

Lucid requires complete abandonment of desires for modern straightahead jazz as well as open-ended ears and deeply concentrated attention to savor some of its hidden splendors. The album is high-brow jazz avant-gardism, which comes with limited gravity regarding syncopated grooves to ground the proceedings. Only on the restive "Logic" does the music approximate forward-leaning rhythmic propulsion.

A couple of those buried treasures occur when Micah Thomas' sparse piano lines obliquely quote "When You Wish Upon A Star" on the opening cut, "O," or when drummer Lesley Monk and bassist Thomas Morgan tease a swing momentum, briefly, at the beginning of "Holiday" only for it be disrupted by Immanuel Wilkins' coiling alto saxophone passages.

The pursuit of balance was established as the main artistic goal for Thomas on *Lucid*, his fifth album. The artistic statement comes across obliquely as the music fluctuates between punchy, clipped motifs, dotted with alto saxophone and trombone and spacious, almost pointillistic piano sketches. Oftentimes the musicians engage in heady banter, causing the music

In 2009 Lloyd made his first trip to India, where the trio was reunited and recorded in Mumbai. Four studio tracks were made, but the project was never completed. Blue Note presents them here, supplemented by three unreleased *Sangan* trio titles, including "Tagore," an unissued take from the original ECM concert.

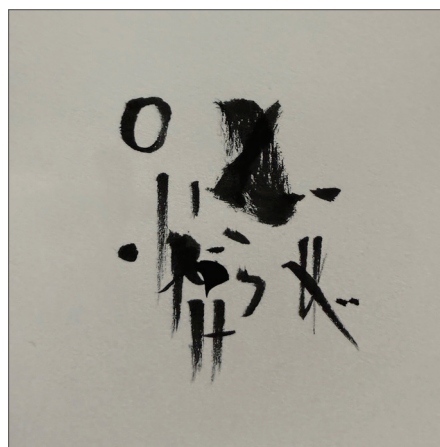
Rhythm is its central focus. Recent Lloyd albums have had a meditative solemnity about them, which tended to make those of us who are more spirituality impaired restless and impatient. While that continues to characterize some of the later Mumbai works, the three trios spring elegantly to life as Hussain's nimble fingers tap dance across the tightly tuned table skins like Astaire and Powell trading twos on a shiny dance floor.

On "Jai Ganga" particularly, he and drummer Harland lock into a perfect groove that builds to a climactic ensemble and sweeps Lloyd's tenor and flute to energetic heights. "Tangore," which Lloyd first recorded in 1966, takes a more loping pace to its pinnacle where the percussionists merge, neither overstepping the other. Memphis and India find something to talk about. —John McDonough

Sangam & Friends: Clear the Dust; The Blessing; Jai Gange; Tegore; Sharati's Dance Tempo Devine; Eternal Dreamer; Sam At The Ganges. (45:07)

Personnel: Charles Lloyd, tenor saxophone; Zakir Hussain (2-7), tabla, percussion; Vijay Prakash (1, 2, 6, 7) vocals; Rakesh Chaurasia (1, 2, 6, 7), bansuri; Sabir Khan (1, 2, 6, 7), sarangi; Ranjit Barot (6, 7), keyboard; Niladri Kumar (1, 2, 6, 7), sitar; Eric Harland (2-7), drums.

Ordering info: bluenote.com



to move about like an amoeba. Other times, musical lines manifest in a chorale-like manner, as on the polyphonic "Interface."

By the sheer design of Thomas' epigrammatic études and wandering approach of the collective improvisations, the music captivates more so than becomes catchy. As finely executed as *Lucid* is, hardly any of the music lodges in the memory banks. Instead, it evokes fleeting flights of fancy.

—John Murphy

Lucid: O; Door; Frontier; Box Heart; Holiday; Interface; Logic; night; spacetime; final. (66:07)

Personnel: Micah Thomas, piano; Immanuel Wilkins, alto saxophone; Kalia Vandever, trombone; Thomas Morgan, bass; Lesley Mok, drums.

Ordering info: micahthomas.bandcamp.com



Kalia Vandever *Mana*

INTERNATIONAL ANTHEM

★★★★

Performing with jazz acts including Shabaka, Joel Ross and Immanuel Wilkins, as well as fronting their own quartet and touring with pop megastar Harry Styles and indie outfit Japanese Breakfast, trombonist Kalia Vandever's music has developed a chameleonic quality unbound by the distinctions of genre. 2019's *In Bloom*, for instance, placed the trombonist at the forefront of an emotive jazz combo, while 2023's *We Fell In Turn* experimented with electronics to create a textural ambience produced entirely by the sound of Vandever's trombone.

Mana is Vandever's most adventurous work yet. Across the album's seven tracks, they layers solo trombone with plaintive piano, atmospheric synths and ethereal vocals to produce a beguiling, cinematic suite. Opener "Hubbard Road" sets the tone with its harmonic fanfare of brass giving way to a forlorn piano line and keening, breathy tones of solo trombone, while ensuing track "Murmuray" continues the mournful feel with its spacious horn melodies and gently droning synth foundations.

Sparse yet artfully arranged, Vandever manages to create music on *Mana* that is deeply thoughtful and draws the listener into its meandering ruminations. Dark, undulating bass tones interject and ground Vandever's keening vocals on the spacious "Waiting," attenuating our ear to the eerie undertones of their melody, while the playful repeated refrain of "Your Fault" — "It's your fault/ I'm like this" — moves from assertion to accusation, finding difference within its echoing continuity. Vandever ultimately delivers a tantalizing window into the continued explorations of an evolving musicality.

—Ammar Kalia

Mana: Hubbard Road; Murmuray; Waiting; Tough Play; In The Folds; Your Fault; Holding. (27:04)

Personnel: Kalia Vandever, trombone, piano, vocals, synthesizers.

Ordering info: intlanthem.bandcamp.com

The Hot Box

Critics	James Hale	John McDonough	John Murph	Ammar Kalia
Terri Lyne Carrington <i>Trip The Night Fantastic</i>	★★★	★★	★★★★½	★★★
Charles Lloyd <i>Sangam & Friends</i>	★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★
Micah Thomas <i>Lucid</i>	★★★★½	★★½	★★★	★★★★½
Kalia Vandever <i>Mana</i>	★★½	★★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★

Critics' Comments

Terri Lyne Carrington & Social Science, *Trip The Night Fantastic*

Familiar protests over poverty, race and oppression parade by to the automated rhythms of rap, produced to slick pop standards. Its heart is in an OK place, but the mind grows tired of its righteousness and agitprop sloganeering ("Be what you wanta be"). —John McDonough

Unrelenting social conscious messages powered by unbridled grooves and defiant joy.

—John Murph

Another large-scale collaborative effort focused on the singular goal of making listeners move. Highlights come on the soulful swing of the Ledisi feature "Autonomy Song" and the chopped sampling of "Abolition Song."

—Ammar Kalia

Charles Lloyd, *Sangam & Friends*

Anyone who was lucky enough to experience an exchange between Lloyd and Zakir Hussain appreciates the love and respect they shared. That bond is heightened here, enriched by numerous other, lesser-known, instrumental masters.

—James Hale

A heartfelt East-meets-West adventure, led by an unflappable icon.

—John Murph

A remarkable expansion on a series of 2009 sessions between saxophonist Lloyd and his longtime collaborator, the late tabla master Zakir Hussain. Across the record the affinity between the two musicians is delightfully clear, while the expanded ensemble featuring bansuri player Rakesh Chaurasia and Carnatic singer Vijay Prakash provides beautiful embellishment.

—Ammar Kalia

Micah Thomas, *Lucid*

A top-tier crew of young improvisers moves deftly through Thomas' finely textured compositions with a reserved sense of confidence and minimalist flow. Over five albums the pianist has steadily built an impressive early catalog.

—James Hale

Intricate avant garde chamber probes into quirky logic and uncertain outcomes. A veneer of restrained propriety, intellectual ratification and rigorous musicianship invites probationary interest. Adventurous experiments, recommended for adventurers.

—John McDonough

Thomas proves his aptitude for delicate improvisation on this minimalist yet inventive record, creating an intriguing and often challenging work that encourages listeners to lean in and untangle the knotty web.

—Ammar Kalia

Kalia Vandever, *Mana*

This deep — if exceptionally short — dive into ambient expression is most effective when Vandever includes vocals or trombone. Elsewhere, as with the jarringly unpolished piano on "Tough Play," the spell is shattered.

—James Hale

Vandever's ghostly trombone floats like a phantom through foggy monochromes of soft, low-hanging harmonies. Conjures a spectral but emotionally flat ambiance. Superb breath and tone control.

—John McDonough

Billowy electroacoustic soundscapes that awaken the mind and calm the nervous system.

—John Murph

THE SOUND OF SMOKE

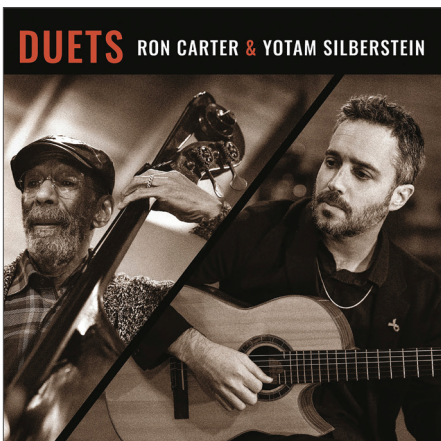
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Duets

JOJO

★★★★★

Duets is the first recorded collaboration between guitarist Yotam Silberstein and bassist Ron Carter. It is a cross-generational meeting that is inspired by the elder statesman's collaborations with the late Jim Hall from the 1980s. In a bit of coincidence (that may be more than just coincidental), the album was recorded in the Rudy Van Gelder Studio on Hall's birthday. Though inspired

by Hall, Silberstein has developed his own voice, and it connects with Carter's almost seamlessly. It is a soft conversation, but one that is wide-ranging. The project takes us to Brazil, to the blues and back to the Great American Songbook, ending with a hard-bop piece. All the while, the pulse is steady and deliberate.

They also pay tribute to the late guitar luminary Russell Malone, who was a longtime collaborator with Carter on the original tune "Blues For Brother Malone." Along with "Rain Again," this blues piece is one of two originals on offer (both penned by Silberstein). Though steady and inviting, it is nevertheless a short conversation.

The duo does not stretch as much until we get to the standard "What Is There To Stay," where Carter offers an extended solo in response to Silberstein. At 89, Carter remains the constant presence he has always been, able to drive the rhythmic register of this project without the backing of a drummer. Moments like this make the effort worth it. It also leaves us wanting more. Perhaps there may be some live recordings, à la Hall and Carter, in the offing.

—Joshua Myers

Duets: Nova Ilusão; Love Letters; Blues For Brother Malone; Rain Again; The Lamp Is Low; What Is There To Stay; They Say It's Wonderful; Mil Dew. (33:56)

Personnel: Ron Carter, bass; Yotam Silberstein, guitar.

Ordering info: jojorecords.com

Florian Arbenz/Bill Frisell/Greg Osby

Quiet Lights

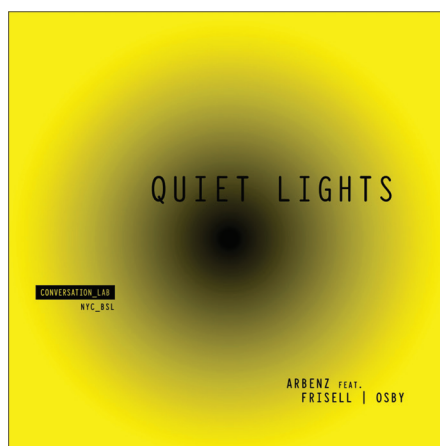
HAMMER

★★★½

Swiss percussionist Florian Arbenz has an ongoing project called Conversation Lab, which fosters encounters between musicians of different backgrounds. While Arbenz has not classified *Quiet Lights* as a Conversation Lab release, an undeniably conversational quality is among its strengths.

Saxophonist Greg Osby and Arbenz have been collaborators since 1998, but for this session, Arbenz invited a musician with whom he had never played: guitarist Bill Frisell. The drummer also brought a selection of tunes, all but one his own. The material is varied, from the drifting near-stillness of "Chant" to the Crescent City rollick of "The Barradas Opening." The participants handle it gently, which proves a mixed blessing. Arbenz's light touch highlights the solemnity that Frisell confers upon the Swiss folk song, "Lueget vo Berg und Tal." But Osby sticks too resolutely to the soft and slippery side of his playing; one wishes for the grit that he brought to his and Arbenz's duo album, *Reflections Of The Eternal Line*.

But one primary force for distinction is Arbenz's equipment. In addition to a standard trap kit and conventional metallic addi-



tions, he uses bespoke constructions that extend his tonal and textural reach. On the title track, a tuned instrument with a soft but durable sustain enables him to braid melodies with Osby, and a stringed drum that bridges the sonorities of a ceremonial gong and a bass guitar enhances the solemnity of "Chant." Arbenz never uses these devices ostentatiously, but close listening will be rewarded with Easter eggs of novel tonality.

—Bill Meyer

Quiet Lights: Homenaje; Chant; Jammin' In The Childrenscomer; Lueget Vo Berg Ind Tal; The Barradas Opening; Quiet Light; Rhumba. (40:54)

Personnel: Florian Arbenz, drums, percussion; Bill Frisell guitar; Greg Osby, soprano and alto saxophone.

Ordering info: florianarbenz.bandcamp.com



Elsa Nilsson and Band of Pulses

Liminal

ADHYAROPA

★★★★★

Swedish-born, New York-based flutist and composer Elsa Nilsson uses music to give form to the uncomfortable stages of personal transformation that accompany decision making. Her explanations for the emotional state each track represents are recognizable to anyone who has wrestled with implementing a significant change.

Each track lands best when considering the band as a whole. Meandering but even-keeled notes on the piano in "Transition State" follows an equally free-roaming passage of notes by Nilsson, resulting in an inescapable rise of anticipation. The individual tracks project their particular struggles, and the album as a whole unveils the full trajectory of the decision at hand. "Not Said, Not Heard" drives progress but adds musical density to match emotional weight.

The jagged distortion on Nilsson's dissonant notes underscores the increasing misalignment of one's internal thoughts and external actions. It's a striking contrast of tonal color for the flute and a welcome touch of sonic creativity. "Capacity" serves as the climax when the band devolves into a whirlwind of chords, splashing cymbals, swirling notes and an almost vengeful reemergence of distortion that drapes over everything before composure returns. On "1 year, 10 months, 3 days for Ahmaud Arbery," Nilsson gives her feelings about Arbery's death an outlet while continuing to support *Liminal's* thesis statement: seeing the rage from this kind of tragedy used as a propeller for pursuing change. *Liminal* balances compositional sophistication, melodic appeal and abstract themes, thriving as both a thought exercise and a stimulating musical adventure from all sides.

—Kira Grunenber

Liminal: Andetag; ‡ Transition State; Not Said, Not Heard; Capacity; Yesterday's Promise; 1 year, 10 months, 3 days for Ahmaud Arbery; Mourning For Two; Stepping Away. (51:35)

Personnel: Elsa Nilsson, flutes, FX; Santiago Leibson, piano; Marty Kenney, electric and acoustic bass; Rodrigo Recabarren, drums.

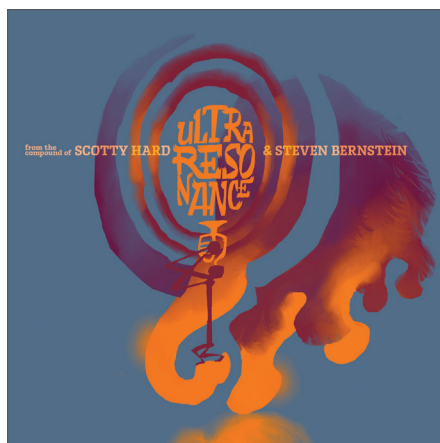
Ordering info: elsanilsson.bandcamp.com



**Steven Bernstein
ResoNation Trio**
ROYAL POTATO FAMILY
★★★

**Scotty Hard
& Steven Bernstein
Ultra Resonance**
ROYAL POTATO FAMILY
★★½

ResoNation Trio and *Ultra Resonance*, two new albums by veteran trumpeter, composer and band-leader Steven Bernstein, are like a sonic ouroboros: the symbol of the snake eating its own tail.



While *ResoNation Trio* presents as a more expected, albeit abstract, trio record, *Ultra Resonance* is an unexpected repurposing of the initial statement, through a dub-style treatment using loops and effects that amps the abstraction and curiosity up tenfold. As he creates, then transposes that creation again with the help of producer Scotty Hard, Bernstein feeds his own music into itself.

While the records represent a creative idea and process usually reserved for pop “remixes,” it suffers from a common pitfall: The music isn’t nearly as interesting as the high concept that underpins it. That said, there are a variety of bright moments throughout both records.

ResoNation Trio features Bernstein, notably on valve trumpet instead of his iconic slide trum-

pet, with bassist Scott Colley and drummer Nasheet Waits. Going without harmonic instruments creates a spacious horizon on which the three players dance together, and alone. Bernstein and Colley’s tender unison over Wait’s simmering drumming on “August 3rd” is breathtaking; on “Pettiford,” a bebop-inspired trumpet melody swims over a delightfully funky bass.

As *ResoNation Trio* undergoes a reinvention on *Ultra Resonance*, things get elemental — literally. Tracks on the companion album are named after metallic elements. Bernstein approached this second record like a composer, using the trio’s music as a color in his palette and adding tracks on different trumpets and an Electronic Valve Instrument (EVI). Of the two, *Ultra Resonance* is the more forward-looking and exciting with its unexpected twists and turns.

While both releases use the same music in different ways, the double record rings a bit meandering and disjointed. But, for those who love music that’s unprecedented and tirelessly exploratory, *ResoNation Trio/Ultra Resonance* is declaratively new — and sometimes that’s just what the mood calls for.

—Alexa Peters

ResoNation Trio: Turf; Pettiford; Two Shakes; Woodstock; August 3rd; West; Mammoth; Question; South; Sitting On Top Of The World. (39:40)

Personnel: Steven Bernstein, trumpet; Scott Colley, bass; Nasheet Waits, drums.

Ultra Resonance: Argon; Erbium; Chromium; Vibranium; Rubidium; Titanium; Radon; Niobium. (37:51)

Personnel: Steven Bernstein, trumpet, EVI; Scotty Hard, production.

Ordering info: royalpotatofamily.com



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100 Years of African Rhythms

Randy Weston: *The Music Of Randy Weston* (In + Out; ★★★★★ 198:48) This handsome boxed set, commemorating the centennial of pianist and cultural griot Randy Weston, was lovingly assembled by the late producer Jacques Muiyal, one of the first people Weston connected with in Morocco. "When I landed in Tangier in 1967 Jacques and his brother Massoud were totally into the music with a great passion," Randy recounted in our interviews for his autobiography *African Rhythms*. "Jacques was an example of people I knew I could count on."

Released on Muiyal's Groovin' High imprint by the German In + Out label, this box (three CDs/three LPs) is a fitting centennial homage that spans three very different concert performances. The first was actually a studio commemoration of a February 1985 Brooklyn tribute to native son Weston, culminating in a grand concert evening at Brooklyn Academy of Music. Not satisfied with his commissioned recording of that evening and recognizing the grandeur of the occasion — Melba Liston arranging and conducting, Weston at the piano leading a stellar 18-piece orchestra — the undaunted Muiyal arranged a studio date the very next day to capture four of Randy's compositions.

One experiences both polarities from the jump: Liston's orchestrations reflect the obvious gaze of Ellington on Weston's "African Sunrise," with Randy's piano interjections clearly recalling Monk. The drama of "African Sunrise," with its familiar horn declarations navigating through the declarative rhythmic bed of percussionists Big Black and Sam Kelly and drummer Charlie Persip, encourages some particularly prominent trombone from Benny Powell. The selfless Weston wraps some especially pungent chords around that richly percussive firmament for his essay on the Motherland at dawn.

Weston's "Blue Moses" closes the session, its bass and castanet embroidered, powering horns thematics familiar to Weston observers. Much credit to Charlie Persip's traps here, as well as Weston's 20-plus-year music director Talib Kibwe's alto sax interlude. In between the two extensive, suite-like opening and closing pieces are the evocative "The Last Day," with its ominous opening chords and voice punctuation followed by a more hopeful solo piano interlude, orchestral theme restatement with voice and some brief but powerful Norris Turney alto sax. "Portrait Of Vivian" is Randy's loving, melancholic reflection on his mother, highlighted by Harold Vick's lovely tenor, the band shifting to swing time, then back to the theme.

The second 1985 date chronicles a triumphant Montreux Jazz Festival nonet performance, with trumpeter Benny Bailey, Sahib Shihab on baritone, trombonist George Lewis, drummer Clyde Lucas, bassist Wilbur Little and



percussionist Kelly joining longtime African Rhythms band members Kibwe and Powell. Though Liston wrote the arrangements, health prohibited her from making the trip, so Hale Smith conducted. An extended "African Cookbook" offers suite-like mastery, Kibwe roaring on alto in call-and-response with the 'bones. Familiar Weston themes include "Hi Fly," featuring Shihab's roiling bari and Powell's buttery 'bone interlude, "African Sunrise" and "Congolese Children." Included also are two rarer Weston concert essays, a mashup of his "Blues For Strayhorn" with his homage to his pops, "Portrait Of F.E. Weston," both delivered lovingly solo piano.

"Congolese Children" is a particular joy, Weston's playful piano shaded by Lewis' conversant 'bone. Duke's 1942 jam session perennial "C-Jam Blues" closes with some rollicking Weston dialogue with Lucas and Kelly, soon joined by Little's sauntering bass. But for the most part this is a swinging piano moment, inspiring some Hale Smith scat choruses.

In 1988, Muiyal brought together two piano masters, resulting in a series of three European festival performances by Weston and his compadre Monty Alexander, augmented by their respective percussionists Eric Asante and Bobby Thomas. Included are two variations apiece of "Hi Fly" and "Blue Moses" (each with their own distinctions), "Caravan," "Blue Monk" and "St. Thomas." The first "Hi Fly" is delivered in a deeper shade of blue. The second, sans percussion, is taken at near ballad tempo, reflecting what Randy recounted as his original intent. The second "Blue Moses" is encouraged by some particularly assertive Bobby Thomas hand drumming.

Ultimately *The Music Of Randy Weston* is a deeply rewarding addition to the master's distinguished discography, completely reflecting his dedication to his two guiding principles: Africa and the blues, questing for the spirits of our ancestors.

DB

Ordering info: inandout-records.com

Joachim Kühn & Young Lions

ACT

Sebastian Wolfgruber
Nils Kugelmann
Jakob Bänsch
Andrés Coll



Joachim Kühn *Joachim Kühn & Young Lions*

ACT

★★★★½

"Iron sharpening iron" is how jazz knowledge is passed on from generation to generation. It's why jam sessions populated by a mix of young cats and masters alike are essential elements of any healthy scene.

1961's *The Young Lions* presented early-career Lee Morgan, Wayne Shorter and Bobby Timmons (among other notables). By the 1980s, a new generation of players took the mantel. And the players on this album are cut from the same cloth.

Via seven Joachim Kühn originals, each player gets a chance to shine; but the trumpet (Jakob Bänsch) and marimba (Andrés Coll) are focal points of the compositions. For instance, "Renata's Sleep" is a quirky gem of a syncopated waltz, while "Prof. Stief" is a typical rumination that would have been at home in a classic film noir.

Kühn wrote the tunes with the goal of utilizing personnel for the album he'd never played with before. Kühn notes, "These four guys, all in their 20s or early 30s, are the outstanding musicians of their generation — as to what they'll be playing in a few years' time — I'm already excited by that." There's a lot to be excited about on this album. The opposite of laid-back, *Joachim Kühn & The Young Lions* peddles a hefty load of assured, high-energy playing.

Another crucial element of "iron sharpening iron" is that a healthy dose of youthful verve can certainly help feed the masters, as well. Kühn, 82, sums it up thusly: "They really fired me up, we play absolutely as equal colleagues, I'm just totally thrilled!"

—Ayana Contreras

Joachim Kühn & Young Lions: Slick Stuff; Station i22; Every Day; Prof. Stief; Elliott Carter; Renata's Sleep; Attakee. (43:45)

Personnel: Joachim Kühn, piano; Jakob Bänsch, trumpet; Andrés Coll, marimba; Nils Kugelmann, bass; Sebastian Wolfgruber, drums.

Ordering info: actmusic.com

Dave Adewumi *The Flame Beneath The Silence*

GIANT STEP ARTS

★★★★½

Young trumpeter Dave Adewumi puts an artistically confident and sensitive foot forward on his debut album, *The Flame Beneath The Silence*. Echoes of jazz history and horn player legacies are funneled through a respectful but fresh and personalized style. The result is a potent and highly musical sound that stands out from the busy pack of formative jazz voices in and around the scene.

Adewumi's album, recorded live at Brooklyn's Ornithology, benefits from a carefully curated diversity of material and dynamics, illustrating his range without diluting the cohesiveness of the whole. He is in sensitive and compatible company, with a "dream team"-like quartet that includes vibraphonist Joel Ross, bassist Linda May Oh and drummer Marcus Gilmore, who establish an organically integrated framework for the leader's aesthetics.

Framing the 10-song set are the opening title track — with its simmering vibe over Han Oh's harmonics-based ostinato — and the gospel-waltz finale of "The Light You Left Behind." Measured lyricism is aglow in the open-time ballad "Abandon," while "Infinite Loop" bustles with cycling post-hard-bop energy waves. On



the track fittingly called "Out Cry," Adewumi and Ross exercise impressive lack of restraint in a free-improv romp that teases us with its 1:04 duration. We are primed to hear more, which we do in the following "If I Have To Do This Again I'm Going To Throw A Fit," a restless collective free adventure.

With his debut album as a leader, the twentysomething Adewumi has landed a potent sense of artistic arrival. —Josef Woodard

The Flame Beneath The Silence: The Flame Beneath The Silence; Is; Abandon; Breach The Gap; Infinite Loop; Pensive; The Vine; Out Cry; If I Have To Do This Again I'm Going To Throw A Fit; The Light You Left Behind. (46:41)

Personnel: Dave Adewumi, trumpet; Joel Ross, vibraphone; Linda May Han Oh, bass; Marcus Gilmore, drums.

Ordering info: giantsteparts.org



Pierre Favre Trio *Bird Food*

SONGS

★★★★½

This concise, previously unissued trio session recorded at Radio Studio Zurich in early 1968 captures that fascinating fissure between maintaining orthodoxy and embracing change in European jazz. The tape was discovered by trombonist Samuel Blaser in the personal archives of Swiss drummer Pierre Favre; it's not only the earliest recording by Favre as a band leader — recorded six months prior to his more

aggressive trio album *Santana* — but it also captures pianist Irène Schweizer underlining an evolving complexion of three originals she had recorded a year earlier with her own trio. Finally, it's one of the earliest recordings to feature Czech bassist George Mraz — when he was still Jiří Mráz — months before he landed the Berklee scholarship that took him to the U.S. for the rest of his career.

The album opens with nearly a minute of churning, scene-setting intensity before the pianist introduces the jaunty theme of Ornette Coleman's "Bird Food," establishing the compositions primarily as loose forms for wide-open improvisation. As Mraz would soon prove, he was more interested in post-bop fundamentals than taking the music out, so his playing injects a strange tension at times. He can kick up plenty of arco fury when he wants to but often defaults to more conventional walking lines. Schweizer's "Sounds II" stretches and contracts time for its entirety, the pianist playing halting phrases that accelerate — especially when she begins mucking around inside her instrument — and decelerate, shadowed by the bassist's pulse-suggestive tones. —Peter Margasak

Bird Food: Bird Food; Sounds II; Hinten; The Attack. (30:06)

Personnel: Pierre Favre, drums; Irène Schweizer, piano; George Mraz, bass.

Ordering info: blasermusic.com



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Joey Alexander *Celestial Keeper*

MACK AVENUE

★★★★

Growing up gracefully in public is hard, and growing up gracefully in the jazz public is borderline impossible.

Fans of this music routinely fear for its well-being, and the emergence of a young virtuoso sparks visions of another Wynton (although the impact that Mr. Marsalis made on jazz will probably never be duplicated). Nevertheless, fair or not, the pressures arrive, and the younger the emergent artist, the heavier.

That's why it's rather impressive that 22-year-old pianist Joey Alexander has made it this far without making a therapist rich. He's been recording for a decade and received Grammy nominations. *Celestial Keeper* finds him further establishing his sound and

branching out in interesting ways. The album showcases his relatively new rhythm section of drummer Jonathan Barber and bassist Kris Funn, and Alexander matches wits with esteemed guests like saxophonist Jaleel Shaw and two vocalists, Lisa Fischer and Alita Moses.

The album begins with an improvised solo piece, "Bemused," which is reflective though chipper. Alexander revisits the solo as "Bemused Again" later in the program, and the sunny spring-afternoon vibe of the opening track has become more layered and complex as if the early optimism has hit some ominous prospects.

Shaw appears playing alto saxophone on the uptempo "Aversion," contrasting Alexander's Brad Mehldau-like elegance with some Jimmy Blythean grit. Then he switches to soprano on the funkier "Deep Calls To Deep" and the wistful "As Far As The Eye Can See."

Moses' vocals highlight the yearning of "Whispers Of Love," and Fischer makes the old warhorse "My Funny Valentine" feel new again.

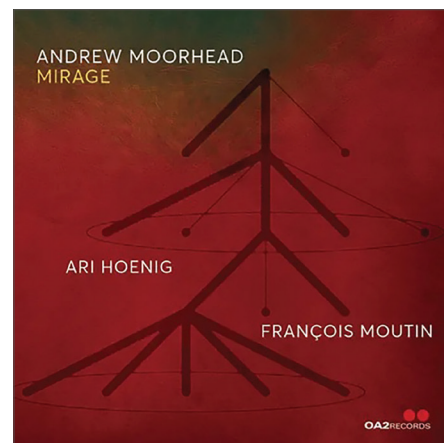
The best pleasures on the recording are when the trio work out alone, though. Their take on "Stella By Starlight" suggests that they know where they are going and how to get there.

—Martin Johnson

Celestial Keeper: Bemused; Aversion; Whispers Of Love; Stella By Starlight; Deep Calls To Deep; My Funny Valentine; Bemused Again; Aliceanna (Bmore); As Far As The Eye Can See; How Great Thou Art. (50:35)

Personnel: Joey Alexander, piano; Kris Funn, bass; Jonathan Barber, drums; Jaleel Shaw, alto saxophone (2), soprano saxophone (5, 9); Alita Moses (3), Lisa Fischer, vocals (6).

Ordering info: mackavenue.com



Andrew Moorhead *Mirage*

OA2

★★★★½

For his second OA2 album, sui generis virtuoso Andrew Moorhead eschews jazz tunes and free-dives for keeps into his own phase-shifting brand of hypnotic piano trio composition. Interweaving West African 3-against-2 currents with the rigorous, incremental mathematics of minimalism, Moorhead produces an original sound that is at once dazzlingly technical, intellectually fascinating and surprisingly expressive. If you are familiar with Steve Reich or Trevor Watts' Moire Music, you know the territory; if not, buckle up for something entirely new.

For most of *Mirage*'s seven tracks, bass and drums follow the piano in strict ensemble presentations, though Moorhead steps out to solo a few times, as does bassist François Moutin, on "Intro Tune," a three-parter that moves from chunky syncopation to nervous soloing to dark introspection. "Intervals" introduces a honky-tonk blues figure (reprised in the delightful "Boogie," which closes the album) that gives way to a torrent of knotty cross-rhythms, with Ari Hoening's drums playing a stronger role. "Phased Voices" showcases Moorhead's remarkable two-handed independence, and "Mirage" suggests a dreamy childhood reverie. The trio masterfully executes the resolutely retarding tempo of "Slower Etude."

A lot of the pleasure here comes from close attention to the subtle or sudden shifts of note groupings, meters and cross-combinations thereof, though sometimes ("Phased Voices") things get too thick or go on too long. The kicker is that for all its intellectual architecture, the music can be enjoyed for the simple pleasure of pure sound: alternately eager, anxious, joyous or bemused.

—Paul de Barros

Mirage: Faster Etude; Intro Tune; Intervals; Phased Voices; Mirage; Slower Etude; Boogie. (43:22)

Personnel: Andrew Moorhead, piano; François Moutin, bass; Ari Hoening, drums.

Ordering info: originarts.com

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Billy Mohler *Live In Europe*

DOX

★★★★½

With a bass-and-drums axis topped by two melodic voices, Billy Mohler's jazz quartets have offered a remarkably consistent sound across his four previous albums. *Live In Europe*, in that sense, marks more of a change in personnel than a shift in approach.

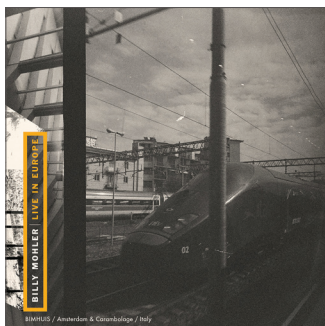
Credit much of that to Mohler's writing style. Rather than take the traditional bass role in a "chordless" quartet, his tunes have more of a rock or R&B approach, with melodies supported by a repeating, riff-like bass line. Given Mohler's background as a rock and session player, that shouldn't be surprising, but it's worth noting that the pulse he generates with long-time drummer Nate Wood is as swinging as it is insistent.

Recorded in Italy and Amsterdam, this EP draws half its material from 2025's *The Eternal*, and in some sense is a corrective, as that album used guitarist Jeff Parker in place of a trumpet player. Here, Hermon Mehari's warm, lyrical horn does an admirable job of reclaiming the brass role, particularly his slyly virtuosic intro to "Perseverance." But tenor man Francesco Bigoni is the big discovery, a soulful, expressive player whose modernist impulses sound thoroughly grounded in blues and hard-bop, as his gruff, expansive playing on "Ultraviolet" makes plain. Here's hoping we hear more from this line-up. —J.D. Considine

Live In Europe: Adaptation; Reflection; Deconstruction; Eternal; Ultraviolet; Perseverance. (39:18)

Personnel: Billy Mohler, bass; Francesco Bigoni, tenor saxophone; Hermon Mehari, trumpet; Nate Wood, drums.

Ordering info: records.dox.amsterdam



Joe Webb *Neath Beat*

EDITION

★★★★

The musical character studies that British pianist Joe Webb composes are key to the appeal of his second album, a mélange of styles that covers a lot of ground. Webb creates virtual jazz personalities in the bluesy "Fantastic Mr. Cox," the deeply grooved "Uncle Paul" and "Mellow Tony," a live track demonstrating the empathy among the pianist, drummer Sam Jesson and bassist Will Sach. You'll want to meet this Tony, a jazz habitué who occupies terrain reminiscent of Horace Silver's "Filthy McNasty" and "Señor Blues."

Webb is an assertive pianist who scrambles ragtime, swing, pop and classical. The 12 tracks he delivers on this too-brief recording span the lusty James P. Johnson homage "James P.," a robust snippet honoring Ellington called "Duke" and "Mylanwy," which stands apart. It is a thundering take on a traditional Welsh folk song. A powerful, thickening track on which Webb shows his mastery and power, this carries classical weight.

Other outstanding cuts include "Goalmouth Scramble" and a deft rendition of "I'm Confessin' (That I Love You)" featuring whispering drums, rumbling bass and Webb's piano in full curlicue and rubato. The touch is light, the drums and bass appropriately minimalist.

—Carlo Wolff

Neath Beat: Goalmouth Scramble; Like Sach; Fantastic Mr. Cox; Dy-Na-Mi-Tee; I'm Confessin' (That I Love You); KDB; Mellow Tony; James P.; Corrêze; Duke; Uncle Paul; Mylanwy. (42:57)

Personnel: Joe Webb, piano; Will Sach, bass; Sam Jesson, drums.

Ordering info: editionrecords.com




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Jazz today is more of a spectrum of lineage and legacy than it is a bounded genre. What unites the five debut albums below is a shared confidence that jazz is amorphous enough to hold whatever vision its artists bring to it.

Danalogue, a founding member of electro-jazz-punk outfits The Comet is Coming and Soccer96, strikes out on his own with *Teleportations* (Castles in Space; ★★½ 36:08). It's trippy and futuristic, in the vein of his other projects, but more restrained and introspective. Bright, persistent electronic beats and woozy synths make the record feel like one continuous cosmic journey that is as much as a conversation with the listener as it is an inner monologue. On "Far Beyond The Sun," Danalogue's voice settles into a groovy downtempo lilt, while on "You Are On The Right Track," a disembodied voice propels us forward into an astral jazz tapestry. Each song speaks to the next, building a meandering exploration through space and time.

Ordering info: danalogue.bandcamp.com

Vocalist and percussionist **Anthony Almonte** takes genre-expansiveness in a different direction on *Conversando Con La Luna* (Wicked Cool; ★★½ 42:37). He embodies the soul of salsa with his poetic lyrics and unhurried ease, weaved into the melodic framework of rock and pop. Bringing together a heavy-hitting roster of Latin and rock music collaborators, including Cuban pianist Gonzalo Rubalcaba and E Street Band guitarist Stevie Van Zandt, this is a gorgeous, deeply listenable record about all the forms that love takes. On "Caminando," funky horns, fiery guitars and a cha-cha groove meld beneath Almonte's aching vocals. He finds his own voice inside traditions cultivated by the very collaborators he has brought together. The salsa percussion carries romance, but it's Almonte's self-assured vocals that make the album soar.

Ordering info: wickedcoolrecords.com

Alicia Waller has that same self-assuredness in her debut, *Louder, Then* (Independent Release; ★★★★★ 33:54), which likely comes from her training in bel canto opera. Years spent traveling and practicing musical diplomacy informs this opinionated record that effortlessly traverses European classical traditions like opera and flamenco and Black American vernacular musics like gospel and blues. The opening track, "Tempo 120," is the best showcase of Waller's powerful voice and worldly perspective: bluesy yet playful and full of colorful storytelling. "The Climb/Job Blues" is another stand-out, mixing soul, funk and operating purity of tone all in one. Waller is a singular force, lyrically and compositionally.

Ordering info: aliciawaller.bandcamp.com

Trumpeter **Ilhan Saferali**'s debut sits toward the more traditional end of the spectrum. *Introducing Ilhan* (Independent Release;



Alicia Waller brings her operatic background to *Louder, Then*.

KENDRA IRENE

★★★ 41:02) is a hard-bop record in the spirit of Lee Morgan and Freddie Hubbard. His quintet, full of young up-and-comers, interprets standards like Bob Haymes' "Love Is A Night Thing," made famous by Carmen McRae, alongside their own renditions of nostalgic songs like Bert Kaempfert's "Danke Schoen" and Mister Rogers' "It's You I Like," with a methodical precision. They sound relaxed yet disciplined, capturing the warmth of a smoky underground jazz club. Nothing here breaks new ground, in that the band is paying tribute, not reinventing the form, but that is also the album's greatest strength.

Ordering info: ilhansaferrali.com

Bassist **Alon Near's** *Names, Places* (Hypnote; ★★★★★ 37:29) sits closer to the middle: contemporary jazz built on original compositions written over several years of self-reflection and growth. Muted percussion and a slow, lingering piano melody anchor the opening track and Near's first composition, "Breathe," around his understated bass. "The Same Story" sounds like it could belong in a Broadway musical, building its own narrative arc, while "Strength Of Repetition," a solo bass piece, threads punctuated punk-rock phrases through lilting lines. "Tokyo" stays playful and light, buoyed by full luscious bass notes. Taken together, these compositions feel like a single unfolding meditation: patient and quietly confident in where it's going.

Ordering info: hypnoterecords.com

At one end, Saferali plays it straight, honoring the lineage he has inherited. At the other, Danalogue, Almonte and Waller stretch jazz's borders ever outward, pulling opera, salsa, rock and electronica into their orbit. In between, Near draws on tradition without being bound by it. Across this array of genre-fluid experiments, each artist uses their debut to answer the same question: who am I and where do I come from? That five such different answers can all still sound unmistakably like jazz says something hopeful about where the genre is headed. **DB**



Tomas Martinez *In Good Company* STEEPLECHASE

★★★★

In Good Company is made up of two bands, one Stateside (Van Gelder Studios), the other in the leader's backyard, Buenos Aires. Argentinian altoist Tomas Martinez, 26, offers his debut with the backing of players familiar to most DB readers: Michael Weiss, David Wong and Kenny Washington. From down under, it's a trio featuring bassist Paul Sikivie and drummer Teo Perez.

Martinez's obvious ease with standard fare had me thinking of Paul Desmond, his youthfulness not getting the in way of his swinging through practically everything historic here, including his own compositions, like the medium-tempo "So Do I." This is a straight-ahead affair, with the altoist generously sharing the solo spotlight to everyone. He takes Charlie Parker's "Quasimodo" at a similar pace, laying out after the theme to let Sikivie take over for a few choruses, the trio's vibe airy, free and, of course, swinging. Perez's solo a nice round-up towards song's end. Eddie Haywood's "Land Of Dreams" is the rare uptempo number (typical for a song based on "Cherokee"), with Washington's lickety-split drumming hovering like a bee over its nest, Martinez showing more ease at high velocity.

The prevailing virtue to *In Good Company* stems from the album's pared-down ambience, Weiss' piano the only sound that seems to create an added layer. That said, his playing is sparse, as if he were there as much for color and contrast. Mel Torme's "Born To Be Blue" sounds right at a slightly slower pace, the trio's simple approach inviting. Nothing fancy.

—John Ephland

In Good Company: Something To Live For; Between The Devil And The Deep Blue Sea; Father Flanagan; Eloy's Delight; It's The Talk Of The Town; Get Out Of Town; So Do; Quasimodo; Land Of Dreams; Born To Be Blue; Byar's Bop; Never The Same. (65:02)

Personnel: Tomas Martinez, alto saxophone; Michael Weiss (1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 12), piano; David Wong (1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 12), Paul Sikivie (2, 4, 6, 8, 10), bass; Kenny Washington (1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 12), Teo Perez (2, 4, 6, 8, 10), drums.

Ordering info: steeplechase.dk



Onilu *Jakuta's Dance*

577

★★★★★

Onilu is a percussion ensemble led by Kevin Diehl, founder of Sonic Liberation Front, and featuring Joe Chambers, Craig McIver and Daniel Villarreal. (Their self-titled debut, released on Eremita in 2025, was a trio effort by Diehl, Joe Chambers and Chad Taylor.) Each of the first album's eight tracks began with a simple, looplike rhythm pattern, sometimes played on jazz kits, other times on hand drums, adding some piano or a vibraphone line to carry the

melody. Most tracks were gentle, more soothing than ritualistic, but it all ended with "A Meta Onilu," on which all three men sat behind drum kits, battering away like a drum corps.

Onilu's second album offers a number of changes from the debut. It's not just that there's one more person playing; it's what they're playing that's different. McIver and Chambers, both of whom are mallet players, dominate many of the arrangements as well as bringing in compositions. McIver's piece "Pope-A-Dope," a tribute to his time working with saxophonist Odean Pope, is built around multiple trilling, intertwined mallet lines, exploring a melody that sounds drawn from 1950s R&B or early rock 'n' roll and may remind listeners of Ruth Underwood's work with Frank Zappa. There's also an electronic element to the music this time, thanks to the use of a sensory percussion kit, which uses light sensors attached to drums to create new sounds after the fact via software; Diehl's "Holocene Serene" and "Olókun Sleeps" use the device to conjure sometimes eerie electroacoustic soundscapes.

—Phil Freeman

Jakuta's Dance: Jakutá's Dance; Landscapes; Holocene Serene; Pope-A-Dope; Café Con Pan; Circles; Olókun Sleeps; Ni Tân (That's It). (43:28)

Personnel: Joe Chambers, vibraphone, drum kit, percussion; Kevin Diehl, sensory percussion drum kit, bata itotele, itotele/bass drum combo, quinto, cajon; Craig McIver, marimba, vibraphone, drum kit, percussion; Daniel Villarreal, drum kit, sensory percussion system, bata okonkolo, conga, cajon, marimba, percussion.

Ordering info: 577records.bandcamp.com

Nat Reeves *Now In Time*

SIDEDOOR JAZZ

★★★★★

In a veteran jazz musician's career, a time comes when they reflect on their times playing clubs, appearing on countless recordings and composing music for an appreciative fanbase. Bassist Nat Reeves is doing just that. Reeves has also helped the next generation of musicians by mentoring and appearing on their debut recordings.

For his 70th birthday, the owner of the SideDoor Jazz Club gifted him the opportunity to record with a dream band. On his new recording, *Now In Time*, he couldn't have assembled a better sextet in trombonist Steve Davis, trumpeter Eddie Henderson, drummer Jeff 'Tain' Watts, saxophonist Eric Alexander and pianist Orrin Evans. His repertoire draws from important figures throughout his career while offering several original compositions.

The opener, "Blue Ridge," establishes the album's character immediately with a warm, swinging vibe, propelled by Reeves' authoritative bass lines. Throughout the session, the frontline of Henderson, Alexander and Davis delivers juicy solos that are both technically assured and emotionally direct. Alexander's muscular tenor work on "Katea's Dance"



and his own composition "Dave's System" stand among the recording's highlights, while Henderson brings his trademark lyrical elegance to "Portrait Of Jennie."

The album's most touching moments arrive when Reeves turns inward. His originals "For RJ" and "Waltz For Ellis" reveal a deeply personal side, while his occasional use of cello adds a fresh timbral dimension.

—Veronica Johnson

Now In Time: Blue Ridge; Katea's Dance; Appointment In Ghana; Portrait Of Jennie; Sounds Of The Flying Pygmies; For RJ; Dave's System; The Creator Has A Master Plan; On Green Dolphin Street; Alice In Wonderland; Samba D'blue; Waltz For Ellis. (64:32)

Personnel: Nat Reeves, bass; Steve Davis, trombone; Eddie Henderson, trumpet; Eric Alexander, tenor saxophone; Orrin Evans, piano; Jeff 'Tain' Watts, drums.

Ordering info: natreeves.com

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Torn Clouds and Spiritual Calm

Beyond can mean massed flute sampling or behemoth electric guitar stacking, electroacoustic collages or Occitan-language folk-punk.

David Torn will be familiar to adventurous jazzers, even recording for ECM, but here his solo guitar takes a ride across the cosmos, questioning levels of abstraction while coated in a frazzled energy more in keeping with rock music. Torn hovers from intimate plectrum string-contact up to a heavenly cloud of billowing axes, as around half of *now i imagine a place not the same* (Kou; ★★½ 71:19) features tracks that sprawl over 10 minutes or more. Torn groans under his own guitar-orchestral carapace, spouting weighted feedback and intimate reverb-acoustics in turn. Here he's playing a National Steel with bottleneck; there, he's coaxing fuzzed chaos out of his skyscraper amp-stack. He makes a juggernaut sludge-crawl, entering the disturbingly distorted dronscape, each piece bleeding into the next, as Torn opens up fresh wounds.

Ordering info: davidtorn.bandcamp.com

Squinting through a hazy vision, the Kiri Ra! trio could be crafting sounds that might have issued from the imaginary later life of John Coltrane, taking the rippling tenor down to a softened caress, and surrounding it with faint piano, flute, marimba, mbira and other instruments that are so touched by opalescent fragility that the cycling patterns and pieces on *nen* (We Jazz; ★★★★★ 45:00) don't require the listener to unfold those parts, but only to inhabit this haunting spectre-jazz slow-cascade, which actually opens up as completely untethered ambient for its first three tracks. From Finland, Linda Fredriksson, Lau Nau (Laura Naukkarinen) and Matti Bye set out to retire their egos, but retain their styles, dedicated to an abstract ensemble music of ravishing poise. Our attention is lightly grasped, our minds carefully concentrating.

Ordering info: wejazzrecords.bandcamp.com

Lea Bertucci has composed *The Days Pass Quickly Immersed In The Shadow Of Eternity* (Cibachrome Editions; ★★★ 33:47), not a bloated progressive rock opus, but more of an early music folk cut-up, as this New Yorker samples the five-flute stack of interpreter Norbert Rodenkirchen (including swan bone and sheep bone variants), arranging his sonic matter in a highly considered fashion that reflects her own experiments on the alto saxophone. Bertucci "triggers and disperses" her makings around an eight-channel system, slowly and subtly introducing each Renaissance or Medieval instrument, meeting playfully with their siblings, steadily responding, overlaying, multiplying and gently crowding, setting up a polyphonic latticework. Wood meets metal, making bright drone sustains or scampering flutters.

Ordering info: leabertucci.bandcamp.com



Cocanha is an Occitan avant-folk group from Toulouse, France.

COURTESY BONGO JOE

The avowed artistic heroes of Schmidt/Berndt are Cluster (from Berlin) and the French comic artist Jean Giraud (this makes Moebius times two!), but their music on *Cloud Machines* (Thrill Jockey ★★★★★ 42:17) doesn't have to sound or feel like either of those: Its electroacoustic charms sound more Gallic than Germanic. The listener can play at identifying the instruments used as core matter for radical re-shaping, snatching an acoustic guitar, a bass, an alto saxophone, a frame drum and some good ol' keyboards (these are often played by guest artists), the duo doing their best to warp them into strange new stretchings, bleepings, wrenchings and distortions. Rhythm is often central, atonality gets catchy through repetition. Twelve years in the making, M.C. Schmidt (half of Matmos) and John Berndt (mostly known around Baltimore) have crafted some of the year's best electroacoustic sonics.

Ordering info: thrilljockey.com

Lila Frayse and Caroline Defrau are Cocanha, singing in the Occitan language of southern France and subjecting their zither-like instruments (or giant-size jaw harp) to severe buzz-distorted digital scalpel-cuts, lending percussion beats via handclaps and footwork. On one level *Flame Foldère* (Les Disques Bongo Joe; ★★★★★ 39:20) has a big sound, its elements microscoped into a giant presence, but on the other side, there are pauses and jump-starts, dropping and pouncing, rising out of stark minimalism towards a furious power. This Toulouse twosome manages to maintain a folkish authenticity while shooting extreme sonic shots hither and thither. Their original in-the-now words are navigating collages of ancient Occitan folk melodies. Sharpened vocal harmonies criss-cross and overlap, hocketing techniques turning rampant. A sweet gentility alternates with bangin' brutality, bent and sliding strings gaining a sudden focus. The Slits might be an influence, holidaying in the south of France.

DB

Ordering info: cocanha.bandcamp.com



Goldings / Bernstein / Stewart Rhombus

SMOKE SESSIONS

★★★★½

The result of Larry Goldings, Peter Bernstein and Bill Stewart's 35 years of trio play, *Rhombus* is a sensitive, melodic and mostly medium-uptempo program rather than the blustery, funk-imbued work typically associated with this kind of lineup.

Interpreting compositions by Keith Jarrett, Randy Weston, Abdullah Ibrahim, Irving Berlin, Wayne Shorter and Thelonious Monk as well as the titular original by Goldings and Bernstein's blues — which has a hint of Wes Montgomery-Jimmy Smith influence — the players evoke late-night moods, especially on the opener and "Penelope," reflecting the intimacy of their interactions and balance. As a rhombus is a tilted-square shape, the songs themselves may be the construed as the project's fourth aspect, equal to the musicians' efforts.

Bernstein's relaxed yet precise clarity tops many of the arrangement, to which Goldings adds commentary, beds of mystery and tremolos with reedy voicings, connected to the guitarist like a shadow as in his comping on "Mamma." But they often change places, subtle rhythm guitar under nimble keyboard solos, during which Goldings expands on themes intriguingly. Stewart is an adept colorist as well as a dependable time-keeper, always supporting and never overwhelming his mates, also providing pleasingly imaginative fills (as on "It's Wonderful").

For my taste, the finale "In Walked Bud" is the standout track, bright, bopping fun. This record is good-plus, not earth-shaking but certainly a satisfying listen and a testament to the creative compatibility that's the hallmark of worthwhile jazz.

—Howard Mandel

Rhombus: Everything That Lives Laments; Hi-Fly; Rhombus; Mamma; They Say It's Wonderful; Dissipation Blues; Penelope; In Walked Bud. (45:26)

Personnel: Larry Goldings, organ; Peter Bernstein, guitar; Bill Stewart, drums.

Ordering info: smokesessionsrecords.com



Goran Kajfeš Subtropic Arkestra Goran Kajfeš Subtropic Arkestra & Avin Omer

WE JAZZ

★★★★½

Global fusion might not be the first thing to spring to mind when imagining what Swedish jazz could entail, yet that is what trumpeter Goran Kajfeš has achieved with his Subtropic Arkestra: an enticing blend of Afrobeat, post-rock, synth-psychedelic and, in the case of this EP, Kurdish folk music in a new collaboration with Swedish-Kurdish singer Avin Omer.

This three-track EP begins with a refreshed version of the traditional folk melody “Suleymanieh,” with a muted rising and rhythmic ostinato enhanced by distorted guitar, light keyboards and flute. It’s over this bubbling texture that Omer’s soaring, plaintive voice lays out the mournful melody. Eventually she gives way to a pensive trumpet solo by Kajfeš, who tempers the energy down to a whisper’s conclusion. Next is “Desmala Min,” an original composition with an infectious funky groove and Omer’s wonderfully melismatic line set to the lyrics of Şêrko Bêkes, the first of two such treatments by the Iraqi Kurdish poet. The melodic and chordal texture is especially delightful, flute and baritone saxophone over what sounds like a hammer dulcimer.

Taken together, this EP is a beautiful example of how to successfully bring together a myriad of musical inspirations to create something new, all with an uncluttered ease of function and flow that seems to be an enduring feature of the Swedish aesthetic. The only downside is that there is not more of this particular combination between Kajfeš and Omer: Here’s hoping there will be one day.

—Gary Fukushima

Goran Kajfeš Subtropic Arkestra & Avin Omer: Suleymanieh; Desmala Min; Monsoon. (23:38)

Personnel: Goran Kajfeš, trumpet, synthesizer, percussion; Avin Omer, vocals; Per “Ruskräsk” Johansson, baritone saxophone, flute; Jonas Kullhammar, tenor saxophone, flute, taragot; Jesper Nordenström; piano, organ, Fender Rhodes, celesta, synthesizer; Reine Fiske, electric and acoustic guitar, mellotron; Johan Berthling, electric bass; Johan Holmegård; drums, percussion.

Ordering info: wejazz.fi



Helen Sung Big Band Oracles

SUNNYSIDE

★★★★½

Fans of pianist-composer Helen Sung won’t be surprised that her first big band album, *Oracles*, is a tour de force. With a strong-in-every-chair 17-piece unit at her disposal, Sung draws on an exhaustive lexicon of jazz and modern classical vocabulary on 12 trenchant, compelling compositions and arrangements, including original “tone parallels,” as Duke Ellington might call them, to the sonic personalities of Clark Terry, Wayne Shorter, Ron Carter, Jimmy

Heath, Barry Harris, Kenny Barron and Herbie Hancock, her mentors in the first-ever class of the Thelonious Monk Institute in 1995.

Highlights abound, among them Terry’s “Samba Da Gumz,” arranged as a pithy, state-ly unison theme by the four horns. Shorter’s “Diana” receives a gracefully intertwining Rhodes-soprano sax (John Ellis) duo, then segues into “Wayne’s World,” delegating to Ellis a long, intense tenor declamation over rich orchestral colors that evoke an imaginary soundtrack to a Shorterized action film. Then she dives headlong into Carter’s “R.J.” with an atonal-ish statement reminiscent of Hancock at his most complex. Heath gets his flowers on Sung’s “A Little Bird Watchin’,” with solos by tenorist Nicole Glover, bassist Vicente Archer and Sung.

She ends with variations of the melody of Horace Silver’s “Peace,” after a three-part homage to oracles Harris, Barron and Hancock that gets to the core of each of these transformative pianists.

—Ted Panken

Oracles: Convergence; Samba Da Gumz; Positively C.T. (for Clark Terry); Diana; Wayne’s World (for Wayne Shorter); Mr. Virtuoso (for Ron Carter); R.J.; A Little Bird Watchin’ (for Jimmy Heath); Pianism: I. Barry Harris; II. Kenny Barron; III. Herbie Hancock; Peace. (52:47)

Personnel: Helen Sung, piano; Tatum Greenblatt, Mike Rodriguez, Alex Norris, Nathan Williford, trumpet, flugelhorn; James Burton III, Sara Jacovino, Willie Applewhite, trombone; Gina Benalcázar López, bass trombone; Dave Pietro, Alejandro Aviles, alto saxophone, woodwinds; John Ellis, Nicole Glover, tenor saxophone, woodwinds; Andrew Gutasukas, baritone saxophone, bass clarinet; Vicente Archer, bass; Adam Cruz, drums; Samuel Torres, percussion; Alan Ferber, conductor.

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Altin Sencalar explores several Latin-derived styles on his seventh album, *Natural Rhythm*.

Altin Sencalar *Natural Rhythm*

POSI-TONE

★★★★

Given Altin Sencalar's Latino heritage and his musical proclivities, there is little surprise that his seventh album showcases Cuban guajira, tejano, calypso, clave, mariachi and Afro-Cuban styles. What all of them have in common is *Natural Rhythm*, the album's title that is possibly derived from Maya Angelou's quote "Everything has rhythm. Everything dances," that adorns the cover. "Baila de Plena," an original by Sencalar with an engaging exposition on electric bass by Boris Kozlov, is tinged with a touch of samba. And brief but sizzling phrases from the trumpet of Alex Norris and Sencalar's quick licks on trombone make this track almost emblematic of the album's range and intent.

If some passages on "In Walked Horace" are reminiscent of J.J. Johnson, that is not by chance since it's his composition. Sencalar extends

his appreciation to the iconic master with "Lament," but it's a radical departure from the standard treatment, something Sencalar has christened "JJ con Clave." As she does on nearly every track, Gary Kerkezou's drum medley is a perfect confection, and it blends most remarkably on "Resolution," a tribute to John Coltrane. Standout moments occur with the solos on alto saxophone by Sharel Cassity on "Reflection" and, presumably, it's she on the lovely, lilting flute on "Run Away." Any album with pianist Art Hirahara on board is a guaranteed winner, and his solo on "One By One" needs no more certification than that. In fact, the band is a delightful winner, and Sencalar knows how to choose his campaneros and the tunes.

—Herb Boyd

Natural Rhythm: One By One; Reflection; I Walked Horace; Resolution; Baila De Plena; Descarga De Dia; New Life; Lament; Run Away Settling. (52:26)

Personnel: Altin Sencalar, trombone; Alex Norris, trumpet; Sharel Cassity, alto saxophone, flute; Michael Dease, baritone saxophone; Art Hirahara, piano; Boris Kozlov, bass; Gary Kerkezou, drums; Alex Acuña, percussion.

Ordering info: posi-tone.com



Stella Cole *Live At Café Carlyle*

JAZZ IS COOL

★★★★

Stella Cole grew up in a small town in Illinois, listening to classic film soundtracks on videos with her parents. She didn't discover pop music until high school, but had no thoughts about becoming a singer. At Northwestern University she took a class in The Great American Songbook and her course was set.

After graduation, she moved to New York. When her auditions didn't get any results, she started posting videos of her singing on YouTube, TikTok and other online platforms. She got thousands of hits, including one from James Taylor, who reposted her video of "Moon River." She was soon playing at Birdland and Café Carlyle, where this live album was recorded.

Backed by her longtime trio, she delivers a generous 19-track album of her personal favorites. She opens with "Love Walked In," delivering the first verses traditionally, then jumping into a swinging arrangement driven by a frisky bass line and her vivacious phrasing. Her vocal on "Singin' In The Rain" has hints of the female jazz singers who influenced her, but she makes them her own with her playful delivery.

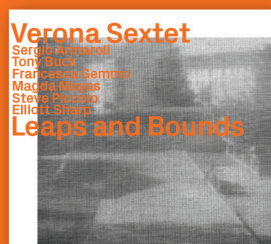
On "Till There Was You," "When The Sun Comes Out" and "It's Magic," she drops into her lower register for fervent readings, concluding "It's Magic" with a long, impressive melismatic note. "Over The Rainbow," the song that made her fall in love with standards, opens with the seldom-heard, pensive introductory verses, before her understated delivery of the more familiar lyrics, marked by an understated solo by her pianist, Michael Kanan. —j. poet

Live At Café Carlyle: Love Walked In; Pure Imagination; Singin' In The Rain Introduction; Singin' In The Rain; It's Magic; Till There Was You; It Had To Be You; I Happen To Like New York; As Time Goes By Introduction; As Time Goes By; Something Good; Perhaps, Perhaps, Perhaps; Cry Me A River; He's A Tramp; Moon River; Anything Goes; When The Sun Comes Out; Over The Rainbow Introduction; Over The Rainbow. (63:43)

Personnel: Stella Cole, vocals; Michael Kanan, piano; Michael Migliore, bass; Hank Allen-Barfield, drums.

Ordering info: stellacole.net

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COURTESY ERIC DIVITO

In a traditional big band, the guitar often acts as continuous rhythmic glue — a clean quarter-note engine that locks with the string bass and complements the drummer's ride cymbal pattern.

Traditional Big Band Rhythm Guitar Techniques

Traditional big band rhythm guitar is a deceptively demanding craft. To the untrained ear it can sound like “just quarter notes,” but in a strong band it functions like a second drummer: stabilizing time, clarifying harmony, shaping form and supporting the ensemble’s dynamic contour. The classic model is the 4/4 “four-to-the-bar” style associated with Freddie Green of the Count Basie Orchestra where the guitar becomes a consistent, buoyant pulse within the rhythm section.

Two of the most valuable resources I’ve found for developing this craft — beyond listening to the greats such as Green, Dick McDonough, Carl Kress, George Van Eps, Eddie Lang, Barney Kessel and Herb Ellis — are studying with one of today’s most accomplished big band guitarists, James Chirillo, and working through the method book *Swing & Big Band Guitar* by Charlton Johnson. Each frame this approach as being less about chord vocabulary and more about delivering a dependable, resonant groove that makes the whole band swing.

4/4 Rhythm Guitar

In a traditional swing band, the guitar’s job is not to “comp” in the modern sense of synco-

pated, conversational punctuation. Instead, it often acts as continuous rhythmic glue: a clean quarter-note engine that locks with the string bass and complements the drummer’s ride cymbal pattern. The result is a unified time-feel: bass walks, ride cymbal keeps the time, guitar chunks on 1-2-3-4, and the piano either lays out or plays lightly to avoid clutter.

This is why Green’s approach is so celebrated: It prioritizes consistency and blend. The attack is short but not dead; the chord rings just long enough to add warmth and definition without stepping on horns or piano. Johnson emphasizes that great rhythm guitarists learn to control duration, density and placement more than they chase complex voicings. The best players also “conduct” subtly through dynamics: leaning into shout sections, relaxing behind solos and smoothing transitions between ensemble figures.

Another crucial function of the big band guitar is harmonic clarity. The guitar often supplies a compact “label” for the chord quality (major, minor, dominant, half-diminished) so that the band and the listener feel the progression even when orchestration becomes busy. In the Freddie Green tradition, that clarity comes from small voicings in the instrument’s mid-

dle register, often without the root, and with a strong sense of voice-leading.

Common Shell “Rhythm” Voicings

The foundation of big band rhythm guitar is the shell voicing: compact shapes built from the chord tones that matter most for defining harmony. The most essential tones are typically:

- The 3rd (defines major vs. minor).
- The 7th (defines dominant vs. major 7 vs. minor 7).
- Often the 6th or the 9th as tasteful color (common in swing language).
- Sometimes the root (useful depending on bass/piano role and arrangement), but frequently omitted.

Johnson’s method strongly encourages thinking in function-first voicings. A classic Freddie Green-style dominant chord might be only two or three notes: often the 3rd and 7th (guide tones) plus one additional tone that supports the line (root, 5th, 6th or 9th depending on context). Surprisingly enough, Green often used only single-note “tenor lines” on the 4th string that harmonized melodically with the bass rather than guide tones or shell voicings. For major chords, 6ths frequently appear in swing-era vocabulary, and on minor chords, 6ths or 9ths can keep the sound open and less heavy than stacked minor 7ths.

In practice, shell voicings are favored because they are fast (easy to grab at tempo), clean (less harmonically dense), orchestration-friendly (leave space for horns and piano); and voice-leadable (connect smoothly from chord to chord).

Example 1 shows some typical drop 3 voicings for various types of chords followed by the “rhythm” shell voicings that are derived from them. The numbers in boxes refer to which scale degree of the chord appears in the bass voice on the lowest string, indicating what inversion the chord is in. These numbers will be useful later in the musical examples to indicate the voicings when chord diagrams are not supplied. Since the rhythm voicings are created by dropping the highest note of the chord (from the 2nd string), you will notice that several voicings are identical throughout different chord qualities. Also, some voicings may be less than ideal. One example is a major 7 chord in 3rd inversion (with the 7th the bass). Due to the dissonant minor 9 interval created in the outer voices, often a major 6 chord in 3rd inversion is a better choice.

Inversions & Voice-Leading

Because big band rhythm guitar is continuously keeping the quarter-note pulse, the real artistry is in how chords connect. Inversions

aren't used for "fancy harmony" so much as for minimal motion and to avoid monotonous and static-sounding harmony. Good rhythm guitarists think like arrangers: Each chord should lead naturally to the next with the smallest possible shifts, especially in the inner voices

Examples 2 and 2a show some simple chord progressions using the rhythm shell voicings from Example 1 that move through the various inversion to achieve smooth voice leading and motion.

Chord Reduction

"Chord reduction" means stripping a chord symbol down to its functional core so you can play it reliably, clearly and with good time at fast tempos. Almost every guitarist at one point or another has been handed a piano chart, confused on how to play all of those changes with all of those extensions. This process of reducing the harmony is essential to create a workable and playable guitar part. Also, arrangements can move quickly and the rhythm section must stay locked even when harmony turns dense.

Reduction steps often look like this:

1. Identify chord quality and function (major, minor, dominant, diminished/half-diminished).
2. Prioritize guide tones (3rd and 7th).
3. Add one color tone only if it supports style and doesn't clutter (6th/9th are common; alterations are used carefully).
4. Consider the band context: If bass strongly defines roots and the pianist is active, you may omit the root and 5th more often.

A chart might show extended symbols (C13, Fmaj9, Dm11), but in traditional rhythm guitar those often become two- or three-note solutions that still communicate the harmony. The goal is not to play the whole chord, but to keep the harmony readable while maintaining a consistent quarter-note feel.

Example 3 starts with a typical big band chart notation that might appear in a piano chart, while Example 3a reduces it to something more functional for the guitar. This time just the root inversions are given above the chords in boxes without the chord diagrams. Use Example 1 as a reference for voicings when needed. The goal here is to help the player better conceptualize voicings from memory that create smooth voice-leading.

Chord Expansion

"Chord expansion" is essentially the opposite of chord reduction. It allows the guitarist to add harmony to keep the music alive, interesting and expressive. By selectively introducing 6ths, 7ths, 9ths or other extensions, and occasionally using tasteful passing chords, the guitarist enhances the harmonic motion without drawing attention away from the ensemble. These additions are not decorative but functional: They create forward momentum, support the line of the arrangement and prevent the harmony from sounding static or monotonous, all while preserving the time-feel and clarity essential to swing and big band playing.

Example 4 shows a chart that is harmonically very basic, while Example 4a introduces some more interesting harmony to that part through chord expansion.

Traditional big band rhythm guitar is a discipline of restraint, where shell voicings, inversions, voice-leading, reduction and expansion serve the goal of making the band swing harder and sound bigger. Charlton Johnson presents this role as a disciplined practice built on strong quarter-note time, practical voicings and arrangement-minded inversion choices, while players like James Chirillo show that mastery is less about adding notes and more about supporting the groove and ensemble. Because many big band charts are often over- or underwritten, the guitarist must interpret the harmony and actively create the accompaniment, functioning as a real-time arranger. They must balance creativity with technical control so that artistry and craftsmanship meet through informed musical choices, refined technique and the skill to serve the band with consistency and taste.

DB

Eric DiVito is a New York-based guitarist, composer and educator who has been performing

professionally since 2003. He has led his own groups and appeared as a sideman at many of the city's premier jazz clubs and festivals. As a recording artist with Pioneer Jazz Collective (PJC Records), he has two albums to his name: *Breaking The Ice* (2012) and *The Second Time Around* (2013). DiVito has over 20 years of experience teaching classroom and instrumental music in New York City and Westchester public schools. Visit him online at ericdivito.com.

Example 1

Examples 2 & 2a

Examples 3 & 3a

Examples 4 & 4a

There's a playfulness to Bartz's soloing that comes across as devoid of posturing or intellectual hipness.



COURTESY GARY BARTZ

Gary Bartz's Alto Saxophone Solo on 'Pisces Daddy Blue'

Originally released on the 1976 album *Ju Ju Man* (Catalyst), but remastered for digital release a couple of years ago, "Pisces Daddy Blue" starts out as an "Equinox"-style minor blues, but about two-and-a-half minutes in turns into a medium-swing major-key 12-bar. Alto saxophonist and composer Gary Bartz plays quite a number of choruses on both sections, but here I've just given you the first five from where the swingin' starts. One thing I feel is evident in this improvisation is that Bartz is having fun. There's a playfulness to his soloing that to me comes across as devoid of posturing or intellectual hipness (though I am a fan of intellectual hipness) — just someone joyfully exploring the blues.

One aspect I really love is Bartz's jumping back and forth between simpler ideas, such as pentatonics, and more outside concepts (even bordering on intellectual hipness), and even straddling the two. One poignant example is measures 42–43. He hits us with an old-school blues lick, repeating it for a full bar.

Playing minor pentatonic on a blues, even when it's a major blues (especially when it's major), is a staple going all the way back to the genre's origins. Especially playing it on the IV chord. But when the chord changes to the tonic, rather than playing the same lick in the same key (as some might have done, and which would sound great) Bartz instead transposes his lick the same interval, so now he's playing F minor pentatonic on top of the B♭7. Playing minor pentatonic on the fifth of the chord is a fairly common sound, but the manner in which Bartz set it up combines the typical with the unexpected.

Bartz exhibits other ingenious ways of using pentatonics. Measure 17 is another example: Other than the chromatic enclosure around the G the first three beats are E♭ major pentatonic, but for the final beat he switches to B♭ minor pentatonic. Since it's a B♭ blues, this scale will sound at home anywhere, but it's curious to me that he switched to it a bar before the harmony switches to the tonic. If this lick had crossed over the bar line into

measure 19, or even been played a bar later so the B♭ minor pentatonic beat was a quarter note pickup to the B♭7, it might have sounded more "inside." But playing it here, especially with the enclosure mentioned before, makes it come off as bluesy yet chromatic. And leaving bar 18 open creates the sense that Bartz is hearing it resolve to the tonic, just earlier than the rest of the band.

Another interesting approach is in bars 38–40. Starting in measure 37 Bartz plays an F minor pentatonic phrase on a B♭7 chord. Minor pentatonic from the fifth we've heard in the previously dissected bar 17, and will hear again later in measures 42–43, which we've also discussed (as well as showing up in other transcriptions that have appeared in this column), but what's curious is that Bartz sticks with F minor pentatonic when the chord changes to E♭7 in the next bar. Playing minor pentatonic on the second is more atypical. Then Bartz continues this scale, in fact, repeats the same lick, for the next two bars, for B♭7 and Fm7 (where it finally fits, even if

just for two beats). Almost like allowing the changes to resolve to his lick rather than the more common other way around.

I bring up these examples for a very important reason: When learning this music we're often taught to change scales with the chord changes, and that is an important thing to learn for a host of reasons. But here we have examples of Bartz changing scales in the middle of a chord and also playing one scale over multiple harmonies. It shows us what's possible, and that conventions we learn can (and should) be questioned (and he does it in such a bluesy way).

Incidentally, there are other instances of Bartz repeating licks. Measures 54–55 have him playing the same lick over the IV and I chords. Clever thing about this is that the lick consists of notes that overlap the B $\flat$ and E $\flat$ major pentatonics, thus fitting nicely on either chord.

Bars 45–47 are somewhat opposite. Bartz plays the same sort-of lick, but alters it, both melodically and rhythmically, for each bar. I don't believe he's doing this to make the licks fit the harmonies, especially since he keeps the high A natural when the B $\flat$ 7 shows up. I feel this is more of a case of wanting to create a different vibe with this bit. In the same manner that he varies how he applies scales to chords, he's also varying how he uses repetition.

Another variation is measures 24 through the downbeat of 26. Bartz plays the same phrase, both rhythmically and in terms of the contour, or the shape of the phrase, but at different points in the scale. In classical music this is referred to as “sequencing,” taking a motif and repeating it through the scale (in this case B $\flat$ dorian).

Can you handle one more example of groovy sounding repetition? I certainly hope so. In measures 21–23, we have the same lick twice with a different last note, and then a sort of sequencing of this lick with a different ending. The final notes of each iteration are descending through B $\flat$ minor pentatonic. The first parts of the first two are an A diminished triad, which could also be the top part of an F7 chord. Since this is a ii–V to B $\flat$, on which the F7 (the dominant) plays prominently, this makes sense. But for the third repetition, which is still on the F7, Bartz alters the lick to B $\flat$ minor pentatonic.

So again Bartz is resolving ahead of the chord changes (and doing it to minor pentatonic obscures it a bit). Another hip thing about this bit: The motif he's repeating is only three beats, so playing it three times makes it resolve to the downbeat. **DB**

Jimi Durso is a guitarist and bassist based in the New York area. He can often be witnessed performing, rehearsing, teaching and pontificating online at twitch.tv/CoincidenceMachine. Find out more about Durso's music at jimidurso.bandcamp.com.

Steinberg Dorico Pro 6

Rigorous Software Solution for All Things Notation-Related

In April 2026, I hit bottleneck territory, with two major composition projects due in quick succession. For decades, I'd relied on Finale notation software to help me get notes on paper, but that program sunsetted in 2024 and I hadn't found a satisfying replacement. So when one of my musical mentors recommended Dorico Pro 6, I was excited to check it out.

Dorico is produced by Steinberg, the OG music tech company responsible for landmark digital audio workstation Cubase. I mention this because notation programs require time and effort to gain fluency. Going deep with a program that may prove flimsy on the backend, or unexpectedly become unsupported, isn't worth it. Given the legacy and pedigree involved, I had none of those concerns with Dorico.

Dorico Pro 6 is called pro for a reason: It's aimed at professional composers, arrangers and orchestrators who need a deep, rigorous software solution that handles everything notation-related with grace and stability. For me, Dorico filled this need. It helped me immensely during two months of heavy use.

The more I composed with Dorico, the more fluid and fun the process felt, from customizing project layouts to entering notes to adding dynamics and articulations. Some complex functions felt surprisingly easy to implement. Divisi parts, for example, are a snap. Switching between Concert Pitch and Transposed Pitch on a score is effortless. And playback capabilities are awesome. If you want to hear something tweaky and specific — like how your Trombone 1 and Clarinet 2 play off each other for three measures midway through your piece — select the specific phrases in question, hit the P key, and only those notes will play back. This was great when I was working on densely orchestrated sections; it allowed me to spot-check just about anything without losing creative momentum.

Learning and memorizing Dorico's keyboard shortcuts took time, but it was worth the effort. Selecting a note and hitting Option-N moves it up one staff, while hitting Shift-T opens an input option to add custom tempo directions. And Shift-L lets you add lyrics more easily than in any other notation program I've used. In my first weeks with the program, I got very used to Googling "how do you do XYZ in Dorico?" There was always an easy answer that thankfully did not require multiple submenus or cumbersome workarounds to implement. And every time I got used to a new shortcut, my workflow improved.

One other cool thing: Dorico has an automatic Proofreading feature that pops a flag when it detects something potentially screwy. Once, it pointed out that two notes I'd written were out of comfortable range for the tuba; another time it pinged me when I'd accidentally repeated identical dynamic markings two measures in a row. It also politely reminded me to add new dynamic markings if a part started playing after a period of silence. I haven't stress-tested this function, but I love that it's there in the first place. It consistently caught things I could have missed when working fast under



a tight deadline.

Dorico Pro 6 is not without its quirks. At one point, I found myself dealing with a 4/4 bar that inexplicably contained five beats and needed to be manually reset. Other times, I tried importing, editing or moving lyrics and found ghost words imposed on top of each other that I had to select and delete.

While I didn't love the hiccups I encountered, they didn't disrupt my workflow in any meaningful way. Notation is a complex game, especially for composers like me who love intricate timings, meter changes, unconventional notation and multiple divisi parts going at once. Dorico did an admirable job auto-adjusting nearly everything in perfect layout whenever I made a change, major or miniscule. The small quirks I encountered were outweighed by the program's manifold benefits.

I asked David Kahne, the composer and producer who introduced me to Dorico, for his thoughts on the program. He's been using it for years and spoke highly of the clear interface and ease of use for compositional purposes. "I'm a Cubase user, and it's so easy to open a session in Dorico and have it be so spot-on," he added. "After developing setup procedures in Cubase, the transition into Dorico is quick and accurate. It saves so much time with all the intense detail needed to get a score perfect."

Dorico is a deep program; in my two months of use, I feel that I only scratched the surface of its capabilities. It's also not cheap. If \$579.99 (USD) for the full package is too much, the slimmer Elements version is \$99.99 and the more limited Dorico SE and Dorico for iPad are both free. If you're curious, try Steinberg's free trial offer to see if the program resonates.

As I write this last paragraph, my compositions are completed, parts printed and deadlines fading in the rearview mirror. Dorico gave me the notational firepower to make it all happen artfully, efficiently and without drama. I expect to use it for many projects (and deadlines) to come.

—Michael Gallant

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More info: shermusic.com

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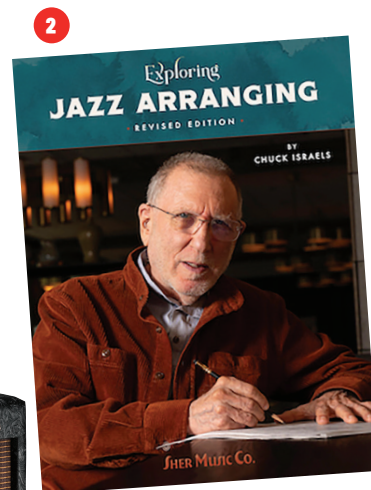
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Rollins in 3/4 Time

Editor's Note: In tribute to Sonny Rollins, here's his first Blindfold Test with Leonard Feather, creator of the column, from our Dec. 12, 1957, issue.

The significance lies in Sonny's having been able, during the past year or two, to practice what he preaches. More than any other tenor player of the younger generation, he has succeeded in developing a sound and style that can be called original rather than derivative.

Sonny has been important in another area of jazz development. He has played a part in the murder of the myth that jazz and the waltz are incompatible. In addition to writing "Valse Hot" and other attractive 3/4 themes, he took part in an entire album of jazz waltzes recently with Max Roach on EmArcy.

Sonny was given no information at all about the records played for him — not even the fact that they were all going to be waltzes. He was a very conscientious blindfolded, taking copious notes and reading off his comments into the tape recorder after each number was played.

Randy Weston

"Little Niles" [Riverside] Weston, piano; Cecil Payne, baritone sax.

This is a better-than-good pianist named Randy Weston. An interesting baritone solo by Cecil Payne and a very effective use of 3/4 rhythm. I'll give this 4½ stars. Randy has been influenced more by Monk than anybody else. He uses Monk's unorthodox approach to piano playing more than any other young player.

Thelonious Monk

"Carolina Moon" [Blue Note] Monk, piano; Lou Donaldson, alto sax; Kenny Dorham, trumpet; Lucky Thompson, tenor sax; Max Roach, drums.

This is the old master painter, Thelonious Monk, and it's an exciting excursion into what sounds like 12/8 time. He was obviously assisted by Lou Donaldson, Kenny Dorham, Lucky Thompson, and perhaps Max Roach on drums — I'll take a guess on Max Roach. This is, of course, "Carolina Moon" — I've heard this before. I would rate this 5 stars for the idea, and I'd rate it 4 stars for the execution of it.

Johnny Richards

"Waltz, Anyone?" [Bethlehem] Charlie Mariano, alto sax; Richards, comp. and arr.

This tune has very nice chord progressions; however, it seems to be slightly over-arranged. The alto soloist is heavily Bird-influenced and because of this it is reminiscent to me of the wonderful Machito-Bird things that were done a few years ago. Unfortunately, however, it suffers by comparison. Overall I'll give it 2 stars. Sounded like it could have been Phil Woods on alto, but I'm not sure.

Art Pepper

"Waltz Me Blues" [Contemporary] Pepper, alto sax; Paul Chambers, bass; Red Garland, piano; Philly Joe Jones, drums.

Everybody seems to be playing 3/4 these days! Anyhow, I recognize Paul Chambers on bass. Possibly Sonny Clark, piano, and a wild guess — Arthur Taylor on drums. But on his name, it's a question-mark. As for the alto player, who was, I guess, the leader, he was Bird-influenced, that's all I can say. Other than that it could have been any one of three or four people — or more. They did have some nice solos. I'd rate it for solos and the idea, 3½ stars.

Duke Ellington

"Lady Mac" (*Such Sweet Thunder*, Columbia) Russell Procope, alto; Clark Terry, trumpet. This record is immediately recognizable as having a Duke Ellington sound. The soloists sound like Russell Procope, possibly, and Clark Terry



"This is the old master painter, Thelonious Monk, and it's an exciting excursion into what sounds like 12/8 time," Rollins said of "Carolina Moon."

on trumpet. It's very important to have a sound that you can recognize immediately, and of course Duke is an institution now in music. He's one of my particular favorites. Always has been a great inspiration to me. This was very well arranged, in contrast to the other big band thing you played which was over-arranged. This is put together much more effectively. All the parts have a significance to the whole thing. I'd rate this 4½ stars.

Mary Lou Williams

"Mary's Waltz" [Storyville] Don Byas, tenor sax; Williams, comp.

That was Duke-flavored once again. I think it was Duke Ellington, and Paul Gonsalves on tenor. It was also in the 3/4 medium. Very good execution on that record. The idea was played very well. The musicians were very well recorded — very good sound and unique idea. I think I'll give this 5 stars. I liked the melody very much, too.

Bob Harrington Quartet

"Three-Fourths" [Imperial] Bob Carter, bass and comp.

I don't recognize any of the musicians. It sounded like the bass player was influenced by Percy Heath. There is nothing outstanding about the tune, but for the fact that they played it in 3/4 time, which is gradually beginning to lose its value, by the way. I'll give it 2 stars.

Dick Hyman Trio

"Flutter Waltz" (*Hi-Fi Suite*, MGM) Hyman, organ; Leonard Feather, comp.

That's a very good jazz organ, I'd say. It can't be Jimmy Smith. If it is, he gets a much more clean sound than he has in some of his other things. Perhaps he was recorded better — if it is Jimmy Smith. It's an interesting tune — fairly interesting, I'd say, and I'd rate it 3½ stars.

Woody Herman

"Tenderly" [Verve] Cy Touff, bass trumpet; Neal Hefti, arr.; tenor sax not credited.

I like the arrangement very much. It was well executed. I can't recognize the soloists. I know the trombonist is Bill Harris-influenced and the tenor sax is Stan Getz-influenced. Because of this, these people have no identity of their own, and I can't name them. The band got a very nice sound. I think I'd give that 4 stars.

John Graas

"6/4 And Even" [Decca] Graas, comp.

This is an attempt at small combo jazz which doesn't come off. The arrangement is hackneyed and cliched, although they did make an attempt to engender complexity and originality through the use of a few unorthodox chord progressions. However, my rating is ½ star.

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.

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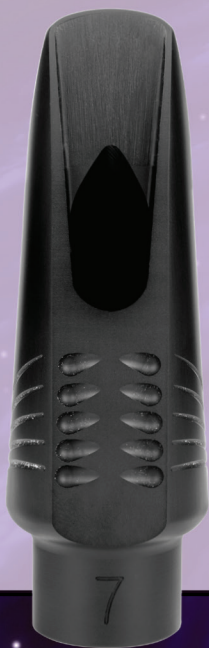
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