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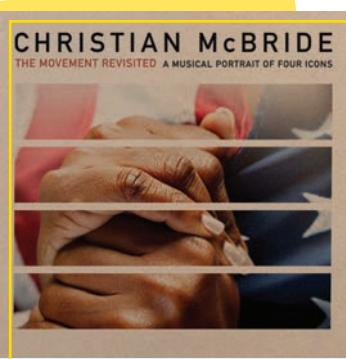
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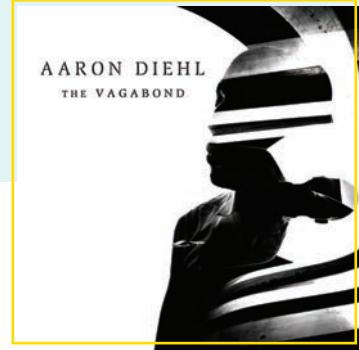
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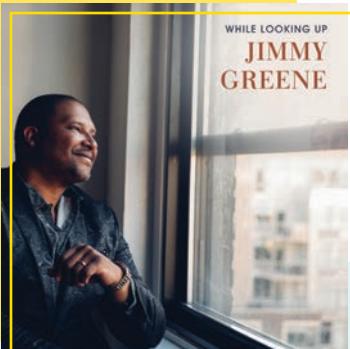
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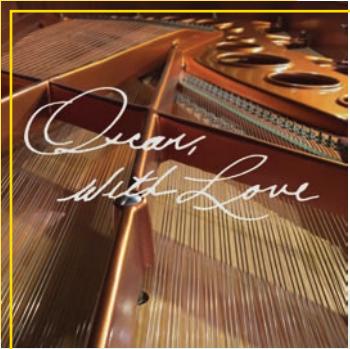
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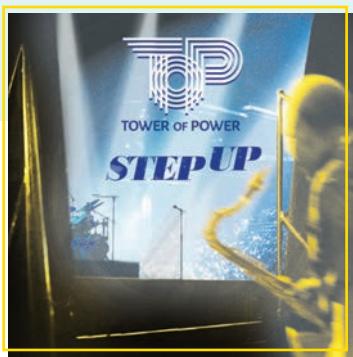
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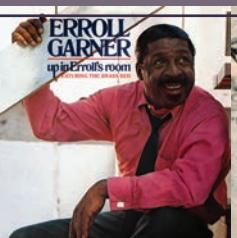
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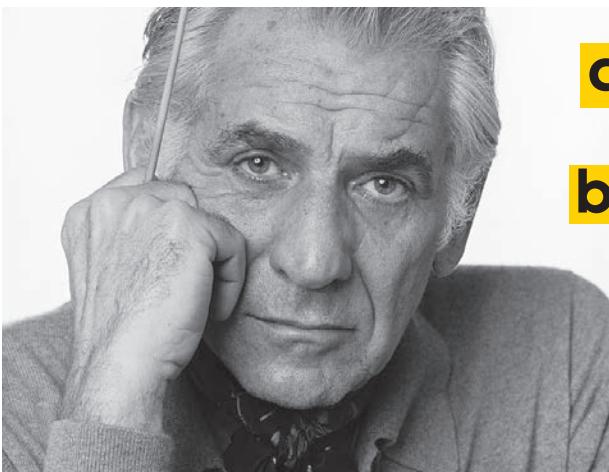
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# JAZZIZ

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# THE DEVINE FLAW

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**Associate Editor** Robert Weinberg

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**Online Editor** Matt Micucci

**Digital Content Editor** Brian Zimmerman

**Editorial Coordinator** Marcela Maia

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**Webmaster** Matt Pramschufer

**West Coast Ambassador** Léan Crowley

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**Advertising** Erica Fagien

**CONTRIBUTORS:** Hayr Attarian, Philip Booth, Shaun Brady, Lissette Corsa, John Diliberto, Ted Drozdowski, Enid Farber, Sascha Feinstein, Phil Freeman, Steve Futterman, Jon Garellick, Fernando Gonzalez, Mark Holston, Jeff Jackson, Ed Kopp, Bill Meredith, Bill Milkowski, John Frederick Moore, Daniel Nevins, Ted Panken, Michael J. Renner, Michael Roberts, James Rozzi, Neil Tesser, Jonathan Widran, Asher Wolf, Josef Woodard, Scott Yanow

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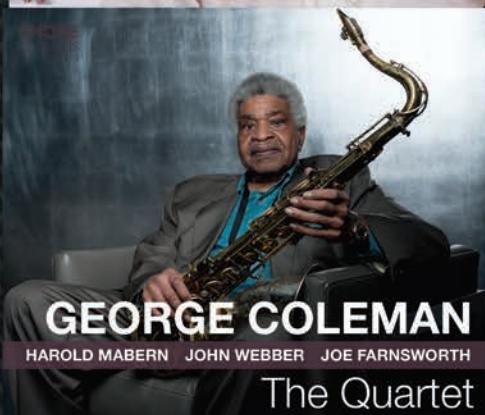
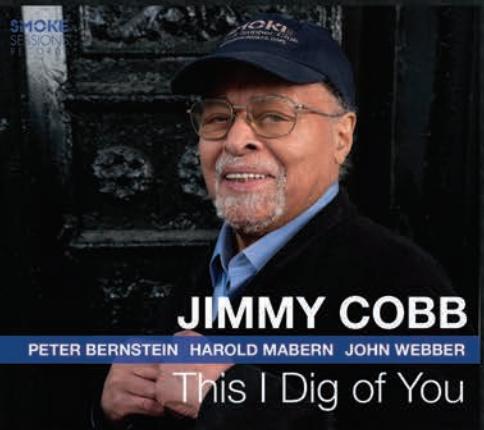
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# THE LATEST RELEASES



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# I'm Here for You

**The phrase “I’m here for you” can sound a bit patronizing. But one** of the things that I love most about regularly communicating with subscribers via email is that it allows me to do just that — to be here for you. Though a lot of digital technology goes into creating the analog print magazines we publish, there’s an unmistakable connectivity and immediacy that we enjoy when we extend our reach beyond print. Sure, even back in the old days, when we’d receive correspondence by way of the postal service, we’d get our fair share of criticism and praise for stories that appeared in the magazine, but they were fewer and usually arrived weeks or months after publication. These days most of the emails we get are constructive critiques written, sent and received in real time, which in turn allows us to respond quickly. Email also encourages our readers to share ideas and inspires the kind of relationships that help good companies become great ones.

Immediately after receiving our Winter 2020 quarterly print issue, Harry McCullagh, of Brisbane, Australia, sent me to the following note (to which I responded immediately):

*Michael,*

*Just loving the content balance of JAZZIZ these days. As a longtime hard bop/avant fan, I had fallen into the trap of being dismissive of some fine players for being too ‘smooth.’ As a consequence of interviews and reviews [I’ve read in JAZZIZ], I have had to re-examine many fine artists.*

*Congratulations on the last few issues. The London issue is fantastic.*

As a publication that covers every kind of jazz, we’ve always been cognizant that hard-bop fans might cringe when they’d see a cover or major feature on, for instance, a smooth-

jazz musician, or, conversely, how a smooth-jazz fan might wince when encountering stories about more eclectic artists. But, as Harry suggests in the email he sent, such encounters can cause people to examine their own preconceived notions, to expand their horizons and leave the door open for further exploration and discovery.

I remember a pleasant dinner back in the 1980s with guitarist Charlie Hunter, during which he asked me why we would cover artists as disparate as John Zorn and the Rippingtons in JAZZIZ — indeed, within the same issue of JAZZIZ. I explained to him that while it’s true that each of those acts typically attract different fans, each was equally passionate about their art. Furthermore, smooth jazz was all the rage at the time (and selling more product and getting more airplay than any other style of jazz). As a magazine, we’ve always done our best to cover the jazz scene without bias. Back in the ‘80s, while we embraced smooth jazz, most other jazz magazines steered clear of it. When it comes to covering popular artists, no matter the style of jazz they play, we’ve always maintained a “rising tide raises all boats” mentality. Today, most jazz magazines do likewise.

For us, it’s always been about listening to our readers, and we do that better now than ever. With that in mind — and if you’ll excuse my patronizing — I invite you all to email me about what you like or don’t like in the magazine, or what you care to see more or less of. Whatever’s on your mind, I’m here for you, just an email away.

**—Michael Fagien**

[michael@jazziz.com](mailto:michael@jazziz.com)

P.S. If you haven’t yet signed up to receive emails from me, be sure to do so at [jazziz.com](http://jazziz.com). ■



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# It's a Celebration

**Sergio Mendes finds joy in the art of collaboration.**

**Bossa nova icon Sergio Mendes has** credited the great success he's enjoyed in his career to a range of unexpected music-related collaborations. "The surprise of the encounter," he called them during a recent phone conversation. "For me," he added, "to experience that encounter in the studio is so beautiful."

Mendes' new album of original songs and past hits, *In the Key of Joy* (Concord Records), is a forward-looking celebration of his six decades in music that once again affords the 78-year-old composer, keyboardist and vocalist ample opportunities to indulge in spirited collaboration with a multi-generational roster of talented cohorts on a range of styles. The deluxe edition of the album is accompanied by a second disc—the soundtrack to a forthcoming John Scheinfeld-directed documentary about Mendes, also titled *In the Key of Joy*.

As a young man playing in small nightclubs in Rio in the late '50s and early '60s, Mendes, a classically-trained pianist, witnessed the birth of bossa nova while hobnobbing with Antonio Carlos Jobim, João Gilberto, Baden Powell and other pioneering founders of the music. "It's a part of my life that was so important,"

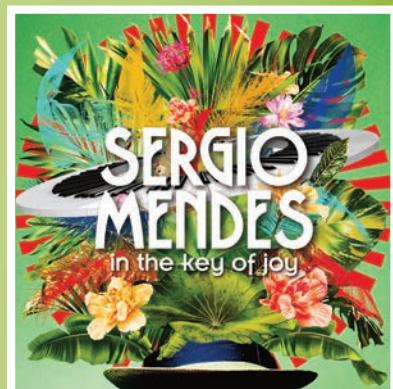
he recalls. When Mendes moved to Los Angeles in 1964, he began playing a pivotal role in exporting bossa nova to the States. Two years later, Mendes and his ensemble Brasil '66 scored their first hit with "Mas Que Nada." Meanwhile, he continued to nurture his love of jazz and pop, transforming bossa nova's hushed minimalism into a seductively effervescent sound, driven by chugging rhythms and melodic buoyancy. He collaborated with a wide array of giants, among them Cannonball Adderley, Frank Sinatra and Stevie Wonder. "I am very curious and open-minded as far as collaborating with different people and trying different genres of music," he says. "I'm always searching for something new."

In 2005 Mendes re-emerged from a 10-year lull when will.i.am approached him to make an album. The result was *Timeless*, a heady blend of Mendes' hybrid brand of bossa, pop, mainstream hip-hop and sundry global trends.

Similarly, *In the Key of Joy* is an eclectic collection of lush Brazilian pop, lilting ballads, hip-hop and danceable urban beats created in collaboration with a diverse cast of fellow Brazilian legends

(Hermeto Pascoal, João Donato, Guinga), modern-day hitmakers (Common) and emerging artists (Compton-based rapper Buddy). Singer Gracinha Leporace, Mendes' wife of 48 years, is featured on three tracks, while *The Voice* alum Sugar Jones (whose father, Joe Pizzulo, along with Leeza Miller, sang lead on Mendes' 1983 hit "Never Gonna Let You Go") adds diaphanous vocals to "Samba In Heaven." Pizzulo himself rejoins Mendes for "Love Came Between Us."

"No scripts, no formulas, just intuition and joy," Mendes says of the sessions that produced his latest outing. "It's worthwhile to be alive and celebrate life." —**Lissette Corsa**





# Rolling Right Along

**Charles Lloyd celebrates his eighth decade with a new concert release.**

**On March 15, 2018, Charles Lloyd celebrated his 80th birthday** with an epic yet intimate concert at the historic, adobe-brick Lobero Theatre near his home in Santa Barbara, California. The Memphis-born saxophonist, flutist and composer marked his eighth decade by performing songs from throughout his era-spanning discography, accompanied by his quintet, guest organist Booker T. Jones and guest bassist Don Was. Alternately sublime and meditative, raucous and bluesy, the music was captured on *8, Kindred Spirits, Live From The Lobero* (Blue Note), a Valentine's Day release that's available in a deluxe box set or in standard CD and LP versions.

Observing this milestone at the Lobero, a venue he's played more than any other, was fitting. "I love adobe and its connection to the Earth and the sun," Lloyd explains via email. "Cool in the summer and warm in the winter. The earthen walls retain the vibrations of all the greats who have performed in this space. It is an extension of my living room and family. The crown jewel for me is the fact that

Marian Anderson performed there on February 14, 1940. It is a beautiful, soulful edifice."

Lloyd expanded his musical family for the concert, adding guitarist Julian Lage to his rhythm section of pianist Gerald Clayton, bassist Reuben Rogers and drummer Eric Harland. Blue Note label chief Was took over bass duties on a couple of tracks, and fellow Memphian Jones lent his sinewy organ sound to several songs, including a version of his Booker T. and the MG's hit "Green Onions." Lloyd was boyhood friends with original MG's bassist Lewis Steinberg, whose four-note introduction renders "Green Onions" immediately recognizable. "I was proud of him for setting off 'Green Onions' with such distinction," he says. "I hadn't known Booker T. before I left Memphis, but through 'Green Onions,' he soon became known to me and the rest of the world. I was also proud that one of my home boys had a big hit."

Lloyd revisits music from his earliest recordings, as well, including an extensive exploration of "Dream Weaver," a cosmic diptych he's returned to frequently since its inception more than 50 years ago. "'Dream Weaver' has two sections, 'Meditation' and 'Dervish Dance,'" he says. "Reflecting the ebb and flow of life, these are constantly expanding and contracting. With each performance, this composition does the same, always ending with an ecstatic dance."

Traditional song also resonates deeply with Lloyd. He offers heartfelt renditions of three folk and gospel numbers that have informed his

music and moved him over the years. "I was introduced to 'La Llorona' through a [cancion singer] Chavela Vargas recording," he relates. "Between the lyrics and her rendition of the song, it tore at my heart and brought tears. 'Abide With Me' is a hymn, and 'Shenandoah' has hymn-like qualities that I love; they are both threads in the fabric of the American songbook. I like to roll along her rivers." —**Bob Weinberg**





# A Wealth of Rich

**A new CD and biography further document the life and times of Buddy Rich.**

Buddy Rich's long and prolific recording career concluded at Ronnie Scott's in London in 1986, less than six months before the legendary drummer passed away in April 1987 at age 69. The previously unreleased recording of that show, which finds Rich and his swinging band of young hotshots in impeccable form, is now available as *Just in Time: The Final Recording* (Gearbox Records). As well as being released digitally, the album is available in standard double-LP and CD formats. There's also a collector's edition that includes more than 30 minutes of additional content, including Rich's extended drum solo from the show's encore. Rich aficionados might also wish to dig into Pelle Berglund's recently published, well-researched 359-page Rich biography *One of a Kind: The Making of the World's Greatest Drummer* (Huson Music).



**requisite**

## Mel Tormé

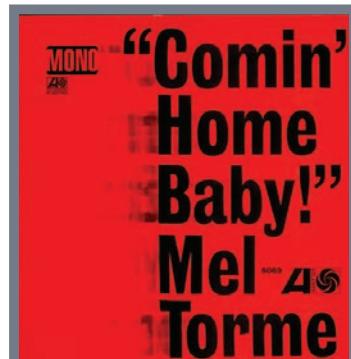
*Comin' Home Baby!* (Atlantic)

Not exactly a youngster at age 37, Mel Tormé had long established himself as a crooner and scat-singer extraordinaire by 1962. Nonetheless, Atlantic Records sought to freshen Tormé's sound — and entice a younger audience — with the LP *Comin' Home Baby*, the title song of which had a cool R&B groove, a taut Claus Ogerman arrangement, hip lyrics by Bob Dorough and call-and-response backing by The Cookies. The gambit worked, and Tormé scored a Top 40 hit.

The album hardly panders to teeny-boppers, though. With Shorty Rogers' arrangements and stellar musicianship from A-list session men, the Velvet Fog dives into a program that includes then-current jazz staples such as Bobby Timmons' "Dat Dere" and "Moanin'" and Randy Weston's "Hi Fly," investing not just vocal prowess but genuine feeling into lyrics by Oscar Brown Jr. (the former) and Jon Hendricks (the latter two). And

Tormé's gorgeous horn-like phrasing wends through standout readings of Benny Golson's "Whisper Not" and Bronislau Kaper's "On Green Dolphin Street."

Over the years, Tormé would continue to connect with new generations, as he had fun with his image on the sitcom *Night Court* and in a 1990s TV ad campaign for Mountain Dew. More recently the singer, who died in 1999, could be heard on Nespresso commercials, singing "Comin' Home Baby." —BW



A V A I L A B L E N O W



# MORRIS PAUL

## Love in the Moments

His appreciation of Music spans the horizon: P-Funk to Classical, Gospel to Jazz, 1960/1970 classic rock and Soul.

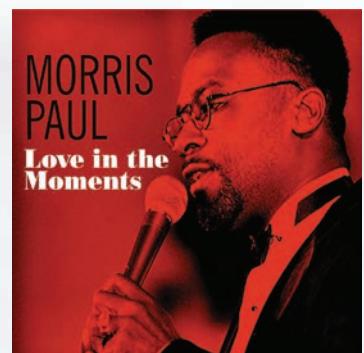
Morris Paul, an extra ordinarily, electrifying entertainer with vocal power. He has been singing throughout the United States with various groups. Years overseas in Europe; performing in Concert halls, Theatre, Opera houses and churches. And his desire still is to become a opening act in Jazz concerts all over the world.

His cousin Harvey Mason, recommended he study and sing the standards, jazz classics where he does well commercially.

Morris Paul was looking for quality love tunes for this CD both old and new. So that he could potentially make hits of, and the overall quality of the material as well as the orchestration and soloing not to mention the vocals themselves is extremely high indeed.

Morris Paul, born in a family of musicians, preachers, singers and artists, this CD is one you sit down and listen as love pours out in the moments. – Leonard Jay Kennedy

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**PRELUDE**



# By Way of South Africa

**Nduduzo Makhathini finds a home on Blue Note Records.**

**Pianist Nduduzo Makhathini doesn't view his status as the first**

South African musician to sign with Blue Note Records as an individual achievement. "I look at this in a collective or a communal way," he explains. "For me, what I'm seeing here is a South African story forming part of a bigger narrative of this music and having a sort of engagement and discourse with the history of jazz. It's also evident in the music how I harness these connections. I try to be very explicit about what they sound like and feel like."

Indeed, *Modes of Communication: Letters From the Underworlds*, Makhathini's wondrous Blue Note debut, includes plenty of nods to American jazz even as it celebrates African rhythms, melodic patterns and expressive methods. To him, his work draws from the legacies of Abdullah Ibrahim, Hugh Masekela, Miriam Makeba and many other South African musical pioneers, plus jazz performers from beyond his country's borders who he considers to be kindred spirits.

"I come from the Zulu tribe, which is a very diverse one when it comes to music genres," Makhathini notes. "When we say *ingoma*, we are simultaneously referring to a song, a feeling, a ritual, a dance. So this kind of totality is embedded in how we understand music and the role of an artist. And when I first heard John Coltrane and McCoy Tyner, their music instantly

resonated with me. I think it has to do with the fact that Coltrane was exploring this idea of home and ancestors, and trying to trace things back to Africa. Sun Ra was doing the same thing. Those were the moments when I understood that they were part of my cultural framework."

On *Modes*, Makhathini's ninth album, these ingredients combine to create a glorious sonic feast. Take "Yehlisan'umoya," the lead track, which juxtaposes the ecstatic vocals of Omagugu Makhathini, Nduduzo's wife, with passionate soloing by trumpeter Ndabo Zulu and saxophonists Logan Richardson and Linda Sikhakhane, supplemented by keyboard excursions from Makhathini that are alternately delicate and driving. As for "Beneath the Earth," the song creates an exotic atmosphere that enhances an ancient theme. According to Makhathini, "It speaks to an ancestor as a type of exile and a kind of confinement that doesn't allow one to speak a particular language."

This concept, like most of the others on the album, is delivered in isiZulu, Makhathini's native tongue. But he hopes those who can't immediately decode his message will still be rewarded. "I really want to express what we're saying in the music itself," he says. "If you go in and find your own meanings, I think that's beautiful." —**Michael Roberts**



# Such a Night

**Artemis shines bright at Carnegie Hall.**

**By the time Artemis, an all-star ensemble, dug deep into the blues while trading solos during an encore performance of Billie Holiday's "Fine and Mellow," most of the Carnegie Hall audience was on their feet, cheering on the band. Each of these seven musicians — pianist Renee Rosnes, clarinetist Anat Cohen (who also played soprano saxophone), tenor saxophonist Melissa Aldana, trumpeter Ingrid Jensen, bassist Noriko Ueda, drummer Allison Miller and vocalist Cécile McLorin Salvant — has been celebrated for individual achievements. At Carnegie, they cohered under Rosnes' musical direction to sound, by turns, authoritative and playful, locked-in and loose. This show, the group's New York City concert debut, was both a statement of arrival and a promise of grander things to come.**

Salvant was riveting, whether singing a version of Kurt Weill's "Pirate Jenny," from *The Threepenny Opera*, or delivering a tender interpretation of Stevie Wonder's "If It's Magic." The concert began with an instrumental version of "Goddess of the Hunt," which Miller composed to evoke the Greek mythological figure Artemis, the paragon of female power and compassion (known for keen focus and steady aim) for which this group is named. And yet the least remarkable fact was that everyone onstage was female. Of greater note was the group's collective cohesion and its ability to move gracefully through many styles and moods while playing original pieces and a wide range of covers (including a cleverly reharmonized take on Lee Morgan's "Sidewinder"), much of which will appear on its debut release, for Blue Note Records, due later this year. —Larry Blumenfeld



Winner North American  
Edition 2019



- 17 June San Francisco Jazz Festival at SFJAZZ, CA  
19 June CGI Rochester International Jazz Festival, NY  
20 June TD Ottawa Jazz Festival, CAN  
21 June DC Jazz Festival Washington, DC  
26 June Festival International de Jazz de Montreal, CAN  
01 July TD Vancouver International Jazz Festival, CAN  
03 July Blue Note in New York, NY  
04 July Iowa City Jazz Festival, IA  
27 Sept. Monterey Jazz Festival, CA  
21- 24 Oct. Earshot Jazz Festival in Seattle, WA



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Winner European  
Edition 2019

- 27 June Leopolis Jazz Festival, Lviv (UA)  
02 July Kongsberg Jazz Festival (N)  
03 July Love Supreme in Glynde (UK)  
13 July JazzOpen Stuttgart (D)  
17 July Vitoria-Gasteiz Jazz Festival (E)  
20 July Nice Jazz Festival (F)



# Kathrine Windfeld

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PRELUDE



# A Tip of the Sax

**Altoist Lakecia Benjamin offers a fresh tribute to John and Alice Coltrane.**

**At first, alto saxophonist Lakecia Benjamin was ambivalent** about recording a Coltrane tribute album, but ultimately pulled the trigger knowing that her concept was materially different than the scores of Coltrane projects that preceded hers.

*Pursuance* (Ropeadope Records) honors and interprets the music of both Alice and John Coltrane — with six compositions by Alice and seven by John. They include the robustly swinging “Liberia” and “Affinity,” the lushly orchestral “Prema” and the R&B-inflected “Central Park West,” which features vocals by Jazzmeia Horn. The epic “Om Shanti,” sung and recited by Georgia Anne Muldrow, begins as an ethereal meditation and builds to a sludgy rock crescendo, heavy guitar and all.

Benjamin, 32, also took comfort in knowing that her tart-toned alto would provide sonic distance from Trane’s immortal tenor sound. “I don’t play the same instrument as him, so he’s not haunting me on every song,” she says.

Born and raised in the Washington Heights section of Manhattan, Benjamin’s career has leaned mostly toward funk, soul and various Latin styles. She leads a busy working band, Soul Squad, and has shared stages and recording studios with the likes of Alicia Keys, The Roots, Madlib and others. At 18, while visiting her friend Muldrow in California, Benjamin met Alice Coltrane at the musician and swami’s

ashram near Los Angeles. Enthralled, Benjamin began studying Alice’s music after returning to New York. Soon thereafter she took a deep dive into John’s work.

In March 2018, Benjamin pitched a John Coltrane tribute concert to Jazz at Lincoln Center. The set went over so well that she played a few more Trane-inspired gigs using musicians outside of Soul Squad, after which she resolved to record an homage to John with a new band.

“I decided I did not want to pay tribute to John alone but to add Alice Coltrane’s music, because they are both favorites of mine,” Benjamin says. Artistic ambition ramped up and, after huddling with her mentor — bassist Reggie Workman, a Trane sideman in the early ‘60s — the concept morphed into a multi-generational all-star project.

Benjamin, who financed the project herself, acted as producer, arranger and talent wrangler. With co-producer Workman opening a few doors, she tirelessly recruited dozens of guest musicians, from elders like Ron Carter, Gary Bartz and Dee Dee Bridgewater to such stalwarts as Greg Osby and Marcus Strickland to several of her contemporaries, including Keyon Harold and Brandee Younger. Her budget ballooned, a few confirmed players canceled at the last minute, and Benjamin’s frustrations and second-guessing mounted.

But it all came together in August 2019, with most of the recording accomplished during two marathon sessions in a Brooklyn studio. “It was like a jazz funeral without the death,” Benjamin says. “Everyone was hanging around having a good time, telling stories. I wouldn’t have wanted to be any place else in the world, and I think the other players felt the same way.” —**Eric Snider**



# JAZZIZ DISCOVERY



# JAZZIZ

SPRING FORWARD

## DISC ONE

- 1 **Vincent Herring, Bobby Watson, Gary Barbz** ""Folklore"" *Bird@100* (Smoke Sessions)
- 2 **Christian McBride** "Soldiers (I Have a Dream)"  
*The Movement Revisited: A Musical Portrait of Four Icons* (Mack Avenue)
- 3 **Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis featuring Wayne Shorter**  
"Endangered Species" *The Music of Wayne Shorter* (Blue Engine)
- 4 **Kurt Elling (featuring Danilo Pérez)** "A Certain Continuum"  
*Secrets Are The Best Stories* (Edition)
- 5 **Michael Wolff** "Chill" *Bounce* (Sunnyside)
- 6 **Theon Cross** "Radiation" *Fyah* (Gearbox)
- 7 **Bria Skonberg** "So Is The Day" *Nothing Never Happens* (self-released)
- 8 **Emmet Cohen** "For Big G"  
*Masters Legacy Series, Vol. 4: Featuring George Coleman* (Emmet Cohen Music)
- 9 **Rosie Turton** "The Unknown" *Rosie's 5ive* (Jazz Re:freshed)
- 10 **SEED Ensemble** "Afronaut" *Driftglass* (Jazz Re:freshed)
- 11 **Antibalas** "Amenawon" *Fu Chronicles* (Daptone)

## DISC TWO

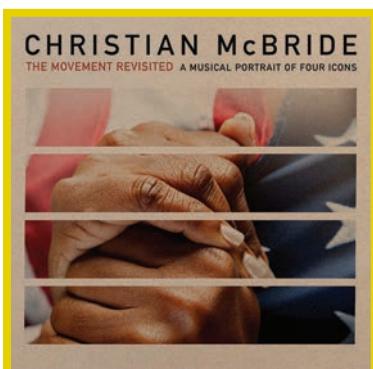
- 1 **Nubya Garcia** "Lost Kingdoms" *Nubya's 5ive* (Jazz Re:freshed)
- 2 **Luciana Souza and the WDR Big Band** "Sim ou Não" *Storytellers* (Sunnyside)
- 3 **Rez Abbasi and Isabelle Olivier** "Stepping Stone" *OASIS* (Enja/Yellowbird)
- 4 **Aaron Diehl** "Magnanimous Disguise" *The Vagabond* (Mack Avenue)
- 5 **Benny Benack III** "A Lot of Livin' To Do" *A Lot of Livin' To Do* (Ring Road Recordings)
- 6 **Aubrey Logan** "High Place" *Where the Sunshine Is Expensive* (Resonance)
- 7 **Eugene Grey** "Variations" *Straight Ahead And Beyond* (self-released)
- 8 **Sara Tandy** "Under the Skin" *Infection In the Sentence* (Jazz Re:Freshed)
- 9 **Jason Miles** "Black Magic" *Kind of New: Black Magic* (Ropeadope)
- 10 **Morris Paul Kennedy** "Mighty Love" *Love In the Moments* (self-released)
- 11 **Nandan Gautam** "The Legacy of Judas" *The Divine Flaw* (self-released)
- 12 **George Burton** "Third Prayer" *Reciprocity* (George Burton Music)
- 13 **Warren Wolf** "For Ma" *Reincarnation* (Mack Avenue)
- 14 **Raul Midón** "I Love the Afternoon" *Mirror* (Mack Avenue)

Illustration by Tom Seltzer at Seltzer Creative Group

## DISC ONE



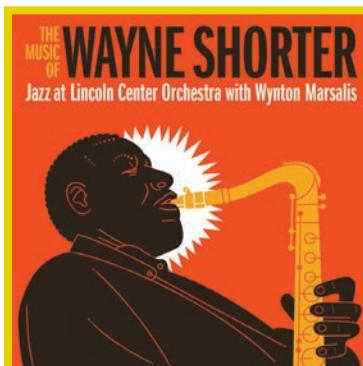
generations of players who came to and experienced Parker's music in different ways and to pool their varied impressions. The results were captured on *Bird at 100* (Smoke Sessions), a live album that finds the principals interpreting classics from the Parker songbook, as well as a couple of originals. The latter comprise Watson's "Bird-ish," a piece he wrote for the session, and Herring's "Folklore," our selection, which was the title track to his 1994 release *Folklore: Live at the Village Vanguard*. "I wrote it [to evoke] Charlie Parker and the era," Herring said in a recent phone conversation, explaining that he penned the tune during his time with cornetist Nat Adderley's band. "I updated it a little bit, and I felt it would be perfect for the musicians involved [in *Bird at 100*]." The track scintillates from the start, introduced by the rhythm section of pianist David Kikoski, bassist Yasushi Nakamura and drummer Carl Allen. Then, in the manner of old-school blowing sessions, the alto players take turns unspooling their respective solos, each saluting Parker in his own way.



and the figures who brought them about. The seeds of his sweeping 2019 release *The Movement Revisited: A Musical Portrait of Four Icons* (Mack Avenue) were sown more than 20 years ago, when McBride received a commission from the Portland (Maine) Arts Society. He penned a suite for his quartet and an accompanying choir that saluted Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Rosa Parks and Muhammed Ali, and utilized their words as part of the work. Years later, he expanded the

The alto-saxophone triumvirate of **Vincent Herring, Bobby Watson** and **Gary Bartz** convened on Smoke nightclub in New York City in September 2019 to celebrate Charlie Parker's impending centennial year. According to junior member Herring, who organized the event, the concept was to gather three

suite to include a movement about President Barack Obama. Finally, in 2013, he brought his big band into the studio to record the current album. "Soldiers (I Have a Dream)," included here, features actor Wendell Pierce reading one of the most stirring oratories in American history, his delivery freighted with a knowledge of the nation's mixed record on race relations since King first spoke his vision, as well as of King's tragic fate. Pierce's recitation is accompanied by Terreon Gully's martial drum beat and McBride's steady, slow-walking bass. Then, the big band quietly emerges, providing a somewhat elegiac backing that builds to a powerful crescendo as King's words grow ever more aspirational.



In 2015, saxophonist **Wayne Shorter** joined up with the **Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis** for an evening dedicated to the then-81-year-old's compositional genius. Captured on the recent release *The Music of Wayne Shorter* (Blue Engine), the program spanned Shorter's remarkable career, cherry-picking tunes from his decades-long discography, but favoring overlooked gems as opposed to "greatest hits." Members of the JLCO individually arranged Shorter songs for the big band from 1960s albums including *Night Dreamer* and *Adam's Apple*, as well as 1974's *Native Dancer* and 1985's *Atlantis*. The latter, Shorter's first solo release in nine years after his stint with Weather Report, rarely enters into discussions of the saxophonist's best recordings. Yet two of its enduring songs — "The Three Marias" and "Endangered Species" — made the cut for the JLCO program, the latter of which is our selection. Shorter's distinctive tenor features prominently on trombonist Vincent Gardner's exciting arrangement, as he energetically surfs the big-band's colorful swirl and then engages in an interlude with the rhythm section — pianist Dan Nimmer, bassist Carlos Henriquez and drummer Ali Jackson — before the orchestra roars back in.

On *Secrets Are the Best Stories* (Edition), **Kurt Elling**'s latest recording, the vocalist once again showcases his remarkable instrument, literate and heartfelt lyrics and concern for the future of the Earth and its inhabitants. And he could hardly have asked for a better foil than pianist **Danilo Pérez**, who adds rich colors to Elling's tapestry and contributes a few compositions, as well. Elling also dips into the songbooks of Wayne Shorter, Vince Mendoza and Django Bates, penning words to their compositions and deftly matching sentiment and narrative to music. His poetic methodology syncs



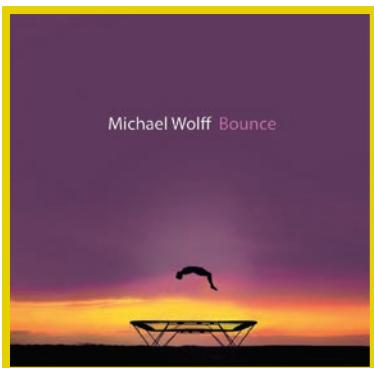
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beautifully with Jaco Pastorius' "Continuum," reinvented here as "A Certain Continuum." Pérez echoes Elling's questing tone and lyric, his nimble playing riding sinuous rhythms laid down by bassist Clark Sommers, drummer Johnathan Blake and percussionist Román Díaz. "There's a ribbon in the

river that is running through your heart," Elling sings. "There's a whisper in the water with a wisdom to impart/Respond, be your own work of art." No doubt Jaco did just that, and Elling continues to do so.



For a rhythmically oriented pianist such as **Michael Wolff**, *Bounce* is a perfect album title. But that's only one reason the name fits Wolff's new trio album on the Sunnyside label; it also reflects his upbeat mood after surviving a grueling battle with cancer and staging a career comeback that saw his 2019 release

*Swirl* reach No. 1 on the Jazz Radio charts. On *Bounce*, Wolff once again trios up with bassist Ben Allison and drummer Allan Mednard, who engage in buoyant rhythmic conversations with the pianist, whether they're laying down boogaloo beats, evoking a hypnotic Caribbean canter or adding sensitive shimmer to a ballad. Wolff's son Nat also makes an appearance, penning and singing the lassitude-dripping "Cool Kids." On the aptly titled "Chill," included here, Wolff dances atop a slinky funk beat maintained by Allison and Mednard, bringing plenty of bluesy elan to the proceedings. Allison plucks a solo that never loses the groove, before handing the reins back to Wolff, who brings the song to a close with a sparkle that mirrors his renewed enjoyment of life.

London-based tuba player **Theon Cross** brings virtuosity and intensity to his breath-defying artistry, enlivening the music of artists such as Jon Batiste and Stay Human, Makaya McCraven and Sons of Kemet, the U.K. group of which he's a core member. And that energy is more than abundant on the aptly named *Fyah* (Gearbox), Cross' first full-length album. Abetted by saxophonist Nubya Garcia and drummer Moses Boyd, Cross deftly switches from rhythm to lead instrument as the trio navigates a thrill ride of a playlist that encompasses New



Orleans jazz and funk, hip-hop, dubstep, grime and attitudes reflecting Cross' Caribbean heritage. The tuba player's unrelenting stomp sets the tempo on "Radiation," included here, establishing a rhythmic motif along with Boyd's trap-set sizzle. Garcia's incisive tenor slices through the mix before giving way

to Cross' elephant-sneezing-fit of a solo. The trio sounds like a much larger ensemble and does indeed feature a few other players on some tunes. And, with its members all hovering around age 30, the threesome could be influencing the direction of jazz in the U.K. and beyond for years to come.



*The New York Times* once called **Bria Skonberg** "the shining hope of hot jazz." And while the Canadian-born trumpeter, vocalist and six-time Downbeat Rising Star poll winner certainly has proven her trad-jazz bona fides, she's also broadened her palette considerably since her 2009 debut album. This

is particularly evident on her moody new recording, the self-released *Nothing Never Happens*. Skonberg workshoped the material at Joe's Pub in New York City, developing a gritty sound that might appeal to indie-rock fans as well as jazz aficionados. She even reworked a concert favorite, the title track to her 2012 album *So Is the Day*, included here. While the initial version of the tune, a simple declaration of romantic frustration, was presented as a New Orleans-style dirge complete with wailing clarinet, Skonberg reinvents it as a haunting torch song, her stark vocal delivery and the sparse musical backing eliciting deeper levels of heartache. Skonberg's muted trumpet floats like smoke in a bar after last call, as drummer Darrian Douglas maintains a plaintive heartbeat and pianist Mathis Picard, bassist Devin Sparks, guitarist Doug Wamble and Hammond organist Jon Cowherd add layers of lonely. Skonberg continues to redefine her artistry while retaining the soulfulness of the trad artists she reveres.

Even as he forges his own identity in the jazz world, pianist **Emmet Cohen** celebrates the artists on whose shoulders he stands. In 2017, Cohen launched his "Masters Legacy Series," the four volumes of which respectively spotlight his playing



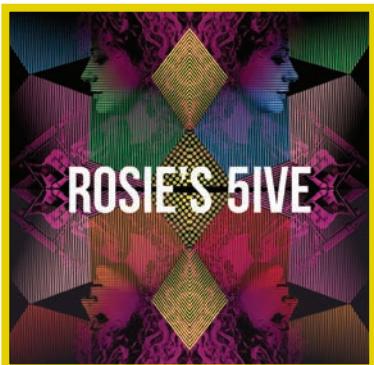
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alongside jazz elders Jimmy Cobb, Ron Carter, Benny Golson and Tootie Heath, and George Coleman. A cynic might accuse the pianist of basking in reflected glory, but his unselfish, expert playing reveals these projects as labors of love. And Cohen, not yet 30, has earned plenty of accolades, from his 2011 finalist status

in the Thelonious Monk International Piano Competition to his 2019 Cole Porter Fellowship, which also netted him a contract with Mack Avenue Records. For his self-released fourth volume in the Masters series, Cohen teams up with 84-year-old tenor saxophonist Coleman, whose résumé includes stints with Max Roach, Miles Davis, Elvin Jones and Charles Mingus. Coleman's huge tone, dexterity and mastery of the modern-jazz idiom feature prominently on "For Big G," included here. The pianist invests plenty of energy and excitement into his comps and solos, and locks in beautifully with bassist Russell Hall and drummer Bryan Carter.



Trombonist and composer **Rosie Turton** grew up in London listening to jazz and reggae records and studying with a teacher who ran the local big band. Inspired by Alice Coltrane and Pharoah Sanders, Turton became intrigued by Indian classical music, even traveling to North India to further study the connection between jazz

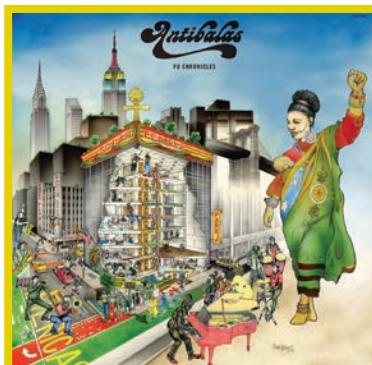
and raga. Returning to London, she assembled a quintet to help her realize her cross-cultural aesthetic, which is expressed on the group's 2019 release *Rosie's 5ive* (Jazz Re:freshed). "The Unknown," included here, provides an exemplary illustration of that aesthetic, building from Jake Long's Carnatic-inspired drumming in the song's intro, as well as Maria Chiara Argirò's inside-outside piano playing. Turton soon adds her moody trombone to the mix, setting the stage for violinist Johanna Burnheart's fevered solo, which is bolstered by Twm Dylan's double bass. The group picks up its heels as the song progresses, building to an ecstatic climax over which Turton blows a joyful solo.

A standout on the U.K. jazz scene, saxophonist Cassie Kinoshi formed the 10-piece **SEED Ensemble** in 2016, recruiting some of London's best young jazz players to realize her singular musical vision. That vision is fully formed on *Driftglass* (Jazz Re:freshed),



the band's 2019 debut release redefining the contemporary big band sound with a chill-out vibe, African and Caribbean grooves and the Afro-futurist sensibilities of the Sun Ra Arkestra. Drummer Patrick Boyle kicks off "Afronaut," our selection, with a swift, skittering electronica-inspired beat, the hot brass

of Miguel Gorodi's and Sheila Maurice-Grey's trumpets cooled somewhat by Sarah Tandy's Fender Rhodes. Spoken-word artist XANA then enters the mix, her poetic flow picking up on Sun Ra's cosmic aspirations for people of color and saluting the late Toni Morrison: "Meteors shining to reflect kinky hair filling my helmet/And yes, I entered space where there's no air so I can breathe and not choke ... And I can see without the bluest eye." Altoist Kinoshi and tenor player Chelsea Carmichael intertwine in an ecstatic dialogue, and Tandy's twinkling keys evoke a star-speckled cosmos.



For 20 years, **Antibalas** has been playing socially conscience Afrobeat music to audiences around the world. The horn-driven band came together in its now recognizable form when founder and baritone saxophonist Martín Perna and guitarist Gabriel Roth met frontman and vocalist Duke Amayo in the Brooklyn

neighborhood of Williamsburg. The Lagos native ran a boutique/kung fu studio/arts space that became the group's rehearsal space and, later, the first Daptone Studios. In their early days, Antibalas (which translates as "bulletproof") built up a local following by playing noncommercial spaces in their neighborhood. Before long, they recorded their first album, behind which they toured, and expanded their audiences globally. On their latest recording, *Fu Chronicles* (Daptone), the album title, cover illustration and spanking horn-fueled tunes all celebrate Antibalas' roots in a pre-gentrified Williamsburg. Amayo's vocals are as hypnotic as ever as he intones the lyrics to "Amenawon," included here, in his native language and in English. The tune builds from an infectious groove, growing in intensity with the addition of the horns and backing vocals, to an ecstatic statement that mirrors the urgency of its plea to save the planet.



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## DISC TWO



Tenor saxophonist **Nubya Garcia** has been making a name for herself as a leader of her own bands and with groups such as Nérija, Maisha and the Theon Cross trio. Her 2017 debut release *Nubya's 5ive* (Jazz Re:freshed) was critically hailed and popularly received, the vinyl version reportedly selling out in a single day;

a limited edition CD has also sold out. And it's no mystery as to why, the music revealing an artist at the top of her game backed by sterling, like-minded players on a set of modern-leaning straightahead jazz. Of course, it doesn't hurt that Garcia's under age 30 and that the album's striking cover image depicts her in an African-patterned head wrap. A gifted soloist with a supple tone, Garcia's also a fine writer, as revealed on the four original tunes here; a fifth track (hence the album title) is a cover of McCoy Tyner's "Contemplation." Album opener "Lost Kingdoms" begins with Garcia's brief solo fanfare before the band joins in on a mellow interlude that picks up steam as it hits a hard-grooving pocket. Bassist Daniel Casimir and drummer Femi Koleoso blend hard-bop and hip-hop sensibilities, as Joe Armon-Jones' Fender Rhodes maintains a chill 1970s vibe. Trumpeter Sheila Maurice-Grey heats up the proceedings with her solo, before handing the baton to Garcia, who mines a rich tonal seam between Sonny Rollins and Grover Washington Jr.



No matter how many musicians join her onstage or in the studio, **Luciana Souza** always manages to create an intimate ambience, as if she were singing to the listener alone. This holds true on *Storytellers* (Sunnyside), the Brazilian vocalist's latest release placing her in the company of the

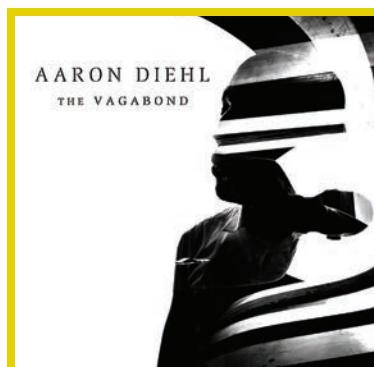
Cologne, Germany-based **WDR Big Band** under the direction of Vince Mendoza. Also blessed with the gift of crafting intimacy when the numbers would deny it, conductor and arranger Mendoza proves an excellent match for Souza. The pair bring their interpretive gifts to a songbook of well-loved Brazilian composers including Antonio Carlos Jobim, Chico Pinheiro, Edu Lobo, Chico Buarque, Ivan Lins and Gilberto Gil. The album concludes with Djavan's impossibly wistful

"Sim ou Não," Souza's heartbreakingly delivered so universal that the lyric is deeply felt even in listeners who speak not a word of Portuguese. Mendoza's arrangement surrounds the singer's trembling vibrato with woodwinds, burnished brass and electric keyboards, at once cushioning and echoing the melancholy sentiments.



The creative ferment of jazz festivals can lead to some rewarding collaborations. Such was the case when Pakistani-born, California-raised guitarist **Rez Abbasi** met French harpist **Isabelle Olivier** at a jazz fest in France and determined that their combined sounds would produce intriguing results. Their

instincts proved correct. After receiving a grant from the French American Cultural Exchange, they began composing for their recording *OASIS* (Enja/Yellowbird), the title of which serves as an acronym for "Olivier Abbasi Sound in Sound." While they initially conceived of their project as a duo, the pair decided to add Prabhu Edouard on tabla and *kanjira* (a South Indian frame drum) and David Paycha on drum set. The magic is evident from track one, a stirring read of "My Favorite Things," the album's lone cover. From there on, the program consists of music penned by the principals, including Abbasi's "Stepping Stone," our selection. Abbasi, Edouard and Paycha establish a rhythmic palette for Olivier, before the song devolves into a freeform jam, with Olivier's effects-laden harp shimmering like a mirage. As if awakening from a dream, the quartet emerges into a groove section powered by guitar and drums, before Olivier leads the song to its satisfying conclusion.



On *The Vagabond*, his third release for the Mack Avenue label, pianist **Aaron Diehl** and his trio examine the melding of jazz and classical sensibilities known as "Third Stream." And so Diehl and company delve into the music of 20th-century modernist Sergei Prokofiev, avant-garde minimalist Philip

Glass and classical-leaning jazz pianists John Lewis and Roland Hanna, and offer original compositions that honor these influences. Lewis, in particular, exerts a strong pull on Diehl's playing and writing, as can be heard on his original



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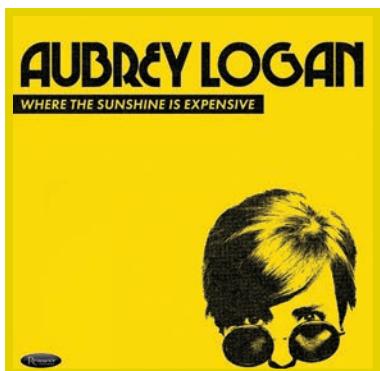
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composition "Magnanimous Disguise," included here. Diehl expresses a barely contained exuberance as he spryly strolls along with bassist Paul Sikivie, who resonantly shadows his steps, and drummer Gregory Hutchinson, whose lively but understated stick work matches his pace. Diehl, 34, is pianist and musical director for vocalist Cécile McLorin Salvant — with whose trio Sikivie also has played — and continues to impress with chops at least the equal of his taste.



Trumpeter and vocalist **Benny Benack III** is a real-deal, old-school performer who, at age 28, has self-released his highly engaging sophomore recording, *A Lot of Living To Do*. Following his well-received 2017 debut album, Benack once again recruits pianist Takeshi Ohbayashi, and calls on

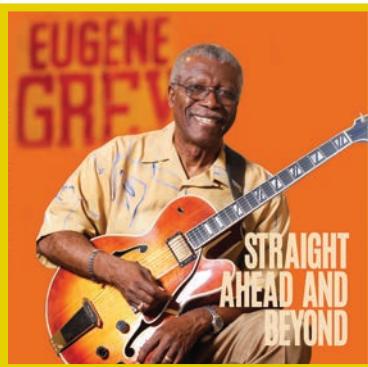
bassist Christian McBride and drummer Ulysses Owens Jr., with both of whose bands he's played. And, once again, the Pittsburgh-born, New York-based leader showcases his warm and seasoned trumpet sound, as well as a lively vocal style that rings with retro charm. In addition to his original tunes, Benack dives into an era-specific songbook that includes numbers by Gigi Gryce, Burt Bacharach, Johnny Mandel and even Fred "Mr." Rogers, all of which are enriched by his superb rhythm section. The album kicks off with the title track, a spunky swinger from the 1960s musical *Bye Bye Birdie*. Benack delivers the lyric with appropriate swagger and blows his horn that way, too. And McBride and Owens could no doubt put a wiggle in Ann-Margret's hips.



Although she didn't win *American Idol* — apparently she was "too jazzy" for judge Simon Cowell — vocalist and trombonist **Aubrey Logan** has that rare combination of charm and chops intrinsic to successful artists. Her 2017 debut recording *Impossible* hit the Top 10 on Billboard, iTunes and Amazon

charts, and her 2019 release *Where the Sunshine Is Expensive* (Resonance) reached No. 1 on the Billboard Contemporary Jazz Charts. Logan has also been racking up millions of views with her entertaining videos with Scott Bradlee's Postmodern Jukebox. What's more, she's an expert trombonist and wry

songwriter, both of which are readily apparent on *Where the Sunshine Is Expensive*. A Seattle native who studied at Berklee College of Music in Boston, Logan details her complicated relationship with Los Angeles throughout the album, mocking the shallowness of her current hometown, but enjoying opportunities to play with world-class musicians. And she's plucked some from the top shelf here: guitarist Will Yanez, pianist Nick Petrillo, bassist Tabari Lake and drummer Dave Johnstone. "High Place," our selection, starts with Logan's soulful vocal intro solely accompanied by Petrillo. The rhythm section then jumps in as the song takes a turn toward swing, while Logan injects plenty of feeling into her clever lyrics and uncorks a terrific trombone solo.



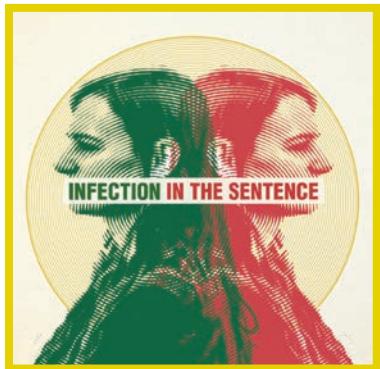
As lead guitarist for Toots and the Maytals and Kid Creole and the Coconuts, **Eugene Grey** long ago established his roots and reggae bona fides. But the Jamaican-born, Fort Lauderdale-based guitarist is also a gifted jazz artist who's released five solo albums under his own name. His latest, the self-released *Straight Ahead and Beyond*, finds the veteran six-stringer employing his distinctive phrasing on standards such as "All the Things You Are," "Stolen Moments" and "All Blues," as well as his fine-tuned original material. Fronting an excellent quartet of South Florida-based talent, Grey folds Jamaican sounds and rhythms into his straightahead jazz recipe, sometimes favoring one mode over the other (dig his reggae-fied take on "Giant Steps"). The opening, self-penned "Variations" also bears an airy, breezy vibe that evokes a tropical setting, as Grey wanders amiably over the laid-back rhythmic terrain set by pianist Paul Banman, bassist Akil Karam and drummer Earl Wright. The rhythm takes a turn for the Jamaican during Banman's playful solo, as Grey, Karam and Wright switch to a chunky reggae beat, which carries over into Grey's intriguing solo.

Pianist and keyboardist **Sarah Tandy** has emerged as a first-call musician on the vibrant London jazz scene, playing with SEED Ensemble and Nubya Garcia, as well as scoring a spot in Ronnie Scott's house band. Although she grew up playing classical music, Tandy began woodshedding with jazz while studying English literature at Cambridge University. Finding a beat-up piano in a hut on the college's gardens, she sequestered herself with stacks of jazz recordings — McCoy Tyner, Herbie Hancock, Robert Glasper and Brad Mehldau among them — and set out learning to play this challenging music. During a

A person is playing a double bass, with their hands and the instrument visible against a teal background. A white rectangular box is positioned in the upper right area of the image, containing the text.

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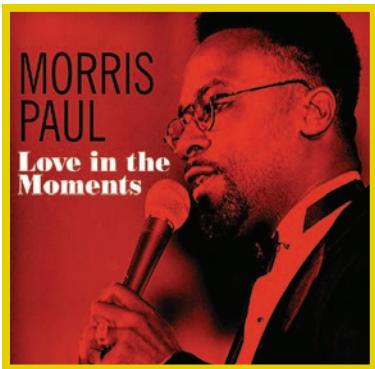
which finds her alternating between Fender Rhodes and piano for different feels on various tracks. Tandy plays the latter on the straighthead burner "Under the Skin," her energetic approach recalling Tyner and the other jazz greats she studied. She's well-matched by Golding's exuberant tenor and the never-flagging rhythm team of Chashi and Koleoso, even as the song winds down to its quiet coda.



Three of Miles Davis' most acclaimed late-career works — *Tutu*, *Music From Siesta* and *Amandla* — bear the distinctive imprint of keyboardist **Jason Miles**. Miles would go on to work with Grover Washington Jr., Michael Brecker and David Sanborn, among others. And as a leader on his own projects, he's displayed an eclecticism of which Davis himself would likely have approved. He's also paid recorded tribute to the artists who've influenced him greatly — Davis, Washington and Weather Report — and nods to a landmark Davis album with his ever-changing Kind of New band, which has just released *Black Magic* (Ropeadope), its third album. At the helm of a lean quintet, Miles crafts a funky, contemporary sound on a set of mostly original music (the lone exception being Davis' "Jean Pierre"). The opening title track sets the mood, Miles' sparkling piano and subtle electronic touches dancing atop an airy, atmospheric groove laid down by bassist Reggie Washington and drummer Gene Lake. Trumpeter Philip Dizack blends with saxophonist Jay Rodriguez and lends bright brass to the proceedings, his sunny solo echoing Miles' own musical disposition as he guides the song to its upbeat conclusion.

Like nearly all soul singers who've left a mark on the genre, Atlantic City native **Morris Paul Kennedy** grew up in the church. Raised in a family of pastors and church musicians, it's unsurprising that Kennedy found an outlet for his musical

residency at the Servant Jazz Quarters in Dalston, Tandy met drummer Femi Koleoso, bassist Mutale Chashi and saxophonist Binker Golding, all of whom became prominent on the burgeoning London jazz scene. They would end up playing on Tandy's debut CD, 2019's *Infection in the Sentence* (Jazz Re:freshed),



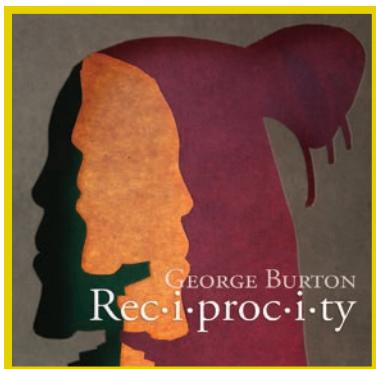
expression in houses of worship, where he played bass and sang behind gospel groups, including one led by his mother. Kennedy would later sing with the veteran Philadelphia gospel quartet The Newberry Singers, with whom he toured Europe for five years. But the vocalist also brings gospel spirit

to secular music, singing behind Harvey Mason Sr. in the late '70s and continuing his jazz studies as part of Kurt Elling's master classes in New York City. Kennedy's recent self-released recording, *Love in the Moments*, reflects deep roots in old-school soul and R&B, his vocal timbre resembling that of The Spinners' Phillip Wynne. Jazz is also well within his wheelhouse, as the singer reinvents standards such as "Nature Boy" and "I'm in the Mood for Love," as well as jazzy crossover tunes such as "The Look of Love." Still, that Spinners connection runs strong, as evidenced by Kennedy's faithful rendition of the soul hitmakers' classic "Mighty Love," included here.



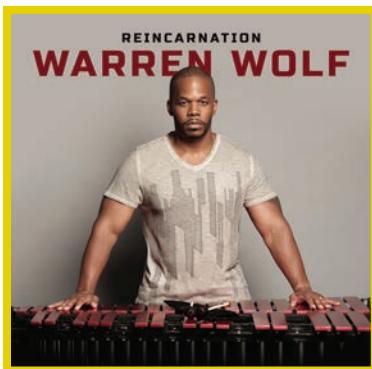
Vocalist and composer **Nandan Gautam** boasts a fairly unusual narrative. Raised in Bangalore, India, he left his native land to write for *USA Today* for a few years before returning home to study yoga and meditation. A lover of music, Gautam strove to make his own. The disciplines of writing

and practicing yoga aided him in this pursuit, and indeed, his album releases are frequently companion pieces to the books he authors. His self-released 2019 recording, *The Divine Flaw*, is his second album to reference his novel *The King of the Sea*, although knowledge of the text is not a prerequisite to enjoying the music. Gautam recruited top-shelf musicians, including pianist Rainer Brüninghaus, guitarist Tony Das and drummer Chad Wackerman, who accompany him on "The Legacy of Judas," the epic track included here. In addition to providing textured keyboards and bass programming, Gautam floats an ethereal wordless vocal atop the sonic palette, undergirded by Wackerman's relentless drumming. Das' heated riffery rends the atmosphere before giving way to Brüninghaus' melodic pianism as the ensemble winds down to a peaceful conclusion.



Pianist and composer **George Burton** created a buzz with his 2016 debut recording, *The Truth of What I Am — The Narcissist*. His sophomore recording, the self-released *Reciprocity*, more than fulfills the Philly native's promise as a creative voice in the jazz world, weaving hip-hop, R&B, indie rock and

electronica into his signature sound. Jazz remains the central aesthetic though, evident in Burton's thoughtful piano playing and writing for his sextet, and in the inclusion of snippets of spoken reflections by veteran Sun Ra Arkestra saxophonist Marshall Allen. The pianist reveals the gospel-influenced side of his artistry with the trio showcase "Third Prayer," our selection. Burton begins the hushed, hymn-like piece unaccompanied, but he's soon joined by bassist Pablo Menares and drummer Wayne Smith Jr., who maintain a stately pace throughout. Menares offers resonant pizzicato testimony on his lovely solo, and the song, while a departure from other tracks on the album, nonetheless fits in with the spiritual orientation of a work that contains songs titled "Gratitude" and "Finding."



As a leader and a sideman, vibraphonist **Warren Wolf** has established himself as one of today's premier players on his instrument. And, as anyone who's witnessed his mallet magic onstage can attest, he's a mesmerizing performer. For the most part, Wolf, 40, has stayed in the straightahead lane, displaying sensibilities steeped in post-bop. But he

also grew up in Baltimore listening to the soul and R&B hits of the '90s, which imprinted itself on his psyche and which inspired the music on his latest release, *Reincarnation* (Mack Avenue). And while Wolf includes a version of the Isley Brothers' "For the Love of You," this is not a covers album, but rather a salute to the jazzy R&B sounds of his young years. The joyful "For Ma," included here, pays affectionate tribute to Wolf's late mother with a sprightly instrumental that showcases his effervescent playing atop a solid R&B-inspired groove laid down by pianist Brett Williams, bassist Richie Goods and drummer Carroll "CV" Dashiell. The album's title also alludes to positive changes in the vibist's life. "It's a celebration of a new lease on life," according to Mack Avenue's web site write-up, "a happiness and contentment that he's discovered through a new marriage and his five beloved children."

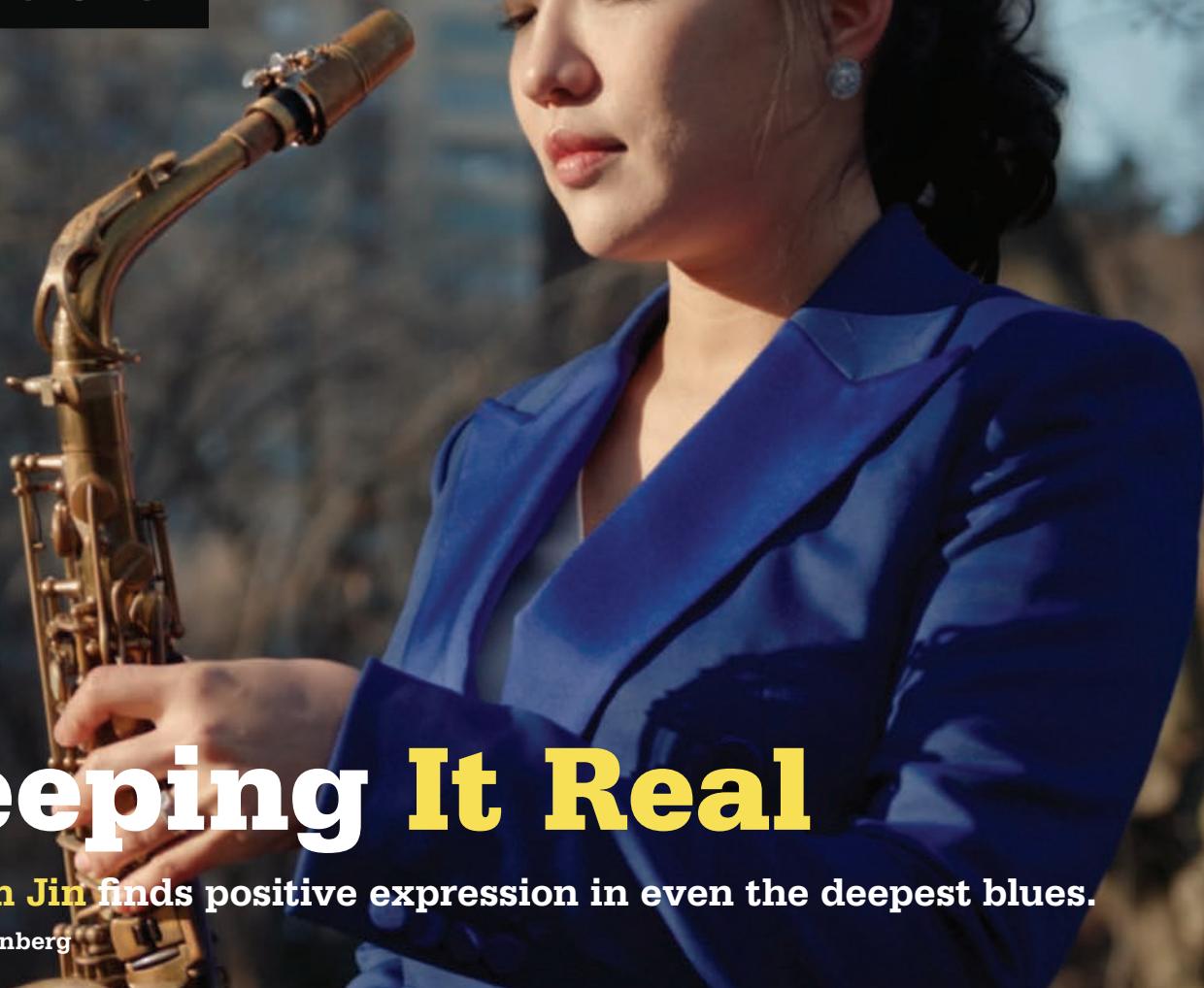


George Burton



Singer-songwriter and guitar wizard **Raul Midón** has been on a roll. His recent recordings, 2017's *Bad Ass and Blind* and 2018's *If You Really Want*, earned him Grammy nominations for best jazz vocal album. The Maryland resident and University of Miami jazz program graduate follows those successful releases

with *The Mirror* (Mack Avenue), a collection of original songs that spotlights Midón's dexterous acoustic guitar playing and engaging vocals. And, for the first time, Midón records a couple of spoken-word pieces, the deeply personal meditations "One Day Without War" and "If I Could See" — the latter imagining a reality in which he hadn't been born blind — both accompanied by his crystalline picking on banjo and guitar, respectively. But the album, while reflective, is hardly depressing. The buoyant opener "I Love the Afternoon," our selection, sets a joyful tone, with Midón's rhythmic, tropicalia-influenced strum bolstered by driving percussion and breezy harmony vocals. "Nowhere to go or be, nothing to do or see," he sings, celebrating the indolence of a lazy time of day with no commitments. ■



# Keeping It Real

**Pureum Jin finds positive expression in even the deepest blues.**

By Bob Weinberg

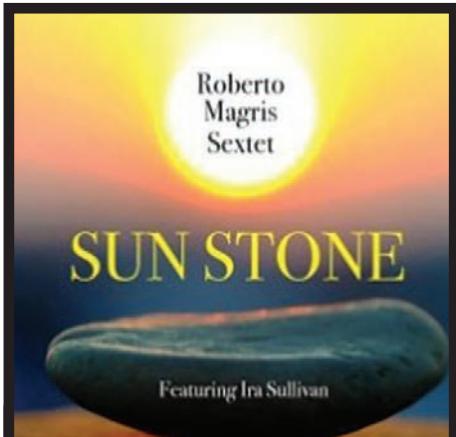
Just off Barcelona's bustling commercial strip known as La Rambla sits the Plaza Real, a charming square in the heart of the city's centuries-old Gothic Quarter. Tucked into this historic landmark is the seemingly anomalous Jamboree, a jazz club dating back to 1960 that hosted the likes of Dexter Gordon, Kenny Drew, Chet Baker and Ornette Coleman. It also serves as the picturesque backdrop to New York-based alto saxophonist Pureum Jin's latest release, *The Real Blue Live in Barcelona* (Swit). A high-energy document of Jin's 2018 pairing with Spanish pianist Ignasi Terraza's trio, the album also provides a companion piece to her 2019 debut studio recording, *The Real Blue*.

The Korean-born Jin had been invited to play the club as part of Barcelona's annual Grec Festival. Still five months away from recording the excellent *Real Blue* with her own quartet in New York, Jin had brought along a couple of original compositions — the upbeat opener "Remembering Mr. Woods" and the deeply indigo "When Blue Gets Blue" — that would appear on that album, as well, presenting them alongside some

deftly interpreted standards and three tunes by Terraza, a well-established Catalonian jazz artist and educator. They reprised the performance this past summer at New York's Rockland Music Hall, and Jin will return to Spain in March for shows with Terraza.

Jin first met the pianist about a decade ago, when he visited Seoul. "He came to one of my gigs and I asked him to sit in," she says, talking by phone from California in December, where she, her husband and their soon-to-be-2-year-old son were visiting her in-laws before flying to Korea to visit her parents. "So we played a couple of tunes that night, and we both loved each other. It was really beautiful. So we kept in touch."

Growing up in South Korea, Jin didn't hear jazz as a youngster, didn't even really know what it was. But when she heard a studio ensemble playing at her school, she knew that making music was what she wanted to do. She started off playing classical music and began to stretch her boundaries under the tutelage of her first jazz instructor, saxophonist



#### Roberto Magris Sextet

#### *Sun Stone* (JMood)

Italian pianist Magris returns to Miami for his second recording in the Magic City, once again utilizing present and former Miami jazz standouts. On a spirited and spiritual outing, Magris finds simpatico voices in tenor saxophonist Mark Colby, trumpeter Shareef Clayton, bassist Jamie Ousley, drummer Rodolfo Zuniga and 88-year-old alto saxophonist and flutist Ira Sullivan. The title track, which is reprised at album's end, reflects a strong Coltrane-McCoy Tyner influence and features dynamic solos from Clayton, Colby, Sullivan and Magris. The pianist's best-known composition, "Maliblues," presents another highlight, the moody, mid-tempo Latin tune showcasing the ensemble's easy rapport, bluesy solo statements and breezy yet potent flute work from the remarkable Sullivan.

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Kenji Omae. "At the time, I loved playing saxophone, but I didn't really like the educational system. My [classical] teacher was very strict," she says. "Then, finally, I met Kenji and got lessons from him. The first few months, I didn't know what [he was talking about], but I had so much fun playing with him, just following his sound and mimicking what he was doing."

**"I was like, 'Oh, my God, this is jazz!' I never felt this kind of energy in the music, so strong a feeling. This is what I'm looking for, always."**

A critical breakthrough happened when Jin heard John Coltrane's 1964 release *Coltrane's Sound*. Suddenly, all the pieces fell in place. "I was like, 'Oh, my God, this is jazz!'" she says. "I never felt this kind of energy in the music, so strong a feeling. This is what I'm looking for, always." From there, she discovered Cannonball Adderley, Phil Woods and Wayne Shorter. "I love all the alto players," she says, "but the reason I first started playing jazz was because of [tenor player] John Coltrane. I was very into tenor sounds on all of my compositions and concepts, but I really liked to play alto more, because I thought it's more like my voice."

Another crucial part of her learning experience was the club scene in Seoul, which she explored while studying at Kyung Hee University's College of Music. Bassist Martin Zenker, who was teaching at Kyung Hee, recalls encountering Jin at that time. "I remember when I first came to Seoul, [seeing] a teenage girl hanging out at the jazz clubs, listening, sitting in and always serious about getting to the core of the music," he writes in the liner notes to *The Real Blue Live in Barcelona*. It was Zenker who invited Terraza to South Korea, where he and Jin began their musical friendship.

A few years later, Jin was accepted at the Manhattan School of Music, where she earned a master's degree and was in proximity to the world's most vibrant jazz scene. However, she took a detour after graduation to be with her husband, who had taken a job for a year in Charlottesville, Virginia. Jin sought opportunities to play jazz and wound up at Miller's Downtown, where trumpet player John D'earth continues to host Thursday jazz nights. She asked to sit in and D'earth was so impressed he invited her to join his band. Jin still has fond

memories of Charlottesville, which she calls her "second hometown."

Jin and her husband returned to New York, where the saxophonist became reacquainted with pianist Jeremy Manasia, whom she'd met at MSM and who ended up playing on and producing 2019's *The Real Blue*. "Pureum Jin is a joyous improviser," he writes in the album's liners. "I heard it the first time I encountered her as a graduate student, and I hear that joy abounding when I listen to her new record."

That positivity leaps from Jin's horn throughout *The Real Blue Live in Barcelona*, as well, even when she's playing blues or a ballad rendition of "These Foolish Things," which spotlights her synergy with Terraza. Even her homage to Phil Woods, a major alto influence whom she dreamed of meeting but never did (he died shortly after Jin moved to the United States in 2015), is a swinging celebration rather than a tear-stained ode. Similarly, on the studio album, she turned the grist of hardships and uncertainties into self-assured jazz.

"When Blue Gets Blue," heard on the live and studio albums, serves as both therapy and as a calling card, of sorts; after all, her name translates to "the real blue" from Korean. "At the time I wrote this tune, I was very [anxious] about living here as a musician, and also as a female, and I had a really hard time," she says. "I felt like I kind of lost my way. So I tried to express my blues feeling in the music, but it's also like meditation. I feel like it brings me somewhere really positive, this kind of warm place. So when I started playing that song, it's kind of like, 'I feel blue,' but eventually it's like, 'Alright, I'm good. I feel better.' I don't like to think negative; I'm always thinking that it's going to be good sometime in the future." ■



# Securing the Vote

**Karrin Allyson and friends pay timely tribute to the heroes of the suffrage movement.**

**By Jonathan Widran**

In December, at a private event in Singapore, former President Barack Obama said, "I'm absolutely confident that, for two years, if every nation on earth was run by women, you would see a significant improvement across the board on just about everything." His point echoed the final words that veteran jazz vocalist Karrin Allyson wrote in the liner notes to *Some of That Sunshine*, the 2018 album that marked her emergence as a powerful songwriter (after establishing herself as a skilled interpreter of other writers' songs over the previous 25 years). She wrote, "I have long felt that if humans could really address our female/male equality and respect issues, so many other things would fall into place."

An important step toward gender equality in the United States was taken on August 18, 1920, when, following a decades-long struggle, the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was passed, securing for women the right to vote. On *Shoulder to Shoulder: Centennial Tribute to Women's Suffrage* (Entertainment One Music), Allyson and her newly formed all-female sextet pay homage to the heroes of the suffrage

movement — among them, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Sojourner Truth and Carrie Chapman Catt — with fresh, improvisation-rich arrangements of 19th- and early-20th-century propagandistic tunes.

Working with several producers, including veteran composer and arranger John Daversa, Allyson embarked on a fascinating fact- and song-finding mission to offer a balanced view of the movement. The resulting album is massive in scope and personnel. "Putting together an album like *Shoulder to Shoulder* was a daunting task," says Allyson, a longtime activist who has helped raise money for Habitat for Humanity and numerous environmental causes. "I'm grateful to have been one of its many moving parts. As far as the music goes, John and I put our heads together and researched the songs of the relevant eras — from the '20s back to the 1840s. Googling and using good old-fashioned books, we sought out famous suffragette marches, hymns and speeches that would provide touchpoints for the long journey."

"Typical of our process was the track that establishes

the essential storyline of the album. 'The Great Convention' was a speech given at Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848, which marked the official start of the movement. The lyrics were originally set to a German song, but John and I wrote fresh chords and a memorable new melody, with John providing the many moods of the moment via his string arrangement. To give the aura of a multitude of female voices, I invited my friends Madeleine Peyroux and Denise Donatelli to take the first two verses, with me following them."

One of Allyson and Daversa's chief reference sources was folk singer Elizabeth Knight's 1958 collection *Songs of the Suffragettes*. Augmenting the stark material from that album with jazzy textures and emotional resonance, Allyson takes a swinging romp through "Columbia's Daughters" and offers a solemn, gospel-tinged rendition of "The Promised Land." A heartfelt plea to men to join the cause, "Columbia's Daughters" was written in 1884 for a meeting of the Women's Suffrage Association of Massachusetts. "The Promised Land" was published in literature distributed by the National-American Women's Suffrage Convention of 1891.

Allyson's alternately sensitive and hard-swinging sextet — trumpeter Ingrid Jensen, pianist Helen Sung, bassist Endea Owens, drummer Allison Miller and alto saxophonist Mindi Abair — provides the foundation for all of the music on *Shoulder to Shoulder*. Because each member of the ensemble is a busy performer in her own right, the tracks came together piecemeal via a swirl of phone calls, exchanged digital files, rehearsals and tracking with whoever was available in New York City on any given day.

One of the album's most remarkable aspects is the balance it strikes between suffragettes and their opponents. On "Anti-Suffrage Rose," Allyson defers to another special guest, emerging jazz vocalist Veronica Swift, and relies on another of Daversa's sweeping string arrangements to reflect on

## "The idea was to make people curious about the process and the history of women's voting issues, so that we never forget to cherish the right to vote."

the movements' foes, symbolized by those wearing the color red (while the suffragists wore white).

The same week Obama spoke in Singapore, Allyson was in Northampton, Massachusetts, headlining a weekly jazz series. At her gig, she performed "Way Down Below" and "Big Discount," the two self-penned compositions that close *Shoulder to Shoulder*. The original version of "Big Discount," a wry, incisive look at traditional wage disparities between men and women, appears on *Some of That Sunshine*. The new version incorporates a thematically related rap by hip-hop artist and activist Rapsody. "Way Down Below," a moody meditation that addresses racial and gender-based inequality in the present day, features violinist Regina Carter underscoring the impassioned lyrics and a spoken-word intro by one of Allyson's heroes, Roberta Flack.

*Shoulder to Shoulder* is partially a theatrical production with a roster of renowned guest artists who are sometimes used in unconventional ways. While Kurt Elling and Allyson pair nicely on the playful duet "Winning the Vote," other guests provide spoken-word speeches that are interlaced between the album's musical numbers. For instance, Harry Belafonte delivers dialogue that originated with Frederick Douglass, Roseanne Cash does likewise with Susan B. Anthony, Lalah Hathaway with Sojourner Truth, and Peter Eldridge with Theodore Roosevelt's Secretary of State Elihu Root.

"Just as some of our greatest singers showcased their oratory abilities, I felt that I was acting as much as singing," Allyson says. "Every song is a vignette. I kept wondering, who am I? Am I Susan B. or Elizabeth or a lesser-known suffragette trying to get by in life? I got

to inhabit all of those amazing people and bring voice to their visions to ensure that their work carries on. The idea was to make people curious about the process and the history of women's voting issues, so that we never forget to cherish the right to vote. With the election coming up this year, this truth is more crucial for our democracy than ever." ■



### Jackie Allen

#### *A Romantic Evening With Jackie Allen: Live at the Rococo* (AvantBass)

Jackie Allen shares life's joys, pains and a range of emotions on this concert recording from the Rococo Theatre in Lincoln, Nebraska, where the Chicago-bred singer currently lives with her husband, bassist Hans Sturm. Propelled by her band — with the ever-brilliant Bob Shepard on saxophones and flute — Allen delivers a breathtaking ride via her usual mix of jazz, blues, gospel, funk, pop and rock. This transcendent show is available as a standalone CD and as a two-disc Blu-ray and CD package.

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# Within a Room of Gold

**Michelle Rosewoman honors ancient rhythms while pushing jazz forward**

By Larry Blumenfeld

Standing on the tiny stage of Manhattan's Zinc Bar in November, the dozen or so musicians in Michele Rosewoman's New-Yoruba ensemble were packed in tight. In celebration of a new release, *Hallowed* (Advance Dance Disques), Rosewoman and her group played sections of "Oru de Oro," an extended work based on sacred Yoruba rhythms played on *batá* — two-headed hand drums essential to Afro-Cuban ceremonies. This suite, which spans 10 of the new album's dozen tracks and nearly 50 minutes, is, by turns, tender and driving, simply stated and complex. It frames ancient rituals in a new context. It places the sound of large-ensemble modern jazz in a fresh light. And for Rosewoman, it represents an exciting new chapter of a personal tale that spans more than 30 years.

"How do stories start?" Rosewoman wonders aloud when I ask about her music's origins at the Lower East Side apartment she's called home since settling in New York City in 1978. Her own story began in Oakland, California, surrounded by music, not least because her parents owned a record shop. She began playing piano at age 6. After high school, pianist and organist Ed Kelly taught her jazz "the old-school way," she says. Soon after, she

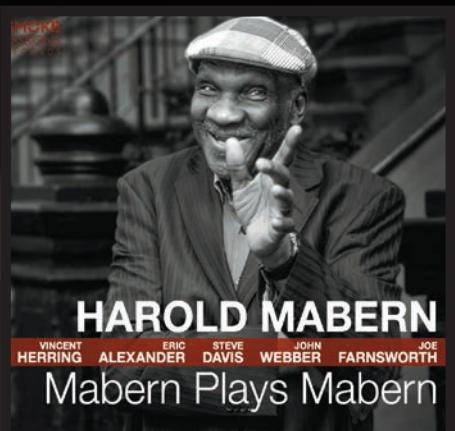
began studying Afro-Cuban percussion, which she was drawn to as powerfully as she had been drawn to jazz. "But they were still parallel worlds," she says.

Once in New York, those worlds began converging in Rosewoman's mind. "I literally dreamed about these folkloric, spiritually powerful songs in a contemporary jazz setting," she says. "I thought, 'What? How?' I needed to work it out." She began setting Afro-Cuban *cantos* (ritual chants) in contemporary musical settings. Around that time, at the Manhattan club Soundscape, she met percussionist and singer Orlando "Puntilla" Ríos, who'd arrived in New York from Cuba in 1980. It's hard to overstate Ríos's impact at that time, in terms of building a community in New York City around West African traditions, transmitted via Cuba.

Puntilla, a singularly important mentor for Rosewoman, became the spiritual and sonic centerpiece of New Yor-Uba, the group she created to realize her cross-cultural vision. She recalls that group's public debut, at Manhattan's Public Theater in 1983, as if it were yesterday. Onstage at the piano, she was surrounded by musicians who represented a rare union of free-thinkers drawn from New York jazz's top rank, such as saxophonist Oliver Lake,

and masters of Afro-Cuban traditions. “You could see the horn players listening to the drummers with their mouths hanging open and the drummers staring at the horn players with wide eyes,” she says. “The musicians had never heard anything like it.”

Rosewoman’s 1996 album, *Spirit*, presented her in a standard piano-trio setup. Her jazz quintet evolved in brilliant and unconventional fashion across five albums. Yet New Yor-Uba, her deepest-held expression, remained undocumented until the release in 2013 of *Michele Rosewoman’s New Yor-Uba: A Musical Celebration of*



#### Harold Mabern *Mabern Plays Mabern* (Smoke Sessions)

When Harold Mabern died on September 17, 2019, at 83, the jazz world lost one of its most soulful and forceful pianists, whose playing was redolent of his birthplace, Memphis, and who, for decades, was a fixture on New York’s scene. Here, caught live at the Manhattan club Smoke, Mabern augments his longstanding quartet (tenor saxophonist Eric Alexander, bassist John Webber and drummer Joe Farnsworth) with trombonist Steve Davis and alto saxophonist Vincent Herring. The revelation is not just how strong and playful Mabern seems at 81, but also how sturdy and full of possibility his compositions sound.

now playing

*Cuba in America*, a double-CD of startling ambition and beauty. Two years later Rosewoman received a commission from Chamber Music America to compose new music. “It was clear to me what to do,” she says. She’d been delving deeply into the traditions of the *batá*, and into the ‘Oru Seco,’ which is a specific sequence of rhythms, each identified with an *orisha* (Yoruba deity), played in sacred chambers before public ceremonies. Rosewoman’s suite “Oru de Oro” (which translates roughly to “room of gold”) treats these *batá* rhythms as precious gems, presenting them in luminous and original settings that accentuate their multi-faceted allure and power. “That *batá* tradition explores the cracks of time,” she says. “They reveal endless nuances that one never knew existed.” In those cracks and nuances, she heard new musical possibilities.

If Puntilla informed and inspired New Yor-Uba’s earliest music, Román Díaz now serves that function. Díaz, a master Cuban percussionist and folklorist, began working with Rosewoman a decade ago. As a font of Afro-Cuban tradition, he is as forceful and precious to today’s New York scene as Puntilla once was. He also works regularly with leading jazz players, displaying great dexterity and curiosity. Puntilla was a master percussionist, but it was his voice that motivated Rosewoman most of all; New-Yoruba’s early repertoire was shaped largely around vocal chants. The group’s new incarnation is more squarely focused on rhythms and instrumentals.

The “Oru Seco” is a strict tradition. “Each master interprets it somewhat differently,” Rosewoman says, “and has their own feel.” (In that way, its legacy, much like jazz’s, is shaped by individual masters.) To create her suite, Rosewoman asked Díaz for a recording of him playing

the “Oru Seco” at a ceremony. With that as her anchor, she dove into composing. “I had to go deep in and not come out of my mind or my heart or my house for quite some time,” she says. In traditional Afro-Cuban music, three percussionists play *batá*; on the new CD, this includes Mauricio Herrera and Rafael Monteagudo. Yet Díaz, on *lyá* (the largest, or “mother” drum of the three), provides the clear lead.

Rosewoman describes the music she composed to surround *batá* rhythms as “embellishments” or “decorations,” but it amounts to far more; she has created a complete original musical structure that breathes as one with the *batá*, negotiating its rhythmic transitions, and that is studded with harmonic innovation, well-placed improvisations, drama and even humor. Her music honors the legacies of jazz masters like Duke Ellington, Charles Mingus and Cecil Taylor as clearly as the *batá* serves Yoruba deities. Throughout, her distinct brand of pianism — highly refined and yet, in spots, often quite daring — shines through.

If Rosewoman’s music is a wondrous marriage of Afro-Cuban and jazz traditions, it benefits from a current generation of musicians who, she says, are “musically bilingual.” These include saxophonist Román Filiú, who is Cuban, and bassist Gregg August, born in the United States. Together, with Rosewoman as leader and Díaz as anchor, New-Yoruba doesn’t so much bridge traditions; rather, it reveals deep and mysterious connections that have always existed. “Jazz is a world of extending and expanding tradition,” Rosewoman says. “The rhythmic traditions of Cuba are about maintaining tradition. But the idea of obscuring things seems fundamental to both. The idea is to know something so well that you don’t have to state it.” ■

**“I literally dreamed about these folkloric, spiritually powerful songs in a contemporary jazz setting. I thought, ‘What? How?’ I needed to work it out.”**



# BIRD AT 100

## DOES CHARLIE PARKER STILL MATTER?

BY NEIL TESSER







here's no shortage of commentary proclaiming the significance of the meteoric genius Charlie Parker. Born 100 years ago this year, on August 29, in Kansas City, Missouri — dead less than 35 years later, a victim of prodigious appetites and addictions — he galvanized the creation of bebop and, along with Dizzy Gillespie, nurtured it to maturity. Three-quarters of a century after bop appeared, that process arguably remains the most significant event in jazz since the music took shape at all.

Bop transformed jazz from mere entertainment to true art form. It moved the music from big bands to small combos. It bolstered the black intelligentsia. It set the stage for everything that followed. At once

liberating and threatening, bop was a musical tsunami that swept over the larger culture as well, seeping into radio ads, movie and TV soundtracks, literature, dance, painting. Its undercurrents are so familiar, you may have trouble comprehending what made it so revolutionary in the first place.

So try blocking out the historical antecedents, such as the swing music Parker loved as a kid and then eclipsed; tune out the drugs and the legendry; ignore the enormity of his discoveries, and home in on the notes themselves. Let yourself drink in the speed, the tone, the fire of his imagination; the accuracy, the audacity, the authority of his concept; his limitless command of the new syntax and the mercurial poetry he created with it. Audiophiles, accustomed to high-definition fidelity, may diss the primitive recording techniques. (A preponderance of Bird tracks aren't even stereo.) Listeners who groove to rock or hip-hop may find bebop song forms antiquated; symphony lovers might think the omnipresent sax-trumpet pairings are too unyielding. Forget all that. Once you leave this baggage on the platform and just take the ride, you cannot miss the exuberance, humor, passion — the sheer life-force — contained in Parker's explosive flights.

His music brims with other emotions, of course, and it points in multiple directions. The more you know about Bird and his world, the more it expands. Once you learn his own history, you can appreciate his connections to not only jazz's past but also to all of Western music — and the fact that bop was as much evolution as revolution. Explore his discography and he becomes Proteus, instantly adapting to his surroundings — quartet, Latin jazz orchestra, sumptuous strings — while leaving no doubt as to who's behind the mask. Hearing him on jam sessions or with pickup rhythm sections reveals the fact that he could lift any band to the next level.

But maybe not to *his* level. Chris Potter, perhaps the most lionized saxophonist of his generation, recently said, "It's still always amazing how much more in the future he sounds than the rest of the band. His playing would have sounded great in the year 1500, and it's going to sound great in the year 2500."

Important milestones, especially centennials, inevitably raise questions repeated often enough to become cliché. "Is [name the artist or genre] *still relevant* all these years later? Does this music *still matter*?" So, a hundred years after his birth and 65 years after his death, we wonder: Does Charlie Parker and the singularly stirring music he made *still matter*?

To those who find pleasure in marveling at the sublime creative and spiritual heights to which a select few human beings can rise, he matters. To those many artists who, because of Parker's music, have been inspired to reach for those same lofty heights in their own work, he matters. To those who love bebop and the entire sonic forest that grew from seeds that Parker planted, he matters, as he does to anyone who finds the world a better place for the enduring presence of soulful, beautiful music.

As Chris Potter suggests, Parker's music will always matter, and it is through that music that, indeed, Bird lives. *Neil Tesser, a longstanding JAZZIZ contributing writer, is annotator of The Savoy 10-inch Collection, a recently released box set of Parker's first four LPs.* ■





# CHAIRMEN OF THE BIRD

BOBBY WATSON, GARY BARTZ AND VINCENT HERRING DISCUSS THE PRIMACY OF CHARLIE PARKER.

BY BOB WEINBERG



Vincent Herring



incent Herring's concept for the live recording *Bird at 100* (Smoke Sessions) was simple: gather three generations of alto saxophonists to pay homage to Charlie Parker on the cusp of his centennial year. Actually, he wanted four and settled for three, but that's a different story. And so, Herring, 55, called on fellow altoists Bobby Watson, 66, and Gary Bartz, 79, who convened at Smoke nightclub in New York City for three dates in August and September 2019 to pool their musical impressions of one of the most celebrated and mythologized figures in jazz.

Supported by a superb rhythm section — pianist David Kikoski, bassist Yasushi Nakamura and drummer Carl Allen — the alto masters dived into the Parker songbook, offering muscular reads of "Klactoveedsedstene" and "The Hymn," terrifically bluesy versions of "Lover Man" and "April in Paris," and a couple of original tunes they'd brought to the sessions. While none of the participants sought to imitate Parker, his influence permeates their playing on an almost cellular level — as it has for so many musicians following Bird's tragic demise in 1955.

Bartz was a teenager when Parker died, Watson a toddler, Herring not even a twinkle. Obviously, they experienced Bird's music in different ways and in different musical milieus that were frequently straining to break free of bebop and find new expression within the sounds of the day. While Bartz found a home in the bands of hard-boppers Art Blakey and Max Roach, he also embraced the avant-garde jazz of the '60s; in the '70s, he incorporated funk, blues, soul and African music into his signature sound. Watson also came through the academy of Blakey's Jazz Messengers. But he studied at the University of Miami in the early '70s, as well, befriending Pat Metheny and Jaco Pastorius, whose innovations brought new colors to his palette. Growing up in the '70s and '80s, Herring, another Blakey alumnus, waded past the shallows of smooth jazz and swam to the deep end of the jazz pool, working closely with trumpeter Nat Adderley, the brother of his idol, Cannonball Adderley.

"I never thought of myself as someone wanting to play bebop or wanting to pay homage in my style of play to Charlie Parker and the bebop movement or era," Herring explains during a phone interview in December. "I thought of myself as just someone trying to learn how to play the music." But, he adds, "Bird — if you're playing saxophone in jazz growing up — it's hard to escape him."

ven though he shares Kansas City, Kansas, roots with Charlie Parker, Bobby Watson didn't grow up with Bird's music, nor was he inundated with local lore about him. His dad, a tenor saxophone player in church, was a Gene Ammons man. Ironically, Watson didn't really get hip to Bird until his dad moved the family to Minneapolis, where he attended high school.

So, naturally, his choice of alto saxophone was not influenced by Parker, but rather by aesthetics. "It was all serendipitous, because we got a bunch of new instruments that year in high school, and they had a brand-new alto," Watson says during a recent phone conversation. "And I asked the band director if I could get one of those, because I just loved the way it looked; it looked like

a piece of jewelry. I said, 'Man, if I got to play that sucker, how beautiful it would be.' Then I discovered Bird, and he plays alto, lo and behold."

It was also in high school that Watson encountered Leonard King, a history teacher who was a jazz drummer by night. Recognizing an interest in his students, King turned the second half of the semester into a jazz-history course that included lessons about bebop. "He took us through the whole progression of the music up until that time, which was 1970-71," Watson recalls.

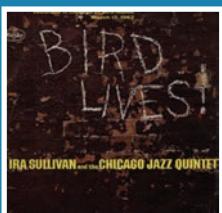
This was the era when the bands of Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter and Chick Corea were exploding genre boundaries as they embraced the electric sounds and rhythms of funk and rock. Nonetheless, Watson says, Bird caught his ear. The spontaneity of his playing and the strong individuality of his sound appealed to him immediately. But there was something more. "He had a sound that lifted me up,

## RECORDED TRIBUTES TO CHARLIE PARKER HAVE APPEARED PRACTICALLY SINCE HIS DEATH IN 1955. THE BEST ONES FEATURE MUSICIANS WHO EXPERIENCED BIRD'S CREATIVE FIRE ON THE BANDSTAND. HERE ARE A FEW RECOMMENDATIONS.



### THE MAX ROACH 4 *Plays Charlie Parker* (Mercury)

One of the architects of bop drumming, Roach brings his usual fire to Parker's tunes, driving the team of tenor saxophonist Hank Mobley, trumpeter Kenny Dorham and bassist George Morrow on the late-1957 Side One session. On the flip side, from April 1958, George Coleman replaces Mobley on tenor and Nelson Boyd takes over for Morrow, with both groups revealing Bird's impact on younger players.



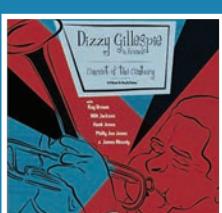
### IRA SULLIVAN AND THE CHICAGO JAZZ QUINTET *Bird Lives!* (VeeJay)

Multi-instrumentalist Sullivan, a Bird disciple, blows trumpet and flugelhorn on this burning 1962 set, ceding the saxophone chair to tenorist Nicky Hill. Pianist Jodie Christian, bassist Don Garrett and drummers Wilbur Campbell and Dorel Anderson ignite rhythmic fireworks as the group hurtles through Bird classics and other material at a club date in Chicago. The album title mirrors graffiti that cropped up around New York City in the wake of Bird's death.



### SONNY STITT *From the Newport Jazz Festival: Tribute to Charlie Parker* (RCA Victor)

This gathering of Bird colleagues and acolytes lights up the Newport stage in 1964. Altoist Stitt leads the charge, abetted by pianist Harold Mabern, bassist Arthur Harper Jr. and drummer Max Roach. Trumpeter Howard McGhee brings high energy, as does indefatigable trombonist J.J. Johnson. Adding poignancy to the set, another distinctive alto voice, Eric Dolphy, had died just a few days earlier. Jackie McLean's quartet contributes a couple of ballads on the flipside, recorded in the studio in 1967.



### DIZZY GILLESPIE AND FRIENDS *Concert of the Century: A Tribute to Charlie Parker* (Justin Time)

In 1980, Dizzy Gillespie convened a summit of bop royalty for a Montreal concert to honor their long-lost comrade. Joining the trumpeter were saxophonist-flutist James Moody, pianist Hank Jones, vibist Milt Jackson, bassist Ray Brown and drummer Philly Joe Jones. Just the specter of Bird — not to mention the pleasure of one another's company — seems to spur these middle-age masters to musical heights, and the joy in their playing is evident throughout.



Bobby Watson



Gary Bartz

the sound of optimism — triumph over adversity — when he played" Watson says. "And that seemed to be his passport, that saxophone, a magic carpet taking him all kinds of places and putting him in touch with all kinds of people at different social levels and expanding his knowledge. I like the spontaneity, that's the part I get from it, and trying to have my own sound and speak with all my heart, tied in with the knowledge of the science of the music — the harmony, the theory and stuff like that — which he had."

While studying at the University of Miami — and later on bandstands alongside Bird familiars Jay McShann, Art Blakey and Max Roach — Watson gained his mastery of those elements, which he continues to pass along to his students at the University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory of Music and Dance. He considers himself fortunate to have interacted with great jazz innovators, some of whom were happy to share stories about Bird. Blakey told Watson about after-hours sessions that most jazz aficionados would sacrifice a limb to have attended. "He said Bird would say, 'Arthur, come with me,'" Watson recalls. "Then he and Dizzy [Gillespie] and Bird would be up in a hotel room and they'd just be playing all night. Art would have a phone book and some brushes, and Bird would have a towel over his head, and they'd be playing. Bird said, 'The music will bring everything to you, Arthur. You don't have to chase after it.'"

Clearly, *Bird at 100* is a project close to Watson's heart. He had worked with both Herring and Bartz over the years, with the latter of whom he recorded the excellent 1997 live release *Altos Peak* and with whom he remains close. "I call him 'Uncle Gary,'" he says. The players met at Herring's place in New York a few days before the club date to rehearse, discuss repertoire and share ideas. Along with an arrangement of Parker's "Mohawk," which didn't make the record, Watson also penned "Bird-ish" — a scintillating bop showcase for the three altos based on the chord changes to Parker's "Confirmation" — which did.

"I'm not so concerned about playing Bird's licks," Watson says. "I wanna play 'Bird-like,' you know, 'Bird-ish.' I'm 'Bird-ish,' I'm 'Trane-ish.' I like to take the spirit of what these men were doing and try to make it my own."

**"THERE WERE SOME EXCEPTIONAL PEOPLE, BUT THEY DIDN'T HAVE A LOT OF OPTIONS BECAUSE OF RACISM. ... SOMEBODY LIKE CHARLIE PARKER, IF HE DIDN'T PLAY MUSIC, WHAT WAS HE GOING TO BE DOING? DRIVING A TRUCK?" —VINCENT HERRING**

N

ot long before he died, Charlie Parker played a weeklong gig at The Tijuana, a nightclub in the heart of Baltimore's black nightlife district. A 14-year-old Gary Bartz, who lived right around the corner and whose dad also owned a jazz club, wasn't going to miss a chance to see his hero in person. "So I went around there every night, hoping that he would come out and that I would meet him," Bartz says, conversing by phone in December. "Because I had met Johnny Hodges, I met Eddie 'Lockjaw' Davis, I met Lou Donaldson. I met all these guys, because I would go around there to listen to them. I couldn't get in, but I could hear the music from standing outside, the same way Bird listened to Lester Young." With a chuckle he adds, "That's when you know it's serious."

In declining health, Bird never came out, preferring instead to stay in his dressing room at The Tijuana between sets. Bartz heard from Henry Baker, who had booked the gig, that Bird would return home to New York each night after the show and come back the following evening. And so Bartz never got to shake the hand of the man who had had such an enormous impact on his life.

Bird's music was what had inspired him to pick up the saxophone in the first place. At the age of 6, he heard a Charlie Parker record at his uncle's house and thought that it was the most beautiful music ever made. "I told my parents, 'I want to do that,'" Bartz remembers. "Whatever he was doing, that's what I wanted to do. When my parents would ask me what did I want for Christmas, I would say, 'I want a saxophone.' And it wasn't until I was 11 that I got one."

When he was in high school, Bartz began transcribing Parker's solos from 78s such as "Star Eyes" and "Au Privave." He credits the lyricism of Bird's playing with capturing his attention, more so than the frantic tempos and bebop freneticism that most listeners seize upon. "That's the virtuosity they're [reacting to]," Bartz says. "That has nothing to do with any kind of genre. Beethoven was a virtuoso. Mozart. They were virtuosos, and they were composers. And that's what I heard [with Bird]."

Bartz would go from the halls of Juilliard to the universities of Max Roach and Art Blakey, both of whom would talk about Bird. However, the jazz figure he really wanted to hear about from his elders was Lester Young, whose playing on tenor influenced Bird's playing on alto. "That was his man," he notes. "Consequently, I like to sound like a tenor, and I like alto players that sound like a tenor. And I like tenor players that sound like altos. Lester Young sounds like an alto, John Coltrane sounds like an alto. I thought the alto doesn't have the attitude that a tenor

has. A tenor has an attitude. So that's what I was going for. And I thought that Bird had an attitude, too; that's what struck me."

Bartz doesn't take the mythology surrounding Charlie Parker too seriously. He refuses to saddle him with responsibility for the musicians who started using heroin because Bird did. Just an excuse, he says. Drugs were prevalent and those who got hooked would have done so with or without Bird's example. Besides, he says, Bird vehemently discouraged younger musicians from using.

What's more, a spike in the arm was no likelier to make a musician sound like Bird than utilizing the same reed or mouthpiece he used. Bartz tells the story of how Benny Golson and John Coltrane went to hear Dizzy Gillespie's band in Philadelphia and were awestruck upon hearing Parker. "So they went backstage to meet him, and they walked him back to his hotel and carried his horn," he recounts. "And they were asking him questions: 'What kind of mouthpiece do you use? What kind of horn? What kind of reeds do you use?' Then, they didn't see each other for a while, and the next time they talked, they said, 'Well, you know, I've been using the mouthpiece and reed combination that Charlie Parker uses, but I still sound the same.'"

rowing up in Vallejo, California, Vincent Herring idolized Cannonball Adderley. Educators and peers were telling the young alto player to check out Charlie Parker, but he didn't understand the fuss. One of the primary reasons? He couldn't get hi-fidelity Bird records. "I would put on [an Adderley record] and it would sound great, and the [Bird record] would be *crrrhh*," he says during a phone interview in December, imitating the static that emerged from his speakers when playing an LP by the latter. Then, Verve issued a series of hi-fidelity Parker recordings, and Herring heard the music with new ears. "It was a tremendous, life-changing experience," he says.

Herring started out playing tenor at age 11, because that's what was available in his school's band. He coveted a high-end Selmer Mark VI, although the instrument was out of his family's price range. Then, serendipity struck. "My mom got hammered one night and just decided she would give me the money to get one," he says. "And I did! And the next day she

## "I'M 'BIRD-ISH,' I'M 'TRANE-ISH.' I LIKE TO TAKE THE SPIRIT OF WHAT THESE MEN WERE DOING AND TRY TO MAKE IT MY OWN." —BOBBY WATSON

said, 'Boy, you still have that money?' And I was like, 'No, I bought the horn.' And it was an alto because that was the only one they had in the store. So it wasn't my love of the alto, it was literally that was what was in the store. And that's the horn that I bought and the one that I stuck with because I really love it. And it seems to be central to my voice."

He would hone that voice at California State University, Chico, then with the Jazz Knights at West Point Military Academy, then at Long Island University. From there, his learning took place on bandstands with jazz greats including Lionel Hampton, Dizzy Gillespie, Art Blakey and, perhaps most importantly, Nat Adderley, the cornet-playing composer and brother of Cannonball. Adderley would talk to him about Bird, and provide insights into the era in which they came up. "We used to have discussions on learning jazz today, versus the way he and Cannonball grew up learning jazz," Herring says. "And he was just amazed that it was embraced at all the universities and the development of Lincoln Center and those things. To Nat, that was incredible."

Jazz, while part of mainstream pop culture in the '40s and '50s, was not generally seen as high art. Bebop innovators were frequently reduced to punchlines, their style of dress and hipster lingo parodied by comedians and exploited by Madison Avenue. Racial discrimination played a major role, limiting opportunities for intelligent, creative individuals such as Parker and the Adderleys. "There were some exceptional people, but they didn't have a lot of options because of racism," Herring says. "And they had a lot of things to overcome, including Bird's addictions. Somebody like Charlie Parker, if he didn't play music, what was he going to be doing? Driving a truck?"

Herring relays an anecdote about how a classmate of his children displayed an unusual gift for numbers, multiplying and dividing dizzying sums in his head. When Herring commented on the child's genius, the math teacher checked his enthusiasm by saying that a certain percentage of the population was capable of similar feats; what truly marks a genius is imagination. "And so what's special about Charlie Parker, I dare say, is not his virtuosity, because the world has caught up," Herring says. "It's that he took an existing music and vocabulary and changed all of it, changed the direction of it. That's why he's still relevant today — the imagination. To do what he did with those 12 notes and his imagination, that's incredible." ■



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# Bird Songs

A GUIDE TO THE BEST OF  
CHARLIE PARKER'S RECORDINGS.

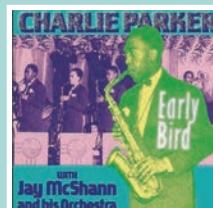
BY NEIL TESSER

# JAZZ

part from a trove of bootlegged live performances, Parker made virtually all of his recordings for only a few labels. But you won't find any of his contemporaneous albums on this list — because there weren't any.

Before the debut of the LP in 1948, the 78-RPM single ruled the roost. Jazz artists didn't enter the studio to create 40 minutes of music. They usually recorded four songs per session, each tune under three minutes, with no concern for how these might fit together. (All of Parker's seminal recordings belong to this group.) Collectors would store their 78s in hardbound books resembling photo albums, but with record sleeves instead of pages. If you filled one such book with Parker records, you had a Parker "album."

The first LPs gathered eight or 10 previously issued singles onto one platter (retaining the terminology) and today's CD anthologies continue in that vein. So choosing an anthology won't compromise authenticity; most of this music wasn't conceived as part of an "album" in the first place.



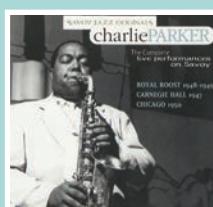
### EARLY BIRD (Stash)

Here are Parker's first recordings as a young star with Jay McShann's Kansas City orchestra. Take his 1940 solo on "Lady Be Good" — recorded as a 20-year-old — and run it half-speed; you'll hear the connection to his idol Lester Young writ large. His 1942 version of "Cherokee" heralds the future. The tracks sound their age, but you're not here for the audiophilia.



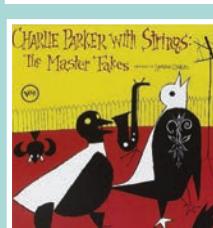
### BEST OF THE COMPLETE SAVOY & DIAL STUDIO RECORDINGS (Savoy)

Welcome to the birth of bop. From 1944-48, Parker made most of his recordings for these two labels, with such similarly hallowed fellow insurgents as Dizzy Gillespie, Max Roach, Duke Jordan and Miles Davis. These tracks include virtually every Parker composition you can name. It's the bebop canon.



### BEST OF THE COMPLETE LIVE PERFORMANCES ON SAVOY (Savoy)

On stage, Parker (like all musicians of the time) could escape the shackles of the three-minute single. From late 1948 to spring 1949, live broadcasts from the Royal Roost in New York brought his riveting extended solos to radio listeners, including a bootlegger named Boris Rose, who recorded them off the air for later release.



### CHARLIE PARKER WITH STRINGS: THE MASTER TAKES (Verve)

In 1949, Parker's quest for cultural "legitimacy" — at a time when opinion-makers equated that term with classical music — led him to record several tunes with orchestral accompaniment. The largely formulaic arrangements run the gamut from cringey to "not bad." But Parker's solos offer an improbable mixture of technical genius and pure melody, a combination that brought a new level of fame.





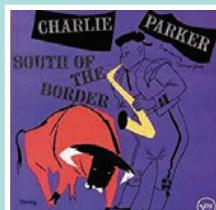
## BIRD AND DIZ (Verve)

This 1950 reunion marks the only record featuring the triumvirate of bop's inventors: Parker, Gillespie and pianist Thelonious Monk, along with Curly Russell on bass. (The addition of big-band swinger Buddy Rich on drums remains controversial to this day.) They recorded only six tracks, all classics; this disc fills out the time with alternate takes and breakdowns.



## BIG BAND (Verve)

After the commercial success of the strings sessions, Parker and his producer Norman Granz hungered for a more aesthetically rewarding set of arrangements. In 1952, this led to eight solid, swingingly played big-band charts over which Bird could soar. Rounding out this set are the only three tracks Parker recorded with the legendary arranger Gil Evans — with vocal choir, to boot.



## SOUTH OF THE BORDER (Verve)

Dizzy Gillespie added Latin rhythms to the bop repertoire, but Parker also embraced that influence on occasion. The first came as guest soloist with Machito and his Afro-Cuban Orchestra in the winter of 1948-49 (a collaboration he reprised three years later); Bird later led two sessions featuring two Cuban percussionists. They're all in this collection, originally titled *Fiesta* when issued on LP.



## JAZZ AT MASSEY HALL (OJC)

Recorded in performance (Toronto, 1953) this set was once nicknamed *The Greatest Jazz Concert Ever*, and you can appreciate the hyperbole. It brought together four original architects of bebop — Parker, Gillespie, Roach and pianist Bud Powell — in a quintet organized by bassist Charles Mingus, who first released it on his own short-lived label. How's the music? Read those names again.



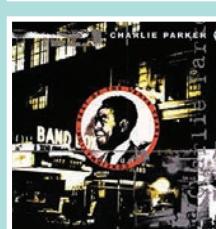
## WASHINGTON CONCERTS (Blue Note)

Stories are legion about Parker's ability to jump into an unfamiliar situation and perform as if he'd rehearsed for weeks. Eight tracks here provide the proof, as Parker guest-starred with an excellent big band in the nation's capital, producing one jaw-dropping solo after another — despite having never seen or played the arrangements. Several small-group tracks round out the disc (now available only on used vinyl or streaming).



## BIRD AT THE HIGH-HAT (Blue Note)

Tail feathers: Parker was recorded on only five instances following the 1954 live broadcast that closes this album. (Bonus: Bird speaks! — with famed disc jockey Symphony Sid Torin — between tunes.) Backed by the house band at the Hi-Hat in Boston, Parker sounds almost as strong as ever; 14 months later, he was gone.



Also... The double-CD *Confirmation: Best of the Verve Years* contains several tunes from each of the Verve discs (and others) mentioned above. And if you want just one starter set covering Bird's entire career, the omnibus *Yardbird Suite* (Rhino) will do the trick. ■

# BIRD LOVERS

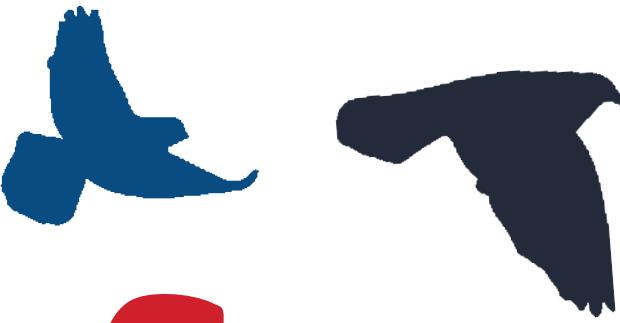


FROM 1941, WHEN CHARLIE PARKER'S FIRST COMMERCIAL RECORDINGS ("HOOTIE BLUES" AND "JUMPIN' THE BLUES," WITH THE JAY MCSHANN ORCHESTRA) DROPPED ON DECCA RECORDS, HIS AESTHETIC DECISIONS AND VIRTUOSO FLAIR MOVED THE COLLECTIVE SENSIBILITY OF JAZZ IN A NEW DIRECTION. AND, TO PARAPHRASE THE MANTRA THAT CROPPED UP AFTER PARKER DIED IN MARCH 1955, BIRD STILL LIVES. TO ILLUMINATE THE DEGREE TO WHICH HE CONTINUES TO INFLUENCE AND INSPIRE, WE ASKED SIX ELITE JAZZ ARTISTS TO SHARE THEIR THOUGHTS ABOUT PARKER. THROUGH THEIR WORK, ON AND OFF THE BANDSTAND (EACH OF THE RESPONDENTS TEACHES), BIRD'S NOTES AND TONES WILL GO ON LIVING THROUGH THE 21ST CENTURY AND, PERHAPS, BEYOND.

BY TED PANKEN







# STEVE COLEMAN

*It is the signal achievement of alto saxophonist-composer Steve Coleman, 63, to have dissected rhythmic, tuning and harmonic systems from various non-Western and ancient Mediterranean cultures, and integrate them into a cohesive weave that refracts his own experiences and cultural roots. Post-Boomers like Vijay Iyer, Ravi Coltrane, Rudresh Mahanthappa, Miguel Zenón and Dafnis Prieto have drawn upon Coleman's investigations — documented over the past quarter-century on close to 30 recordings and elaborated upon in numerous workshops and residencies — in constructing their own hybrid tonal identities.*

More than Bird's tunes, I'm into his playing — though I like his tunes, don't get me wrong. I tend to like the rarer tunes more — "She Rote" and "Ko-Ko," things people don't play so much. I thought his band had the perfect balance when Miles and Max Roach were in it. I've tried to emulate how they played together without emulating the music. So my Five Elements group is really based on Bird's band. To me, Charlie Parker is a rhythmic player; my father used to say, "It sounds like he has a drum in his horn," and that's the perfect description. If you take away the notes and just sing the rhythm,

he's still interesting. I can go [sings pattern of "Moose the Mooche"], and you know it's "Moose the Mooche" without singing a note. But I see melody and rhythm as the same thing, and I also think of Bird as a melodic genius, in the notes he chose and where they led to.

Von Freeman used to say that his goal was to play like he talked, and Chan Parker once said that Bird said that all the time. Most people today play what I call run-on sentences, the way auctioneers sound, running everything together; but they played the natural cadences and flow of talking, of conversation. Bird had what I call a wide style, with so many elements. Cats come out of him and latch onto different things, so they don't sound anything like each other. I hear this speech-rhythmic thing, while some people I talk to don't hear that at all. Ornette Coleman had part of that speech thing, too. I feel he listened to those very early Bird-and-Miles records, which you can definitely hear Don Cherry coming out of, but he didn't live there or dive into the details; he just got the shape, and then went in his direction. He sparked a whole group of things.

Sonny Rollins and Coltrane both come out of different aspects of Bird. Bird was very intuitive and very precise at the same time. Trane took the precision part and got the intuitive part later. Sonny took the intuitive part; of course he was also very precise. Trane comes more out of Bird's mathematical side, while Sonny comes out of what I call the "trickster" side, incorporating quotes and little tricks with the rhythms, twisting the beat around.

**"TO ME, CHARLIE PARKER IS A RHYTHMIC PLAYER; MY FATHER USED TO SAY, 'IT SOUNDS LIKE HE HAS A DRUM IN HIS HORN,' AND THAT'S THE PERFECT DESCRIPTION."**



# JOE LOVANO

*"I've always lived in different camps of music," says saxophonist Joe Lovano, 67. "That means to be very free with inside approaches and to be really in there on freer music — what they call 'outside.'" Lovano has embodied this aesthetic self-description since his formative years in Cleveland, Ohio, never more formidably than on the 2011 Parker homage, *Bird Songs* (Blue Note), with the still extant group Us Five, which will tour with Bird's repertoire during 2020.*

I think Charlie Parker's impact is in the flowing way that he played, the total organic expression of constant free-flowing ideas. His sound was all about what he was trying to express; his tone captures you within the ideas that he's expressing. When I listen to Bird, he takes me with him, every phrase. I think we've all learned from the way he swung and felt the music and expressed his feelings; he impacted all the instrumentalists who were on the scene with him and afterwards. But I don't hear it as much in a lot of young cats today, who haven't listened to him in depth and really felt all the songs that he knew and loved to play. Every song you ever heard on any recording of his was something that he loved to play. Sinatra touches a wide scope of all kinds of folks, because he's speaking to you and he's speaking the truth, the way he's feeling it. Charlie Parker had that, for sure. The swinging feeling and the pronunciation of his notes, like words, is incredible. It's just a natural thing.

Bird's technique around the horn was astonishing. He had amazing ears, and he just knew music. He was in all 12 keys all the time; whatever key he was in, he knew all these things in any key, expressing himself throughout the instrument and not as a technical exercise. He had the most amazing recall as far as melodies and tunes, and they would all come out in such a natural way. He always created melodies and he spoke those melodies with love. That was how he lived. That's how he influenced everyone. He taught a lot of people how to play — drummers, piano players, bass players. The melodic phrasing of some of Bird's tunes taught me how to play the drums. Trying to play "Confirmation" on the snare drum and the bass drum, and moving that melody around with the cymbals and the hi-hat and the whole thing. I was trying to learn a language on the saxophone, and then having it in my head and memorizing it and speaking that on the drums taught me everything, man.

**"HE ALWAYS CREATED MELODIES AND HE SPOKE THOSE MELODIES WITH LOVE. THAT WAS HOW HE LIVED. THAT'S HOW HE INFLUENCED EVERYONE."**

# RUDRESH MAHANTHAPPA

*"What I do is all the same material as Charlie Parker, just rearranged a little — a different perspective,"* alto saxophonist Rudresh Mahanthappa told me in 2010. A multiple "Best Alto Saxophonist" poll-winner during the 2010s, and currently the Anthony H. P. Lee '79 Director of Jazz at Princeton University, Mahanthappa, 48, has been a force in the international jazz arena since the turn of the century. From his initial duo and quartet recordings with Vijay Iyer through his 2015 Charlie Parker homage, *Bird Calls* [ACT], Mahanthappa has developed tuneful, compelling ways to remap and recontextualize the tunings and rhythms of South Indian Carnatic music within a Western jazz setting.

In the last 10-15 years, more attention than ever is being paid to rhythm, and a lot of that can be traced back to Charlie Parker. It's the idea of not only rhythmic fluidity, but rhythmic variety. For me, that goes hand in hand with things that sound like speaking, like somebody actually telling you something when he takes a solo. Hearing Bird was my first experience like that. His playing has the flow and variety and nuance of beautifully constructed yet spontaneous speech. I think we've all experienced somebody who speaks very well, even in off-the-cuff situations. Bird always carried that spirit in an exemplary way. For me, everybody should know four or five Bird solos. He's foundational. If you're playing jazz, it's "Mary Had A Little Lamb." There's a lot of talk about innovation in the jazz world, but the reality is that it's very hard to actually create something truly new — and very hard to create something not somehow related to Charlie Parker.

On the *Bird Calls* album, one thing I did with his solo on "Dexterity" was use only its rhythm and change all the notes. It has a very contemporary rhythmic content and contour. Some harmonic things he did are as advanced as anything happening today. For example, the head of "Donna Lee," is tagged to a particular era, but parts of its melody sound as modern as any 20th- or 21st-century classical music, as modern as anything that Steve Coleman or Evan Parker plays. I never feel obligated to play like Bird, to try to play bop when I'm playing one of those tunes with my band. I feel like there's so much material in there that lends itself to more modern playing.

"Red Cross" was the first Bird tune I ever learned, probably when I was 12. It immediately spoke to me. The pure virtuosity bowled me over; he was playing the shit out of the saxophone. But also this joy, this humor coming out of his horn — the flexibility and flow, going from the low part of the horn to the high part with total ease. I hadn't heard anything like it. It always made me happy, and it had this charisma. I couldn't stop listening to it. It made me want to play, and it made me want to practice. There are people who play the saxophone as well as Charlie Parker, but no one plays it better.



**"THERE'S A LOT OF TALK ABOUT INNOVATION IN THE JAZZ WORLD, BUT THE REALITY IS THAT IT'S VERY HARD TO ACTUALLY CREATE SOMETHING TRULY NEW — AND VERY HARD TO CREATE SOMETHING NOT SOMEHOW RELATED TO CHARLIE PARKER."**

# Sheila Jordan

*The heartbeat of bebop lives on in the singing of Sheila Jordan (née Sheila Jeannette Dawson), who took her surname in 1952 after marrying Duke Jordan — the pianist in Charlie Parker's band during 1947 and '48 — and kept it after their divorce 10 years later. Although Jordan tabled her career during the 1960s and '70s while holding a day job and raising her daughter, she would make up for lost time with a vengeance after returning to the scene. At 91, she sustains a robust global performing and teaching schedule.*

I first heard Charlie Parker my last year of high school, at Cass Tech in Detroit. One day I was

looking at the jukebox of the hamburger joint across the street, and I saw this listing of Charlie Parker and his Reboppers, "Now's the Time." I put my nickel in. Four notes. Blew my mind. I said, "Oh, my God, that's the music I'll dedicate my life to, whether I sing it or teach it or just support it." After that I met Tommy Flanagan, Kenny Burrell and Barry Harris, who I grew up with, and two guys who were singing Bird — Skeeter Spight and Leroi Mitchell. I'd been buying all these Bird records to learn these tunes, and I asked if I could sing with them. They took me in, and we became a trio. They called us Skeeter, Mitch and Jean; my middle name is Jeannette. Skeeter was the greatest scat singer I ever heard. Then Bird came to town to play the Graystone Ballroom, and [saxophonist] Billy Mitchell, who was living in Detroit then, introduced him to us. After the break, Bird played an incredible song — I can't remember which one — then he invited us up. We were terrified, but we sang. I think it was "Confirmation." Bird complimented us, then he looked at me and said, "Kid, you've got million-dollar ears."

After I moved to New York in 1951, I went to Birdland with a friend who was close to Bird, and we went backstage during the break. Bird said, "I know you. You're the kid with the million-dollar ears." Anyway, we got very close. I had a loft on 26th Street right off of 8th Avenue, where I let all the Detroiters stay when they came to town. I had



extra cots, and I had a bed for Bird. Maybe he'd have had a fight with his wife, and he'd come by and ask if he could rest. There was nothing romantic going on; he was like my big brother.

He was a sweet, giving human being. He had the cunning, baffling, powerful disease of drug addiction and alcohol. And he was a genius. He was it! It was the fierceness and heart and soul that he put into his music. He played tempos that were unheard of and never missed a note. Each solo he took was a song within itself. It was Charlie Parker who turned me on to Béla Bartók and Stravinsky. He was looking to move ahead.

**"HE WAS IT! IT WAS THE FIERCENESS AND HEART AND SOUL THAT HE PUT INTO HIS MUSIC. HE PLAYED TEMPOS THAT WERE UNHEARD OF AND NEVER MISSED A NOTE. EACH SOLO HE TOOK WAS A SONG WITHIN ITSELF."**



# CHARLES McPHERSON

*No jazz musician of the past 60 years has more palpably channeled the sound of Charlie Parker than alto saxophonist Charles McPherson, who turned 80 last July and recently recorded his 25th album as a leader. A San Diego resident for several decades, McPherson — who spent his teens in Detroit, and relocated to New York at 20, promptly establishing bona fides on consequential albums with Charles Mingus and Detroit mentor Barry Harris — spoke to JAZZIZ a few days after a four-night engagement at New York's Jazz Standard.*

Charlie Parker did so many things well that he's A-plus on any one of them you want to isolate. A lot of people are impressed with his technique when they first hear him; he plays a lot of notes and he's clean as a whistle. But other people have the technique to play a lot of notes — Don Byas, Earl Bostic, Johnny Hodges. Other people have the harmonic knowledge. Where Bird sticks out for me is his creative ability in phrasing and rhythm, which is very syncopated and present on almost any tune of

his. "Moose the Mooche" is a perfect example, the way he uses accents on the offbeat, and uses unexpected offbeats. A later tune, "She Rote," is very rhythmic, and so is "Bird Feathers." His music is much more rhythmical than what people did in the 1960s. He taught the world how to phrase. When you hear John Coltrane, Sonny Rollins or Clifford

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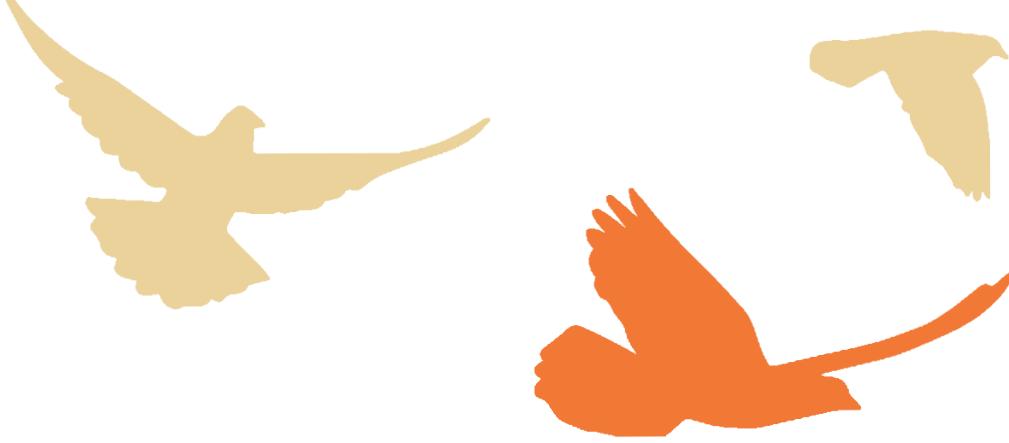
Brown, they all play eighth notes in the way that Charlie Parker instigated.

When I was 14, I heard Bird play "Tico-Tico" on the jukebox at a candy store. I got it immediately; something resonated right then and there. It was unlike anything I'd heard. I thought, "This guy makes more sense than anybody." It's the melodic, linear sense of logic, musical phrases that seamlessly connect to the next phrase, like sentences in a well-written paragraph; his ability to take the best four or five notes of the moment and find the right sequence and rhythmic configuration of those notes, and string them along for days. When you listen to his interviews, he speaks in long, perfectly connected sentences, with perfect grammar — very much like his music pattern. It's like Bach. Even though many notes are being played, everything fits like a glove, as though he'd thought about it for years and then wrote it out.

In February 1955, I saw Bird play a Saturday night dance. I remember looking at his eyes. To me, he looked like there was nothing that he didn't understand. He's in a ballroom, surrounded by hundreds of people, and he is acting no differently than he would if he was in his living room. He wasn't putting on a face. Without even trying, without being overbearing, his way of being radiated animal magnetism.







Tenor saxophone “colossus” Sonny Rollins, 89, is a peerless master of thematic improvisation with a walking-the-highwire attitude. Rollins refined that rarefied art through 65 years of sustained development along a path that included a 1953 session led by his good friend and frequent ’50s employer Miles Davis on which Rollins and Charlie Parker matched wits on tenor. In Bird’s manner, Rollins explains, “I always have the melody in my mind, so I can extemporize in any kind of crazy way, but it still contains something people can relate to.”

My first guy was Louis Jordan, my second guy was Coleman Hawkins, my third guy was Bird, my fourth guy was Lester Young, then my fifth guy was Don Byas. But although I certainly love and got a lot from all these other people, Bird’s improvisations were so salient that he was my main guy. They were so powerful and strong and unique for that time. He brought things beyond people like Benny Carter and Johnny Hodges, whose playing also stood out, because they were extemporizing, improvising, and it was all singular; it was all good. The bebop language had come to the fore, and, as Dizzy Gillespie said, Bird created it. He had his influences, but he came out with his own sound. It was his time to emerge and do his thing. Bird was the word. Everybody was trying to play like Charlie Parker.

I can certainly see Bird’s influence in my own development. In fact, when I was living in Chicago, a radio disk jockey named Daddy-O Daylie would refer to me as “the Bird of the tenors.” One thing I got from Bird was the way I use a lot of quotes. Miles Davis heard that aspect of Bird in me; that’s one reason why he loved me so. Probably a lot of other people,

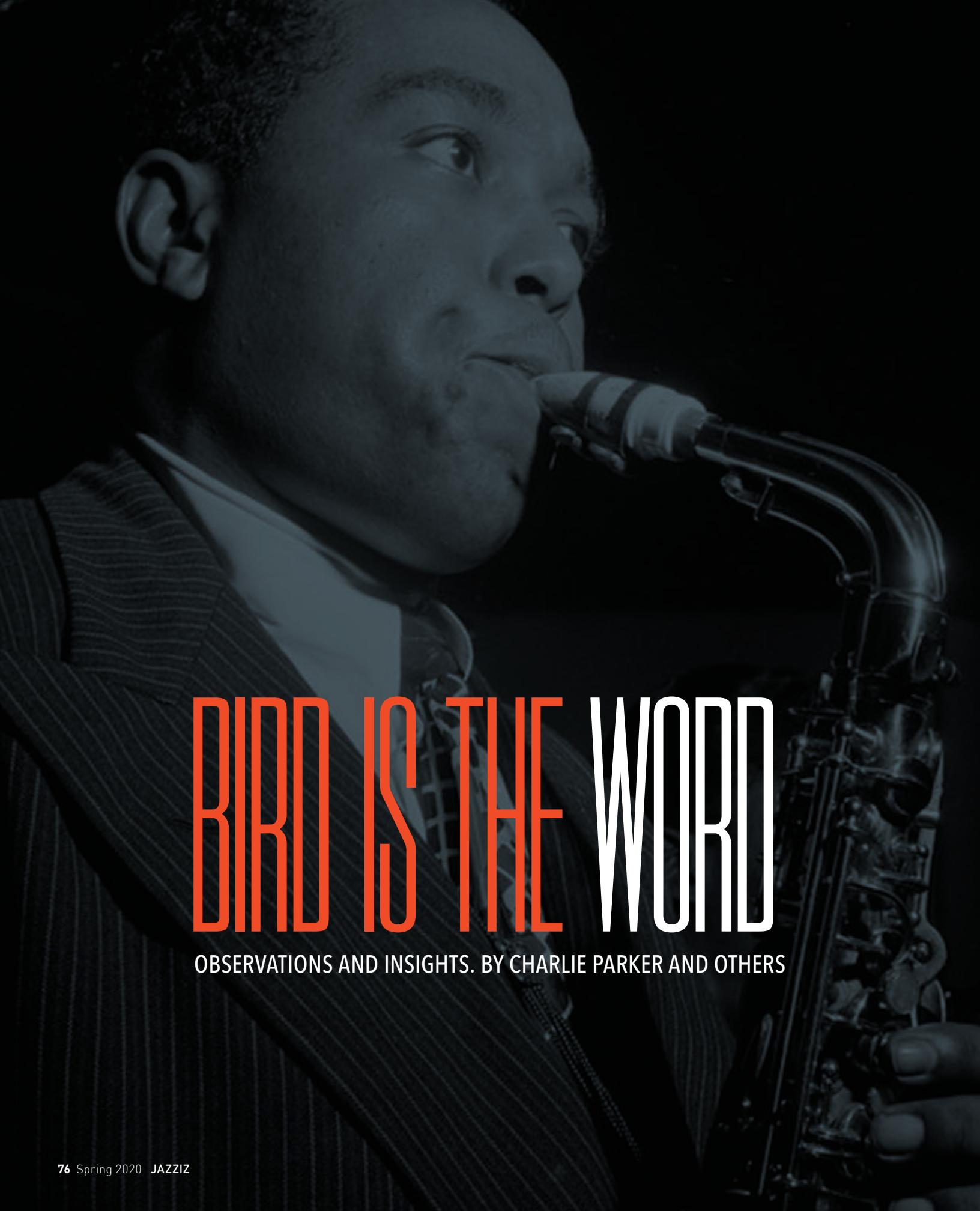
## “HE HAD HIS INFLUENCES, BUT HE CAME OUT WITH HIS OWN SOUND. IT WAS HIS TIME TO EMERGE AND DO HIS THING. BIRD WAS THE WORD.”

like Daddy-O Daylie, heard it also. One day in 1947 or 1948, I was at a music store on 48th Street, and Bird and Budd Johnson, the tenor player, were also there. Budd knew my reputation, and he told Charlie Parker, “I want you to hear this young guy play.” I played for Bird, and Bird said, “Hey man, that’s me!” So Bird felt that I was one of his protégés or acolytes.

One thing that made Bird special is that he represented a counter to music that just entertained, which was the

way much of jazz was looked at then, when there was so much racial and social injustice in the country. He stood very still when he played, as the so-called “Classical” artists would do. Then, too, the music he was playing was so advanced. For a lot of us, Bird represented the pattern of someone new who had the right social message for us young musicians. I was just one of a multitude that looked up to Bird as our god. He was our prophet. ■

SONNY  
ROLLINS



# BIRD IS THE WORD

OBSERVATIONS AND INSIGHTS. BY CHARLIE PARKER AND OTHERS



"I can play all I know in eight bars." —**CHARLIE PARKER**

"You could look at Bird's life and see just how much his music was connected to the way he lived. ... You just stood there with your mouth open and listened to him discuss books with somebody or philosophy or religion or science, things like that. Thorough. A little while later, you might see him over in a corner somewhere drinking wine out of a paper sack with some juicehead. Now that's what you hear when you listen to him play. He can reach the most intellectual and difficult levels of music, then he can turn around — now watch this — and play the most lowdown, funky blue you ever want to hear. That's a long road for somebody else, from that high intelligence all the way over to those blues, but for Charlie Parker it wasn't half a block; it was right next door." —**EARL COLEMAN**

"I remember one night I was jamming in a chili house on Seventh Avenue between 139th and 140th. It was December 1939. ... I'd been getting bored with the stereotyped changes (harmonies) that were being used all the time, and I kept thinking there's bound to be something else. I could hear it sometimes, but I couldn't play it. Well, that night I was working over "Cherokee," and, as I did, I found that by using the higher intervals of a chord as a melody line and backing them with appropriately related changes, I could play the thing I'd been hearing. I came alive." —**CHARLIE PARKER**

"If Parker was bebop's inspiration, the Pied Piper of modern jazz, Gillespie pulled the style into shape like a master craftsman. But if Gillespie was the showman who knew how to sell the new music to skeptics, Parker accrued the saintly aura of a martyr whose every solo demanded preservation and analysis, whose improvisations suggested an emotional density that best captured the agitated temper of the times." —**GARY GIDDINS**

"During 1945, we used to go down almost every night to catch Diz and Bird wherever they were playing. We felt that if we missed hearing them play, we were missing something important. Man, the shit they were playing and doing was going down so fast, you just had to be there in person to catch it." —**MILES DAVIS**

“When word got around where [Parker] was playing, they came to check him out. Motherfuckers peeked and backed right up. Those of us who were affected the strongest felt we’d be willing to do anything to warm ourselves by that fire, get some of that grease pumping through our veins. He fucked up all our minds. It was where the ultimate truth was.” —**HAMPTON HAWES**

“Bird himself was almost a god. People followed him around everywhere. He had an entourage. All kinds of women were around Bird, and big-time dope dealers and people giving him all kinds of gifts. Bird thought this was way it was supposed to be. So he just took and took. He began missing sets and whole gigs.” —**MILES DAVIS**

“Sensitive and thoroughly aware of the terrifying cost of his art and his public image, he had to bear not only the dismemberment occasioned by rival musicians who imitated every nuance of his style — often with far greater financial return — but the imitation of his every self-destructive excess of personal conduct by those who had in no sense earned the right of such license. Worse, it was these who formed his cult” —**RALPH ELLISON**

“Any musician who says he is playing better either on tea, the needle or when he is juiced is a plain, straight liar. When I get too much to drink, I can’t even finger well, let alone play decent ideas.” —**CHARLIE PARKER**

“I want to say something about Charlie Parker, his importance in the picture. As great as we all think Bud Powell is, where would he be without Bird? He’s the first one that should remember it — he himself told me that Bird showed him the way to a means of expression. George Shearing shows a good deal of personality, but it’s still a take-off on Parker. You take *Groovin’ High* or pick at random any five records and phrases. You’ll see that if Charlie Parker wanted to invoke plagiarism laws, he could sue almost anyone who’s made a record in the last 10 years. If I were Bird, I’d have all the best boppers in the country thrown into jail.” —**LENNIE TRISTANO, 1951**



"There was not a lot of rock 'n' roll in the house. Our parents didn't think it was very groovy, and I tend to agree with them. If you grew up with Charlie Parker, Bill Haley wasn't very hip." —**ELVIS COSTELLO**

"I don't care who likes it or buys it. Because if you use that criterion, Mozart would never have written Don Giovanni, Charlie Parker would have never played anything but swing music." —**CHARLIE PARKER**

"Like his spiritual brother Dylan Thomas, who died a year or so earlier, Parker was labyrinthine. He was a tragic figure who helplessly consumed himself, and at the same time he was a demon who presided gleefully over the wreckage of his life. He was an original and fertile musician who had reached the edge of self-parody. He was an irresistibly attractive man who bit almost every hand that fed him. He lived outside convention (he probably never voted or paid an income tax), yet, though totally apolitical, he presaged, in his drives and fierce independence, the coming of Malcolm X and Eldridge Cleaver. And he was, albeit succored by a cult, largely unknown during his life."

—**WHITNEY BALLIETT, FROM THE NEW YORKER, FEBRUARY 1976**

"Charlie Parker looked like Buddha. Charlie Parker, who recently died laughing at a juggler on TV after weeks of strain and sickness, was called the perfect musician. And his expression on his face was as calm, beautiful and profound as the image of the Buddha represented in the East — the lidded eyes, the expression that says: All is well. This is what Charlie Parker said when he played: All is well." —**JACK KEROUAC**

"Music is your own experience, your own thoughts, your wisdom. If you don't live it, it won't come out of your horn. They teach you there's a boundary line to music. But, man, there's no boundary line to art." —**CHARLIE PARKER** ■

**AUDITIONS**



# Mallets in Wonderland

VIBRAPHONIST LOLLY ALLEN SUSTAINS, AND EXTENDS, THE BUZZ OF WEST COAST ACCLAIM WITH HER NEW RELEASE.

BY JON GARELICK

**L**olly Allen's first audition as a jazz vibraphonist was not propitious. She was a high school student in upstate New York, attending a summer band camp run by the prestigious Eastman School of Music. For her placement audition, the call was for Thelonious Monk's "Straight, No Chaser." Allen recalls, "It did not sound good."

It wasn't just that she'd never played or even heard the Monk classic before. (She played it "correctly," she allows.) But as a mallet percussionist, the closest she'd

come to vibes was the xylophone and marimba. Not knowing any better, she played the entire solo piece with the pedal down. "I didn't know what else to do with it," she says. The result was cacophony. That said, the camp did place her in a jazz band. "It

wasn't the 'A' band, but once you're in the high school summer camp music program, they have to put you somewhere"

More important, though, was that Allen came back from camp inspired. "I said to my parents, 'I'm a vibraphone player now.'"

Years later, that identity is secure, as made clear on Allen's new release, *Coming Home* (OA2). The album not only shows off her virtuosity as a soloist and superb accompanist, but also as a composer and arranger with impeccable taste in standards. She tackles core bop from Dizzy Gillespie ("Bebop") and Tadd Dameron ("If You Could See Me Now"), as well as Afro-Cuban and Brazilian classics by Mario Bauza, Luiz Bonfá and Antonio Carlos Jobim, respectively. The opening track, Horace Silver's "The Hippest Cat in Hollywood," offers tribute to the Los Angeles scene that's now Allen's home base. "All the music I chose is

personal to me," she says. "It's from all the jazz greats who have influenced me, composers who have written beautiful music."

In such company, Allen's originals hold their own, with the samba of the title cut and the fleet "I Got Rhythm" changes of "Little Hummingbird" making a case for future standard status. The Dameron cut, as well as the Johnny Mandel classic "Emily," display Allen's warmth with a ballad — and her subtle mastery of that pesky sustain pedal — while a piece by her friend, veteran big-band trumpeter Carl Saunders, nods both to the vibraphonist ("Lolly's Folly") and the big-band tradition.

Arrangements extend from quintet (with L.A. vets like Saunders, pianist Tom Owens and drummer Paul Kreibich) to nonet. Young alto and tenor player Danny Janklow is exceptional throughout. "I wanted something like Cannonball [Adderley] meets the Shearing Quintet meets Jobim meets Afro-Cuban, with an arranging sensibility from Strayhorn and Ellington," Allen says.

It was Ellington who opened her to the possibilities of jazz. "Our high-school band played a lot of different kinds of music, but when a Duke Ellington chart hit the music stand, you knew it was going to be great music. It made everything else sound like crap." Allen's feeling for jazz was reinforced when she got to the New England Conservatory, where she applied her classical training to vibraphone studies, while also studying voice and improvisation. "I knew jazz was my language," she says.

Allen's only previous album as a leader, 2004's self-released *AllenHazFunk*, was made in Boston following her NEC days. In L.A., she's been a regular with Bill Cunliffe's big band, as well as playing with vibes legend Terry Gibbs, saxophonist Bob Mintzer and the late trumpeter Donald Byrd.

Allen isn't sure what her next project as a leader will be, but she expresses no doubt about her goals or her place in the music. "It's kind of cool to represent as a woman in jazz, especially on an instrument that isn't known for a lot of famous females," she says. "Making a small dent in jazz history — that's something I want to keep doing, progressing as a bandleader and improviser."



## George Burton

*Roma*

(self-released)

George Burton took his time before releasing his debut recording as a leader in 2016, choosing to work on his craft through supporting the likes of Joe Lovano, Michael Brecker and Meshell Ndegeocello. The result was a statement from a pianist and composer with a voice that seemed fully formed. That voice has only grown more self-assured since then, as proven by *Reciprocity*, his outstanding follow-up.

Like many of his contemporaries, Burton draws from a wide range of sources — the fact that he covers two pieces from Icelandic avant-rock band Sigur Rós provides a window into his thinking. The alt-rock influence is immediately evident on the opening track, “Gratitude,” on which Burton’s skittering ostinatos underpin a soaring melodic statement from the front line of soprano saxophonist Tim Warfield and alto saxophonist Chris Hemingway. But it quickly becomes clear that Burton is painting with a vast palette.

Burton is especially adept at creating a variety of moods and textures. “Tiki,” one of the Sigur Rós covers, opens with a ghostly prologue of minimalistic gestures from Burton on harmonium and guitarist Andy Bianco that drift in and out. When drummer Wayne Smith Jr. and bassist Pablo Menares join in, and Burton adds piano to the mix, the hallucinatory

effect remains as the rhythmic intensity builds. On “Finite Space,” Alexa Barchini’s overdubbed wordless vocals create a choral-like, haunting atmosphere atop Smith’s skittering rhythms and Burton’s deft pianism, while Burton’s elegant touch drives the gospel-infused “Third Prayer.” The title

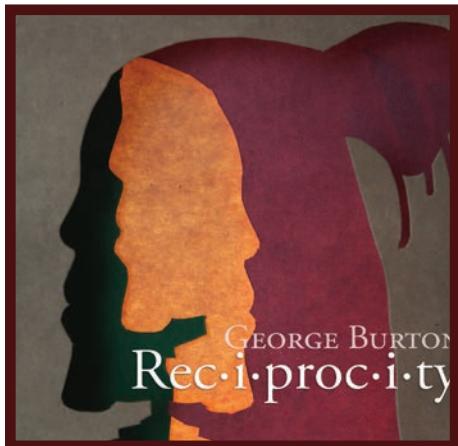
track, featuring a doleful melody that fails to catch a spark, is the only misfire. Sprinkled throughout the album is commentary from legendary Sun Ra Arkestra saxophonist Marshall Allen on the joys, responsibilities and dangers of making music. In Burton’s case, it’s clear that both exuberance and daring are in abundant supply.

— John Frederick Moore

## Kurt Elling featuring Danilo Pérez *Secrets Are the Best Stories*

(Edition)

Since the release of his 1995 debut recording, *Close Your Eyes*, vocalist and lyricist Kurt Elling has created as moving, compelling and artistically rich a body of work as anyone in jazz. And as evidenced by the passionate, compelling music and messages on *Secrets Are the Best Stories*, a thrilling collaboration with pianist Danilo Pérez, his energy and



inventiveness show no sign of flagging.

Elling's way with words tends to dominate many of the conversations about him, and that's understandable. He can certainly be blunt, as in "Song of the Rio Grande (for Oscar and Valeria Martinez-Ramirez)," in which he intones, "America, you've lost your heart/It's no excuse being scared or blind." But he's also capable of generating impressively evocative imagery, as in the opening lines of "Gratitude (for Robert Bly)": "Just as sunlight casts a shadow/The first shade of another day/Interrupted in his sleep/Still in half a dream."

At the same time, Elling's singing — which eschews ostentatious effects in favor of alternately tender or tempestuous interpretations that are always put at the service of the song — elevates every syllable. Moreover, his

creative generosity consistently inspires those with whom he partners, including Pérez, whose playing has seldom sounded more emotional.

Pérez's compositional skills are on full display throughout "Beloved (for Toni Morrison)," which encompasses tender chording and a driving power matched by bassist Clark Sommers, drummer Johnathan Blake and saxophonist Miguel Zenón. And the stamp the pianist puts on melodies penned by Jaco Pastorius ("A Certain Continuum"), Wayne Shorter ("Stays") and Silvio Rodríguez ("Rabo de Nube") are equally memorable.

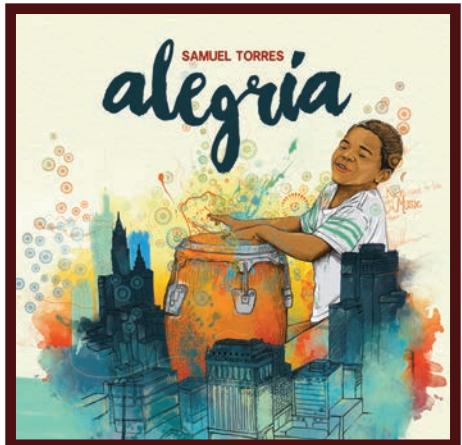
The same can be said of Elling. A quarter century down the line, he's no longer a secret. But the latest chapter of his story will leave listeners eager for the next one.

— Michael Roberts

#### Samuel Torres



Photo by Diego Almanza



#### Samuel Torres

##### *Alegria* (Blue Conga)

A release as daring and fulfilling as *Alegria*, the latest from Bogotá, Colombia, native Samuel Torres, is a rarity. The formula the percussionist, composer and arranger utilizes on this bracing collection of eight eclectic tracks results in a truly evolved variant of Latin jazz. Keys to the date's success are the leader's ingenious blending of disparate rhythms, and the presence of six first-call horn players who provide the orchestral heft and harmonic textures needed to approximate a big band. Savvy Latin jazz connoisseurs will have to reach back to a pair of largely forgotten 1970s recordings by the late Bobby Paunetto, vintage Irakere and Fort Apache sessions, or a small handful of other instances, to find examples of performances so audacious and compelling.

"Salsa, Jazz y Choke," the opening track, sets the tone via a rumbling cross-pollination of salsa and folkloric (*choke*) rhythms from Afro-Colombian enclaves on the country's Pacific coast, brazen horn ensembles, jaunty solos by trombonist Marshall Gilkes and pianist Luis Perdomo, and a gale-force barrage of Torres' congas. "The Strength to Love" sashays to quick-paced, African-root rhythms, jagged horn lines, and spirited solos by Perdomo on Fender Rhodes, tenor saxophonist Joel Frahm and the leader on talking drum. "Barretto Power," inspired

# GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

Creative jazz continues to thrive throughout Europe.

By Hrayr Attarian

With its deep African-American roots, jazz has branched out to the entire world. Historically, Europeans were the first to embrace this uniquely American export. Here are some of the best jazz albums the continent had to offer in 2019.

On *Psychosis* (Challenge), her fifth release, Italian saxophonist **Carla Marciano** and her quartet expressively interpret six of composer Bernard Herrmann's film scores, including three from iconic Hitchcock pictures. The group infuses these pieces with spontaneity and deconstructs them in a thrillingly original way.

The most representative track, "Theme From Psycho," opens with pianist Alessandro La Corte's angular improvisation. Bassist Aldo Vigorito bows the ominous, now universally recognized lines associated with the shower scene. The ensemble's tense and riotous performance of the main melody follows. Marciano takes center stage with an ardent and eloquent extemporization over drummer Gaetano Fasano's rumbling, expectant polyrhythms. As with all her oeuvre, Marciano has imbued this aptly cinematic homage with her signature passion and candor.

While Marciano's distinctive style is squarely in the mainstream, Hungarian reedman **Mihály Borbély** is a genre bender. On his enchanting *Grenadilla* (BMC), Borbély engages in pan-cultural experiments and showcases his skills on several woodwinds, some from his homeland's folk canon. On "Our Favorite Things," Borbély switches between the *dvojnice*'s resonance and the *tárogató*'s fiery wail as he quotes fragments of Rodgers and Hammerstein's "My Favorite Things." His inventive lines encompass Western angularity and Eastern fluidity with melancholic elegance. Pianist Áron Tálas' crystalline keys and drummer Hunor G. Szabó's galloping beats propel the tune. On the title track, Borbély sticks with the clarinet as he lets loose a warm and undulating song, to which bassist Balázs Horváth contributes a charmingly agile solo. With the masterful *Grenadilla*, Borbély creates a truly universal language that bridges gaps of both space and time.

Borbély's BMC label mate, the collaborative French trio **Deep Ford**, takes yet another creative approach. Its introspective explorations are quite cerebral yet pack a visceral punch. The trio's stimulating debut, *You May Cross Here*, brims with lively spontaneity within ethereal ambiences.



Pianist Benoit Delbecq's percussive chords and drummer Sylvain Darrifourcq's thumping beats join saxophonist Robin Fincker's staccato honks on the clamorous "Loop of Chicago." Melodic shards make up Delbecq's contemplative improvisation. Over the jagged cadence, Fincker constructs a provocative abstract image with his fervent, brassy tenor. The trio becomes more adventurous on the hypnotic "Inner Whatever." Darrifourcq's thunderous percussion drives Fincker and Delbecq's pensive duet, as prepared piano, zither and droning saxophone set an otherworldly mood. Heavily influenced by avant-garde jazz, Deep Ford brings a singularly French sophistication to extemporized music.



Another captivating trio debut, Icelandic guitarist **Mikael Máni**'s *Bobby* (Smekkleysa), is profoundly lyrical and introspective. Drawing inspiration from chess grandmaster Bobby Fischer's biography, Máni has crafted 10 interlinked tracks that form a remarkably cohesive and dynamic record.

Some are short and poetic, like the free-flowing "Lend Me Your Finger and I'll Take Your Whole Arm," while others are fully realized narratives, like the intricate and multilayered "Down in the Well." On the former, Máni, bassist Skúli Sverrisson and percussionist Magnús Trygvason Eliassen build a serene yet penetrating musical haiku with their sparse tones and thuds. On the latter, the trio's percussive refrains coalesce around Máni's poignant and graceful notes. The synergistic interchange within the band changes the mood from tender to anxious and the melody from darkly shimmering to clear and acerbic. On the brilliant *Bobby*, Máni exhibits maturity and a distinctive voice that belies his 24 years.

These four intriguing works, with their unique sounds and disparate origins, give further testament to jazz's lasting appeal in Europe and beyond.

by the late salsa and Latin jazz icon Ray Barretto, is rendered in boogaloo (Latin soul) fashion with hand clapping, an electric bass solo by Ruben Rodriguez and a furious baritone sax outing by Ivan Renta. The track pays homage to Edy Martinez, Torres' uncle and the noted pianist who worked with Barretto in the '70s. "Bolero Para Raquel," the date's most straightforward arrangement — albeit with a Dominican *bachata* approach to the rhythm — is a lovely ballad written for Torres' wife.

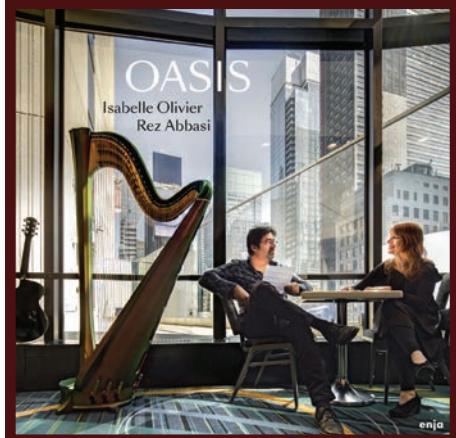
The only fault to be found with this invigorating session is that it ends all too soon. With luck, Torres is already at work on its successor.

— Mark Holston

## Rez Abbasi/Isabelle Olivier *OASIS*

(Enja/Yellowbird)

Outside of the jazz sphere, many listeners will decide whether or not they like a piece of music within the first 10 seconds, more or less. This is because the subtleties of production, instrumentation and arrangement create an aesthetic signature that is more immediate than qualities like form and harmony that emerge with time. Jazz musicians, on the other hand, tend to defy this vertical style of listening, valuing the personality of each instrumentalist more than the tool through which they convey it; the choice to perform as, say, a piano trio is a creative premise rather than a creative act.



Guitarist Rez Abbasi and French harpist Isabelle Olivier have convened with both a drummer and a tabla/*kanjira* (South Indian frame drum) player for a record that splits the difference. OASIS, an acronym for "Olivier Abbasi Sound in Sound," came about after the bandleaders met at a festival in 2018, establishing a chemistry that earned them a grant from the French American Cultural Exchange program. And while interpersonal resonance abounds within the four-piece ensemble, there is also a rare fixation on the sonic palette itself.

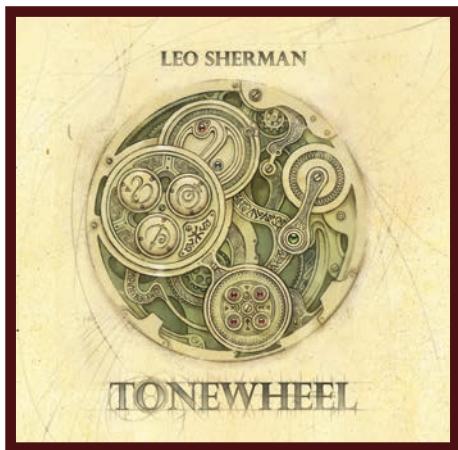
Throughout an array of fluttering grooves, harmonically corrupted rock vamps and abstract improvisational courtships, OASIS is defined by its use of empty space. Even on the album's most frenetic compositions, "Other Tones"

and "Stepping Stone," the singular lineup bristles with tactile intimacy. The metallic elements of the drum kit fill out the tabla's hooded patter just as the overtones glancing off of Abbasi's reverb-heavy acoustic guitar complement Olivier's warm voicings.

But it is the introduction of effects that allows the group to hit full stride with its textural alchemy. The ruminative interlude "Dodeca," along with the record's agitated highlight "Timeline," allude to psychedelia with digital delays and pitch-warp that tip the string instruments into bouts of chorus and distortion. More than a curious one-off, OASIS conjures a world worthy of further exploration.

— Asher Wolf





## Leo Sherman

### *Tonewheel*

(*Outside In Music*)

Leo Sherman's debut recording is an evocative collection of fresh originals that renders a sonic portrait of his life's pivotal moments. The Leningrad-born, New York City-based bassist, composer and newly minted bandleader showcases a wide-ranging palette of nuances in both trio and quintet settings, accompanied by a dynamic, forward-looking cast — tenor saxophonist Paul Jones, guitarist Alex Goodman, pianist Ben Winkelman and drummer Dan Pugach.

Sherman's nine tracks utilize a rich harmonic soundscape and a sophisticated approach to melody as intertwining strands with which to weave the stories that have informed his experiences — from childhood and his formative years in Baltimore to his current life as a jazz musician in NYC. The aptly titled opener, "In Flight," sets the course with the airy optimism of a new life. Universal themes of migration and the search for home fuel the track's steadily ascending melodies over Winkelman's rhythmic circularity on piano.

Sherman scales back to a piano trio on "Nocturne" and "Holdover," deftly anchoring the album midway with an "opposites attract" dichotomy. On the former, Winkelman, Sherman and Pugach commune within classical-inspired meanderings and unexpected tempo shifts, the drummer artfully embellishing the piece with poignant

percussive accents. The latter, a blistering vamp, swings with up-tempo exuberance. Jones' raw brilliance on tenor is fully displayed on "Aquí Me Quedo," a song by Chilean singer-songwriter Victor Jara. Goaded by drums, the saxophonist scrapes out a guttural timbral range, eliciting an unsettling tone that segues into subdued piano and rummaging bass. The title-track closer reaffirms the album's emphasis on each part's relationship to the whole and the in-between spaces that make that possible.

Sherman may have encapsulated his life thus far on a single album, but *Tonewheel* is permeated by the promise of what's to come.

— Lissette Corsa

## La Tanya Hall

### *Say Yes*

(Blue Canoe)

Having had an impressive career as a backup singer — with Harry Belafonte, Aretha Franklin and Steely Dan, among others — La Tanya Hall has stepped into the spotlight. In 2008, she recorded her debut album as a leader, *It's About Time. Say Yes* is her long overdue encore.

For this project, the singer is joined by pianist Andy Milne, bassist John Hebert and drummer Clarence Penn, with two appearances from trumpeter Michael Leonhart. Milne's modern and often-surprising arrangements lend new life to a set comprising mostly standards, inspiring Hall to be at her most adventurous.



## La Tanya Hall

Blessed with a beautiful voice, Hall has the emotional range of an opera singer along with the desire to stretch in spontaneous ways. Milne's frameworks challenge her on most of the selections. "All You Need To Say" (the vocalized version of Nat Adderley's "Say Yes") was given a classic rendition by Karrin Allyson and Nancy King a few years ago. This swinging version features Milne's modal-oriented piano, Leonhart's muted trumpet and Hall's sensual wordless vocalizing toward the song's conclusion. The singer displays the power of her instrument on the soulful (and partly out-of-tempo) ballad "Because I Told You So." And "Poor Butterfly" perfectly suits her voice; both its range and slow tempo allow her to be at her most emotional.

Of the other highlights, "Whisper Not" benefits from Milne's infectious rhythm, while "Softly As in a Morning Sunrise" presents an expressive vocal-bass duet. "Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye" receives a floating treatment, with implied rather than stated time, and "Jitterbug Waltz" is given a purposely ragged interpretation that gets a bit demented.

Finally commanding center stage, Hall displays plenty of potential to remain there.— Scott Yanow



## Pat Metheny *From This Place*

(Nonesuch)

Pat Metheny's music has always contained a certain spaciousness, perhaps hinting at his Midwestern origins. Same goes for his melodies and solos, which are frequently given to soaring over rhythm-section grooves that are sometimes tranquil, sometimes turbulent. All of those elements are present on "America Undefined," the 13-minute opening track on Metheny's latest release, *From This Place*. The guitarist and his most recent touring group — longtime drummer Antonio Sanchez, pianist Gwilym

Simcock and bassist Linda May Han Oh — are joined by the Hollywood Studio Symphony. Metheny's laid-back, searching lines are countered by fluttering piano and bass figures, all enhanced by strings before making way for piano and guitar improvisations and later opening up for grander orchestral gestures. The piece settles into a minor-toned chill-down section, strafed with various sound effects — chugging trains, bells, distant voices — and moves forward on pulsing bass before offering a furious crescendo and a final round of stray-sounds cacophony.

It's an audacious start to a collection of compositions that benefit from arrangements by Alan Broadbent and Gil Goldstein alternately. Metheny and his collaborators deploy a wide range of textures and colors. "You Are" opens with crystalline piano, which is joined by chiming guitar, the hypnotic rhythms building to great intensity before ending as it began. Oh's bluesy upright-bass figure lays the groundwork for "Same River," which features an extended synth-guitar outing. The jaunty "Pathmaker" offers some creative bars-trading with Sanchez. And the pretty "The Past in



"Us" has Metheny's nylon-string guitar sparring with the soulful ministrations of harmonica virtuoso Gregoire Maret. The disc closes with the gorgeous ballad "Love May Take a While."

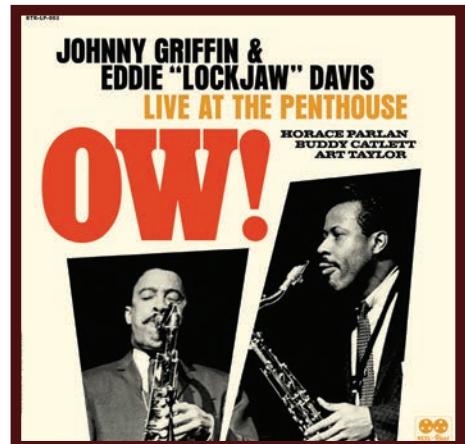
Metheny nods to our current political maelstrom with "From This Place," its melody written on the heels of the 2016 U.S. presidential election, with Meshell Ndegeocello singing lyrics written by her partner, Alison Riley. As the guitarist suggests in the liner notes, music can transcend even the most troubling circumstances. I'd contend that Metheny's work has just that power.

— Philip Booth

## Johnny Griffin and Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis *Owl Live at the Penthouse* (Reel to Real)

For pure hipness, Johnny Griffin and Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis stand among the jazz elite. They were elegant, earthy, brainy, virtuosic and hell-bent on a good time. This historic release, recorded live in Seattle in 1962, finds the tough tenors at their peak.

"Blues Up and Down" kicks off the proceedings with sizzling, up-tempo elan — it's hard bop at the speed of thought. Davis growls with a big, burly sound that's in a direct line of descent from Coleman Hawkins. Sometimes he plays with a sexy languid purr; other times he bites off the ends of his phrases with menacing abruptness or caroms off the beat with a slap-tongued staccato. Griffin is sleek and





Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis and Johnny Griffin

fast, his tone polished to a glossy finish. His baroque lines spill out of his horn in crazy somersaults and deep contours.

A great deal of the music — like "Blue Lou" and "Tickle Toe" — unfolds at similarly ridiculous tempos. But the two tenor masters never just run the changes; they play clear, cleanly articulated ideas and they never seem to break a sweat, no matter how fast they play. "Bahia," played at a more reasonable medium tempo, shows off Jaws' ability to build a solo using melodic development and space, all while escalating the tension and excitement. Griffin's solo ballad feature, "Sophisticated Lady," showcases the subtlety of his tone and his flair for dramatic pacing.

And the rhythm section is more than competent. Pianist Horace Parlan plays with bluesy authority, drummer Art Taylor maintains a crisp beat and bassist

Buddy Catlett keeps time with unerring note choices. Yet they're overshadowed by the ebullient co-leaders. Sophisticated, daring and audience-pleasing, this is what swagger sounds like.

— Ed Hazell

### Sunny Jain

### *Wild Wild East*

(Smithsonian Folkways)

With *Wild Wild East*, drummer Sunny Jain — who grew up the son of Indian immigrants in Rochester, New York — set out to make not just a collection of music, but a statement. And it's a grand one, involving clashing cultures, the South Asian diaspora, immigrant struggles and Jain's complex personal history.

While the 12 tracks inventively mash together Eastern and Western styles, *Wild Wild East* is often overstuffed with

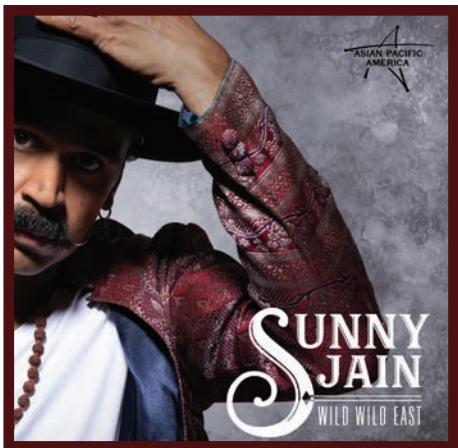
ideas and sounds, rendering much of it a listening endurance test. The album's first half, especially, is an onslaught of thick guitar washes, echo-drenched saxophones, chants and lyrics sung in the Urdu language, and strident drumming. It's more South Asian-influenced heavy rock than jazz. The record contains precious few actual solos.

In a helpful essay that opens a handsome 22-page booklet, Jain recalls getting asked as a child, "What tribe are you from?" This prompted him to explore a "Cowboys and Indians" theme, yielding tunes that merge Bollywood and Spaghetti Western melodies, finding more commonality than contrast. The rhythms on "Immigrant Warrior," "Aye Mere Dil Kahin Aur Chal" and the title track have a galloping quality that evokes America's Western frontier days.



Sunny Jain

# AUDITIONS



The album's second half takes a turn for the better when it becomes more contemplative, allowing the music to breathe and introducing Indian instruments such as *bansuri* flute (played beautifully by Sawan Benjamin) and *sarod*, a cousin to the sitar. Included in this segment, "Hai Apna Dil to Aawara," a loping American-style country tune, is sung in Urdu by female vocalist Ganavya. It's an odd outlier, but an oddly satisfying one.

The set amps back up with the closer, "Brooklyn Dhamal." The most successful up-tempo number on the album, its galloping beat drives a succinct guitar riff and ends in a manic crescendo of droning guitar smears. *Wild Wild East* becomes more coherent and palatable with repeated listens, but how well Jain's highly personal project translates to jazz aficionados is very much in question.

— Eric Snider

## Valery Ponomarev

### *Big Band Live — Our Father Who Art Blakey: The Centennial*

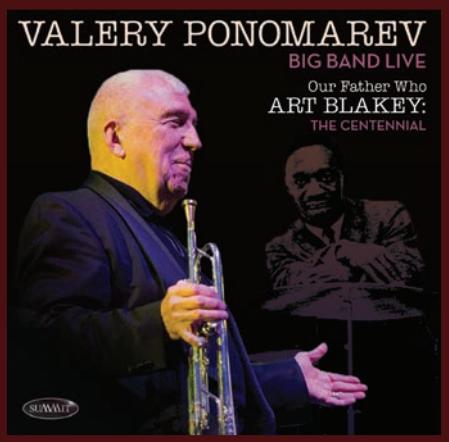
(Summit)

The 2019 centennial birthday of master drummer Art Blakey has inspired a number of tributes, and this album by trumpeter Valery Ponomarev ranks among the best for its ambition. A member of Blakey's Jazz Messengers from 1977 to 1980, Ponomarev previously recorded a live big-band session with a similar group in 2014. This session, performed in late January 2019 at Dizzy's

Club Coca-Cola, swings even harder.

After a very brief *Tonight Show*-like introduction, the band digs in more earnestly with "Tell It Like It Is." One of three Wayne Shorter originals, it features the first of several inspired solos by drummer Victor Jones, who anchors and spurs the group throughout. Next up, Benny Golson's "Are You Real?" showcases Ponomarev's brilliance as an arranger. Orchestrating for the sax section, he harmonizes the first two measures of Golson's original solo from 1958's *Moanin'*, then continues the arrangement with his own hip lines. Later in the tune, the trumpet section pays homage to Lee Morgan's solo from the same album. It's a tour de force of writing.

Ponomarev only solos twice himself, choosing instead to highlight a range of swinging musicians. Pianist Mamiko Watanabe is featured on six of the nine selections, shining brightest on "Hammer Head." Baritone saxophonist Anthony Nelson honks and hollers on "Caravan," which also includes a



glittering solo by the leader. On "Quick Silver," tenor saxophonist Peter Brainin gives a wink to "Lover Come Back to Me," the tune on which it's based. Trumpeter Antoine Drye sounds particularly crisp on Bud Powell's "Webb City," and the concert ends with a two-minute mashup of "Kalypso" and "The Theme," which functions a little like an after-dinner mint: not absolutely necessary, but lovely and refreshing.

— Sascha Feinstein

Valery Ponomarev



Photo by Nikolai Komissarov

# INDIE CULTURE

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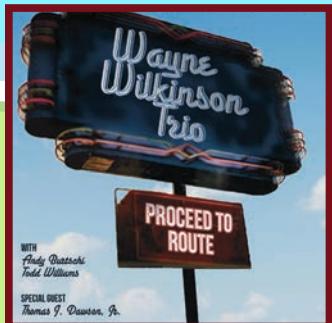


## Kerry Politzer

### *Diagonal: The Music of Durval Ferreira*

(Kerry Politzer Music)

Kerry Politzer is a Portland-based jazz pianist, composer and educator. Since 2013, she has served on the music faculty at Portland State University. In 2019, Kerry was awarded a Regional Arts and Culture Council Artistic Focus grant to explore the music of Brazilian composer Durval Ferreira. The project culminated in the August 2019 release of *Diagonal: The Music of Durval Ferreira*.



## Wayne Wilkinson Trio

### *Proceed To Route* (Wayne Wilkinson Music)

Guitarist Wayne Wilkinson's latest CD, *Proceed To Route*, is his eighth independent-label recording, and the first as the Wayne Wilkinson Trio. An inspired mix of straight-ahead and traditional jazz, American Songbook standards and Wilkinson's original compositions, the recording was under consideration for a Grammy Award in 2019.



## Gabriel Mark Hasselbach

### *MidCentury Modern Vol. 1 & 2* (Sassabrass)

Gabriel Mark Hasselbach is a lyrical trumpeter/flugelhornist who, in addition to having recorded 10 *Billboard* hits, has won Juno Awards and, in 2011, the Canadian "Album of the Year" and "Instrumentalist of the Year" awards. Equal parts Wynton Marsalis, Blue Mitchell and Rick Braun, he considers his *MidCentury Modern Vol. 1 & 2* series his most exciting and polished work to date.



## Brenda Earle Stokes

### *Solo Sessions, Vol. 1* (Allsheneeds Music)

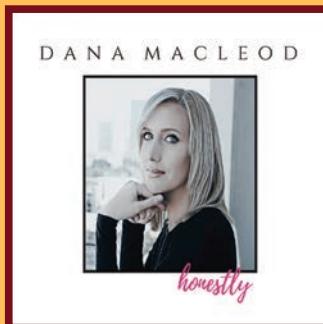
Canadian-born, New York-based Brenda Earle Stokes is that rare jazz artist who possesses a true command of both piano and voice. On her latest album, *Solo Sessions, Vol. 1*, she explores the infrequently recorded format of solo piano/voice, showcasing her mesmerizing fluidity as both singer and pianist.



## Lisa Addeo

### *Listen to This* (Lisa Addeo Music)

Lisa Addeo is a pianist, vocalist and composer whose music is in constant rotation on such programs as Music Choice's Smooth Jazz channel and Sirius XM's Siriusly Sinatra channel. On *Listen to This*, produced by chart-topping smooth-jazz guitarist Nils, she delivers a colorful mosaic of cool jazz grooves.



## Dana MacLeod

### *Honestly* (Dana MacLeod Music)

Dana MacLeod is a Canadian pianist and singer-songwriter currently living in Vancouver. *Honestly*, released in 2018, features a mix of popular songs and MacLeod's original compositions. Inspired by some of her favorite songwriters, the album includes such cover songs as Leonard Cohen's "First We Take Manhattan" and The Guess Who's "Undun."

# SOUNDBITES

By Eric Snider

**Russ Lossing Trio**

is a journey — to get lost in.

**Russ Lossing Trio*****Ways* (ezz-thetics/Hat Hut)**

With dynamics that range from whispery vto occasionally riotous, and emphasizing the space between the notes as much as the notes themselves, this wholly improvised program featuring the piano wizard's regular trio

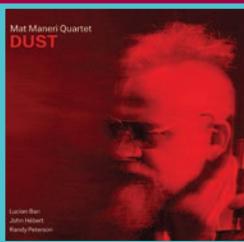
**Delfeayo Marsalis  
Uptown Jazz Orchestra*****Jazz Party* (Troubadour Jazz)**

An antidote to the lofty seriousness that marks most of today's jazz, this 11-song set delivers unpretentious, joyful music performed by trombonist Marsalis and a big band (and guest singers). Buoyant

swing, funk and New Orleans second-line grooves drive this horn-heavy bacchanal.

**Kandace Springs*****The Women Who Raised Me* (Blue Note)**

The velvet-voiced singer/keyboardist's third album is a small-group jazz effort consisting of homages to artists ranging from Norah Jones ("The Nearness of You") to Billie Holiday ("Strange Fruit") to Bonnie Raitt ("I Can't Make You Love Me"). Thoroughly satisfying, this is Springs' most mature release.

**Mat Maneri Quartet*****Dust* (Sunnyside)**

Maneri's use of dark-toned viola in this chamber-jazz project fits the mood, where the nine pieces, all but indistinguishable, move at such a glacial pace that the result is sheer dreariness. Music to draw the blinds and brood by.

**Franco Ambrosetti Quintet*****Long Waves* (Unit)**

At 76, the Swiss trumpeter/flugelhornist has retained his round, warm sound, which is on full display in this relaxed set of originals and standards ("Old Folks," "On Green Dolphin Street"), backed by an elite foursome that includes Jack DeJohnette and John Scofield.

**Andrea Brachfeld*****Brazilian Whispers* (Origin)**

There's comfort in flutist Brachfeld's loving embrace of samba and bossa nova in this tribute to Antonio Carlos Jobim. Although she doesn't dare so much as a single wayward note, her full-bodied, sonorous tone makes for a consistently pleasant listen.

**Emma Frank*****Come Back* (Justin Time)**

More folksy singer/songwriter than jazz chanteuse, Brooklyn-based Frank's collection of contemplative, down-tempo originals (and Wilco's "Either Way") showcases her gossamer voice, evoking equal parts vulnerability and assertiveness. Pianist Aaron Parks and a rhythm section provide unobtrusive support.

**Gordon Grdina's Nomad Trio*****Nomad* (Irabagast)**

Vancouver guitarist Grdina — working with drummer Jim Black and pianist Matt Mitchell, titans of New York City's "downtown" scene — wanders through a program of probing free-improvisation pieces that move from cacophonous to dirge-like. Grdina's spiky tone adds extra bite to a winning concept.



## Jonathan Kreisberg *Capturing Spirits — JKQ Live!*

(New for Now)

New York City-born guitarist Jonathan Kreisberg wowed South Florida audiences while attending the University of Miami from 1990 to 1994, simultaneously recording albums with his fusion trio and his progressive rock band. Since returning to New York after graduation and turning toward traditional jazz, his dozen releases include a 2003 trio disc with bassist Larry Grenadier and drummer Bill Stewart and a 2013 solo-guitar document. What Kreisberg had never done prior to the new *Capturing Spirits — JKQ Live!* was release a concert recording.

The guitarist, longtime drummer Colin Stranahan, pianist Martin Bejerano and bassist Matt Clohesy were recorded live in March 2019 at Jazz Schmiede in Düsseldorf, Germany. The fact that the bandmates didn't know they were being recorded until afterward contributes to the seven-song set's energy and honesty. Kreisberg's compositions are prominent, from the opening "The Lift," with its rhythmic shell game of uneven time signatures and impressive, crowd-pleasing solos by the bandleader and Bejerano, to the improvisational, accent-laden rave-up "Relativity."

The simpler, spacious ballad "Everything Needs Something" features a gorgeous solo by Clohesy; sparse, standout accompaniment by Stranahan and Bejerano; and effects by Kreisberg that hark back to his pre-trad career. And the guitarist's unaccompanied



**Jonathan Kreisberg**

intro on "Wild Animals We've Seen" spotlights his dexterity and rarefied technique, all leading to 11 minutes of risk-taking interplay that might've been impossible if the bandmates were looking at a recording light. The lone cover, a creative, heartfelt rendering of "Body and Soul," concludes the set and will leave this album's listeners wishing they'd been there.

— Bill Meredith

## Joe McCarthy and the New York Afro Bop Alliance Big Band *Upwards*

(Zoho)

Dizzy Gillespie's keen interest in melding 1940s bebop with Afro-Cuban music was spurred by his knowledge that swing (and jazz in general) would not have been possible without the ancient rhythms of Africa and its diaspora. Drummer Joe McCarthy's Afro Bop Alliance Big Band

# AUDITIONS

represents a direct lineage. Now in its 20th year, McCarthy has relocated his big band from D.C. to New York City, where a larger pool of players is poised to aggressively fuse international music with jazz, utilizing unlimited musical possibilities.

Afro Bop Alliance's powerhouse brass and sinewy saxophones make for an excellent session. At the heart of it all is the rhythm section, driven by McCarthy on drum set and further propelled by percussionist Samuel Torres, guitarist Vinny Valentino, pianist Manuel Valera and bassist Boris Kazlov. Duple- and triple-beat interplay is the essence of clave, the rhythmic pattern driving many types of Latin music. Afro Bop Alliance takes clave to the next level by having entire sections of songs seamlessly weave duple and triple meter. The results are exciting and highly complex.

Two stylized standards ("Afternoon in Paris," "Caravan") show that this big band can refresh old war horses. However, original compositions by band members display the depth of creativity available in the vast realm of contemporary Latin jazz. Valera's title track is a veritable tour de force, featuring Matt Hong's alto and an open section for drum set and percussion. Kozlov's "Nostalgia in Time" typifies the set with its atypical extended song form and Valentino's retro, 1970s-era, wah-wah guitar solo. The guitarist's "J Ben Jazz" fluctuates between 6/8 (triple) and 4/4 (duple) meters, creating ample intensity



Dopolarians: Chad Fowler, Kidd Jordan, William Parker, Kelley Hurt, Chris Parker and Alvin Fielder

while setting up Kozlov's fluid electric bass feature. "Isabelita" and "Positano," penned by Valera and Valentino respectively, are lyrical ballads that defy formulaic compositional devices in favor of total surprise.

Hats off to McCarthy and his Afro Bop Alliance Big Band for further proving that jazz will never be stymied as it encompasses numerous cultures in democratic fashion.

— James Rozzi

## Dopolarians

### Garden Party

(Mahakala Music)

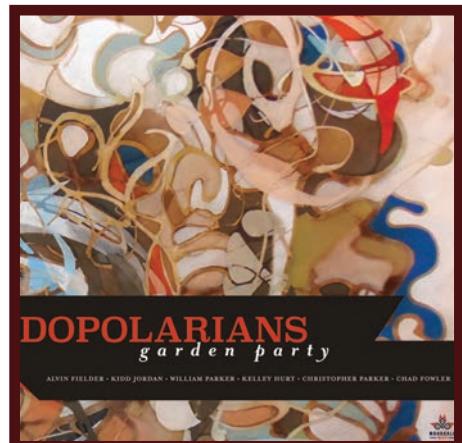
In an age of strictly defined stylistic directions in jazz, Dopolarians ventures into decidedly "inside-outside" territory. The innovative yet organic intergenerational group — bassist William Parker, tenor saxophonist Kidd Jordan, vocalist Kelley Hurt, drummer Alvin Fielder, pianist Chris Parker and alto saxophonist/saxello player Chad Fowler — is onto something fresh and contextually revitalizing.

*Garden Party*, Dopolarians' debut recording, succeeds in fulfilling a stated mission of creating a more rootsy, accessible avant-garde sound. They create new syntheses while also recalling the blending of free improv with sweet, simple melodic structures — think folk tunes and nursery rhymes from alternate

universes — and the infectious rhythmic elements found in seminal avant-garde statements by Ornette Coleman, Albert Ayler and the Art Ensemble of Chicago.

Despite prior musical alliances among the players — Jordan and Fielder had worked together for decades — this recording represents the first meeting of this aggregate, and the release is the first on Fowler's new Mahakala label. The recording date was also the last for revered veteran AACM elder Fielder, who died in January 2019, lending the effort a poignant tinge.

Variety enhances the musical map. "C Melody" begins with an open, ecstatic spirit and Fielder's rumbling toms, while "Dopolaria" shifts from a balladic luster to wilder turf, its dusky melody loosely wending throughout. "Father Dies; Son



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# AUDITIONS

Dies," featuring a stellar piano solo by Chris Parker, leans into bebop without fully committing, while "Guilty Happy" and the closing "Impromptu" oscillate between melodic buoyancy and blissful anarchy.

Midway through, vocalist Hurt's delightful title track, "Garden Party," nudges listeners into a weirdly enchanting detour, a giddy sung-spoken tale of backyard bunnies in which Beatrix Potter meets avant-jazz menageries of sounds and attitudes. Hurt's final chanted word, fittingly, is "outside," here loaded with double meaning.

— Josef Woodard

## The DIVA Jazz Orchestra

### DIVA + The Boys

(MCG Jazz)

Although the DIVA Jazz Orchestra only began recording for the MCG Jazz label in 2014, the hard-swinging all-female ensemble boasts a history that dates back nearly 30 years. The inspiration came from Stanley Kay, one-time manager and relief drummer for Buddy Rich, who was conducting a band featuring Sherrie Maricle on drums. Blown away by her skills, Kay began searching for other top female jazz players via nationwide auditions.

Celebrating its 25th anniversary with a performance for the Manchester Craftsman's Guild concert series, the big band — still helmed by Maricle and currently featuring 16 musicians — is all brassy glow, spirited boom and sensual seduction on its latest release, *DIVA +*



*The Boys*. The live showcase includes lushly arranged interpretations of tunes by Benny Goodman, Antonio Carlos Jobim and Ivan Lins, as well as a couple of originals, all of which seamlessly pair the orchestra with the notable "boys" of the title — clarinetist Ken Peplowski, trumpeter Claudio Roditi, trombonist Jay Ashby and guitarist Marty Ashby.

Roditi and Jay Ashby are not simply contributing key solos. As integral participants in the project, they bring original compositions to the party. Ashby's lighthearted, horn-fired "Deference to Diz" and Roditi's jaunty, sashaying "Piccolo Blues" breeze beautifully alongside the orchestra's spirited new spins of the classics.

With a title like *DIVA + The Boys*, this project could be seen as a girl-power-type novelty. Yet, it's so graciously and perfectly balanced, it's anything but. Rather, the album serves as a reminder that transcendent jazz has no gender. The concept may draw you in, but the musicianship and fun-filled arrangements are what will win you over.

— Jonathan Widran

## Lak Lan

### (Next Level)

"Sneha," a haunting ballad first recorded in Thailand in the mid-1960s, has become an iconic standard in that country and beyond. It occupies a pivotal spot right in the middle of Kengchakaj Kengkarnkja's *Lak Lan*. Sung without artifice by Sirintip Phasuk, the Thai lyrics convey the hesitation of one who recalls a heartbreak but dares to hope that love will return.

Bangkok-born pianist and composer Kengchakaj has set his arrangement of "Sneha" in a similar middle ground — between his native music and the jazz he has embraced as a New Yorker — by backing the melody with rubato piano rhythms out of Keith Jarrett's book. The entrance of drummer Nolan Byrd, and some measured reverb, create a sparse but sumptuous dreamscape that heightens the uncertainty depicted in the lyrics. It's

the perfect centerpiece for *Lak Lan* (the title, which translates into "paradox," embodies the push-pull of cultures that shape this music).

The album's syntheses of East and West provide a steady stream of eclectic delights. Kengchakaj composed all the other songs on *Lak Lan*, and he has cast his net wide in evoking a sense of artistic "in-between-ness." "Sneha" melts effortlessly into "Deceptive," which borrows from the billowy hip-hop of Robert Glasper; Pat Metheny's influence shows through in the melody and piano-guitar voicings on "What Called Home." The septet roars through the hard-bop melody of "Fa(c)t" but plays a different role on the fusion-energy "6849," which shimmers with dissonant chords before alto saxophonist Shai Golan's guttural, quasi-free solo. On several tunes, Phasuk becomes a pure orchestra voice, carrying a wordless lead or engaging in voluptuous three-part harmonies with the two saxophones.

Don't think that this constitutes a collection of knock-offs. Echoes of Kengchakaj's predecessors don't overshadow his own vision; they tie the whole project together, thanks to his ability to blend Thai tradition with undisputed jazz. You'll easily spot the Asian scales and rhythms, but Kengchakaj's great skill lies in the subtle balancing of these elements throughout the disc. Rather than traipse through a no-man's-land between East and West, Kengchakaj straddles the border on this beguiling debut.

— Neil Tesser





Kengchakaj

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# R.I.P., Jimmy Heath

By James Rozzi

When I discovered that saxophonist Jimmy Heath's daughter, Roslyn, was employed by the same hospital at which I volunteered, I brought her an armload of LPs for Jimmy to sign. "Would you mind asking your Dad to autograph these?" I asked. Also, "Do you think he might want to have lunch?"

"I'll ask him," Roslyn replied. The following week she handed over my stack of signed LPs and relayed, "My dad says ... 'cool.'"

So began my weekly visits to the Heath house in suburban Atlanta. As a fellow saxophonist, I soon became the sole local musician friend to an isolated jazz legend and his lovely wife, Mona — a woman of beauty, strength and dignity, whose love for family is rivaled only by her love of the arts, especially jazz. They met in 1959, the day Jimmy was released from a four-and-a-half-year prison sentence for heroin possession.

N.E.A. Jazz Master James Edward Heath was born in Philadelphia on October 25th, 1926, to a family immersed in music. His first gigs were with territory big bands. In 1946, he formed the Jimmy Heath Orchestra with fellow Philly resident John Coltrane playing second alto. A late 1940s sideman gig with bop trumpeter Howard McGhee found Heath playing New York's storied 52nd Street and traveling to Europe for the first of many times.

In 1949, Heath recorded with Dizzy Gillespie's big band, initiating a longstanding friendship with the trumpeter. "Dizzy was such a warm person," Heath recalled, "always willing to share everything he knew because he wanted the music to last."

During the early 1950s, Heath was widely admired as a player, composer and arranger. He recorded under Miles Davis' and J.J. Johnson's leadership, supplying "Gingerbread Boy" and "C.T.A.," both of which quickly became jazz standards. When Davis recorded the LP *Collector's Items* for Prestige, Miles stole credit for Heath's bop composition "The Serpent's Tooth." "Whenever I'd see Miles," Heath said, "I'd remind him about

that song, and he'd peel a few hundred dollars off a roll of bills he was carrying."

In 1959, Davis hired Heath to tour with his group. But what should have been the opportunity of a lifetime ended in disappointment. "We played L.A., Indiana, and Chicago," Heath said. "But I got called back to Philly because I was on parole. Playing with Miles would have boosted my career. I probably would have ended up recording on Blue Note."

Instead, Cannonball Adderley and Philly Joe Jones

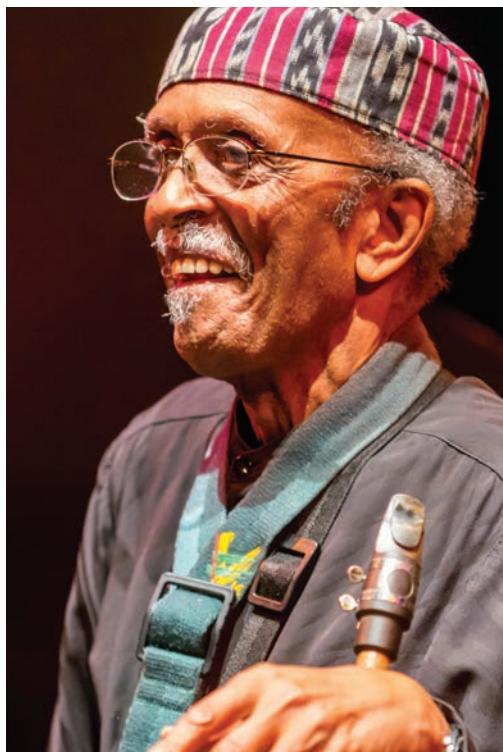
recommended him to Orrin Keepnews at Riverside Records. "They told Orrin, 'You need a Coltrane,'" Heath said. A string of excellent leader dates ensued, featuring Heath's rough-and-tumble tenor and lilting soprano. He composed excellent tunes and supplied superb arrangements for his own record dates as well as those of his labelmates.

Heath stayed busy throughout his career. As a professor at Queen's College, he influenced many lives. He released a wonderfully candid autobiography, *I Walked with Giants*. Periodically, he recorded and toured with his brothers, bassist Percy and drummer Tootie, in The Heath Brothers Band — a crowd-pleasing favorite for their swinging music and comedic banter. He performed in 42 countries.

As it turned out, Jimmy and I never ate lunch together. When I arrived at his house, he'd often be talking with Sonny Rollins on the phone. He'd tell Sonny, "James Rozzi is here!" — as though he somehow saw us as the Three Musketeers. Around

2 p.m., after spending the morning with me listening to albums or reharmonizing standards, he'd suddenly stand and shuffle to the kitchen, where he'd eat peanut butter crackers. At 5'3" and 98 pounds, he didn't seem to need much nutrition to maintain his high-energy level.

After battling prostate and bladder cancer for years, Jimmy died peacefully at home on January 19th, surrounded by his extended family. He was 93. ■



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