

# JAZZIZ

art for your ears

THE AGE OF

**BOSSA**

WHEN JAZZ PLUGGED IN



HAVE YOU EVER BEEN  
TOUCHED BY SOUND?

Introducing the **PULSE SOUNDBAR**.

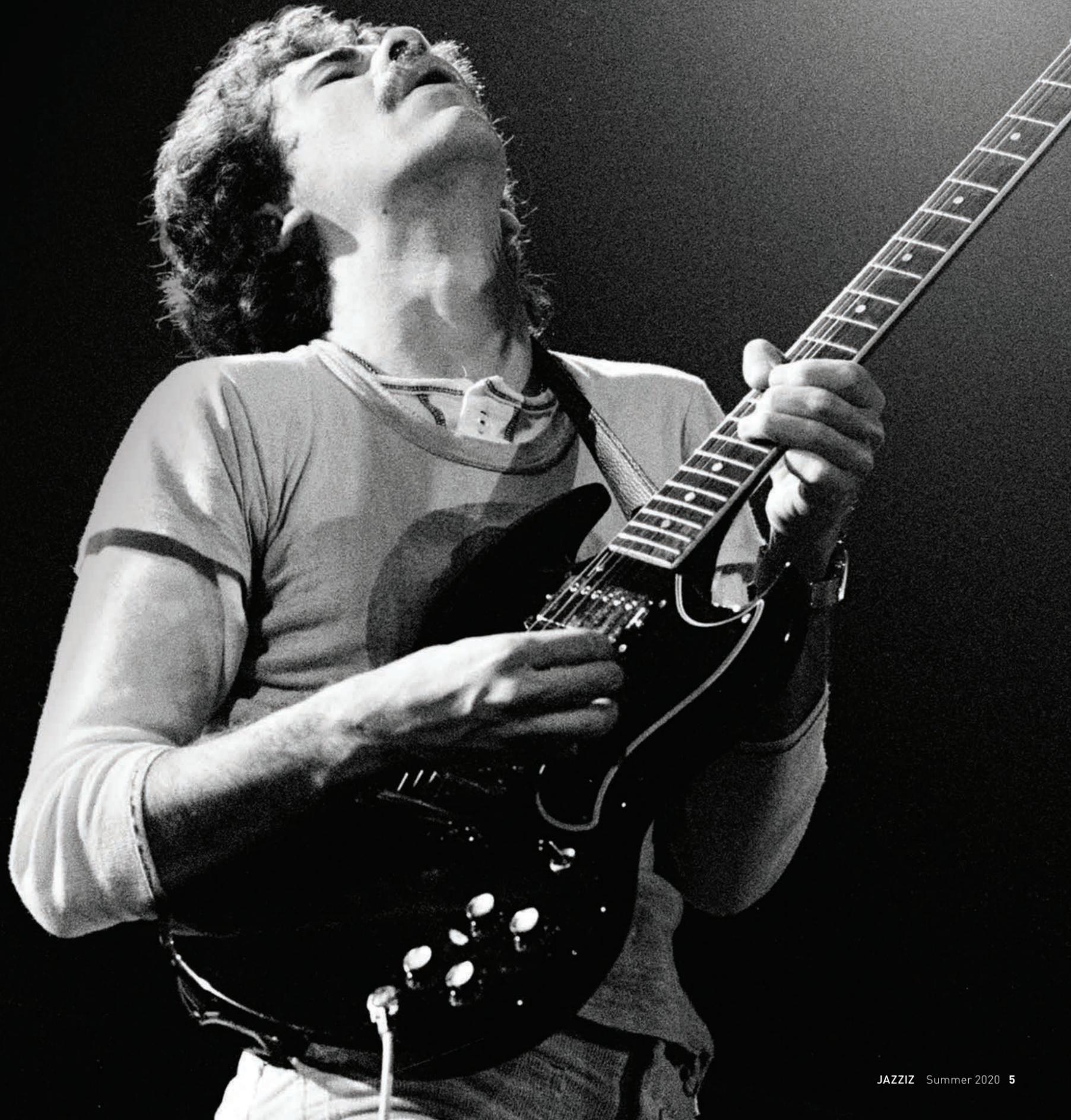
Discover a whole new world of sound at [bluesound.com/touchedbysound](https://bluesound.com/touchedbysound)



BLUESOUND

## STOLEN moment

*“We’re a culmination of everything that we’re listening to. Like Gregg Rolie listens to The Rolling Stones and The Beatles. And then you have Michael Shrieve, who listened to Coltrane and Miles, and I’m listening to the blues and Otis Rush. And when you churn it all together, it’s like making some kind of juice out of all the things that we love. [At Woodstock], when people in the audience heard us, you could just feel that humans respond to positive energy — and the band had a lot of energy.”* —Carlos Santana, discussing 1969’s Woodstock music festival on a “JAZZIZ Not What You Think” podcast.



e·a·r MUSIC  
proudly presents

"When the sublime simplicity of these historic songs meet with Al's richly harmonic inner ear and historical command of the guitar, the results are a complete surprise and delight."

STEVE VAI

"This is Al Di Meola showing what his imagination and unique one-of-a-kind style can do to some of the most legendary songs of our lives! Get this!"

STEVE LUKATHER

# Al Di Meola

## ACROSS THE UNIVERSE



### A tribute to THE BEATLES

by guitar virtuoso & GRAMMY award winner.

14 songs incl. timeless classics like "YESTERDAY", "HEY JUDE", "STRAWBERRY FIELDS FOREVER" & "HERE COMES THE SUN" on CD, LP and digital.

Watch Al Di Meola discuss the new album and hear him perform an excerpt at [JAZZIZ.COM/ACROSSTHEUNIVERSE](http://JAZZIZ.COM/ACROSSTHEUNIVERSE)

www.ear-music.net | f earmusicofficial | y earmusicofficial

e·a·r MUSIC

## Qobuz, the streaming music choice for discerning audiophiles



Our passion: all music.  
Our obsession: premium sound quality - CD and Hi-Res.  
Curation, digital booklets, exclusive articles.

One month free trial now at [Qobuz.com](http://Qobuz.com)

Compatible with: Control 4, Sonos, BluOS, Roon, Yamaha MusicCast, DTS Play-Fi, Chromecast, Airplay, Devialet, Audirvana, Bubble UPNP, Mconnect and many more.

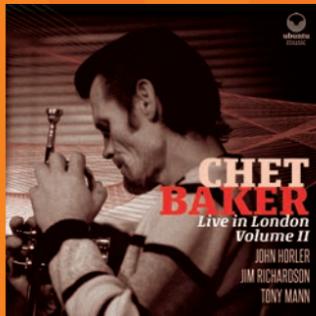


▶ We are the music lovers.

beautiful releases from ubuntu music



**ALINA BZHEZHINSKA**  
INSPIRATION  
★★★★★  
The Times



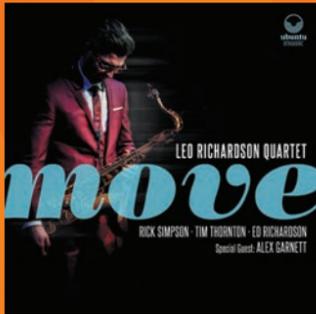
**CHET BAKER**  
LIVE IN LONDON VOLUME II  
"A revelation"  
DownBeat Magazine



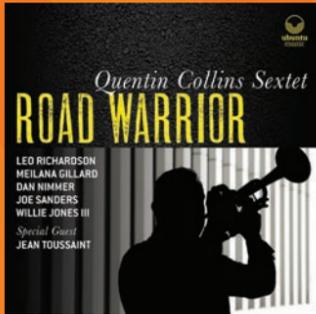
**CAMILLA GEORGE**  
THE PEOPLE COULD FLY  
"Girl with the Golden Touch"  
The Evening Standard



**GWEN & TIANA**  
AFRICAN TIME  
"The highest standard"  
Jazz Views



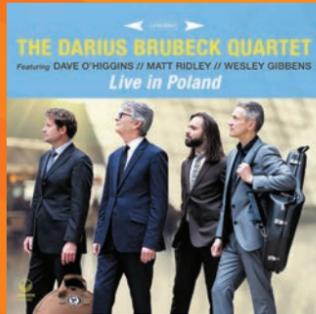
**LEO RICHARDSON**  
MOVE  
★★★★★  
BBC Music Magazine



**QUENTIN COLLINS SEXTET**  
ROAD WARRIOR  
★★★★★  
BBC Music Magazine



**NEW YORK ALL-STARS**  
LIVE ENCOUNTER  
★★★★★  
BBC Music Magazine



**DARIUS BRUBECK**  
LIVE IN POLAND  
"Standout performances"  
Jazzwise Magazine



**PAUL BOOTH**  
TRAVEL SKETCHES  
"Flawless as you would expect"  
Jazz Views



**JOHN LAW'S CONGREGATION**  
CONFIGURATION  
"Most imaginative"  
The Times



**JAY PHELPS**  
SOULENDR  
"Assured, clever, fluent"  
The Observer



**NOEMI NUTI**  
VENUS EYE  
★★★★★  
Kind of Jazz



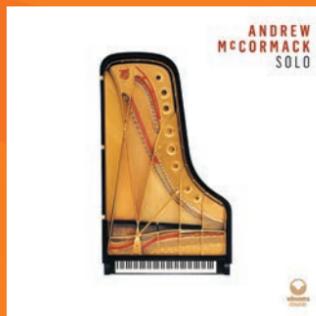
**MEZCLA**  
SHOOT THE MOON  
★★★★★  
The Scotsman



**GEORGE COLLIGAN TRIO**  
LIVE IN ARKLOW  
"Best kept secrets in jazz"  
All About Jazz



**JAMES COPUS**  
DUSK  
"Into the stratosphere"  
The Jazzman



**ANDREW McCORMACK**  
SOLO  
★★★★★  
BBC Music Magazine

roon

The ultimate player for music fanatics

## EXPAND YOUR MUSIC EXPERIENCE.

With Roon, you'll rediscover old favorites and find new music you love.

Explore the world of music as you listen, precisely tailored to your tastes.

Discover photos, bios, reviews, credits, lyrics, tour dates, and more...

Start with the music you know, and then let ROON connect it with the millions of high-resolution tracks available on TIDAL and QOBUZ.



Roon is all you need:

- Highest quality audio
- All your music sources in one place
- Your files tagged and connected with rich data
- Intelligent playback that makes the most of your gear
- Millions of playback setup possibilities
- An incredibly rich and dynamic user interface

EXCLUSIVE FOR  
JAZZIZ READERS  
1 MONTH FREE  
[roonlabs.com/jazziz](http://roonlabs.com/jazziz)



# JAZZIZ

TABLE OF CONTENTS, SUMMER 2020

## UPFRONT

- 12 Publisher's Letter**
- 16 Prelude**  
Drummer **Ted Poor** steps to the fore as a leader; on her latest project, **Sara Serpa** explores a dark chapter in Portuguese history; as he approaches 60, **Matthew Shipp** looks to go deeper; the **GroundUP Music Festival** thrives in Miami Beach; requisite **CTI All-Stars** and more.
- 26 JAZZIZ Discovery**  
"Summer Fusion"
- 40 Traditions**  
A new biography explores Tommy LiPuma's winning ways. By Bob Weinberg
- 42 Contempo**  
On *The Mirror*, Raul Midón considers matters great and small. By Jonathan Widran
- 44 Blu Notes**  
Maria Schneider takes on Google and YouTube. By Larry Blumenfeld

## FEATURES

- 46 When Worlds Collided**  
A brief history of "fusion." By Shaun Brady
- 52 The Fusion Moment**  
A conversation with Chick Corea. By Bill Milkowski
- 60 Essential Fusion**  
Ten albums that rocked jazz to its foundations. By Bob Weinberg
- 62 Party of Six**  
A half-dozen jazz musicians weigh in on old-school fusion. By Ted Panken

## AUDITIONS

- 82 Musical Oases**  
On *Last Desert*, Liberty Ellman colors and contours an evocative ensemble soundscape. By Jon Garelick
- 84** Reviews of albums by Omer Avital Qantar, Carla Bley/Andy Sheppard/Steve Swallow, Gregory Porter, Theo Hill, Lara Driscoll, Kassa Overall, Jen Allen, Joey Alexander, Ibrahim Ferrer, Eldar Djangirov, Paul Jones and others.
- 86 Out of Africa**  
African musicians blend jazz with its ancestral roots. By Josef Woodard
- 94 SoundBites**  
Brief reviews of eight new releases. By Eric Snider

## CODA

- 98 A Jazz Man Passes**  
By Wynton Marsalis

# JAZZIZ

www.jazziz.com

**Editor and Publisher** Michael Fagien  
**Publisher** Zakiya Fagien

**Managing Editor** David Pulizzi  
**Associate Editor** Robert Weinberg  
**Editor-at-Large** Larry Blumenfeld  
**Digital Content Editor** Brian Zimmerman  
**Online Editor** Matt Micucci  
**Audio Editor** Ian White

**Creative Director** Eric Beatty  
**Freelance Designer** Kelsey Morrison

**Live Media** Geoffrey Fagien

**Webmaster** Matt Pramschufer

**West Coast Ambassador** Léan Crowley

**Accountant** Karen Rosenfeld  
**Certified Public Accountant** Melamed & Karp

**CONTRIBUTORS:** Hrayr Attarian, Philip Booth, Shaun Brady, Lissette Corsa, John Diliberto, Ted Drozdowski, Enid Farber, Sascha Feinstein, Phil Freeman, Steve Futterman, Jon Garelick, 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

JAZZIZ USPS# 015486 ISSN 074-5885 is published (in print and delivered by mail) quarterly by JAZZIZ Publishing, LLC.

PO Box 880189 • Boca Raton, FL 33488

Subscription rates for one-year are:

- Digital Only: US - \$24.95 / Canadian - \$24.95 / Foreign - \$24.95
- Digital + Magazine: US - \$39.95 / Canadian - \$49.95 / Foreign - \$59.95
- Digital + Magazine + 2 CDs: US - \$69.95 / Canadian - \$79.95 / Foreign - \$89.95

Please allow 6 weeks for new subscriptions and address changes to take effect.

Periodicals postage paid at Boca Raton, FL and additional mailing offices.

U.S. Postmaster Send address changes to:

JAZZIZ Magazine, P.O. Box 397, Congers, NY 10920.

All contents copyright 2020 by JAZZIZ Publishing, LLC. All rights reserved.

JAZZIZ is a registered trademark of JAZZIZ Publishing, LLC.

Direct non-subscription correspondence to our Boca Raton office.

**Permissions:** Nothing can be reproduced in any manner without prior written permission of JAZZIZ Publishing, LLC. The North American edition of JAZZIZ is printed in the USA. Editorial and photographic contributions must be accompanied by return postage and will be handled with care. The publisher assumes no responsibility for the return postage or the safety of the artwork, photography, or and copyright purposes, subject to unrestricted right to edit and comment editorially. manuscripts. All rights in letters sent to JAZZIZ will be treated as unconditionally assigned for publication

GET IN TOUCH WITH JAZZIZ!

For all subscription inquiries - [customer@jazziz.com](mailto:customer@jazziz.com)

For customer service - [customer@jazziz.com](mailto:customer@jazziz.com)

For home office inquiries - [office@jazziz.com](mailto:office@jazziz.com)

For advertising inquiries - [advertising@jazziz.com](mailto:advertising@jazziz.com)

For editorial requests - [editorial@jazziz.com](mailto:editorial@jazziz.com)

# THE LATEST RELEASES

**ORRIN EVANS**  
AND THE CAPTAIN BLACK BIG BAND  
The Intangible Between

**BOBBY WATSON**  
Keepin' It Real

**WAYNE ESCOFFERY**  
The Humble Warrior

**HAROLD MABERN**  
Mabern Plays Mabern

**BOBBY WATSON**  
**VINCENT HERRING**  
**GARY BARTZ**  
Bird at 100

**NICHOLAS PAYTON**  
Relaxin' with Nick

**GEORGE COLEMAN**  
The Quartet

**JIMMY COBB**  
This I Dig of You

**SMOKE SESSIONS RECORDS**  
CDS, LPS AND DIGITAL FORMATS

www.SmokeSessionsRecords.com • www.Facebook.com/smokesessionsrecords • © 2020 Smoke Sessions Records



# Ahead of the Curve

**Beyond my family, who already accepts that I'm not from this world, anyone who knows me well has heard me rant over the last 40 years about my severe phobia of viruses. Allow me to shed some light on this.**

Since my undergrad days as a microbiology major, I've regularly opined that whereas world wars, terrorist attacks and the like are all terrible, none of them cause as much devastation as viruses. Knowing this, back when I was working in a hospital — a petri dish shaped like a building — I would scrub my hands all day long, like Howard Hughes. I still scrub often. And ever since my pre-teen daughter began treatment with immunosuppressive chemotherapies for a debilitating autoimmune disease — a year before the current pandemic appeared — my entire family has been on antimicrobial lockdown. When COVID-19 surfaced late last year, I realized how this little contagion checked all the boxes for uber-virulence, and so I pre-emptively urged family and friends to prepare for an era of social estrangement.

If there is a silver lining to this pandemic, it's that it has become increasingly clear that the way we treat the world in the future is going to be very different than we've done in the past. And while we debate about how long we need to self-isolate, we're concomitantly reminded of things we once took for granted, not the least of which is the importance of homelife and family. In a recent conversation with guitar hero Al Di Meola, he mentioned that during this time he's been enjoying putting his little Ava to bed at night. Bassist Nathan East, whose shows around the world and tour with Phil Collins were all canceled, now relishes making music in his living room with his son, budding piano protégé Noah East. Proud jazz musicians and readers alike have sent us photos of their culinary creations, their newly planted gardens and other accomplishments. Acts of kindness are many. All of this comes as good news.

The world is changing, and most every industry in it will be forced to change, as well. Which brings me to JAZZIZ. While this magazine literally invented the delivery of a magazine and CD subscription in a clean polybag in the '80s, that innovation,

when CDs were all the rage, was of its time. For the past few years, we've been forecasting our future, refining our mobile-friendly podcasts, streaming audio and video — all of which is growing steadily more popular on our website. By the time self-isolation became global, the JAZZIZ team was poised to flip the switch to live streaming with our *Daily Brunch* shows (11 a.m. EST), which offer a new kind of home entertainment — and, hopefully, a pleasurable distraction — for quarantining jazz fans around the world.

Before and after each daily show, we chat “backstage” with our guests, many of whom point out that most jazz artists today make the vast majority of their income from live performances — as opposed to days gone by, when album sales constituted a greater share of musicians' incomes — and how all their planning and preparation for upcoming shows vanished in the COVID air. Even small gatherings intended for broadcast — like Bluesound and MQA's “Master Sessions” with tuba sensation Theon Cross and SEED Ensemble — quickly hit the pause button, while album releases were put on hold as CD manufacturing plants (including ours) were forced to close and record companies went into hibernation. When a representative of the company that prints our magazine called to ask if we were planning to print a summer issue, she divulged that most of the printer's other clients had cancelled future issues until further notice. We decided to forge ahead, all of us working from our homes, to deliver the magazine you now hold in hands — another special issue, this one focused on fusion music.

What lingers in our minds, beyond any impact we've had on flattening the curve and whether it's now safe to mingle, are questions about how to adapt and change as we move forward. As we continue to grapple with those questions at JAZZIZ, we'll likewise surely continue to change and evolve. Regarding our print magazines and CDs, our playlists and podcasts and other ventures both online and off that we continue to deliver, I'd love to hear your thoughts. You can reach me at [michael@jazziz.com](mailto:michael@jazziz.com).

—Michael Fagien



The  
MACALLAN  
RARE CASK

Introducing The Macallan Rare Cask, the single malt whisky for the truly selective.

The finest liquid is hand-chosen from the rarest 1% of The Macallan's sherry-seasoned oak casks for an exceptionally rich, vibrant ruby red whisky.

Available in limited quantities.

© 2015 The Macallan Distillers Limited, The Macallan® Scotch Whisky, 43% Alc./Vol. Imported by Edrington Americas, New York, NY. Demonstrate your discernment, enjoy responsibly.

# He Got the Beat

Drummer Ted Poor steps to the fore as a leader.

Within the jazz world, Ted Poor is known for collaborating with musicians — Cuong Vu, Ben Monder, Bill Frisell, Kurt Rosenwinkel and others — whose work conjures immersive and identifiable sound worlds. In other realms the Seattle-based drummer creates richly textured foundations for a wide range of artists including singer-songwriter Andrew Bird and Chris Thile's band for the radio variety show *Live From Here*. So it should come as little surprise

that his leader debut, *You Already Know* (New Deal/Impulse!), focuses more on atmosphere than virtuosity. The album is centered on a series of duets between Poor and saxophonist Andrew D'Angelo, with judicious post-production additions conceived with in-demand producer Blake Mills.

—Shaun Brady



## Why did you decide to go the duo route for your first album?

Three years ago, Andrew D'Angelo and I played an impromptu set of improvised music here in Seattle as he was passing through town. It was a really memorable night; even though we were improvising, it felt like we were playing well-rehearsed songs. Afterwards I felt like I had to keep this going. It felt special, like music that I had never made before.

## How did the duo approach affect your approach to the drums?

It's a celebration of the resonance of the drums. For me, it was primarily about sound, not feeling like I have to find some flashy new licks to contribute to the continuum. I tuned the drums in particular ways for each song and let them provide the bass fundamentals and harmonies. When they're not competing with a whole band the drums can carry that load.

## You worked with Blake Mills to add touches of strings, harmonium, guitar, etc. How did post-production transform the material?

Blake and I listened through all the tracks one day and let our imaginations run wild. The idea was to subtly introduce textures and instruments as the record unfolded. One beautiful bit of imagery that we kept close at hand was this idea of being on stage with all these musicians waiting in the wings; a few of them would step forward and support us, then recede shortly thereafter.

## What have you taken from working in contexts outside of jazz?

Going from supporting a singer to a more exploratory or improvisatory jazz situation, I bring back a love of simplicity. Complexity doesn't mean more notes. Complexity and depth can just mean a deeper intention, a deeper control of texture, sound and feeling.

## The album fits comfortably within your work in the jazz world but definitely seems to take inspiration from your other experiences.

Some people say it transcends genre, and some people say it's definitely a minimalist jazz record. I'm good with all of it. My favorite jazz musicians don't think in terms of genre, they think in terms of playing their life story. And that takes a lot of courage.



# Confronting Colonialism

On her latest project, **Sara Serpa** explores a dark chapter in Portuguese history.

**Portuguese vocalist Sara Serpa's stunning new album, *Recognition: Music for a Silent Film* (Biophilia Records),** was sparked by an invitation. "John Zorn asked me if I wanted to do something combining music and film at the Drawing Center," Serpa says of the idiosyncratic saxophonist and composer, who was curating a program at the New York City venue back in 2017. "And I thought it was a good opportunity to explore things that had been in the back of my mind for quite a while."

The topic to which she turned was Portugal's colonial past as it applied to Angola, where her parents were raised in a society that systematically oppressed the native population.

The Angolan roots of Serpa's family run deep. "They go back to the beginning of the 20th century," she points out. "My great grandfather settled there in 1910, and my grandfather was born there in 1914. But from conversations with my mother, she knew as a child she didn't want to stay there. There were a lot of inequities, of course — things children don't understand, but they could feel that something was not right."

Her parents moved to Portugal to attend university, and they subsequently rallied on behalf of colonial independence and took part in protests against the fascist regime, which fell in 1975, four years prior to Serpa's birth. As she grew, she discovered this dark chapter in the country's past, but not via institutional

sources. "History was kind of whitewashed the way I learned it in school," she recalls. "There was hardly any mention of the slave trade and the colonial period and what really happened there."

Fortunately, Serpa found out while researching the Drawing Center project that she had access to original material about Angola — not just family photo albums, but also silent Super 8 footage shot by her grandfather that even her mother had never seen. "They were a huge revelation, a door to a reality," she notes. "They weren't family-focused films. He filmed everything around him, outside his house. It was really a window onto that period."

With the aid of director Bruno Soares, Serpa created the film version of *Recognition*, in which these images are juxtaposed with text by Amílcar Cabral, an anti-colonial leader and poet. For the score, meanwhile, she collaborated with three gifted accompanists: harpist Zeena Parkins, pianist David Virelles and saxophonist Mark Turner. On moving and dynamic tracks such as "Free Labour," Serpa employs her trademark wordless vocals to plumb emotional truths. But she uses a Cabral speech to devastating effect on "Unity and Struggle" and couples a disturbing narrative with gentle sonics throughout "Beautiful Garden."

"I wanted the music to have reflective characteristics, to provide a place where the listener is in a relaxed state — not being confronted or feeling attacked," she explains. "The music might sound peaceful or nice, but the subject is very dark and heavy. It is a reality that has been hidden from a certain population for a long time." —**Michael Roberts**

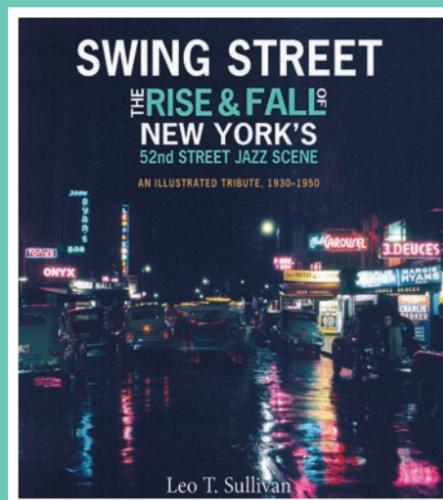


## PRELUDE

# On the Street of Dreams

Starting during Prohibition, the stretch of 52nd Street between Fifth and Sixth avenues became a haven for hot jazz. Leo T. Sullivan's new book, *Swing Street: The Rise and Fall of New York's 52nd Street Jazz Scene, an Illustrated Tribute, 1930-1950* (Schiffer Publishing), tells the tale of the storied thoroughfare through anecdotes, print ads, postcards and photographer William P. Gottlieb's visual chronicle of jazz royalty such as Billie Holiday, Art Tatum, Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie, caught in youthful vigor and sartorial splendor. Sullivan traces the history of the street and its soundtrack in chapters dedicated to its legendary haunts, including Club Downbeat, The Famous Door and The Three Deuces.

—Bob Weinberg



## requisite

### CTI All-Stars

#### California Concert:

*The Hollywood Palladium, 40th Anniversary Edition (CTI)* In the early 1970s, Creed Taylor assembled a nonet of the hottest players on his CTI label and put them on the road, drawing huge crowds to venues like the Hollywood Palladium for this 1971 concert. With a frontline comprising trumpeter Freddie Hubbard, saxophonists Stanley Turrentine and Hank Crawford, flutist Hubert Laws, guitarist George Benson and organist Johnny Hammond, and a liquid-fire rhythm team featuring bassist Ron Carter, drummer Billy Cobham and percussionist Airto Moreira, the results, as captured on a 1972 double album, were predictably torrid.

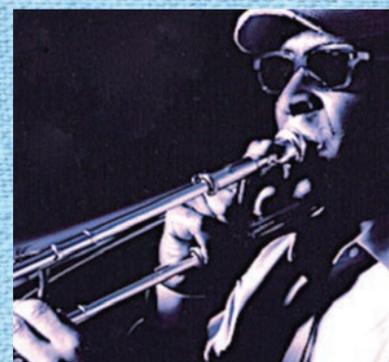
Then, in 2010, CTI released an expanded 40th-anniversary edition, doubling the number of tracks and revealing ever greater depths to this remarkable ensemble. A slow-burning read of John Coltrane's "Impressions" now opened the set, introducing each of the players via long, relaxed solos. Benson took point on his arrangement of Miles Davis' "So What," and Hammond shook the foundations with his take on Carol King's "It's Too Late." The classic status of the original



LP tracks was reinforced, as well, showcasing hits by Hubbard ("Red Clay") and Turrentine ("Sugar") and Laws' spectacular rendition of James Taylor's "Fire and Rain."

As Leonard Feather relates in the album's liners, the Palladium, ironically, was owned by Lawrence Welk, the paragon of all things square. Yet these performances retain their timeless cool as they approach their 50th anniversary. —Bob Weinberg

# BLUE CANOE RECORDS



ESTABLISHED 2003

[BlueCanoeRecords.com](http://BlueCanoeRecords.com)



# The Poetic Aspect

On the cusp of turning 60, Matthew Shipp looks to go deeper.

Iconoclastic free-jazz pianist Matthew Shipp is in a reflective mood these days. He has little choice. In December he'll turn 60, and so he's been dealing with a lot of questions about what that milestone means for an artist who, since he began recording in 1988, has been as uncompromising in his approach as he's been prolific.

"Earlier on I was in a mindset to disrupt a lot of things," he says. "I think now I'm way more interested in the pure poetic aspect of it all. Just being myself and going for the poetry is definitely where I'm at now. I'm really focusing on solo and trio these days, so there's not really anything new I want to do. I just want to get deeper into what I'm doing."



trees — natural structures that have their own integrity and growth from strong roots upward."

What inspires him has evolved as well. Yes, there are the musicians he considers models of purity — Albert Ayler, Bud Powell, Thelonious Monk — but he's increasingly likely to find inspiration outside of music. "I kind of get cheeased just looking at

Those words also aptly describe Shipp's music, which, even when it threatens to stretch beyond reach, remains connected to a firm base. That quality is certainly evident on his new solo album, *The Piano Equation* (Tao Forms). The trademark attributes of Shipp's music — intensity, drama, rambunctiousness — permeate the record, but there's also plenty of unadulterated beauty. "I don't know if I'm going to call that romanticism, but whatever it is, I've come to accept that that's kind of me," he says.

While Shipp's artistic expression continues to evolve, he's left nothing unfinished in his career in terms of exploring new forms or seeking out collaborators (though there are a few high-profile festivals he'd like to be a part of). As for any birthday celebrations, Shipp says he'd be open to booking a residency at a venue where he could revisit previous projects, though, as of mid-March, nothing is booked. There's also a new trio album due in September, fittingly titled *The Unidentifiable*. For now, he seems content with where his career as a fiercely independent musician has taken him.

"I don't feel the need to get anybody's definition of what it means to be 'out' or 'transgressive' anymore," he says. "It's transgressive enough to get out of bed every morning and wake up in this world. I just feel the need to be myself, whatever that is. I'm just getting deeper and deeper into what I actually do on the instrument, and feeling grateful that I've been able to continue to practice and grow as a musician." —John Frederick Moore

# Made in the Magic City

The GroundUP Music Festival thrives in Miami Beach.

The fourth annual edition of the GroundUP Music Festival, which took place at the North Beach Bandshell in Miami Beach over a three-day weekend in mid-February, was a smartly curated showcase of creative music in a beautiful setting and a relaxed, low-key atmosphere.

The festival was created and is produced by Paul Lehr, CEO of GroundUP Music, Snarky Puppy's artist-run label, and bassist, composer and Snarky Puppy instigator Michael League, who is also the festival's artistic director.

This year's highlights included singer and songwriter Michael McDonald, who revisited old hits, proving again that with his voice, the telling is the story; drummer Brian Blade and the Fellowship Band, which offered a master class in musical storytelling and ensemble playing; and singer Cécile McLorin Salvant, who daringly performed a quirky club set in an open-air venue, accompanied solely by pianist Sullivan Fortner.

Other notables included saxophonist Chris Potter, the festival's artist-at-large, who over the weekend sat in with several acts, including McDonald and McLorin Salvant; trumpeter Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah, who offered a muscular set of ideas for "the second century of jazz," as he put it; and Brazilian mandolinist Hamilton de Holanda, who made astonishing appearances leading his own quartet and also sitting in with Snarky Puppy. The all-female mariachi group Flor de Toloache offered a delightful performance that was warm and entertaining. As in previous editions of the festival, Snarky Puppy played host, performing at the bandshell every day and closing the event on Sunday evening.

Outdoor music festivals are a combination of cultural feast, social event and commerce. At the GroundUP Music Festival, those many parts move beautifully as one. —**Fernando Gonzalez**



Bill Laurance



Jay Jennings



Lila Downs



Michael McDonald



Michael League



Bill Campbell



Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah

### DISC ONE: MACK AVENUE

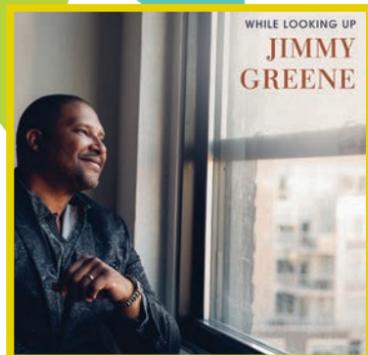
- 1 **Jimmy Greene** "While Looking Up" *While Looking Up* (Mack Avenue)
- 2 **Christian McBride Big Band** "Pie Blues" *A Salute to Jimmy, Wes and Oliver* (Mack Avenue)
- 3 **Erroll Garner** "Lovely To Look At" *Plays Gershwin & Kern* (Mack Avenue)
- 4 **Michael Mayo** "The Way" *Bones* (Mack Avenue)
- 5 **Connie Han** "Captain's Song" *Iron Starlet* (Mack Avenue)
- 6 **Erroll Garner** "Gemini" *Gemini* (Mack Avenue)
- 7 **Tower of Power** "Look in My Eyes" *Step Up* (Mack Avenue)
- 8 **The Soul Rebels** "It's Up to You" *Poetry in Motion* (Mack Avenue)
- 9 **Roberto Fonseca** "Kachucha" (ft. Ibrahim Maalouf) *Yesun* (Mack Avenue)
- 10 **Christian Sands** "Drive" (ft. Marcus Strickland) *Be Water* (Mack Avenue)
- 11 **Thone Paxton & the RJ Spangler Quartet** "Back in Your Own Backyard" *Back in Your Own Backyard* (Mack Avenue)
- 12 **Harold López-Nussa** "The Windmills of Your Mind" *Te Lo Dije* (Mack Avenue)
- 13 **Benny Green** "Cool Walk," *Oscar, With Love* (Mack Avenue)
- 14 **Erroll Garner** "The Loving Touch" *Feeling Is Believing* (Mack Avenue)

### DISC TWO: FUSION

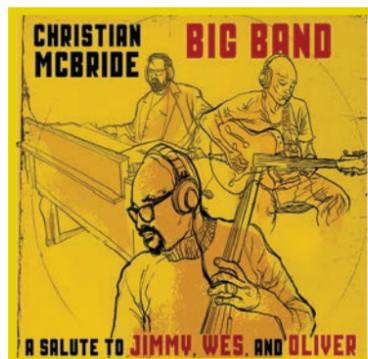
- 1 **Karl Sterling** "Song for Barry" *Dream* (Blue Canoe)
- 2 **Randy Bernsen** "Red Clay" *Grace Notes* (Blue Canoe)
- 3 **Gady Carpenter** "Badger's Wedding" *Control* (Blue Canoe)
- 4 **Roger Burn** "Naima" (ft. Robben Ford) *Trilogy (A Tribute to Roger Burn and Shapes)* (Blue Canoe)
- 5 **Christian de Mesones** "Year of the Dragon" *They Call Me Big New York* (self-release)
- 6 **Randy Hoexter** "Escape (The Piña Colada Song)" *Fromage* (Blue Canoe)
- 7 **Tunnels** "Light Gathering" *Natural Selection* (Buckyball)
- 8 **Yonrico Scott** "Life of a Dreamer (Marimba Suite)" *Life of a Dreamer* (Blue Canoe)
- 9 **Jake Hertzog** "Timeline" *Evolution* (Buckyball)
- 10 **Markus Reuter** "Swoonage" *Truce* (MoonJune)
- 11 **Marc Wagnon** "Heliopause" *Interesting Times* (Buckyball)
- 12 **Mark Wingfield** "I Wonder How Many Miles I've Fallen" *Tales From the Dreaming City* (MoonJune)
- 13 **Vasil Hadzimanov Band** "Freedom From the Past" *Lines in Sand* (MoonJune)
- 14 **Brand X** "Virus" *Manifest Destiny* (Buckyball)

A NOTE TO LEGACY SUBSCRIBERS: Some readers brought to our attention that the Spring 2020 issue included misprinted JAZZIZ Discovery CDs. Because we do not know which subscribers received the wrong discs, we've included the correct Spring 2020 JAZZIZ Discovery CDs as a supplement to this issue. Feel free to add them to your Spring 2020 CD sleeves. Sorry about the error, and thanks, as always, for listening.

## DISC ONE: MACK AVENUE



1. At a time when the national discourse has devolved into partisan shouting matches, saxophonist **Jimmy Greene** recognizes the need for connection — not only to one another, but to a higher power. Inspired by the words of his pastor, the Connecticut native determined to look upward rather than inward for answers, the philosophy driving his latest release *While Looking Up* (Mack Avenue). That's not to say that Greene's not introspective, just that he draws sustenance from his faith and realizes a common spark of the divine in his fellow man — ideals that were sorely tested when he lost his 6-year-old daughter in the Sandy Hook Elementary School shootings of 2012. Greene also strove for connection with some old friends, who join him on the album. Guitarist Lage Lund, bassist Reuben Rogers and vibraphonist Stefon Harris had all played on his 2009 recording *Mission Statement*; pianist Aaron Goldberg and drummer Kendrick Scott had recorded with him even earlier. The album's mood-shifting title track, included here, reflects the dichotomy of Greene's serene confidence in his relationship with God, but at the same time expresses an existential questing that's perhaps innately human. And his bandmates could hardly be more simpatico, with Goldberg and Lund eloquently echoing Greene's sentiments, and Rogers and Scott sensitively shading and propelling the piece.



2. On their third release, *A Salute to Jimmy, Wes and Oliver* (Mack Avenue), the **Christian McBride Big Band** salutes three artists who were undoubtedly important in bassist-bandleader McBride's musical development: Jimmy Smith, Wes Montgomery and Oliver Nelson. A veteran sideman and leader of his own groups, McBride first recorded with his big band in 2011, cherry-picking some of New York's first-call players to fill up the sections. And it's testament to McBride's stature that most of them re-upped for the new session, with trumpeters Frank Greene and Freddie Hendrix, trombonists Michael Dease and Steve Davis and saxophonists Steve Wilson and Ron Blake, among others, returning to the fold. The slinky "Pie Blues," our selection, begins with a staccato brass fanfare, which is punctuated by bass, guitar and organ,

while trumpet slurs and wails recall the early years of hot jazz. McBride's fellow Philadelphian, organist Joey DeFrancesco, lays down typically heated riffs on Hammond B3, before guitarist Mark Whitfield enters with a steamy blues solo of his own, followed by Carl Maraghi's edgy baritone-sax solo. The full 17-piece swing machine engages in some hearty ensemble play, but McBride gets the last word, his bowed bass rumbling its way to the exit. The bandleader's hearty chuckle and studio chatter shirttail the piece. "Hey, let's get some of that!" he exclaims, to which we can only add, "Yes, please!"



3. As with many jazz pianists of his generation, **Erroll Garner** delved frequently into the songbooks of George Gershwin and Jerome Kern. In 1976, his double-tribute album, *Plays Gershwin & Kern*, dedicated a side to each man's songs and featured performances recorded in the 1960s. The album was an anomaly in the pianist's discography — it was his first full composers' album. A new reissue of that recording represents the final chapter of the 12-volume Octave Remastered Series, released in partnership with the Mack Avenue label. Accompanied by his familiar rhythm team, bassist Eddie Calhoun and drummer Kelly Martin, Garner revisits "Lovely To Look At," a sprightly melody composed by Kern with lyrics by Dorothy Fields and Jimmy McHugh. "I don't know if Erroll knows the lyric of each song he plays," George Wein wrote in the album's liner notes, "but I would guess he certainly understands the composer's intent and then gives each song his own meaning."



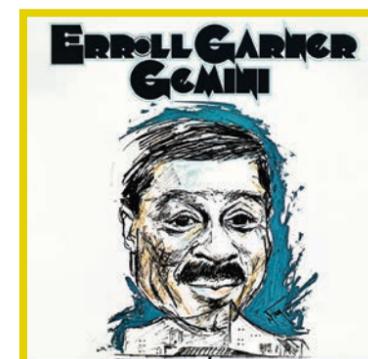
4. Not unlike Bobby McFerrin, vocal virtuoso **Michael Mayo** astonishes audiences with his remarkable dexterity, conjuring a full band with just his voice and tape loops. As the son of two musicians, the Los Angeles-born Mayo grew up watching performers such as Diana Ross, Earth, Wind and Fire and Stevie Wonder from the wings. After graduating from the New England Conservatory of Music, he was just the third vocalist accepted into the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz Performance, where he studied under Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock and Luciana Souza. Since then, the New York-based musician has performed at the White House and Kennedy Center,

Photo by Ricky Chavez

and collaborated with jazz-world luminaries including Gretchen Parlato, Christian Sands, Ben Wendel and Theo Bleckmann. His upcoming album, *Bones* (Mack Avenue), provides a showcase for Mayo's engaging artistry, as heard on "The Way," a lush synth-and-keyboard-powered track that splendidly displays his remarkable range with multi-tracked Take 6-like harmonies.

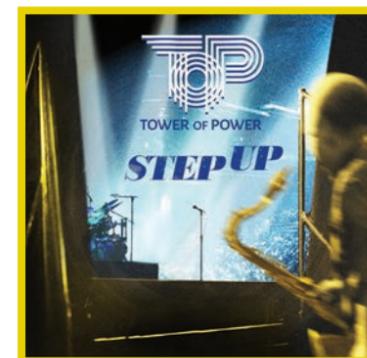


5. Having turned many heads with her 2018 breakthrough release *Crime Zone*, pianist **Connie Han** continues to fulfill the promise of a rising jazz star with her latest release, *Iron Starlet* (Mack Avenue). Just 24 years old, Han plays and writes like a seasoned hard-bopper, but with a youthful energy and a perspective shaped by the 21st century. It's not difficult to hear the influences of Herbie Hancock, McCoy Tyner, Chick Corea and Kenny Kirkland on the Los Angeles-raised musician, who's joined once again by drummer and producer Bill Wysaske and tenor saxophonist Walter Smith III on the new album. The partnership between Han and Wysaske has been a productive one, and the drummer contributes a few original compositions to the program, including "Captain's Song," our selection. The tune carries an introspective vibe, with Wysaske's whispering brushes and Ivan Taylor's hushed bass notes shading Han's delicate, crystalline statements. Trumpeter Jeremy Pelt adds to the self-reflective mood, his mellow brass adding another layer to this truly contemplative session.



6. Perhaps picking up on the era's obsession with astrology, **Erroll Garner** titled a 1972 release *Gemini*, which was indeed the sign under which he was born. Jazz critic Dan Morgenstern, while voicing skepticism of the stars' influence on human events, nonetheless makes a reasoned argument for at least a metaphorical connection to the Gemini twins: "Musically, Garner's duality is complete," he wrote in the liner notes. "His music combines intellect and emotion in perfect balance, moving and involving the listener on many planes, from sheer unreflecting enjoyment to total astonishment." Garner certainly astonishes throughout this nine-track collection, which was reissued as part of the Octave Records Remastered Series, particularly so on the self-penned title track. The pianist gleefully rips into a bluesy

bounce, which is made all the more buoyant by the percolating rhythm section of bassist Ernest McCarty Jr., drummer Jimmie Smith and conga player Jose Mangual.



7. Oakland's **Tower of Power** has been cranking out its signature brand of horn-driven soul and funk for more than 50 years and is still going strong. Although they've refreshed their membership several times over the decades, the group remains under the leadership of their founder, tenor saxophonist and vocalist Emilio Castillo. Longtime baritone saxophonist Doc Kupka also continues to anchor the famed horn section with his raunchy low notes. While original ToP bassist Rocco Prestia has retired from the road, he still makes the recording sessions, as he did for their latest release, *Step Up* (Mack Avenue). Prestia also co-wrote the funky R&B groover "Look in My Eyes," included here, which spotlights Castillo's greasy tenor horn and growling vocals along with backing singers Leah Meux and Tiwana Porter. With the horns spanking and the rhythm section churning up a nasty backbeat, ToP is in top form.

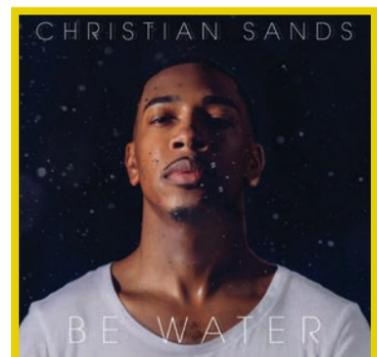


8. New Orleans' **Soul Rebels** have been making a big noise in the Big Easy for more than 20 years. With their latest release, *Poetry in Motion* (Mack Avenue), the brass-fueled party band hopes to expand its fan base even further. Blending Bourbon Street jazz with hip-hop, funk, soul and R&B, The Soul Rebels are hardly traditional. But with origins in the Olympia Brass Band and other local institutions, the members are well-versed in the second-line vernacular. On the new album, the mighty octet invites guests from around the corner — Trombone Shorty, trumpeter Kermit Ruffins, vocalist PJ Morton and rapper Big Freedia — and from around the music spectrum, with reggae-rapper Matisyahu and keyboardist Robert Glasper also contributing to the mix. Reggae artist KES and R&B singer Kayla Jasmine provide the vocals on the highly danceable "It's Up to You," included here, which also features the rapping of Soul Rebels trumpeter Julian Gosin. The whole thing is livelier up by the group's bright horns, with sousaphone player Manuel Perkins Jr. pumping out the bass groove.



**ROBERTO FONSECA**  
**YESUN**

9. Since he was a teenager playing at the Jazz Plaza Festival in his native Havana, pianist **Roberto Fonseca** has been captivating listeners with his mix of traditional Cuban music and forward-leaning jazz. A graduate of the Institute Superior del Arte with a master's in composition, Fonseca has been recording for more than 20 years. He was also a member of the Buena Vista Social Club and toured with legendary Cuban performers such as Ibrahim Ferrer and Omara Portuondo. These deep roots nourish Fonseca's music, as can be heard on his 2019 release *Yesun* (Mack Avenue). Accompanied by his trio mates, bassist Yandy Martínez and drummer Raúl Herrera, Fonseca dives into a lively program of original tunes that nod to a variety of influences. The pianist, who also plays electric keyboards, sings and plays percussion, welcomes some guest musicians, as well, including saxophonist Joe Lovano and French-Lebanese trumpeter Ibrahim Maalouf. The latter is featured on "Kachucha," our selection, which celebrates the importance of dance in Cuban culture, both in its lyrics and in its irresistible rhythm. Fonseca, Martínez and Herrera maintain a lively but stately groove to which Maalouf adds heated brass accents.



**CHRISTIAN SANDS**

**BE WATER**

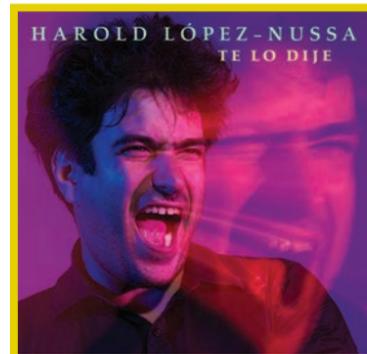
10. Explaining how he could adapt his fighting style to match any opponent, Bruce Lee touted the benefits of being like water. After all, when you pour water into any container, it immediately conforms to the shape of that container. Thus, he advised, "Be water, my friend." Jazz pianist **Christian Sands** takes this philosophy to heart on his new recording, *Be Water* (Mack Avenue), with music rather than martial arts serving as the metaphorical H<sub>2</sub>O. To accomplish this vision, Sands recruited bassist Yasushi Nakamura and saxophonist Marcus Strickland, with both of whom he's previously recorded, as well as trumpeter Sean Jones, trombonist Steve Davis, guitarist Marvin Sewell and drummer Clarence Penn. Sewell lays down a percolating riff to open "Drive," included here. He's soon joined by Sands' playful arpeggios and Penn's driving beat. Strickland's tenor adds quietly joyful expression before Sewell uncorks a fanged solo that carries the song toward its conclusion. Sands' use of Hammond B2 organ and Strickland's bass clarinet further layer the sonic tapestry. Throughout the variety of textures

and styles, Sands retains his bright, sparkling voice, like water adapting to its surroundings without losing its essential nature.



**Tbone Paxton & the RJ Spangler Quartet**

11. Trombonist and vocalist **Tbone Paxton** and drummer **RJ Spangler** share a rich 40-year history, going back to their days with Detroit's Sun Messengers and then working in the bands of soul and blues stars Johnny Adams, Earl King and Eddie Bo. As you might imagine, more than a little New Orleans seasoning flavors their mix, whether they're playing traditional jazz, blues or R&B. Paxton and Spangler continue their long association on *Back in Your Own Backyard* (Detroit Music Factory/Mack Avenue), a collection of vintage jazz and blues tunes expertly interpreted by Spangler's quartet and guests with Paxton out front. Comprising a jukebox's worth of classic music, the album spans the songbooks of Louis Jordan, Sidney Bechet, Louis Armstrong and Hoagy Carmichael. The title track, our selection, was performed by Billie Holiday, The Andrews Sisters, Erroll Garner and Al Jolson, the last of whom actually co-wrote the song. Propelled by Spangler and bassist Kurt Krahnke, the tune maintains a finger-snapping swing and features fine work by pianist Michael Zuporski, guitarist Matt LoRusso and baritone saxophonist Goode Wyche III. Paxton's vocals display real charm and he's equally charismatic on the instrument from which his moniker derives.



**HAROLD LÓPEZ-NUSSA**  
**TE LO DIJE**

12. Havana-born pianist **Harold López-Nussa** is among a generation of Cuban musicians who are injecting fresh vitality into the jazz world of the island and beyond. The son of drummer Ruy López-Nussa, the pianist has worked with Cuban legends Omara Portuondo and Heitor Villa-Lobos. He received an even brighter spotlight as a featured player on the all-star *Ninety Miles* sessions alongside headliners Stefon Harris, David Sánchez and Christian Scott. Since then, his career has soared, and the pianist continues to impress on recordings under his own name, such as 2016's *El Viaje* and 2018's *Un Día Cualquiera*, featuring his trio and original songs that at once embrace and transcend tradition. His upcoming release *Te Lo Dije* (Mack Avenue) promises to be another corker, as an advance listen to his version of Michel Legrand's "The Windmills of Your Mind" reveals. A brisk rhythm — courtesy of bassist Julio César González and



**Buckyball Records** 40 years of outstanding fusion and jazz-rock  
[www.buckyballmusic.com](http://www.buckyballmusic.com)



**Marc Wagnon feat.: Sarah Pillow**



**Tunnels feat.: Percy Jones**

**Artists featured on Buckyball Records releases:**

Mike Clark, Phil Collins, Dave Douglas, Nicholas D'Amato, David Fluczynski, John Goodsall, Maria Grand, Jake Hertzog, Paul Jackson, Percy Jones, Victor Jones, Frank Katz, Dave Kikoski, Wayne Krantz, Van Manakas, François Moutin, Alon Nechushtan, John O'Reilly Jr., Morris Pert, Sarah Pillow, Josh Roseman, Harvie S, Leo Traversa, Marc Wagnon, Dan Weiss

For more artists and releases and to stream, download and purchase CDs, visit our website: [buckyballmusic.com](http://buckyballmusic.com)



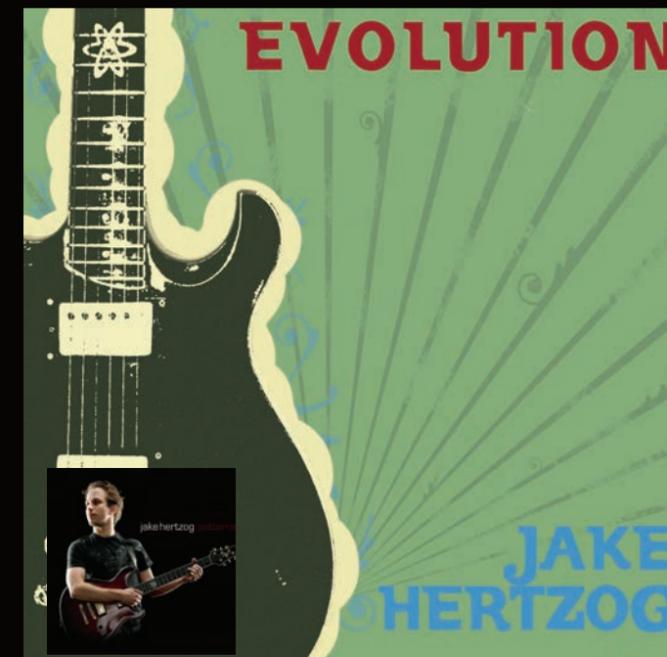
buckyballmusic



@buckyballmusic



@buckyballmusic



**Jake Hertzog**



**Brand X**

drummer-percussionist Ruy Adrián López-Nussa, the pianist's brother — flows beneath López-Nussa's swift reading of the familiar melody, while French accordionist Vincent Peirani teases out the *chanson* nature of the song. The album's title translates to "I told you so," and anyone who's seen or heard the pianist perform can proudly proclaim it to the uninitiated.



13. In 2015, Mack Avenue assembled a who's who of jazz piano to pay tribute to Oscar Peterson on the three-disc collection *Oscar, With Love*. It's fair to say that Peterson, who died in 2007, exerted a powerful influence on each of the participants, who spanned generations from Kenny Barron and Michel Legrand

to Hiromi and Justin Kauflin. Certainly, the life and career of **Benny Green** were significantly impacted by his association with Peterson; in 1993, the Canadian-born piano legend bestowed the first-ever Glen Gould International Protégé Prize in Music upon the emergent Berkeley, California-raised talent; five years later, he shared the billing with him on the collaborative release *Oscar and Benny*. So Green was a natural for inclusion on the tribute album, on which he takes a gleeful yet relaxed solo-piano stroll through Peterson's "Cool Walk," capturing the great joy and excitement that were hallmarks of the tributee.



14. Having established his bona fides in the early days of bebop, piano virtuoso **Erroll Garner** became a popular mainstream figure, with his classic 1955 release *Concert by the Sea* designated as one of the first blockbuster LPs in jazz. Always striving for artistic freedom and to reap a greater reward for his

efforts, Garner co-founded Octave Records with his manager, Martha Glaser, and released albums that showcased his genius while also updating his sound and image for the 1960s and '70s. The Mack Avenue label restored and expanded a dozen of these recordings, which they've released over the past year, and will be wrapping up the Octave Remastered Series in June. *Feeling Is Believing*, as the liner notes inform, was Garner's first release of the 1970s, and he dives into then-current pop fare such as "Spinning Wheel" and "The Look of Love." But this was hardly an artistic compromise for the middle-aged Garner, who brilliantly and energetically tackles the material with quick-

fingered elan. "The Loving Touch," our selection, starts out as a moody love song, with Garner's wistful reverie shadowed by bassist George Duvivier and drummer Joe Cocuzzo. The tune brightens considerably when conga player Jose Mangual joins the trio and Garner displays the joyful sparkle for which he was revered. The album was nominated for a Grammy in 1970.

## DISC TWO: FUSION



1. After more than three decades as a jazz drummer, **Karl Sterling** entered into the medical field, becoming a neurorehabilitation specialist and working with Parkinson's patients from his home base in Syracuse, New York. He developed an education program called Parkinson's Regeneration Training and continues to

help people affected by the disease around the world. Having witnessed the ravages of Parkinson's, Sterling rounded up longtime friends and associates for an all-star recording titled *Dream: Parkinson's Global Project* (Blue Canoe), with 90 percent of the proceeds going toward research for a cure. Sterling curated the musicians with the same care as the songs, recruiting top players such as bassist Jimmy Haslip, drummer Peter Erskine and guitarists Jeff Richman and Nir Felder, among others, and selecting hits such as The Doobie Brothers' "Here To Love You," Peter Gabriel's "Don't Give Up" and Pharrell Williams' "Happy," all of which convey a message of positivity. A read of Michael Brecker's "Song for Barry," included here, rides a buoyant Afro-pop groove, with Haslip and Erskine maintaining a lively rhythm bolstered by Richman's guitar and Scott Kinsey's percolating keyboards. Bob Reynolds' tenor sax dances exuberantly throughout, and African chants add further texture to the piece.



2. Fort Lauderdale-based guitarist **Randy Bernsen** has been captivating audiences in South Florida and beyond for decades. On 2015's *Grace Notes* (Blue Canoe), his 12th recording as a leader, Bernsen recruited talent from the West Coast, as well as from around the corner, to perform his funky, bluesy brand of

jazz fusion. Bassist Jimmy Haslip lent his instrumental and production skills to the guitarist, with whom he'd played in

# WWW.MOONJUNE.COM

PROGRESSIVE MUSIC EXPLORING BOUNDARIES OF JAZZ, ROCK, ETHNO, AVANT & THE UNKNOWN

## MoonJune Records Samplers FREE DOWNLOAD

5+ HOURS OF PROGRESSIVE MUSIC WITH JAZZ'N'BEYOND FLAVOR. WAV/FLAC/ALAC/MP3

*Two collections flow like two proper albums, and as such, they reflect the vision of a fellow Don Quixote of modern times, Leonardo Pavkovic, MoonJune Records' honcho.*

The  
**INVITATION**  
to MoonJune Records Vol. 01

The  
**INVITATION**  
to MoonJune Records Vol. 02

CELEBRATING 100 RELEASES SINCE 2001

24 tunes from 24 albums, 155 minutes of music.      23 tunes from 23 albums, 158 minutes of music.

www.moonjunerecords.bandcamp.com/music

*There are, in these times of reduced music sales, fewer and fewer models that help niche labels to survive. In the case of New York City based MoonJune Records and its intrepid head Leonardo Pavkovic, the path to survival seems increasingly more about doing what he does for the love of it, and less about fiduciary gain (much as he would like as anyone to reap some financial benefits for his hard work). That said, few labels could not only survive but, as MoonJune has over the past two decade, actually thrive and expand based upon nothing more than one man's passionate love of music and those who make it. MoonJune may never have a million-seller, but its profile has certainly grown, even as Pavkovic has looked even farther across the globe to locate talented musicians, astutely introduced them to other world-class players, and put them together in a studio to watch the sparks fly. Few labels, in fact, beyond the much larger ECM Records, have managed to bring so many diverse musicians from seemingly disparate backgrounds and cultures together to make music so glorious, so magical and so seemingly effortlessly groundbreaking. This, as it supports the adage of music being a universal language that brings people together, comes at a time when there are far too many factors conspiring to sow division.*

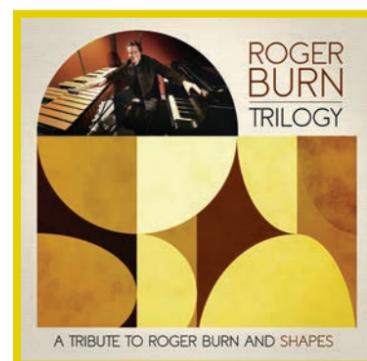
- JOHN KELMAN, All About Jazz

the Jaco Pastorius Big Band, and brought along Yellowjackets bandmate Russell Ferrante to assist on keyboards. Also on the session was drummer Peter Erskine, who played on Bernsen's 1986 debut recording, *Music for Planets ... People and Washing Machines*, as well as former Weather Report percussionist Bobby Thomas Jr. and bassist Felix Pastorius, the son of his old friend, Jaco, who had also played on his first album. Bernsen dives into a set of original music and covers that illustrate his interests and influences. Among the latter is a bright and effervescent read of Freddie Hubbard's "Red Clay," with Bernsen's reverberant, lacerating leads engaging in call-and-response with saxophonist Steve Tavaglione and trumpeter Max Boiko, the mix utilizing deftly applied synth effects. Erskine and percussionist Luis Conte keep it all anchored and grooving.



3. Fans of horror and action movies revere John Carpenter, who not only wrote and directed genre classics such as *Halloween* and *Escape From New York*, but also composed scores to those films that tautened suspense to the snapping point. So perhaps it's unsurprising that Carpenter's son (with actress Adrienne Barbeau), **Cody Carpenter**, would be bit by the music bug early in life. Carpenter the younger contributed music to a couple of his dad's films (1998's *Vampires* and 2001's *Ghosts of Mars*) while still in his teens, and now leads his own ensembles, as heard on *Control*, his third release for the Blue Canoe label. And the keyboardist, guitarist and composer has rounded up some first-call sidemen to accompany him on a program of original material that draws on influences from classic prog-rock and fusion bands to video-game music. A joyful Latin-jazz vamp powers "Badger's Wedding," our selection, as Carpenter rolls out a *son montuno* on electric piano. The proceedings are made all the more festive by the presence of bassist Jimmy Haslip, drummer Scott Seiver and percussionist Jimmy Branly, who maintain a spirited and fluid rhythmic foundation from which Carpenter takes textured flights of fancy.

4. Pianist, vibraphonist, drummer, composer, arranger, bandleader — **Roger Burn** could list them all on his crowded résumé. The Southern California native was a prodigy, playing gigs around Los Angeles while still in his teens. He'd later tour the world with his band Shapes, leaving an imprint on the contemporary-jazz scene before his 2009 death from cancer at age 46. The three-disc compilation *Trilogy: A Tribute to Roger Burn and Shapes* (Blue Canoe) reflects the wide scope of his talents, as well as the esteem in which he's held, featuring performances from some of the top players in his field. Mike



Stern, Robben Ford, Béla Fleck, Russell Ferrante and Jimmy Haslip are just a few of the guest musicians who lend their skills to this sprawling collection. With Ford on guitar, a rhythmically upbeat rendition of John Coltrane's most lovely composition, "Naima," our selection, rings with Burn's resonant vibraphone and utilizes Doug Livingston's sighing pedal steel and Tollak Ollestad's wistful harmonica. Ford's textured leads glow with an understated radiance, beautifully realizing Burn's rootsy vision for this classic love song.



5. Funk, rock, jazz and Latin influences flavor the original music of veteran bassist **Christian "Big New York" de Mesones**. A graduate of the Bass Institute of Technology in Hollywood, California, De Mesones studied with jazz greats including Ray Brown, Abe Laboriel, Steve Morse and Pat Metheny. And while he's had chart success with his self-released singles, and has generated some excitement in the Northern Virginia area where he resides, and in D.C., where he sold out Blues Alley last year, de Mesones has just released his first full-length recording under his own name. *They Call Me Big New York* collects de Mesones' singles, including "Latin Jive Redux," which went to No. 1 on U.K. charts, and puts the bassist in the company of some of the top contemporary-jazz talent with whom he's worked in recent years. His mastery of the six-string fretless bass is evident but not ostentatious on tracks such as "Year of the Dragon," included here. Trumpet and guitar solos float through a lush orchestral bed, as de Mesones maintains a liquid rhythmic line and Chao Tian adds a lustrous shimmer on the *yang quin*, or Chinese dulcimer.

6. Like The Bad Plus, who made their bones by deconstructing familiar rock and pop tunes for jazz audiences, **Randy Hoexter** has also recontextualized radio playlists of summers past. On his wonderfully titled release *Fromage* (Blue Canoe), the Atlanta-based pianist dips into a fondue pot of 1970s cheese with his jazz treatments of hit singles that ruled the airwaves. However, he's not so much making fun of them as trying to layer disposable (if indelible) ditties with rhythmic and harmonic sophistication, no easy task when dealing with



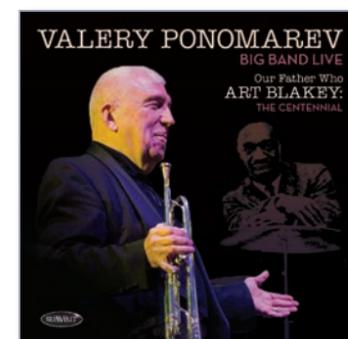
## NEW SUMMIT JAZZ!

### SCHAPIRO 17 NEW SHOES: KIND OF BLUE AT 60 [SMT 756]

Schapiro 17 re-imagines Miles' legendary release with an acclaimed roster of artists!

It's not quite right to say that "New Shoes" features arrangements of the five songs on Miles Davis' landmark album "Kind of Blue". They are more like entirely new compositions, which happen to take the Miles material as a starting point. Schapiro translates the lean sound of the sextet...into the wide-screen colors of a large jazz ensemble in the tradition of the Ellington and Basie bands. The whole recording is in a fundamental way true to the spirit of Miles' restless and mercurial inventiveness as he was, in addition to so many other things, a powerful and original interpreter of other people's tunes.

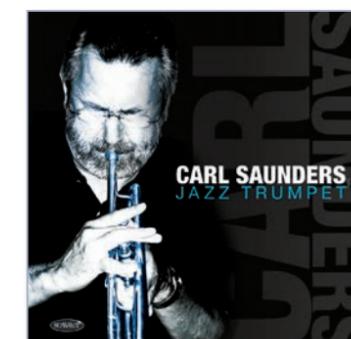
## GREAT NEW JAZZ



### VALERY PONOMAREV OUR FATHER WHO ART BLAKEY: THE CENTENNIAL [SMT 758]

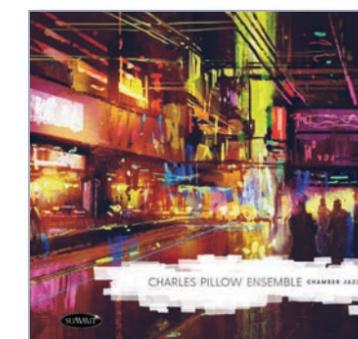
"...playing is...fiery enthusiasm...All members get a chance to shine..." -JAZZIZ

"...Ponomarev has put together a first class band that has a solid footing in hard bop jazz." -Audiophile Audition



### CARL SAUNDERS CARL SAUNDERS, JAZZ TRUMPET [SMT 761]

Saunders is widely recognized as one of the greatest jazz trumpet players in the world...here, with **Joe LaBarbera**, drums; **Chuck Berghofer**, bass; and **Josh Nelson** on piano, he doesn't disappoint.



### CHARLES PILLOW CHAMBER JAZZ [SMT 760]

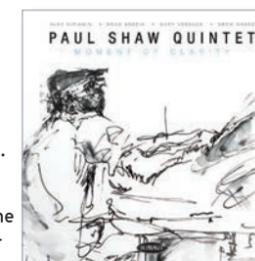
The music compiled here is a the result of an interest in combining the warmer sonorities of alto flute, English horn, french horn, tuba and strings with a rhythm section and soloist to complete a large ensemble - All top New York musicians!...Tasty outing!!

### PAUL SHAW MOMENT OF CLARITY [SMT 763]

Veteran drummer **Paul Shaw** brings a fascinating history to his debut as a leader... featuring **Gary Versace** on piano...

"...one of the HOTTEST jazz drummers on the scene... his debut as a leader... is crisp, clear and upbeat all the way..." -Contemporary Fusion

"... Tasty stuff for those that want their jazz to have a serious edge, this set hits it out of the park." -Midwest Record



### HGTS "...AND THEN THEY PLAYED..." [SMT 766]

HGTS (**Holmes, Giampietro, Tomita, Salles**) - roll through this entertaining program of original jazz in an elegant sort of way. This is radiant music!

"...a first class endeavor with wonderfully melodic yet some complex original compositions..." -Randy Brecker

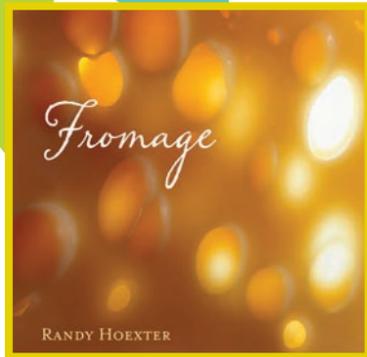


## COMING SOON... SOUTH FLORIDA JAZZ ORCHESTRA CHEAP THRILLS - THE MUSIC OF RICK MARGITZA



AVAILABLE EVERYWHERE  
CHECK OUT ALL AT:  
SUMMITRECORDS.COM!





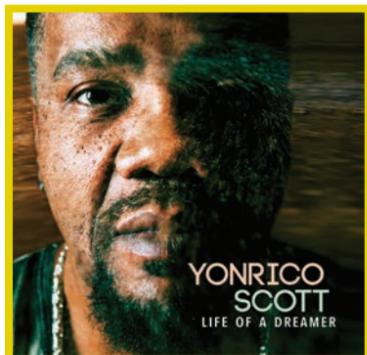
“You Light Up My Life” or “Yummy, Yummy, Yummy.” Hoexter’s arrangements manage to extrude fresh flavor from pre-chewed bubblegum, for the most part maintaining what made the former pop hits stick to the bottom of listeners’ brain pans. And it doesn’t hurt that he’s surrounded himself with

A-list players. A sprightly read of Rupert Holmes’ inescapable “Escape (The Piña Colada Song)” rides a Caribbean groove laid down by bassist Jimmy Haslip, drummer Dave Weckl and percussionist Kit Chatham, while Hoexter and saxophonist Sam Skelton trade verses. Hoexter injects bluesy grooves and Latin touches into his solos, and leaves room for a slippery Haslip solo. The outro by Skelton and guitarist Trey Wright adds a touch of introspection to a song that blithely deals with infidelity.



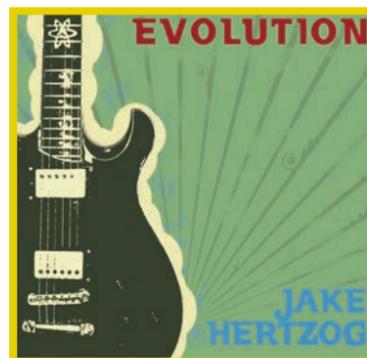
7. Vibraphonist Marc Wagnon and bassist Percy Jones assembled the avant-garde fusion ensemble **Tunnels** in the early 1990s. The group toured and recorded a handful of albums in a dozen years, culminating with the 2006 release *Natural Selection* (Buckyball). Frequently operating as a quartet on

their various sessions, Tunnels pared down to a trio for their last release, with Wagnon and Jones joined by drummer John O’Reilly Jr. and some guest musicians who shared a history with the band. Wagnon’s use of midi-vibes provides some intriguing colors and textures on his composition “Light Gathering,” included here, which rides an irrepressible groove provided by Jones’ rumbling fretless bass and O’Reilly’s unrelenting backbeat.



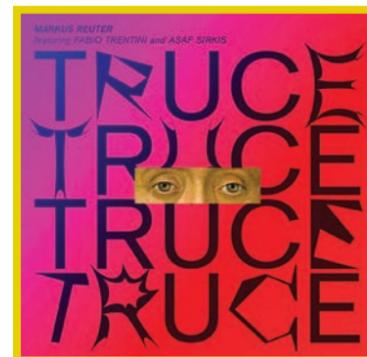
8. As the longtime drummer for the Derek Trucks Band, and later for the Royal Southern Brotherhood, **Yonrico Scott** knew how to drive the action from behind his kit. Of course, the Detroit native had absorbed many of those groove fundamentals as a teenager while studying with

Motown drummer George Hamilton, and performing with heroes such as Aretha Franklin, Ray Charles, Freddie Hubbard and Sonny Stitt, to name a few. Scott, who died at age 63 in 2019, had also led his own bands, recording four albums under his own name for the Blue Canoe imprint. His 2016 release, *Life of a Dreamer*, displays several facets of Scott’s wide-ranging musicianship, utilizing jazz, funk and rock sensibilities on an eclectic set of material. On the album’s self-penned title track, Scott reveals his mallet skills with a gorgeous unaccompanied marimba intro. The rest of the unit soon joins in, an ecstatic horn section elevating the mood ever higher, with standout work from trombonist Kevin Hyde. Scott tattoos a big drum beat on the proceedings, then re-enters on marimba toward the song’s exuberant close.



9. Like Marc Wagnon, for whose Buckyball label he records, guitarist **Jake Hertzog** takes inspiration from science and nature. He’s titled albums *Chromatosphere*, *Patterns* and *Beyond the Standard Model*, this last a collection of highly individualized interpretations of jazz standards that takes its

name from physicists pondering the nature of dark matter and energy. And then there was his 2011 release, *Evolution*, which seems to apply Darwinian principals to the development of jazz guitar for the 21st century. A graduate of Berklee College of Music with a master’s degree from the Manhattan School of Music, Hertzog knows the components of what he’s reconstructing. He was also savvy enough to trio up with jazz veterans Harvie S on bass and Victor Jones on drums, both of whom are more than comfortable in the fusion realm, as heard on “Timeline,” included here. A jaunty, dance-club-influenced rhythm provides a launchpad for Hertzog’s sonic explorations.



10. German-born guitar virtuoso **Markus Reuter** has developed a signature style that involves his use of “touch” playing on a specially crafted eight-string instrument. Not unlike Stanley Jordan, Reuter employs a method in which strings are tapped or pressed into the fret board, creating sonic resonances

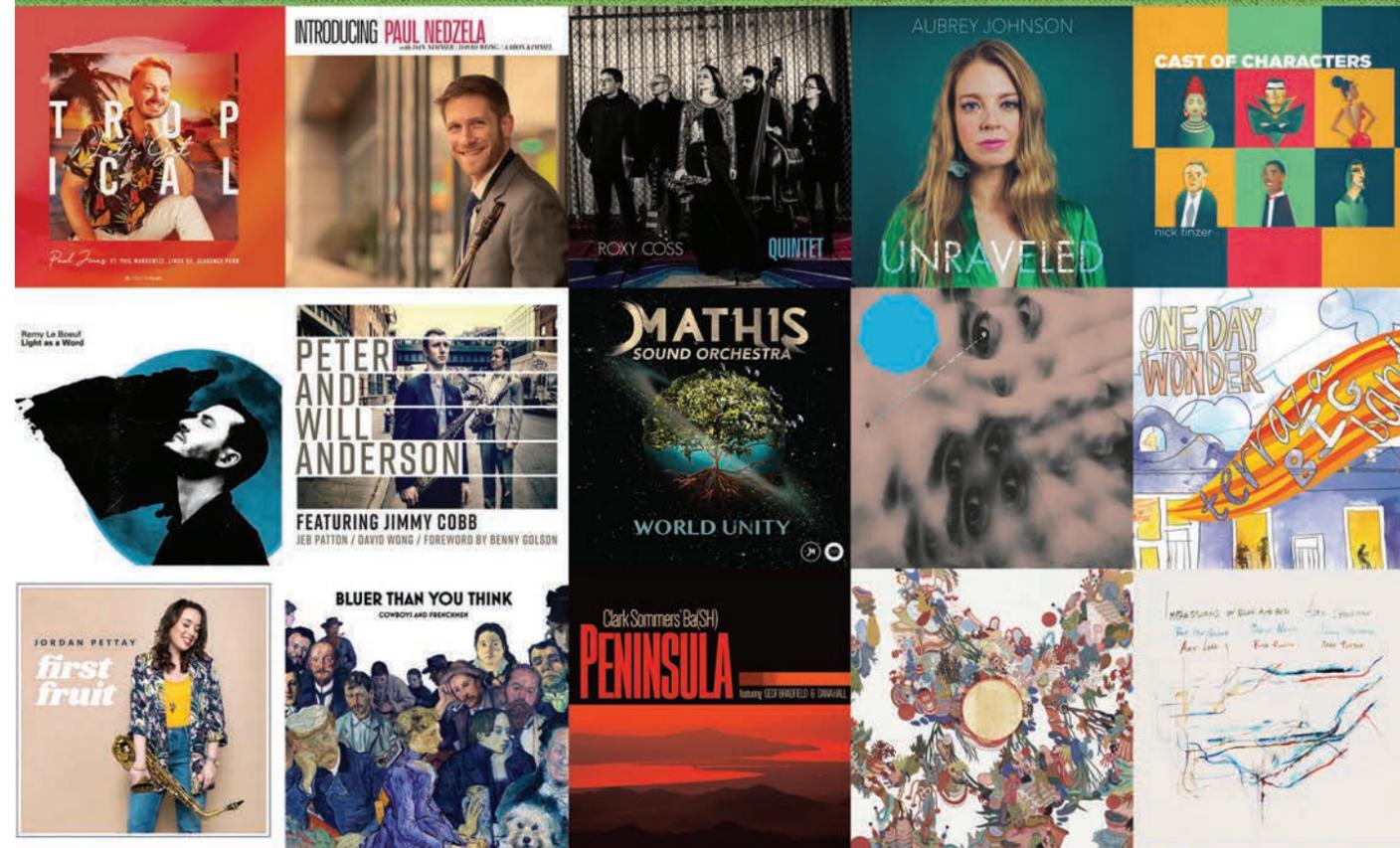
that ring and sustain in ways that differ from fingerpicking (although he does that, too) or using a plectrum. However,

# OUTSIDE IN MUSIC

jazz record label & media company



## CATALOG HIGHLIGHTS



Outside in Music is a record label and media company that exists to serve and empower musicians. We are a community that strives to lift its artists above the noise of the twenty first century music industry and make music that expresses the sounds of today’s wide-ranging jazz and creative

VIDEOS  
PLAYLISTS  
PODCASTS

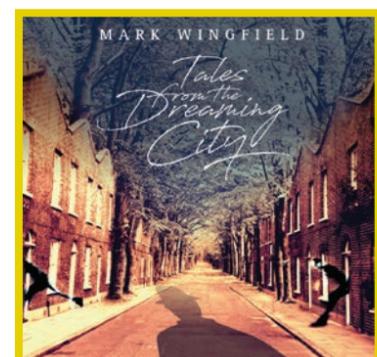
learn more & listen to these releases at [www.outsideinmusic.com/jazziz](http://www.outsideinmusic.com/jazziz)

the 47-year-old guitarist's music would not be mistaken for Jordan's, as made quite plain on his recent trio album *Truce* (MoonJune). Allying himself with Italian bassist Fabio Trentini and Israeli-born, U.K.-based drummer Asaf Sirkis, Reuter evinces a heavy fusion sound frequently reminiscent of the genre's 1970s heyday. The moody and atmospheric "Swoonage," included here, showcases the guitarist's textural depths, his feedback-laden strings drawing on deep emotional resources as Trentini and Sirkis maintain an ominous rhythmic foundation.



11. On his latest release, *Interesting Times* (Buckyball), Swiss-born vibraphonist and composer **Marc Wagnon** explores themes that involve his interests in science and history. Something of an autodidact, Wagnon became fascinated with astronomy, actually built a couple of telescopes, and recently became a "Solar

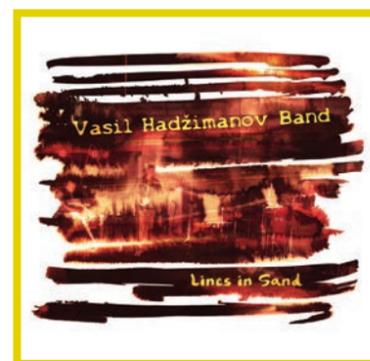
System Ambassador" for NASA. So perhaps it's unsurprising that he'd take inspiration from space travel, specifically the Voyager spacecrafts that ventured beyond the outer boundary of the region surrounding the sun, which he celebrates on his tune "Heliopause," our selection. Wagnon's vibes sparkle and chime as drummer John O'Reilly Jr., bassist Jonathon Price and guitarist Van Manakas maintain a swift momentum. Trombonist Kevin Moehringer and Maria Grand provide stellar solos and ensemble work, setting the stage for Wagnon's own lively mallet attack, and the whole piece exudes a shimmering excitement.



12. While a number of musical innovators influenced British guitarist **Mark Wingfield**, Jimi Hendrix remains a touchstone. Echoes of Hendrix continue to inform Wingfield's playing, even as he absorbed the influences of guitar heroes such as John McLaughlin, Allan Holdsworth and Terje Rypdal, to name a few. The

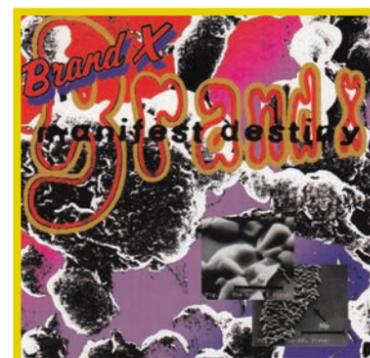
raw expression of Hendrix's sonic soundscapes can be heard and felt in Wingfield's music, as he utilizes a variety of techniques — as opposed to relying overmuch on effects — to wring drama and emotion from his instrument. On his 2018 release *Tales From the Dreaming City* (MoonJune), the guitarist deftly crafts a series of instrumental narratives alongside trio mates Yaron Stavi and Asaf Sirkis, as well as guest synthesizer artist Dominique Vantomme. Included here, "I Wonder How Many

Miles I've Fallen" maintains a somber, menacing tone, with Wingfield's textured lines shadowed by the heavy footfalls of Stavi and Sirkis. The meandering melody travels down shadowy sidestreets, as Stavi's fretless bass guitar ventures out front for a spell. Wingfield again takes point, his tremolo-laden strings evincing the unease of trodding unfamiliar terrain, while Sirkis' unrelenting, unrushed backbeat ups the anxiety.



13. Serbian keyboardist and composer **Vasil Hadzimanov** integrates the folk music of his homeland into a heady mixture of jazz, funk, rock and electronica. Released in 2018, the evocative *Lines in Sand* (MoonJune) provides a tantalizing taste of this unique fusion. Hadzimanov's electric keyboards and synthesizers remain at the

center of an exciting ensemble, creating washes of sound that organically combine traditional music with modern iterations. The group's musical aims, and philosophy, are best illustrated on the track "Freedom From the Past," which grows from a traditional-sounding dance number into an ecstatic electronic whirl, driven largely by Bojan Ikoivic's percolating percussion and Miroslav Tovirac's supple bass guitar lines. Hadzimov and guitarist Branko Trijic create reverberant and otherworldly sounds that evoke the mysteries of earlier eras while fully plugged into the technology of today.

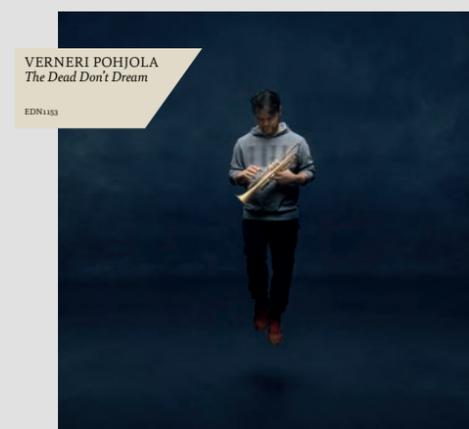


14. Formed in 1974, British fusion pioneers **Brand X** started as side project for guitarist John Goodsall and drummer Phil Collins (yes, that Phil Collins). The band made some truly progressive recordings, starting with 1976's well-titled *Unorthodox Behaviour*. While band members rotated in and out of the band, Goodsall and

bassist Percy Jones remained at the core of Brand X. The group's final studio album, *Manifest Destiny* (Buckyball), was released in 1997 after a two-year hiatus, and includes contributions from vibraphonist Marc Wagnon. Once again, Brand X explored adventurous sonic terrain, utilizing various effects and samples with intriguing results. Jones' hellacious bass groove underlines "Virus," our selection, as Goodsall's acid guitar lines filter in and out of the layered mix. Keyboardist Franz Pusch, who co-wrote the song with Goodsall, and Wagnon, on midi vibes, also provide plenty of color.

## EDITION RECORDS - NEW RELEASES

British Record Label with a global presence. New Music. New Thinking.



**HOME TO CHRIS POTTER, KURT ELLING, THE BAD PLUS, KNEEBODY, BEN WENDEL AND MANY MORE.**

Visit [www.editionrecords.com](http://www.editionrecords.com) for more info



# The Hit Maker's Tale

A new biography explores Tommy LiPuma's winning ways.

By Bob Weinberg

Tommy LiPuma lived a fascinating life. As detailed in *The Ballad of Tommy LiPuma* (Nardis Books), a biography penned by longtime friend and musician Ben Sidran, the influential record mogul's saga reads like a sprawling work of fiction. Over the past four or five years of LiPuma's life — he died in 2017 — Sidran rolled tape during their frequent get-togethers, capturing LiPuma's reminiscences about his life and experiences and gaining insight into how he became a pivotal figure in the worlds of jazz and pop. From pairing Miles Davis with Marcus Miller to forging indelible hits with George Benson to helming Natalie Cole's triumphant *Unforgettable* and engineering Diana Krall's ascendance on a string of successful records, LiPuma's ears and instincts were damn near infallible.

Sidran first met LiPuma after he was signed to his Blue Thumb label. Shortly after walking into the producer's office, he was put to work playing Hammond B3 organ on a session for guitarist Phil Upchurch's 1972 soul-jazz classic *Darkness Darkness*. Here he got to observe LiPuma's production methods up close, as LiPuma famously preferred to hang out on the musicians' side of the studio glass. "Tommy's style of production was always a mystery, not just to me,

but to a lot of folks," says Sidran, 76, talking by phone from an oceanfront Mexican vacation spot in early March. "Because he was very affable and very friendly and always open to other people's ideas, it could often appear that all he was doing was ordering lunch. But then you'd be aware that all the records came out sounding very beautiful and well-crafted, so he was clearly doing more than lunch. He was very focused and he had a way with people that brought out their best. They trusted him and he trusted them. And there was a feeling in the room that you wanted to do your best for this guy."

LiPuma's amiable demeanor, Sidran posits, had its roots in a fateful childhood incident. Growing up in an Italian family within a multi-ethnic Cleveland neighborhood, LiPuma enjoyed a lively first-generation immigrant experience. Then, at age 9, a freak accident during a sandlot baseball game changed the course of his life. A line drive hit LiPuma squarely on the hip, knocking him unconscious and later activating an infection that made him quite ill. Confined to his bed for a couple of years, he turned to the radio for company. And when he heard Ruth Brown singing "Mama, He Treats Your Daughter Mean," in Sidran's words, "a whole new world opened up to him." Songs by Charles Brown, Lionel Hampton, Louis Jordan



The Ballad of Tommy LiPuma

Ben Sidran

Photo courtesy of Conqueroo

**"He was very focused and he had a way with people that brought out their best. They trusted him and he trusted them. And there was a feeling in the room that you wanted to do your best for this guy."**

and Red Prysock spoke to him not just through their deep-pocket grooves but in expressions of longing and overcoming whatever life threw at you. "Ballads and blues is where I live," LiPuma told his biographer. Explains Sidran: "This was clearly because of the travails he went through as a child. If you look at Tommy's records, they all have this kind of romanticism, which I think comes from his love of ballads."

In his teen years, LiPuma would pick up a saxophone and a serious jazz jones. George Shearing and Horace Silver had turned him on to jazz, but hearing Miles Davis' *Birth of the Cool* was a significant turning point. "It changed the way he listened to music," Sidran writes.

Cutting hair, like his father did, was not a lifelong ambition. Music was his mistress, and he'd do anything to make a life with her, literally working his way from packing records for distribution to plugging records to local DJs to running the show at some of the biggest music companies on the planet, including Warner Bros. and A&M. Early on he realized the primacy of the song, finding successful vehicles for Brook Benton and The O'Jays. "The song was definitely king," Sidran says. "Tommy came up through publishing. The song was the asset, and you accessorized it almost with the artist."

That philosophy remained with LiPuma throughout his career, as did his ability to identify an artist's true strengths. This is nowhere better illustrated than in LiPuma's guidance of George Benson, who had been recording for Creed Taylor's CTI imprint. Why, LiPuma wanted to know, did Benson not sing more on his albums? Apparently, Taylor had wanted to make Benson into "the next Wes Montgomery." Understanding that Benson's vocals

were every bit as appealing as his silky guitar sound, LiPuma urged him to sing on "This Masquerade," a Leon Russell tune that they initially planned to record as an instrumental. He also remembered a song from a Gábor Szabó session, a catchy ditty penned by R&B star Bobby Womack called "Breezin'," which became the album's title track. *Breezin'* ended up selling more than eight million copies and earned a slew of Grammy nominations, with "This Masquerade" taking Record of the Year.

LiPuma's instincts once again proved sound after he met Miles Davis in 1986. More than anything, he wanted to return Davis to prominence, something Davis longed for, as well. LiPuma brought in bassist Marcus Miller to contemporize Davis' sound with his virtuosic drum-machine programming on tracks that would comprise the album *Tutu*. "I stopped by when they were making *Tutu* at Capitol Studios," Sidran recalls, "and I heard the [title] track that Marcus had come up with before Miles put his trumpet on. And at that time, that triplet feel that he got out of a drum machine was very unusual. Marcus got it to swing. I don't think Tommy liked drum machines, but I do think he had no compunction about making a record like *Tutu* with Miles."

LiPuma's magic touch continued with Cole's *Unforgettable* and on Krall's remarkable run in the '90s and 2000s. Even as he grew increasingly disenchanted with the industry, he lent his production skills to a rising star, Cleveland trumpeter Dominic Farinacci, on his 2014 release *Short Stories*. And though he kept up with trends and was attracted to the latest technology, LiPuma still drew on the deep wells of feeling from his early listening experiences. "In the last year of his life,"



Anne Mette Iversen Quartet + 1  
*Racing a Butterfly* (BJU)

Inspired by a butterfly that kept her company during a morning run, bassist and composer Iversen conceptualized the playful and sometimes profound music of her latest release. The results are vividly joyful, mimicking the seemingly erratic flights of butterflies, singly and in groups. Iversen and drummer Otis Brown III supply dynamic grooves over which tenor saxophonist John Ellis, trombonist Peter Dahlgren and pianist Danny Grissett collectively and individually flutter and soar. The two-part "Parallel Flying" is a dazzler. Part 1 opens with Iversen's resonant pizzicato, which is soon joined by Brown's whispering brushes, then the full ensemble, with solos by Dahlgren and Grissett evoking a serene pastoral setting. Part 2 breaks for the open sky, as the five-piece takes wing and conjures the awe and excitement of witnessing one of nature's finest works in action.

NOW PLAYING

Sidran relates, "Tommy was listening mostly to Ben Webster, Benny Carter, Lester Young. He was just falling back in love with the music of his childhood, as I think we all do. There's a line in the book that says, 'Nostalgia doesn't just color the past, it colors the future.' I think that's really true: What we fall in love with, we stay in love with." ■

# Upon Reflection

**On *The Mirror*, Raul Midón considers matters great and small.**

By Jonathan Widran

Fifteen years after the release of his Arif and Joe Mardin-produced Manhattan Records debut, *State of Mind*, singer/songwriter/guitarist Raul Midón is beyond the point of trying to figure out his audience demographic or ascertaining the nature of his specific brand.

When he launched his solo career, he and roster mates like Amos Lee were soft-spoken artists laboring under what he calls the “Norah Jones Witness Protection Program.” Back then he thought he was on course to be a pop/R&B star, but by the time he signed with Artistry Music in the mid-2010s he had amassed a huge following of jazz fans. In 2016 he toured the United States under the Monterey Jazz Fest moniker with Gerald Clayton, Nicholas Payton, Gregory Hutchinson and Joe Sanders. Two years later, he recorded *If You Really Want* with conductor Vince Mendoza and the Metropole Orkest. As the son of a father who was an Argentine folkloric dancer, Midón, who was born and raised in New Mexico, has Latin rhythms practically coursing through his veins.

“My career to this point should make it clear that I don’t subscribe to this idea of fitting into boxes for marketing purposes,” says the two-time Grammy nominee, who launched his career in Miami as a session singer for Julio Iglesias, José Feliciano, Alejandro Sanz and Shakira, with whom he also toured during her *Laundry Service* heyday. One of the key moments that brought him to the attention of record label executives was a performance of Stevie Wonder’s “Make Sure You’re Sure” during a Carnegie Hall tribute concert to the movie music of Spike Lee.

**“There’s precious little written in mainstream culture about what it’s like to be blind, and it’s a major deal. It changes your life completely and gives you a very different perspective on life.”**

“The art of music is endless if you’re willing to explore that,” Midón says. “All I’m interested in is continuing to try to find my voice and express how I feel about things from my perspective.”

Embracing this creative freedom allows the singer to venture blissfully off the beaten path on his latest album, *The Mirror* (Artistry Music/Mack Avenue), on which he surrounds eight core songs with two spoken-word pieces (that include soft acoustic-guitar accompaniment). On the first of these, titled “If I Could See,” Midón, who’s been blind since infancy, imagines the sensual feast he might experience during a simple walk. He intones: “If I could see/I would walk alone sometimes/Stroll serenely along a tree lined street and/Watch the comings and goings of people/Moving toward their separate destinies ... I would move through space and time/Letting my arms swing nonchalantly at my sides.” On the second, “One Day Without War,” he wonders, “What would it be like if there was no war for one day?/Just one day on which the world would stop and reflect upon the innumerable loss, the bottomless suffering, the unspeakable evil that is visited upon the world when war breaks out.”

“Spoken word is something I debated about before including,” Midón says. “But at heart I’m an artist who speaks to whatever is happening at the moment, so I decided it would be a good choice. I’ve always been interested in writing other things besides structured songs, and I had been toying for a while with putting music to poetry, which is different than blending music and lyrics. I grew up listening to artists who were rappers before they called it rap, like Gil Scott-Heron, and I’ve always wanted to take that sort of approach. Speaking the words over the music makes it especially personal and intimate, and I’m at a point in my career where I feel liberated to do that.”

The balance that Midón strikes between addressing global concerns and allowing us

to walk a few blocks in his shoes extends to the equally extraordinary “regular” songs on *The Mirror*. He peppers the easy-grooving Latin/R&B-influenced “You’re the One” with a brief rap takedown of President Trump and his administration. On the charming, lightly swinging “Disguise,” he lets a woman know that even though he can’t see her, he can “hear through her” and that he’s not impressed with her “dilettante finesse” or superficial values. Though the album also has lighthearted moments — including the bright and breezy “I Love the Afternoon,” featuring lush harmony vocals by Janis Siegel and Lauren Kinhan — and traditional-styled jazz ballads, the deep insights he offers about his disability reveal an artist unafraid to reveal slightly inconvenient truths. “If I Could See” and “Disguise” — as well as the overall concept of *The Mirror* — follow in the tradition of his fearlessly vulnerable 2017 set *Bad Ass and Blind*. Unlike legends like Stevie Wonder, Ray Charles, José Feliciano and Andrea Bocelli, Midón uses his art to illuminate the realities of his unique world.

“I’m putting my neck out there and letting people know this is who I am,” Midón says. “There’s precious little written

in mainstream culture about what it’s like to be blind, and it’s a major deal. It changes your life completely and gives you a very different perspective on life. Sometimes even filmmakers trying to be sensitive get it wrong. In the movie *Ray*, [Ray Charles] touched a girl’s wrist to see if she was good looking or not. The only book I’ve ever read that has a blind character with any dimension is Anthony Doerr’s *All the Light We Cannot See*.

“Many blind people I know are obsessed about getting a good-looking girl, even when they can’t see her, and that’s ridiculous,” he adds. “Our culture emphasizes looks so much, but there’s too much emphasis on it. You’re gonna pick a mate based on their appearance? You’ll spend the rest of your life with her, and she won’t always look like that! I’ve been in a lot of conversations with musicians on the road talking about whether a woman was hot or not, and I have nothing to add to those superficial exchanges. They’re so focused on looks, they’re ignorant of what that person may be hiding. It’s not that we’re any less judgmental, we just emphasize and evaluate people based on other elements of their character.” ■



**Sinne Eeg & The Danish Radio Big Band**  
*We’ve Just Begun* (BFM Jazz)

Seventeen years and nine celebrated albums into her celebrated career as one of Scandinavia’s top jazz vocalists, sensual, supple-voiced Sinne Eeg joyfully and soulfully swings through her latest release. From the brisk, brass-punched title track that opens the 10-track album to the rousing closer, “To a New Day,” Eeg embraces a new phase in her career with her first collaboration with The Danish Radio Big Band.

**NOW PLAYING**

# Anger Management

Maria Schneider takes on Google and YouTube.

By Larry Blumenfeld

Maria Schneider doesn't think up concepts for her albums. "I've never preconceived a subject for my music," she says over the phone from her cabin near the Delaware Water Gap, where she was holed up in March, having left her Manhattan apartment to ride out the COVID-19 crisis. "I just don't work that way."

Yet themes keep creeping into her work. "The music reveals the ideas," she says, "and it ends up being what I need or want. It expresses what I need to say." *Evanescence*, the 1984 release that first brought her music and her 18-piece orchestra to widespread attention, proposed a search for new musical colors with which to move large-ensemble jazz forward. *Allegresse* and *Concert in the Garden*, released in 2000 and 2004 respectively, reflected the complex blend of optimism and despair she absorbed while spending extended time in Brazil. *The Thompson Fields*, from 2015, sounds the way it does because she had begun spending time at the cabin, which set off deep nostalgia for her upbringing in rural Minnesota and rekindled "my true identity as a country person," she says.

When Schneider sat down at the piano last year to compose a piece commissioned by the Library of Congress, the music she

came up with sounded dark, urgent, even angry. "The truth is, I was angry," she says. The source of that anger was the dark side of the digital revolution. "I was angry about the ways in which online life and artificial intelligence are taking us over and destroying us. I'm just so frustrated with how 'big data' has destroyed the creative industry. They use us as a carrot for 'eyeballs.' They need music to be free, they need everything to be free, so they try to evade and knock down copyright laws so that their platforms get as much traffic as possible, and so that they can amass our personal data for ad sales and artificial intelligence. It's no wonder I wrote this dark and intense piece."

For years, Schneider has been venting her anger toward Google, YouTube and other "big data" companies off the bandstand, through her words. She's written articles and white papers, appeared on Copyright Office roundtables, even testified before Congress about pending legislation. On her website, along with all the links to recordings and music scores, is a running log of her published missives. In an essay for the website *Trichordist*, titled "Three Simple Ways to Protect

Ourselves from Big Data Companies," she wrote: "Considering the degree to which these companies already overlord our lives, opinions and political system, one questions whether regulation can actually happen, and the degree to which it would ultimately protect us. Many are worried it's too late to reign in the power and control of these companies." In an op-ed piece for the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*, she issued a wake-up call: "We have allowed powerful companies to enter our homes and lives to extract personal assets worth

**"Musicians have been the canary in the coal mine. We were the first to be used and traded for data."**

billions of dollars without paying us one cent for taking them."

Her advocacy has been particularly focused on artists' rights. "Musicians have been the canary in the coal mine," she told me. "We were the first to be used and traded for data." Her piece for *Allegro*, published by New York City's musicians' union, bears the headline, "Like a Wood Chipper on Steroids' — How YouTube Strips the Metadata of Creators and Why We Must Fight Back." It's a call to arms concerning the clever and, to her, illegal ways that YouTube evades copyright laws. She wrote, "Essentially, YouTube is herding music and musicians into its platform, stripping away our identities, and then rebranding our works with the hot iron of its own system."

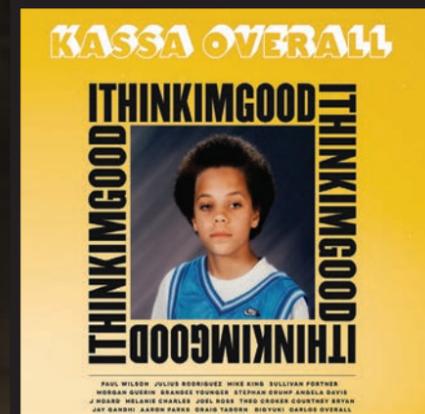
The act of composing has now become a method of purging her anger. "It's less literal," she says, "but maybe more satisfying." She wrote a piece called "Data Lords," full of intense harmonies and contorted rhythms. "It is the physical manifestation of my frustration," she says. Another piece, "Don't Be Evil," named for Google's now-discarded corporate motto, came out as humorous, meant to mock the corporate giant for its disingenuousness. Around that same time, Schneider found herself also writing lovely, poetic pieces. One, "Sanzenin," was inspired by her visits to meditative temple gardens, hundreds of years old, north of Kyoto, Japan. Another, "Stone Song," is based on whimsical pieces of pottery, given to her by ceramicist Jack Troy, that look like little stones and rattle when shaken, as if possessing voices of their own. (The pottery became instruments in her orchestra for the recorded version.)

At first, Schneider couldn't reconcile the darkness and the beauty. "But then I realized that, once again, the music was reflecting my life and telling me what I needed to do," she says. "I know that I'm

not alone in struggling to find space, and to keep connected with my inner world, the natural world, and just the simpler things in life. Just as I feel myself ping-ponging between a digital world and the real world, the same dichotomy is showing up in my music." If the dark and intense pieces channeled her rage toward digital overlords, these poetic pieces represented the flipside of the digital dilemma. She settled on creating a double-album, *Data Lords*, reflecting these two polar extremes. The first half features dense, often frenetic and, yes, angry music. The second half is spacious, largely reflective and sometimes playful.

There's an irony to all of this, Schneider admits. The Internet has been a key element in shaping her career. She was among the earliest and most savvy adopters of digital distribution. *Data Lords* was created, funded and documented through ArtistShare, the world's first crowd-funding Internet platform. Her *Concert in the Garden*, which was ArtistShare's first release, was also the first recording with Internet-only distribution to win a Grammy Award. When we spoke on the phone in March, the world was quickly shutting down due to a raging pandemic. The rash of event cancellations included the May concert at Manhattan's 92nd Street Y that would have celebrated the release of *Data Lords*. Even the date of her album's release was suddenly in question.

"Can you imagine living through all of this if we couldn't communicate through the Internet?" Schneider says. "It's not as if I'm some Luddite, you know. I live and work and thrive in the digital world. I just don't want it to rob me or to rule me or to swallow us whole." With *Data Lords*, Schneider and her orchestra give stark musical voice to the digital era's darkest dangers while reminding us of the simple things we so often forsake or forget when we linger online. ■



Kassa Overall

*I Think I'm Good* (Brownswood)

Music that attempts to fuse jazz and hip-hop often amounts to little more than jazz musicians allowing rappers to drone on over their music or hip-hop crews persuading a saxophonist to solo within their production. Kassa Overall is an exception. His new album displays a densely textured and cleverly swinging approach that reflects both his tenures with jazz greats such as the late pianist Geri Allen and his collaborations with hip-hop acts such as Das Racist. Overall has worked as a drummer, anchoring jazz bands; as a producer, cutting up beats for hip-hop artists; and as a rapper, lending text and flow to bands such as Terri Lyne Carrington's Social Science. Here, he does all those things, combined into an original concept that sounds new.

now playing



WHEN WORLDS

# COLLIDED

A BRIEF HISTORY OF "FUSION."

BY SHAWN BRADY

Miles Davis

legend has it that when Bob Dylan went electric at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival, the move sent shockwaves through the folk music community. Half a century later the incident is a key part of Dylan's mythology, but the music itself is hardly controversial. Miles Davis' decision to plug in just four years later, with the recording of *In a Silent Way*, remains divisive in the jazz world to this day.

In part that's due to the differences between the genres; rock and roll is predicated on rebellion against the past, while jazz's foundations are built on a respect for tradition. But since its 1970s heyday, "fusion" has remained something of a dirty word in many jazz circles, tainted by the sins of its most garish excesses and soulless acolytes. At its best, the music proved an exhilarating and necessary evolution, absorbing the radical influences of rock, funk and psychedelia that were proving to be the most innovative sounds of the day.

Miles was hardly alone in recognizing the possibilities inherent in a hybrid of modern rock and jazz. Raised in the rock era, guitarist Larry Coryell made his debut by blurring the lines with the Free Spirits, a band (including drummer Bob Moses and saxophonist Jim Pepper) that layered jazz soloing over Woodstock-ready pop tunes. Charles Lloyd's hippie-jazz classic *Forest Flower*, captured at the 1966 Monterey Jazz Festival, earned him a crossover success that led to a decade-long relationship with the Beach Boys.

But it was Davis' embrace of rock and funk that would prove epochal. Name the greatest ensembles from the fusion era, and nearly every one can trace its origins to Davis' employ. Three members of the iconic Second Great Quintet — the break-up of which heralded Davis' discovery of a new sound — would go on to form landmark bands: Herbie Hancock with The Headhunters (not to mention the *Mwandishi* band), Wayne Shorter with Weather Report, and Tony Williams with Lifetime.

The new, younger sidemen that Davis brought into his circle in order to record *In a Silent Way*, *Bitches Brew*, *A Tribute to Jack Johnson* and others would also prove fundamental to fusion's development. They included Chick Corea, who later formed Return To Forever; John McLaughlin, founder of the Mahavishnu Orchestra (which included fellow Miles alumni Billy Cobham and Jerry Goodman); Shorter's Weather Report partner Joe Zawinul; and Headhunter Bennie Maupin, among others.

Davis had found rejuvenated inspiration in the electrifying music — and immense success — of rock and funk artists like Jimi Hendrix, James Brown and Sly and the Family Stone. His new collaborators had come of age with those influences, lighting the spark that would carry bands like Return To Forever and Weather Report to unprecedented audiences, playing on arena and festival stages. The flow happened in both directions, with rock acts like Blood, Sweat & Tears, Chicago and Frank Zappa borrowing elements and musicians from the realm of jazz.



Many of these bands took the notion of “fusion” to heart, looking further afield for other traditions to incorporate. Corea’s original incarnation of Return To Forever, which included Airto Moreira and Flora Purim along with mainstay Stanley Clarke on bass, was laced heavily with Brazilian accents. McLaughlin’s Mahavishnu Orchestra explored a meld of jazz, rock and Indian classical music. Weather Report looked to a panoply of world music along with a slicker variety of R&B that earned the group enormous success while alienating elements of their jazz audience. Just one year after honoring *Heavy Weather* with a 5-star review, *DownBeat* infamously granted 1978’s follow-up, *Mr. Gone*, a single star, accusing the band of having “done to jazz in the ’70s what Paul Whiteman did to it in the ’20s.”

Hostility like that would flourish, sometimes justifiably, as the ’70s drew to a close and the ’80s ushered in the birth of smooth jazz. The two styles are intimately related, though it’s difficult to find the charged invention of Billy Cobham’s *Spectrum* or Jaco Pastorius’ audacious grooves anywhere in the frictionless banality of Kenny G. In the earliest stages of its evolution, though, the style was still recognizably jazz. Serious players like Grover Washington Jr., David Sanborn and the Brecker Brothers were simply following a path laid down by Creed Taylor’s CTI Records, crafting a more radio-friendly brand of soul jazz. Bands like the Yellowjackets, Spyro Gyra and the Rippingtons managed to bridge the divide, as proved by their longevity.

Fusion proper faded from prominence in the ’80s as jazz, like much of American society, took a neo-conservative turn. The Young Lions movement, epitomized by the opinionated Wynton Marsalis, led the charge back to acoustic instrumentation and swing-based rhythms. The proliferation of synthesized tones also infested fusion with sounds that seemed almost immediately dated and overly polished, leading to a yearning for something more organic.

“By decade’s end, fusion had degenerated into formula — even for competent players,” wrote Gary Giddins in *The Village Voice* in 1979. “Where fusion might have incorporated rock sonics to bolster improvisation and slice through the muddle of Top-40 sentimentality, it turned to easy-listening sophistication, complete with doggerel, cloying guitar sonorities, pretentious interludes from 19th-century Europe, and synthesizer-replicated strings.”

Which seems like a pretty definitive obituary, except for the cyclical nature inherent in music. In the modern scene, it seems that fusion has become the predominant mode, if in spirit more than in style. There’s hardly a genre outside of modern jazz that hasn’t been incorporated into it. Hip-hop, of course, is nearly ubiquitous, with artists like Makaya McCraven, Kassa Overall, Ambrose Akinmusire and Kamasi Washington finding novel ways to blur the lines. But jazz composers have also drawn from virtually every style that’s caught their ear: a globe-spanning range of folk musics, Americana, punk, metal — all have emerged in provocative ways.

As fusion forefather Miles Davis once said, “Nothing is out of the question.”



# the fusion moment

A conversation with Chick Corea

BY BILL MILKOWSKI



celebrated keyboardist-composer Chick Corea has had his hand in many styles of music: bebop, post-bop, avant garde, Latin and straightahead jazz, flamenco and classical. He's also famously carved out a place for himself in music history as a prominent explorer and innovator of fusion.

A participant in Miles Davis' seminal 1970 fusion recording *Bitches Brew*, Corea had already played Fender Rhodes on two previous Davis releases from 1969, *Filles de Kilimanjaro* and *In a Silent Way*. But *Bitches Brew* had him diving headlong into a brave new world of electric instruments, a direction he would pursue in earnest with his own Return To Forever band in the mid-'70s and his Elektric Band from the mid '80s through the early '90s. He continued to embrace electronic instruments on albums like 2004's *To the Stars* (an Elektric Band reunion), 2103's *The Vigil* and 2019's *Antidote* (with his Spanish Heart Band). Two upcoming projects set for release later this year on the Concord Jazz imprint — *Plays*, a double-CD solo-piano outing, and *Live*, an Akoustic Band reunion with John Patitucci and Dave Weckl — are strictly acoustic.

Recently, Corea reminisced about being on the forefront of the fusion movement 50 years ago.

**Bill Milkowski: While your two upcoming releases are both in acoustic mode, you have a significant place in the history of fusion music.**

Chick Corea: Yeah. So everyone has agreed to use the term in a non-derogatory way, huh? It was a dirty word in the '70s, you know.

**Oh, yeah, the F-word.**

Yeah, the F-word. Right. You know, an interesting thing that just popped in mind was that in the late '80s or maybe early '90s, the pianist Billy Childs had a position at UCLA for a while and he was teaching a course devoted entirely to the electronic music of the '70s featuring Return to Forever, Mahavishnu Orchestra and Weather Report. He was like a champion of the fusioners.

**So how did you become a fusioner? Because in 1968 you recorded *Now He Sings, Now He Sobs*, your classic piano-trio album with Miroslav Vitous and Roy Haynes. And then just a year later you're playing electric keyboard with Miles on *Filles de Kilimanjaro* and *In a Silent Way*. How did that happen so quickly?**

Well, every artist, I think, wants to get his message felt by people. It's a subtle thing and some artists say, "Oh, that's not important." But I think all artists basically have a desire somewhere to do that. And that certainly was Miles' design. When I joined Miles' band in 1968, I was playing acoustic piano and we were playing quintet jazz in nightclubs, some of which were half empty. Miles was already a legend and a star, and yet the music we were playing was so edgy and so improvised and so far out that people weren't coming to listen to it. Just imagine, the Plugged Nickel in Chicago empty or half-full on the second set ... for the great Miles Davis!

So then while I was in the band, I observed this transition take place where Clive Davis and the people at Columbia Records were trying to get Miles to reach more people. But Miles of his own accord in 1968 wanted to reach more people. He was saying that people couldn't follow this style of music that he had developed to a point of abstraction, where this bombast of technically proficient musicians was just going all over the place, improvising from Mars to Arcturus. Only a small handful really got what that vibe was. And Miles became, I think, unhappy about it. And so he looked around at what was happening — at Sly & The Family Stone and Jimi Hendrix — and he saw whatever he saw, and he came back to the band with some new ideas. And for me, it was, "Chick, play that," which was an electric piano. And he also wanted Dave Holland to play electric bass. And it all started changing from there.

Then when he invited everybody into the studio to do *Bitches Brew*, there it was. It was like an abrupt left turn had taken place. And for the musicians that worked with him — me and Herbie Hancock and Joe Zawinul, Tony Williams, John McLaughlin, Lenny White and these guys — it seemed natural to pursue that direction. And it looked like fun. So the attitude became, "Let's see what we can do with these electric instruments." And when



we got ahold of these electric instruments, it certainly didn't come out sounding like Sly & The Family Stone or Hendrix. We took it somewhere else. So that's one angle on how I think that whole movement was begun.

**During your time with Miles, you certainly got creative with the ring modulator.**

Yeah, and a lot of other stuff. You know, I never saw a synthesizer before I saw that electric piano in 1968 [*Filles de Kilimanjaro* was recorded on June 19–21 and September 24, 1968]. And then I started to see other guys using it, and I got my hands on one and started to experiment with all kinds of different electronics.

**When you had your loft in New York at that time on 19th Street, in the same building that Dave Liebman and Dave Holland also had lofts, and you guys were jamming a lot, were you ever playing electric keyboard?**

No, just piano. As a matter of fact, when Miles was definitely going in that electric direction that he was going, me and Dave Holland at the time were still totally enamored with acoustic music. So when we left Miles' band to form our own trio with Barry Altschul and then Anthony Braxton made it a quartet, it was strictly acoustic. And so for the year or more that we were together, Circle was a working band playing gigs around the world — all acoustic music, all improvised. It was the furthest from the fusion movement that you could possibly imagine.

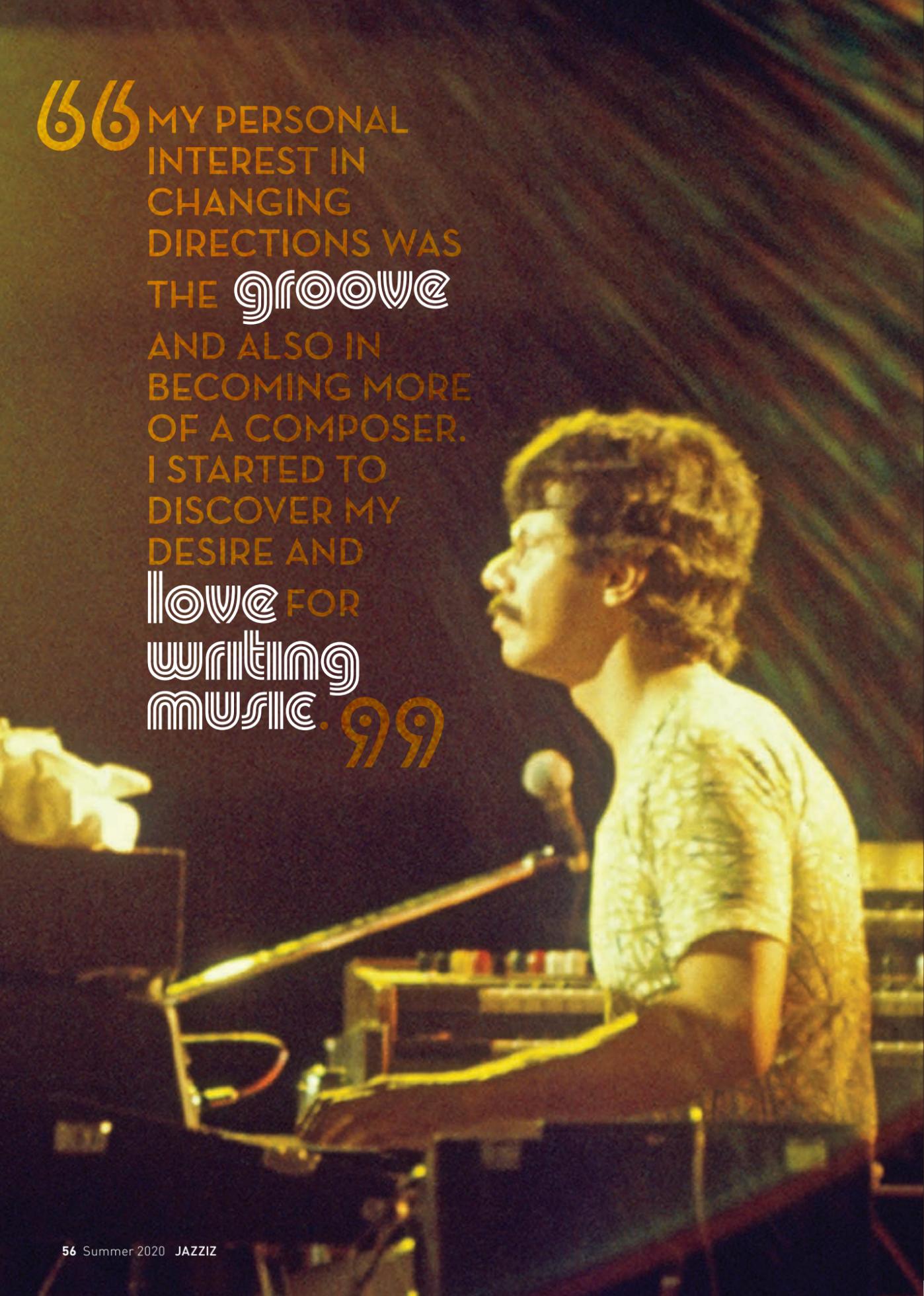
**During the time that you were recording acoustic jazz sessions in the mid-'60s with Blue Mitchell, Herbie Mann, Cal Tjader and others and also gigging with Booker Ervin, there was some new stuff bubbling up on the scene down in Greenwich Village, where Larry Coryell, Jim Pepper and Bob Moses were combining rock and jazz with Free Spirits as early as 1966. Were you hip to them?**

I didn't know much about that band, but looking at it now I think that Larry was changing the music like John McLaughlin was. Both were advanced players, but they played an instrument, electric guitar, that was one of the absolute hallmarks of rock 'n' roll and funk music. So those guys made that transition early and easily.

**And both of them were influenced by Jimi Hendrix.**

Absolutely. I think the more interesting angle is you have someone like John McLaughlin, who took the singing, screeching, wild sounds of electric guitar and brought it into a brand-new musical direction. Totally. He had a reverence for Jimi Hendrix, of course, and those other great rock guitarists. But to me, he took that electric guitar to another place. The way he played it, it was almost another instrument. So to my mind, you would compare Hendrix and McLaughlin only in one factor, which was the sound of distorted guitar. But musically they were ages and universes apart.

66 MY PERSONAL INTEREST IN CHANGING DIRECTIONS WAS THE GROOVE AND ALSO IN BECOMING MORE OF A COMPOSER. I STARTED TO DISCOVER MY DESIRE AND LOVE FOR WRITING MUSIC. 99



**After Circle you formed Return to Forever, which began as an acoustic group. How did you transition to a full-blown fusion band?**

My first transition out of Circle was rhythm. I wanted a groove. And the groove that appealed to me at that time was Brazilian or Latino. So I wrote tunes like "Some Time Ago" and "La Fiesta," which appeared on my first Return to Forever album in 1972. In fact, I wrote "La Fiesta" while I was still with Circle, before I put Return to Forever together. So my personal interest in changing directions was the groove, and also in becoming more of a composer. I started to discover my desire and love for writing music.

**Your second Return to Forever album, *Light as a Feather* [recorded in October 1972], contains the classic songs "Spain," "500 Miles High" and "You're Everything." You played Fender Rhodes exclusively on that, and it's a continuation of that Brazilian-Latin vibe you explored on the first album. But things changed radically on the third Return to Forever album, *Hymn of the Seventh Galaxy*, where you took things up a notch sonically.**

Yeah, that was a big transition. The previous band with Airtio on drums and Flora Purim on vocals, Joe Farrell on sax and flute and Stanley Clarke on upright bass toured around for a good year and a half. We made two recordings, the first one for ECM and the second one for Polydor. And really, I would have kept on with that band if it wasn't for the fact that Flora and Airtio needed to leave the band. Stanley was already going in a direction of electric bass, so he and I

went to the Felt Forum in New York to hear the Mahavishnu Orchestra. They had a big audience at the Felt Forum, and they blew us away. I told Stanley, "Man, check out the way that electric guitar is being used." John floored me. So as a composer, I wanted to write music for a guitar that played with that kind of sound. And that was the beginning of Return to Forever with Billy Connors.

**Did you audition various guitar players for Return to Forever?**

Stanley and I booked a week at Todd Barkan's Club in San Francisco, The Keystone Korner. The purpose of that week was to audition guitar players, and Billy was one of them. Lenny White had a prior commitment with the band Azteca and couldn't make this gig, so I asked Steve Gadd to come and play. And we auditioned a conga player too, a guy named Mingo Lewis. So the first electric version of Return to Forever was with Gadd on drums, Stanley on electric bass, myself on Fender Rhodes, Mingo Lewis on congas and Billy Connors on electric guitar. The band kept growing and I kept writing. Al Di Meola came into the band for *Where Have I Known You Before*, and then I encouraged Stanley to write more. Al wrote a tune or two. I think we made three albums with that group. Yeah, it was a creative period.

**During that time, were you calling your music fusion or jazz-rock or what?**

Nah, musicians don't use those terms. We don't even use the term "jazz."

**In that moment, in the heyday of Return to Forever, did you feel a kinship with groups like Mahavishnu Orchestra, Herbie Hancock's Headhunters and Weather Report?**

Oh, absolutely. And we have through the years. We've had this kinship of knowing, "We're doing something here!" Of course, we all came out of Miles' band. Tony Williams was one of the first ones to leave Miles' band. Well, actually, Herbie left first, but he did some acoustic projects first. But when Tony left, he came with Lifetime. And that was one of the first powerful electric projects coming from a "jazz musician." And yeah, there was definitely a kinship there. I miss Tony and Joe Zawinul, too. Herbie and I, we have our different kinds of music, but there's a lot of similarities in the directions that we've taken and certainly we have remained great friends. And I've collaborated with John McLaughlin through the years.

**Right. Including the Five Peace Band that you formed in 2008.**

Yep. That was a beautiful reunion. And that was during a period, which I guess still exists, where the combination of the beauties of both an acoustic rhythm section and an electric sound can be had. That's been John's goal; that's been my goal when I put some of my bands together. The Spanish Heart Band is like that.

**Given the improvements in technology with both instruments and sound systems, it seems that electric bands today have the sonic thing much more under control.**

Yeah, it's true. My engineer Bernie Kirsh — he's been with me since the '70s — has learned how to make any size band sound great in one of those acoustically reverberant halls. A lot of it has to do with the musicians now having a sensitivity, especially the drummers, like Brian Blade and Marcus Gilmore. They're incredibly sensitive to a sonic environment, which was not true in the '70s. The drummers were just bashing along in the '70s with the new fusion music. And the use of the P.A. system was very crass in those days. It was badly used.

**Several musicians from fusion's heyday have suffered hearing loss because of those overly loud sound systems that they had to work with night after night.**

Absolutely. I've had high-end loss of hearing myself. At the heyday of the electric Return to Forever, like '74-'75, the stage sound was so loud ... I think that was maybe the year that I hurt my eardrums. But I didn't think about that at the time, I was just loving the energy of it. That whole time, it was just a naivete. It was new equipment. No one really knew how to use an amplifier onstage, how to make that coordinate with an artistic, quality communication to an audience; we were just discovering this stuff. People didn't have front-of-house mixers, they didn't know what the hell to do with a P.A. They had no control over the band

onstage. In fact, a lot of those bands used to ignore the P.A. and just play as loud as they could from the stage, because the P.A. operator didn't know what he was doing. So it was just a battle. But I think the underlying reason was just not understanding the equipment or how to use it, basically. It took a while. And I'm very fortunate to have Bernie Kirsh, who lived through all of that and learned. Both of us learned how to tame the beast. Because you can cause a great impact without playing that loud. It's an emotional thing that you want to get across. The massive volume, to me, is not a needed component. It can be nice and visceral without it hurting.

**Are you aware of any young bands today carrying on that tradition of '70s fusion music?**

Not specifically.

**Groups like the Robert Glasper Experiment, Snarky Puppy, The Funky Knuckles and the British trio GoGo Penguin are all groups using Fender Rhodes electric piano and conjuring that '70s vibe to some degree.**

I may have seen one or two of those when I scan YouTube or a friend drops me a link. And I can see in what they're doing that the tradition is still there. And maybe they checked us out on YouTube to see what we were doing back in the day. I mean, now with YouTube and the Internet, the recorded history of anything you want is just totally available. So technologies tend not to get lost so easily. You can go back and see what we were doing back in the '70s and

'60s, to a degree. And certainly starting with the '80s and '90s, it's all documented.

**Do you have any plans to get back to a more electric project yourself?**

Well, it's always part of my interest. You know, a new instrument comes out and I'm intrigued. Moog makes a new polyphonic instrument, which I have, which I love. But in order to take the time to delve into that direction, it becomes a commitment. I could say, "I'd like to put a band together with three keyboards and three guitars and a symphony orchestra, and I'll write something for that." But it's not feasible. I've learned that word from economics. So I'm sticking with things that are pretty economically feasible right now, which is writing music for my small groups. Anything larger needs funding.

To do a tour with an electric band, even my Spanish Heart band, it's pretty tight, budget-wise, to be able to do that. It's a 10-piece band. We're touring this summer, and Rubén Blades is going to be singing with us. It's gonna be a lot of fun. But I can't do that often. You know, it's difficult economically. One of my things that I'd like to do is to use my electronics and new instruments the way I have them and do occasional projects out of my home studio and stream them somehow, maybe invite musicians down to do that. But to tour with a band like that is becoming less and less possible.

**So you're keeping one toe in the fusion pond.**

I guess you could say that. One toe in the pond!

“YOU CAN CAUSE A  
great impact  
WITHOUT PLAYING  
THAT LOUD. IT'S AN  
EMOTIONAL THING  
THAT YOU WANT TO  
GET ACROSS. THE  
MASSIVE VOLUME, TO  
ME, IS NOT A NEEDED  
COMPONENT. IT CAN BE  
nice & visceral  
WITHOUT IT HURTING.”

”



# ESSENTIAL FUSION

While the blending of jazz and rock aesthetics had started years before, the 1970s was the golden age of fusion. Here are 10 albums that rocked jazz to its foundations.

BY BOB WEINBERG



## MILES DAVIS

*Bitches Brew* (Columbia), 1970

Fusion didn't start with *Bitches Brew*, but for many listeners, it gets no better. Armed with a few musical sketches, Davis assembled his working band plus guests to play sprawling jams that were edited and spliced together by producer Teo Macero. Results were funky, atmospheric and artful, with doubled keyboards (Chick Corea, Joe Zawinul), bass (Dave Holland, Harvey Brooks), drums (Jack DeJohnette, Lenny White), percussion (Don Alias, Jumma Sultan) and reeds (Wayne Shorter, Bennie Maupin), plus guitarist John McLaughlin and the Dark Magus himself lasering through the mix with his incisive, minimalist trumpet. Released in April 1970, the double album earned Miles a Grammy and a gold record. Its ripples continue to be felt 50 years later.



## LARRY CORYELL

*Spaces* (Vanguard), 1970

Guitarist Coryell had established himself as a prodigious up-and-comer with Chico Hamilton's and Gary Burton's groups — neither of which would have prepared listeners for the frenetic yet lyrical fandangos offered here. Engaging in fleet and fiery exchanges with guitarist John McLaughlin, Coryell displayed bluesy chops and classical technique undergirded by Miroslav Vitous' poignant bowed bass and cello and Billy Cobham's scintillating drums.



## THE MAHAVISHNU ORCHESTRA

*The Inner Mounting Flame* (Columbia), 1971

John McLaughlin set the template for fusion guitar playing with this first album by The Mahavishnu Orchestra, his furious leads engaging in feedback-laced freak-outs elevated by an underlying melodic sophistication. His intensity was matched by Jerry Goodman's skittering electric violin, Jan Hammer's atmospheric piano and synths, Rick Laird's rumbling bass and Billy Cobham's untethered drumming.



## BILLY COBHAM

*Spectrum* (Atlantic), 1973

Drummer Cobham's debut album highlighted his nail-gun drumming and dynamic R&B-influenced compositions, as well as the frighteningly talented young guitarist Tommy Bolin. Cobham's joyful exuberance was matched by Bolin's driving, boogaloo-rock leads and Jan Hammer's keyboards and synths. Cobham also dipped into the electronic trick bag, utilizing Moog synth drums and sample and hold devices. Bolin's stellar career came to a tragic end with his overdose death in 1976 at age 25.



## HERBIE HANCOCK

*Headhunters* (Columbia), 1973

With an arsenal of electric keyboards at his command — Fender Rhodes, clavinet, ARP synths — Hancock crafted one of the funkier instrumental records to ever test a pair of woofers. His Headhunters quintet maintains slippery, slinky grooves throughout, with Paul Jackson's liquid bass lines, Harvey Mason's sinewy drumming and Bill Summers' snaky percussion flowing like magma under Hancock's spanking keys and Bennie Maupin's sinuous saxophone.



## RETURN TO FOREVER

*Where Have I Known You Before* (Polydor), 1974

Chick Corea's seminal fusion group evolved from album to album, but remained rooted in lyrical melodies and dazzling musicianship. On the band's fourth release, 19-year-old guitar hotshot Al Di Meola joined Corea and the remarkable rhythm section of bassist Stanley Clarke and drummer Lenny White on a set of tunes with their heads in the stars and their feet in the funk. Echoed by Di Meola's blazing leads, Corea's sci-fi sonics evoke galaxies aborning, while Clarke and White are the fuel that propels the rocket onward.



## JACO PASTORIUS

*Jaco Pastorius* (Epic), 1976

Jaws dropped from the needle drop on fretless bass phenom Pastorius' debut release. His Track 1 read of Charlie Parker's "Donna Lee," accompanied solely by Don Alias' congas, backed up his boast as the "world's best bassist." Not only showcasing his instrumental virtuosity, this self-titled release also displayed Pastorius' compositional genius on tunes such as "Continuum" and "Portrait of Tracy," and revealed roots in soul and R&B ("Come On, Come Over" with Sam and Dave) and island music ("Opus Pocus" with steel drummer Othello Molineaux).



## PAT METHENY GROUP

*Pat Metheny Group* (ECM), 1978

Guitarist Metheny had made his debut on ECM in 1976, introducing listeners to his airy, bucolic signature sound with his trio (with bassist Jaco Pastorius and drummer Bob Moses). He extended his palette on subsequent recordings, such as this third outing for

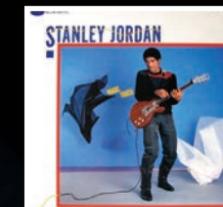
ECM, continuing a fertile association with keyboardist and co-composer Lyle Mays and the easy-flowing rhythm section of bassist Mark Egan and drummer Danny Gottlieb. Soaring and full of space, songs eschewed shredding excesses in favor of a lyrical melodicism that evoked the wide-open Missouri skies of Metheny's youth.



## WEATHER REPORT

*Weather Report* (Columbia), 1979

Captured live in San Francisco in 1979, fusion powerhouse Weather Report more than lived up to its supergroup status on this double album. Joe Zawinul's frisky keyboards, Wayne Shorter's burning tenor sax, Jaco Pastorius' remarkably elastic bass and Peter Erskine's propulsive drums contribute equally on a thrilling set of some of the band's best-loved tunes, including Pastorius' street hustling "Teen Town" and Zawinul's boogying "Birdland."



## STANLEY JORDAN

*Magic Touch* (Blue Note), 1985

Guitarist Jordan brought the art of string tapping to new heights, displaying a dizzying dexterity that blurred distinctions between classical, jazz and rock. On his second Blue Note release, Jordan unleashes his exquisite tone and technique on jazz ("Freddie Freeloader," "Round Midnight") and rock ("Eleanor Rigby," "Angel") selections, as well as a couple of lovely original tunes ("All the Children," "Return Expedition"). While his virtuosity astounds, it's always in service of the song.



# PARTY OF SIX

A HALF-DOZEN JAZZ MUSICIANS WEIGH IN ON OLD-SCHOOL FUSION.

BY TED PANKEN

**D**uring a 1979 interview, Herbie Hancock provided a working definition of the plugged-in fusion music that was popular in the late '60s and throughout the '70s — a movement to which he contributed mightily with his funkified Headhunters band. “Fusion uses elements of jazz and elements of popular forms, but it established its own idiom,” he explained. “I want to play the music I’m playing and still have it be dance music. It’s funny, because a lot of it has simpler chord structures and harmonies than in the past. The complexity is now in the textures and in keeping the groove going.”

For this issue, we asked six working jazz musicians for their thoughts on the old-school fusion Hancock describes. These artists are creating their own varieties of fusion today. Able to access and assimilate a global array of musical dialects on the Internet, they blend styles and genres with ease. For them, fusion is a perfectly natural, normal and even necessary part of their work. And so we thought it would be telling to get their thoughts on the specific fusion that was recorded and performed during an era when blending so many diverse elements still constituted a novel and often exciting approach to making music.



**“A LOT OF TECH EMERGED DURING THAT PERIOD. AN OBVIOUS EXAMPLE WAS HERBIE HANCOCK’S HEADHUNTERS, USING THE OLD ECHO BOXES AND THESE GIGANTIC, GARAGE-SIZED SYNTHESIZERS, TESTING THE BOUNDARIES OF ELECTRONIC SOUNDS.”**

## THEO CROKER

*On Star People Nation, issued last year on DDB, trumpeter Theo Croker, 35, presents original songs that reference and meld elements from swing, post-bop, hip-hop, soul, funk and different West African strains. As on his two prior DDB releases, Croker, the grandson of iconic swing-era trumpeter Adolphus “Doc” Cheatham, projects his harmonically erudite lines with a golden tone, orchestrating the flow with layers of textured keyboards, bespoke samples, polyrhythmic drum beats and insinuating voices to illuminate their melodic core.*

Cats in the fusion era were looking beyond the swing rhythm. They seemed more interested in making sure they were incorporating elements of other styles they were hearing than staying with one sound. Donald Byrd and the Mizell Brothers put a lot of soul and R&B into the *Stepping Into Tomorrow* and *Street Lady* albums; they wanted people to dance. Those two albums and Miles’ *Bitches Brew* — not just the one that was released, but the full session, with people playing sitar and tablas — were the first albums I heard that you’d call fusion. The music wasn’t AABA tune-based, but more about rhythm and expansive forms — having a groove that sustains and melodies that are easily heard and repeated many times. It continued the legacy of the aesthetic of repackaging popular songs from the ’30s through the ’60s with swing and improvisation. People who shunned using modern elements became traditionalists.

A lot of tech emerged during that period. An obvious example was Herbie Hancock’s *Headhunters*, using the old echo boxes and these gigantic, garage-sized synthesizers, testing the boundaries of electronic sounds. Sun Ra, Gary Bartz, Eddie Henderson, Joe Chambers and Bobby Hutcherson were taking advantage of the electronics, experimenting and being brave. I — and a lot of my contemporaries — try to draw from that spirit, and implement those elements. I seek out

studios that have synths from the ’70s. It’s nearly impossible to get the same sound twice, unless you intentionally record what you had done physically. You could brush over the board by accident and change the sound completely.

The fusion period definitely gave a foundation to hip-hop. A Tribe Called Quest’s “Butter” sampled Gary Bartz’s “Gentle Smiles.” Pieces of Gary, Roy Ayers and Donald Byrd have been sampled non-stop. So has a lot of Joe Chambers’ stuff. Now, in 2020, people are still reaching into the ’70s big-time when they sample, and we can say they’re reaching into the ’90s also. People like Christian Scott and Kamasi Washington, or even Robert Glasper or myself, are fusing what’s available around us through hip-hop, trap and funk with our jazz upbringing or our jazz education, into the improvisational worldview. That makes it accessible to younger people, and relates to conditions in the venues where stuff is played — standing rooms, cool light effects, visual backgrounds. I don’t think it’s revolutionary to do that. I think it’s contemporary and being honest, because to be contemporary was always the tradition.



# JAMES FRANCIES

*The c.v. of James Francies, the 24-year-old keyboardist-acoustic pianist, includes performances and recordings with drummers Jeff “Tain” Watts and Chris Dave, vibraphonist Stefon Harris, guitarist Pat Metheny, saxophonist Chris Potter and vocalists Chance the Rapper, Common, Nas, Lauryn Hill and José James. A regular with the Roots since he moved from his native Houston to New York City in his late teens, Francies blends his various layers into a unitary, transparently honest sonic vision on his 2019 Blue Note debut, Flight.*

For me, “fusion” means where electronics started taking a role in jazz, with more guitars and synthesizers, but still having the improvisational aspect. It’s Weather Report with Jaco and Zawinul and Wayne. It’s Allan Holdsworth, his songwriting, the sounds he got from the guitar, his linear approach to soloing. Mahavishnu — the different time signatures. All of Miles’ stuff with Chick and Keith Jarrett on Fender Rhodes, the more guitar-sounding things, and the texture changes and different harmonic structures to play over on *Bitches Brew*. Right off the bat, that’s where my head comes from. Also, some of Pat Metheny’s stuff, where the tunes sounded like he was writing melodies for singers in the context of instrumental music. I heard these things pretty early on. For me, it’s another take on music with some technical evolutions in terms of equipment and technology and the form of songwriting. It was also a period of experimentation. Pat’s told me about how, when the first wave of synthesizers was coming into play, they’d break down, and it would be challenging to fix them or keep them in tune. You’d play something and not know if it would sound the same the second

time. Some people think it’s a little overwhelming — some of it is too loud, it doesn’t have as many dynamics as acoustic music. But I think the really good players played with dynamics, with peaks and valleys.

The ’70s is my favorite era of music, and the sound of the ’70s is coming back now with producers who are sampling it or trying to re-create how a sample would sound. People want the Moog, the shiny synth-sounding keyboards, the amazing bass and drum sounds. Guitar was super-heavy then, and you hear that sound today, where it doubles with other instruments to bring out melodies. It complements synthesizers and electronics very well. I’ve talked with Pat about how [a guitar] is a genre-less instrument. When you walk into a venue and see a guitar on stage, you don’t know what kind of music you’ll hear, whereas if you see a saxophone you’ll have a pretty clear idea. I like to use guitar and electric bass because you can go in so many different directions. I want to be without borders. That way I open it up to more people, and that’s what I’m hearing and where I’m coming from.



**“SOME PEOPLE THINK IT’S A LITTLE OVERWHELMING — SOME OF IT IS TOO LOUD, IT DOESN’T HAVE AS MANY DYNAMICS AS ACOUSTIC MUSIC. BUT I THINK THE REALLY GOOD PLAYERS PLAYED WITH DYNAMICS, WITH PEAKS AND VALLEYS.”**

Photo by Saito Ogata



**“NOW, TODAY, I HEAR BANDS TRYING TO MIMIC WHAT THE FUSION GUYS IN THE '70S WERE DOING. THOSE SOUNDS THAT WERE ONCE BRAND-SPANKING-NEW AND CONSIDERED EXPERIMENTAL, DOWN TO THE FATNESS OF THE SNARE AND THE WARMTH OF THE ELECTRIC BASS AND THE FENDER RHODES, ARE NOW THE NORM.”**

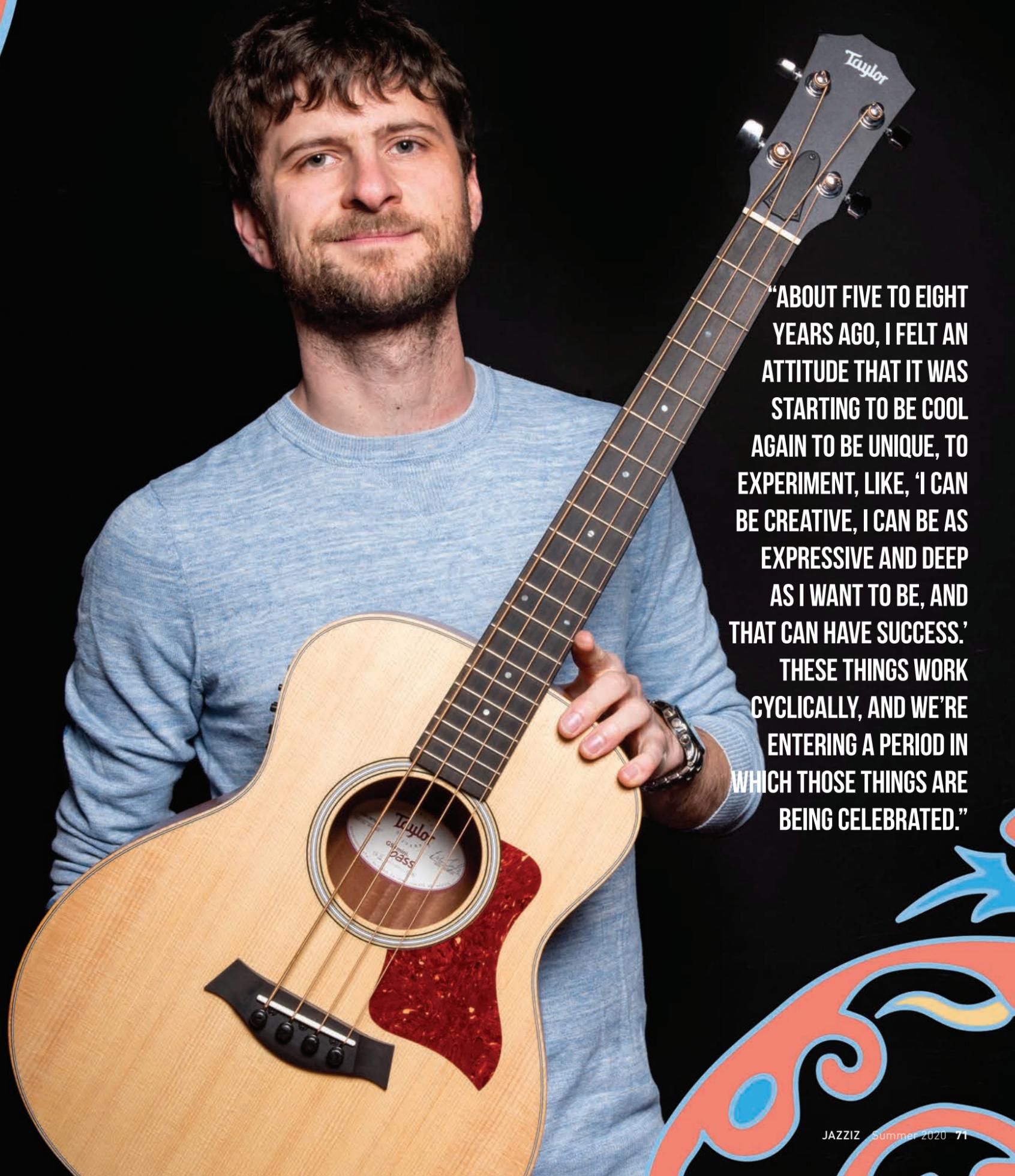
## MARQUIS HILL

*On his nine albums as a leader, Chicago-born trumpeter-composer Marquis Hill, 32, has established a lyrical, multi-layered, electro-acoustic tonal identity that draws on the sophistication of hardcore post-bop and free jazz, along with the kinetic grooves of funk, soul and hip-hop. Sometimes illuminating his message with pungent spoken-word narratives, Hill embodies the 21st-century notion of coalescing multiple musical food groups into a unified, hybrid cuisine.*

I know the broader definition of “fusion” is the fusing and combining of different types of music from different cultures. But when I hear the word, my mind jumps straight to Headhunters, to Weather Report, to Miles Davis, the Chick Corea sounds, Donald Byrd’s Blackbyrds — introducing the Fender Rhodes, electric guitar, incorporating the backbeat into the music, creating music for people to dance, younger audiences, jazz artists being able to cross over into mainstream. I grew up in Chicago, and what happened there was also incredible; Charles Stepney did so many things at Chess Records, while Eddie Harris experimented with his reed trumpet mouthpiece and used a harmonizer and effects on the saxophone. The AACM were on their own wave, too, creating new sounds with computers and synths and acoustic instruments. The direction all those musicians took jazz in was a sense of “we want to do something different,” a sense of freedom, a desire to expand the sonic palette, an urge to make music for the people. The

sounds were brand-new, and these guys were experimenting in the moment, figuring it out as they were going.

Bebop was my first exposure to jazz, but I jumped heavily into fusion in college, and the lights started to click on — the connections with hip-hop and gospel, that all this music is coming from the same place. I was born in 1987, when hip-hop was getting popular, and I listened to these things on the radio. So these sounds and grooves naturally resonated with me a bit more than bebop. Now, today, I hear bands trying to mimic what the fusion guys in the '70s were doing. Those sounds that were once brand-spanking-new and considered experimental, down to the fatness of the snare and the warmth of the electric bass and the Fender Rhodes, are now the norm. What those cats did was liberating, and artists in jazz and hip-hop nowadays are doing the same thing, being unapologetically themselves in their art. You hear those grooves and sounds in groups like Butcher Brown, and even myself and some of my colleagues, like Makaya McCraven. So the '70s have had a huge impact.



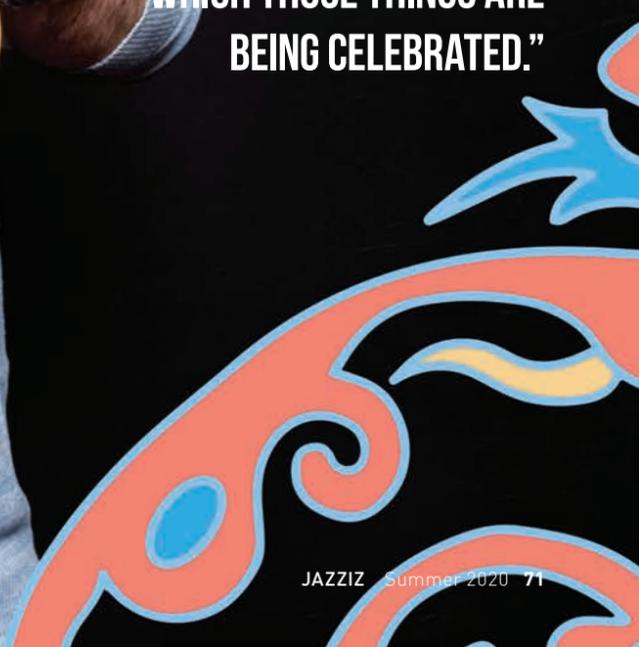
# MICHAEL LEAGUE

*At 36, bassist and composer Michael League, a three-time Grammy Award winner, is the bandleader of the uniquely jazz-plus unit Snarky Puppy and the more recently formed world-blues ensemble Bokanté, music director for David Crosby's Lighthouse Band, and owner-founder of the GroundUP record label and music festival. Equally proficient at the languages of jazz and various groove dialects, League firmly upholds the aesthetic, as he said in 2016, of "taking the jazz tradition and doing our thing with it" while "improvising all the time."*

As a description, "fusion" reminds me of a very special moment — a period of technological innovation when everyone's mind was open, and the trendiest thing was being creative and exploring, when the public was hip enough to support beautiful music being in the top 10. But I recoil when "fusion" is used as a genre — people who play too many notes on instruments that sound dated; a flash-in-the-pan moment of musical athleticism over musicality. To me, there are two schools — jazz-rock fusion, which I don't enjoy very much, and R&B-soul-funk-jazz fusion, which is Headhunters, George Duke and all the stuff I love. Actually, there's nothing that isn't fusion. As purist as you want to get about jazz, it's been a fusion of different African music traditions since Congo Square. Specifically with Snarky Puppy, we don't think of ourselves as a fusion band. Stylistically, we've combined the different things that we love about jazz and R&B and soul and funk and hip-hop and electronic music, so it ends up sounding something like the fusion from the '70s. I think of Bokanté as a fusion of all the different forms that the blues has taken.

The thing we think of as "authentic," or "the real way" or the established old norm was revolutionary at a certain point. Can we get past that and embrace that we're always combining things? Now, because of the Internet, things have broken wide-open; we have accessibility to everything that's being made, and I would challenge someone to make music that isn't fusing two things together — or 20. If you're not part of the major-label machine, if you're not one of those lucky 20 artists in the world that everything they do gets broadcast everywhere, your best chance of having success and standing out basically rely on making interesting art. About five to eight years ago, I felt an attitude that it was starting to be cool again to be unique, to experiment, like, "I can be creative, I can be as expressive and deep as I want to be, and that can have success." These things work cyclically, and we're entering a period in which those things are being celebrated. There's a good chance we can again have those glory days of the '70s that were powered by musicians like Jaco and Herbie Hancock, but with a new batch of highly creative, talented artists.

**"ABOUT FIVE TO EIGHT YEARS AGO, I FELT AN ATTITUDE THAT IT WAS STARTING TO BE COOL AGAIN TO BE UNIQUE, TO EXPERIMENT, LIKE, 'I CAN BE CREATIVE, I CAN BE AS EXPRESSIVE AND DEEP AS I WANT TO BE, AND THAT CAN HAVE SUCCESS.' THESE THINGS WORK CYCLICALLY, AND WE'RE ENTERING A PERIOD IN WHICH THOSE THINGS ARE BEING CELEBRATED."**



## AUBREY LOGAN

*Aubrey Logan, 32, has been described as a “jazz-influenced pop singer and trombone player — or pop-influenced jazz singer and trombone player depending on her mood or set list.” However she’s described, Logan, who graduated from Berklee in 2010, is a remarkable artist. She applies virtuosic musicianship, intellectual individualism and emotional openness to repertoire culled from the Great American Songbook, ’60s and ’70s soul and funk, the European canon, hip-hop and hardcore jazz. In Logan’s hands, the well-traveled works are subjects for fresh, on-point reinterpretation.*

I am very much a piecemeal artist — Ella Fitzgerald and Al Jarreau are the only two musicians I dove into in pure fashion. So it’s fun for me to think of fusion, of the 1970s, when different elements were being put together, which I do all the time. My mind pictures jazz and funk coming together. I think of the same improvisational, in-the-moment sensibilities of traditional jazz — acoustic piano and bass, no microphones, no effects — applying to fusion, adding synthesizers and other technologically advanced tools, and creating this new sound.

Stevie Wonder is my biggest influence from the ’70s. His music touched your soul. Many of his lyrics were simple, and he had a beat you could dance to. He was innovative and interesting, more sophisticated than most pop artists. I think of “Golden Lady,” which is repetitive and you can sing along to it, and yet the modulations are every which way, the verses in a different place than the chorus. It has that psychedelic element as well. For me, that’s pop fusion, and that’s what I like.

Weather Report is important. Each song is an epic story, like a classical composer who takes you different places in several

movements of a symphony, but with synthesizers and deep grooves, and varying between songs that have heavy changes left and right, and then songs that have maybe two chords for five minutes.

To me, the crowning glory of fusion is Blood, Sweat and Tears, which started in the late 1960s. I’m a trombone player, so I identify with that music. They would put you in this simple little pop moment, and take you on a symphonic journey (that obviously had too much technology for it to be symphonic) — and it’s improvisational, which is jazz.

People think of fusion as the good old days, but it’s not just that. It feels good. It makes you feel like a badass! I can’t hide from it. I think it’s making a major resurgence, and it’s sounding fresh. Some folks might feel discouraged by the current state of pop music — they might feel it sounds too fake or whatever. But it’s going to turn around. The average human being, whether they know it or not, wants something authentic-sounding, and even if that’s not mainstream right now, it is happening among people of my generation.

**“PEOPLE THINK OF FUSION AS THE GOOD OLD DAYS, BUT IT’S NOT JUST THAT. IT FEELS GOOD. IT MAKES YOU FEEL LIKE A BADASS!”**



## DONNY MCCASLIN

Earlier in his career, tenor saxophonist-composer Donny McCaslin, 53, demonstrated, as he once put it, “a sense of eclecticism” on diverse gigs with jazz-rock avatars *Steps Ahead*, Afro-Caribbean pioneer Danilo Perez and experimental units like *Lan Xang*, as well as the challenging charts of the Mingus and Maria Schneider big bands. McCaslin’s open-ended proclivities blossomed when David Bowie recruited his band to play on his final album, *Blackstar*; he took the next step on *Blow*, on which he integrates elements culled from a broad spectrum of contemporary genres.

When I think about fusion, it’s the bands and the moments that made an impression on me when I was first getting exposed to music and finding my way — some experiences from records, and some playing the music from these records. *Heavy Weather* by Weather Report is one that’s part of my DNA; the imaginative way they put together the different sounds cast a spell over me, as well as the strength of the compositions. *Blue Montreux*, which had Mike Mainieri and Mike Brecker, is also in my DNA, because of Michael’s playing, profound and full of emotion, and the sonic palette and the groove. That was sort of an offshoot of *Steps Ahead*, whose recording of “Pools,” with Eliane Elias, was big for me. Another part of my DNA is *Headhunters*, whose bassist, Paul Jackson, was living in Santa Cruz, where I grew up; when I was 16, I started playing once a week in his band called *Surely Out*. It all felt exciting and new and modern to me. My father was a pianist, and I’d be at his gig, which would be Great American Songbook material — Duke Ellington and so on — and then move into some Latin Cal Tjader, R&B tunes like “Feel Like Making Love” or “Mustang Sally,” but then “Birdland” in the later sets. I saw how these things could coexist in a way that felt organic.

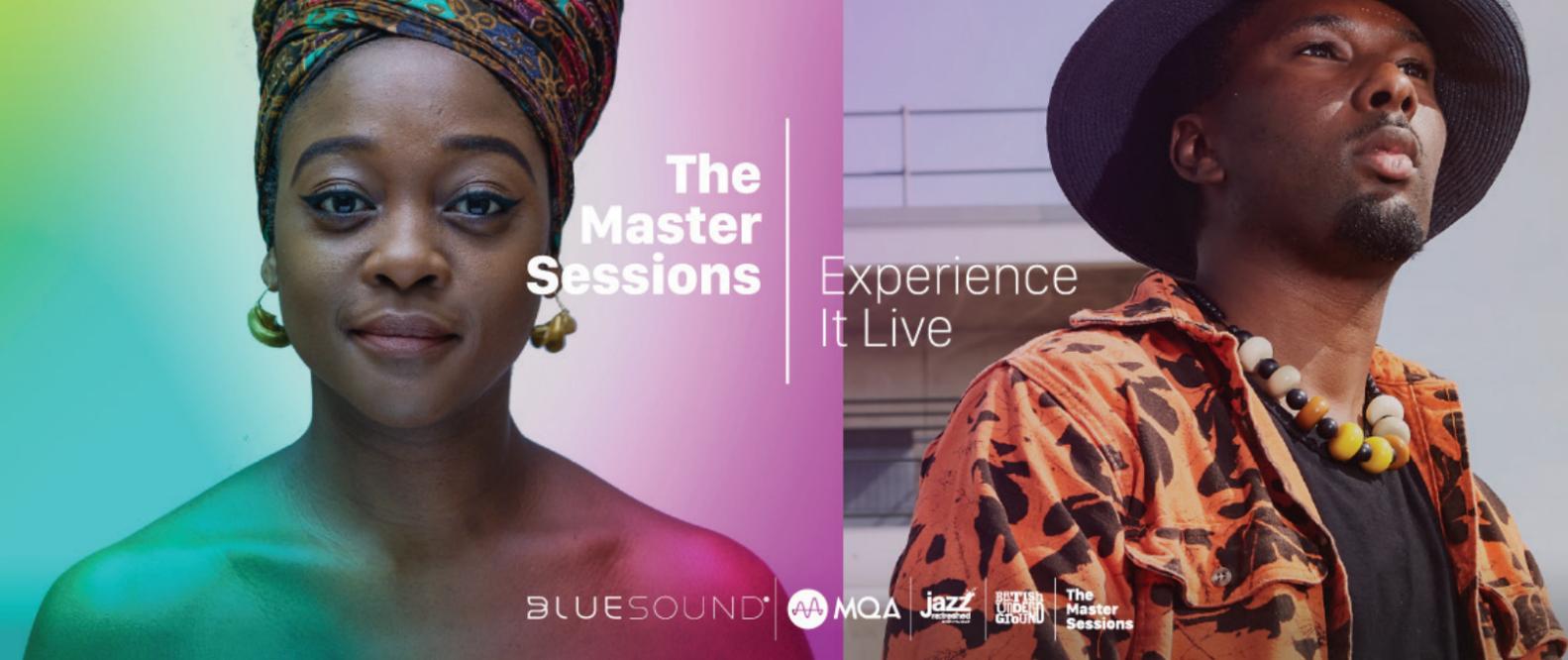
Fusion was the continuity of the creative imagination; add to that the new technology of the time, and the new sounds suddenly at musicians’ disposal. Joe Zawinul was experimenting, improvising on sounds. Herbie Hancock was experimenting with sounds. I draw a direct line to Zawinul and Herbie in that aesthetic. In my band, Jason Lindner has parts and has certain sounds he uses on certain songs, but his overriding aesthetic is he feels he can play anything at any time, not just the choice of notes or chords, but the sonic choice. He’s constantly manipulating sound, and it’s really experimental and interesting. In the aesthetic of today’s music, you feel the influence of the way Wayne Shorter played in *Weather Report*, or the influence of bassists like Paul Jackson or Rocco Prestia or Jaco. That ties in with the jazz improvising aesthetic, where you’re taking what’s available to you and being a creative artist with it, which leads into a whole other sonic world.

“FUSION WAS THE CONTINUITY OF THE CREATIVE IMAGINATION; ADD TO THAT THE NEW TECHNOLOGY OF THE TIME, AND THE NEW SOUNDS SUDDENLY AT MUSICIANS’ DISPOSAL.”

Photo by Jimmy Fontaine



The SEED Ensemble



# Bluesound and MQA Team Up with British Music Tastemakers to Present “The Master Sessions”

BY IAN WHITE

Experiencing live jazz concerts in high-resolution audio becomes a reality in 2020 through an innovative collaboration between Bluesound, the premium audio brand, and MQA, the pioneering music-technology company, who have teamed up with two influential music organizations, Jazz re:refreshed and British Underground, to present “The Master Sessions.”

The Master Sessions is a series of live concerts, streamed in real-time using MQA sound, to over 100 audio retailers around the world through Bluesound’s premium hi-res audio players, including the Node 2i and PowerNode 2i. Jazz fans are invited to share in the live audio experiences, which will feature some of the UK’s leading jazz acts performing from renowned studio locations.

To mark the campaign launch, a dedicated microsite, The Master Sessions.com, has been published with full details on the participants and activities.

The collaboration brings together a powerful partnership of experts and tastemakers in the music and technology worlds with two shared objectives: 1) to promote skilled artists and help them reach a wider audience, and 2) to articulate the power of pioneering audio technology and create better listening experiences.

A brace of live events sits at the heart of the campaign, one U.K.-based, the other set to be held in the United States. On February 5, the first of those events — a performance by the Mercury Prize-nominated SEED Ensemble — took place live at London’s British Grove Studios. Later in the year, rising star Theon Cross will play live at Orb Recording Studios in Austin, Texas. (Cross’ performance was originally scheduled to take place on March 19, 2020, during the now-cancelled SXSW Festival. The concert is now expected to take

place in September. Bluesound will make an official announcement on the rescheduled concert date shortly.) Music fans were invited to visit local Bluesound dealerships to experience the SEED Ensemble concert — streamed in real-time on a Bluesound-powered sound system and in MQA studio-quality audio — and will be invited again to dealerships for the Cross performance. “As accomplished live musicians, the idea that high-resolution audio technologies like Bluesound and MQA can offer a studio experience at home was something both SEED Ensemble and Theon Cross were keen to support,” says Jazz re:refreshed co-founder and co-chief executive, Justin McKenzie. “They believe, as we do, that technologies like these bring artists closer to their fans by literally delivering the sound of the studio.”

The Master Sessions team will work closely with Bluesound’s extensive U.K., E.U., U.S. and Canadian dealer networks to help support and promote the public listening sessions. Each event will be streamed in real-time from the studio using the MQA Live encoder, where the performance will be captured at 24-bit/192kHz resolution and ‘folded’ using MQA’s “Music Origami” technique.

At more than 100 audio retailers around the world, music fans will be invited to share in a live audio experience like no other. The exclusive gigs will be played through Bluesound’s MQA-enabled high-resolution audio players, unfolding the encoded stream to reveal the original studio performance, as though the audience was in the studio with the band.

Bluesound MQA-enabled high-resolution audio players are available online. For more information, visit [www.bluesound.com](http://www.bluesound.com) or [www.mqa.co.uk](http://www.mqa.co.uk).

# The London Eye

Bluesound and MQA partner with JAZZ re:refreshed and British Underground to offer “The Master Sessions” in high-resolution audio

BY IAN WHITE

Two of the United Kingdom’s most influential music organizations have partnered with Bluesound and MQA to offer the groundbreaking Master Sessions, a new and exclusive live-streamed concert series presented in a curated listening-party format. Music listeners can participate in these live events at over 140 Bluesound authorized dealers around the globe. Each concert is streamed in real-time using MQA’s innovative audio technology, capable of streaming high-resolution master-quality audio.

Jazz re:refreshed is the brainchild of Justin McKenzie and Adam Moses, who launched the organization in early summer 2003. Its intention was to challenge the elitism and prejudice within the music community that had kept jazz on the sidelines for far too long, while at the same time striving to make jazz shows live, fun and affordable. Perhaps the most important aim was — and still is — to promote underexposed music and artists deserving of wider recognition.

A small but relentlessly determined organization, Jazz re:refreshed has its hands in many pies, hosting a weekly live residency, a record label, festival, film club, band development programme, club night, workshops and more.

“As accomplished live musicians, the idea that high-resolution audio technologies like Bluesound and MQA can offer a studio experience at home was something local musicians were keen to support,” says Jazz re:refreshed co-founder and co-chief executive Justin McKenzie. “They believe, as we do, that technologies like these bring artists closer to their fans by literally delivering the sound of the studio.”

The British Underground is a creative production company that produces international music showcases and works with artists outside the mainstream who are selected to perform at industry showcases. British Underground also runs special projects like Jazz re:refreshed’s Outernational program, Afropunk Europe and Arts Council England’s art and tech missions for SXSW Interactive.

Bluesound, as one of the earliest adopters of MQA’s Master Quality Authenticated technology, has taken the lead in the high-end audio community, giving mainstream music listeners their first opportunity to experience MQA’s pathbreaking technology through its award-winning streaming amplifiers, digital streamers and wireless loudspeakers.



# Bluesound Buyer's Guide

Bluesound offers a comprehensive selection of award-winning wireless hi-res audio components that allow you to play music in every room throughout your home, as well as outside in your backyard. With support for all of the major streaming services — including Tidal, Qobuz, Amazon Music HD, Spotify, Deezer — and the ability to stream from a music library connected to your home network or through a platform such as Roon, Bluesound 2i components offer access to millions of tracks which are playable in high-resolution digital audio for the ultimate sonic experience.

Listeners can stream high-resolution music in either 24-bit/96kHz or 24-bit/192kHz with full support for MQA (Master Quality Authenticated) and streaming playback of uncompressed WAV, FLAC and ALAC music files over their existing WiFi network or a connected USB device.

Bluesound components employ advanced amplification technologies designed by legendary audio engineer, Paul Barton, for NAD Electronics, and award-winning acoustic technologies from PSB Speakers. The end results are digital streaming, amplification and wireless loudspeaker components that deliver a true high-end audio experience that any music lover can appreciate and afford.

Bluesound components now support voice control through the integration of Amazon's Alexa for BluOS, allowing you to use your voice to explore music services, select presets, adjust volume levels, switch up songs in different rooms or even group your components together and play your music in perfect sync throughout the house.

With support for AirPlay 2 on Bluesound 2i, you can connect multiple components around your home and have

them communicate with each other through AirPlay. Listen to your music in perfect sync as you walk room-to-room, or play different songs in different rooms, and control everything on your iOS device.

All Bluesound components are controlled via the comprehensive BluOS control app that supports iOS (iPhone, iPad), Android, Kindle Fire, and Windows and Mac desktops.



## Wireless Stereo Components

### NODE 2I WIRELESS MULTI-ROOM HI-RES STREAMER (\$549.00)

There are few components as important in a 21st-century audio system as a wireless digital streamer that offers access to a comprehensive selection of streaming services and wireless multi-room capabilities. The Node 2i delivers on all fronts, including a bold musical presentation that makes it compatible with a wide range of components and loudspeaker systems.

The Node 2i includes enhanced dual-band Wi-Fi, which provides best-in-class performance even when competing against other wireless devices at home. With state-of-the-art Bluetooth® aptX® HD, the Node 2i supports 24-bit streaming

directly from your phone or tablet, and transmits studio-quality music to Bluetooth headphones and speakers. High-end DAC technology built into every Bluesound Player allows the Node 2i to decode and stream MQA files and stream high-res lossless digital codecs.

Featuring a comprehensive array of digital and analog inputs/outputs, the Node 2i can be connected to external amplification, active loudspeakers, headphones and even an external DAC making it a long-term hub for all of your digital music playback.



### POWERNODE 2I WIRELESS MULTI-ROOM STREAMING AMPLIFIER (\$899.99)

Listening behavior has changed dramatically with the advent of digital streaming, and music listeners who put sound quality first have much to celebrate with the PowerNode 2i, which is the amplifier reinvented. Combining a powerful 60-watt/channel HybridDigital™ power amplifier and Node 2i high-res digital streamer, the PowerNode 2i offers the ultimate one-box solution for consumers looking for a superior sounding audio system that can be hidden away. Connect the PowerNode 2i to a pair of passive loudspeakers and you are ready to listen in high-res.

Stream high-resolution digital audio files with no latency drop-outs in every corner of your home with the PowerNode 2i, which offers advanced dual-band Wi-Fi and support for Bluetooth 5.0 aptX HD, including streaming to your wireless headphones with dedicated volume controls. With a wide array of inputs including analog, optical and HDMI ARC, the PowerNode 2i can be the heart of a two-channel home audio/video system that is controllable with the BluOS control app.

With support for lossless codecs like FLAC, WAV, AIFF and MQA, the PowerNode 2i takes your digital music experience to the next level with its 32-bit/384kHz DAC that will make streaming services like Tidal, Qobuz, Deezer and Amazon Music HD sound like nothing you've ever heard before.



### VAULT 2I HIGH-RES 2TB NETWORK HARD DRIVE CD RIPPER AND STREAMER (\$1,299.99)

For the music listener with an existing CD collection and growing list of digital streaming subscriptions, the Vault 2i offers the most compact and effective platform for both formats. The Vault 2i allows you to rip it, download it, and store it in bit-perfect, high-resolution formats. Store thousands of tracks on its internal ultra-quiet 2TB hard-drive that doubles as a network NAS drive. Connect the Vault 2i to your existing amplifier or a pair of active loudspeakers and you're ready to listen.

Like the Node 2i, the Vault 2i can stream high-resolution digital audio in every corner of your home with advanced dual-band Wi-Fi and support for Bluetooth 5.0 aptX HD, including support for multi-room streaming and wireless headphones. With its wide array of inputs/outputs including analog, TOSLINK digital optical, coaxial digital RCA, and USB (for connection to memory sticks), the Vault 2i is one of the most comprehensive digital sources for the music listener who requires the flexibility to listen to their existing CD collection but is also committed to digital streaming.

With support for lossless codecs like FLAC, WAV, AIFF and MQA, the Vault 2i takes your digital music experience to the next level with its 32-bit/192kHz DAC that will make your CDs and streaming services like Tidal, Qobuz, Deezer, and Amazon Music HD sound like nothing you've ever heard before. Controllable with the BluOS controller app and Amazon Alexa and Google Assistant voice control.

## Wireless Home Theater

### PULSE SOUNDBAR 2I WIRELESS STREAMING MULTI-ROOM SOUND SYSTEM (\$899.99)

Designed with the same level of acoustic engineering that has made PSB Speakers one of the most respected loudspeaker brands in consumer audio, the Pulse Soundbar 2i delivers a full-range music and home theater experience that fits right under your television. The first wireless multi-room soundbar to deliver high-resolution audio and audiophile-grade bass response without a subwoofer sets the bar for what can be achieved in a compact soundbar.



The Pulse Soundbar 2i features six high-performance drivers and two advanced passive radiators, which recreate a fully immersive sonic experience. All 8 drivers inside the Pulse Soundbar 2i are driven by its own dedicated amplified channel where the low and high frequencies are seamlessly blended using DSP-powered crossover filters. Each driver is housed in individually optimized chambers to eliminate vibrations, allowing the Pulse Soundbar 2i to deliver the deepest bass without any distortion.

The Pulse Soundbar 2i offers a comprehensive selection of digital and analog inputs, including both HDMI ARC and eARC, optical inputs and a dedicated subwoofer output. With an internal DAC that supports up to 24-bit/192kHz, and lossless codecs including FLAC, AIFF, WAV and MQA, the wireless Pulse Soundbar 2i delivers both high-resolution audio and surround sound as impressive as your 4K HDTV picture image.



## Wireless Speakers

**PULSE 2i WIRELESS MULTI-ROOM STREAMING SPEAKER (\$899.99)**  
Bluesound's flagship wireless high-fidelity desktop streaming loudspeaker will fill your listening space with full-range high-resolution sound and deep enveloping bass performance. Control the Pulse 2i from anywhere in your home with the BluOS controller app and take voice control of your music

playback with support for Amazon Alexa, Google Assistant and Apple Siri.

With AirPlay 2 built-in for easy integration into the Apple ecosystem, the PULSE 2i is the most flexible all-in-one speaker ever. The high-end 24-bit/192kHz DAC technology also allows the PULSE 2i to decode and stream MQA files and offer high-resolution playback of your favorite streaming services like Tidal, Qobuz, Amazon Music HD and Spotify.

With 2 x 5.25" mid/bass drivers, and 2 x 1" tweeters, the Pulse 2i offer a full-range presentation that you won't hear anywhere else from a desktop wireless streaming loudspeaker; support for Bluetooth aptX HD turns the Pulse 2i into a hub for your digital music collection controlled with your smartphone or tablet. Two-way wireless transmission enables you to stream from your loudspeaker to wireless headphones when others can't be disturbed.



## PULSE FLEX 2i PORTABLE WIRELESS MULTI-ROOM STREAMING SPEAKER (\$349.99)

Portable high-resolution audio streaming has never been easier with the Pulse Flex 2i streaming loudspeaker that delivers full-range sound both indoors and outside on the backyard patio, by the pool or in the garage while you work. Attach the optional Flex battery pack and take the Pulse Flex 2i with you to the park. Group two Pulse Flex 2i together in the

same room for a true stereo presentation or combine with the Pulse Soundbar 2i and create a true wireless surround system with dedicated rear channels.

Control the flexible Pulse Flex 2i with the BluOS controller app and stream your favorite digital streaming services like Tidal, Qobuz, Amazon Music HD and Spotify in 24-bit/192kHz digital audio. With support for Amazon Alexa, Google Assistant and Apple Siri, the Pulse Flex 2i can be controlled with your voice giving you access to your music collection.

The Pulse Flex 2i supports lossless codecs like FLAC and MQA, giving you the ultimate audio experience from a portable and durable streaming loudspeaker that allows you to enjoy music whenever and wherever you want.

For more information, visit [bluesound.com](http://bluesound.com).

**LISTEN  
TO THE MUSIC**

**JAZZIZ.COM**



# MUSICAL OASISES

ON *LAST DESERT*, LIBERTY ELLMAN COLORS AND CONTOURS AN EVOCATIVE ENSEMBLE SOUNDSCAPE.

BY JON GARELICK

For Liberty Ellman, guitar was the starting point but composition was the key. The 48-year-old started as any aspiring guitarist of his generation might — listening to Jimi Hendrix, Led Zeppelin, Prince. But it was exploring his mother's vast record collection that set him on his path. Particularly noteworthy was his discovery of Miles Davis' *In a Silent Way*, with John McLaughlin on guitar.

"Hearing the way John played in that format was a gateway," says Ellman by phone from his home in Brooklyn. "Hearing a relatively modern approach in a jazz context, even though the record was relatively old by then. I thought it was amazing."

From there, he says, it was "down the rabbit hole" of jazz: Ellington, Mingus, Monk, Coltrane, Wayne Shorter — "all great leaders and composers and players, all very important for me in what I thought a jazz musician would do." He adds, "It was never just about blowing for me. It was about creating the context for the music."

Though Ellman has long been a peerless guitarist — with a beautiful, precise attack and broad harmonic vocabulary and imagination — his writing is what distinguishes *Last Desert* (Pi), his fifth disc as a leader and the first since 2015's *Radiate*. As on that previous album, Ellman is joined by alto saxophonist Steve Lehman, trumpeter Jonathan Finlayson, tubaist Jose Davila, bassist Stephan Crump and drummer Damion Reid. Ellman and Davila have a two-decade relationship as members of Henry Threadgill's Zooid. The similarities between Ellman's and Threadgill's approach are immediately apparent. Melodic lines proceed in quirky chromatic steps, with odd dissonances and rhythmic displacements. And like Threadgill, Ellman favors a "modular" conception of form. Pieces might start anywhere — a solo, a group improvisation, a duet — before proceeding to a unison theme. Or not.

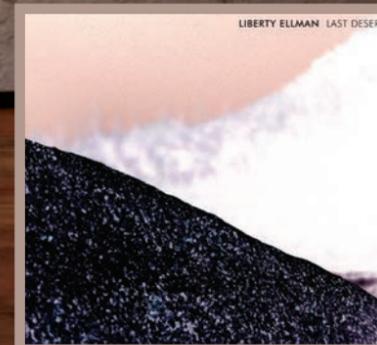
But Ellman's music has its own sweet lyricism, as in the breath-like group harmonies of opener "The Sip" or the way he

juxtaposes Lehman's hard-edged spitfire attack with Finlayson's long-lined, lyrical cool. One of the highlights of the album is a graceful *pas de deux* for trumpet and tuba on the title track. And Ellman's layered, complex rhythms don't exclude a fast walking-bass pulse with dotted cymbal hits.

Ellman says he likes to think in terms of narratives when he writes. The new disc sprang from "an idea about a soundtrack for a sort of post-environmental disaster" — a "last desert" — until he found that there was actually a marathon foot-race series called 4 Deserts, from Namibia to Antarctica (the "last desert"). Without trying to be too literal, Ellman combined the concept of endurance with "the idea of perspective and shapes and distances and the quality of a landscape pattern." The album's cover image — an abstraction of pink, white and bituminous black — is drawn from Ellman's own landscape photography.

In addition to his mother's record collection, Ellman credits as influences the composers with whom he has since played, including Steve Coleman, Myra Melford, Joe Lovano, Jason Moran and Threadgill. As for his own band, you could make a Venn diagram of their overlapping relationships and influences, from Threadgill (Ellman and Davila) to Coleman (Finlayson) to Vijay Iyer (Lehman and Crump), with Reid crossing over into Lehman's and Finlayson's bands.

Whatever the complexities of Ellman's music, listen to any of his solo spots on *Last Desert* — his delicate single-note melodies and chording on "The Sip," his runs of sprightly funk on "Liquid" — and you know he hasn't lost sight of his early inspirations. "The first Coltrane record I listened to was *A Love Supreme*, which I wasn't ready for. But the more I listened to it, the more it made sense to me. It was a clarifying moment, the way you could communicate that raw emotion through your instrument. That remains important to me in terms of what I hope to deliver in my own music."





**Omer Avital Qantar**  
*New York Paradox*  
(Zamzama)

Bassist Omer Avital wrote the title track to his latest release, *New York Paradox*, upon moving back to the city from his native Israel in 2005. Drum and piano grooves clatter around an exhilarating, Spanish-tinged bass vamp, as trembling saxophone drones create large-scale structure through textural diversity. The song alludes to its title by treading the line between fervor and anxiety.

In a press release, Avital spells out the paradox in question: “NYC presents an imperfect balance — a certain energy that can be exhilarating and taxing that I have learned to deal with, and sometimes even beat.” This record, Avital’s sophomore release with his Qantar quintet, demonstrates his solution to New York’s alienation and restlessness. Rather than pushing boundaries, these gratifying tunes provide a soulful expression of comfort and community.

Though the Qantar group has gestated only four years — fleshed out by a younger generation of Israeli expatriates — Avital assembled the track list from old compositions. The eight originals, reflecting funk, rock and romantic classical, are sourced from output that dates back to the ’90s. Tracks like “It’s All Good” and “Shabazi” fit snugly within the smooth-grooving, harmonically direct style of contemporary crossover that Avital once

helped pioneer on the West Village scene with Brad Mehldau, Peter Bernstein and others.

The circumstances of *New York Paradox*’s production accentuate the band’s familial dynamic. In addition to releasing the album on Avital’s new label, Zamzama Records, Qantar chose to record in their de facto home base, the Wilson Live! venue, that the bandleader set up in Brooklyn. Rather than writing out parts, Avital opted to develop each arrangement organically through demonstration and group experimentation. The result is a collection of warm and humble tunes that conjures a tangible sense of sanctuary.

— Asher Wolf

**Carla Bley/ Andy Sheppard/  
Steve Swallow**

*Life Goes On*  
(ECM)

There’s a deceptively casual musical intimacy afoot in *Life Goes On* that belies the deep jazz currents navigated by pianist Carla Bley, saxophonist Andy Sheppard and bass guitarist Steve Swallow, whose first release as a trio was 1994’s *Songs With Legs*. The new album, recorded last May in Italy, is built on three suites, first heard during the group’s performances at concerts around the United States and Europe. This is engaging chamber jazz, with surprising melodies, unexpected chord changes, inventive arrangements and



engaging improvisations delivered in a warm, uncluttered fashion and recorded pristinely; it all feels like being in a cozy listening room as these elegant compositions unfold in real time.

Bley’s music again is streaked with quirky humor, most pointedly on “Beautiful Telephones,” the suite’s title inspired by a left-field Trump remark. The cycle’s first part, a minor-toned ballad, has the pianist’s slowly circling figure matched by the counterpoint lines of Swallow’s five-string bass guitar, plucked with his plectrum in a remarkably clean and clear manner; he later offers a twisting, rangy slow-burn solo. Part three, with Sheppard on tenor, is an off-kilter jaunt that occasionally stops to throw in bits of patriotic American songs, including “Yankee Doodle Dandy” and “Hail to the Chief,” and a momentary “My Way.”

The four-part title suite opens with a laid-back blues, the bass line played on piano and the melody volleyed between bass and tenor. It continues with the somber “On,” the quick-shifting “And On” and the tango-tinged “And Then One Day.” The “Copycat” song cycle opens in more atmospheric terrain, with Sheppard’s long tenor tones unfurling atop his trio mates’ gently ebbing rhythms on “After You.” And the group, with the saxophonist on soprano, engages in playful call and response on “Follow the Leader” and “Copycat”; at one point, on the latter, Bley drops out to allow for an extended, dazzling tête-



Photo by Lior Tzema



Gregory Porter

à-tête between Sheppard and Swallow, providing yet another example of the profound connection among these longtime comrades.

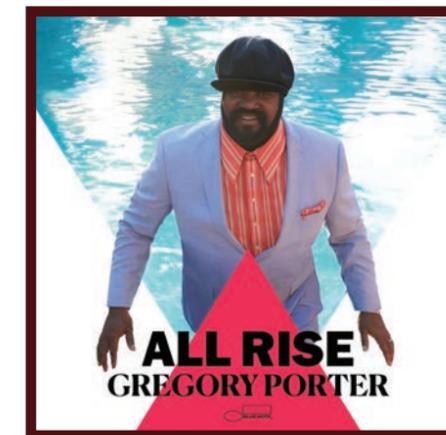
— Philip Booth

**Gregory Porter**

*All Rise*  
(Blue Note)

Released, purely coincidentally but quite serendipitously, during a crazy and fearful moment in modern history, Gregory Porter’s *All Rise* takes soul and jazz to church in energizing, uplifting ways.

Buoyed by the London Symphony Orchestra Strings — a lush through line from his last release, the tribute album *Nat King Cole & Me* — a fiery handpicked horn section and a rousing 10-member choir, the powerful baritone vocalist takes flight, symbolically and literally embracing his place in the cosmos while 60,000 feet in the air on “Concorde,” then soaring over the hypnotic handclaps, sizzling brass, low-toned “mmm-hmmm” vocals and choral shouts of “Revival.”



Unlike typical gospel albums, Porter appeals to secular listeners as well as religious ones, brilliantly evoking Jesus’ name while hoping to build trust in a romantic partner on the mellow, then jazzy and rambunctious “Faith in Love.” Recognizing that the redemption that love and faith can provide sometimes only comes from enduring life’s trials, Porter throws down some ominous, rootsy funk blues on “Long List of Troubles,”

# OUT OF AFRICA

African musicians blend jazz with its ancestral roots.

By Josef Woodard

It's a given that African musical influences are deeply embedded in the DNA of jazz and its related musical languages. A handful of new releases bears witness to the richness of jazz-related music coming out of Africa via her historical legacies and contemporary currents.

Saxophonist **Shabaka Hutchings**, of British and Barbadian descent, has been headlining festivals and concerts in Europe with his group of South African musicians **The Ancestors**. *We Are*



*Sent Here by History* (Impulse!), their sophomore release, may earn them devotees in the United States, as well. Hutchings' fresh-yet-roots-conscious brand of Afro-jazz is in full ensemble swing, lined with themes concerning cultural-racial alienation and global peril. With a loose and unfussy

collective sound, Hutchings and company summon a winning group identity on the shambling groove of "Run, the Darkness Will Pass," the roiling rhythmic undulance of "We Will Work (on Redefining Manhood)" and the graceful benediction of the sax-piano closer, "Teach Me How To Be Vulnerable."

Cross-cultural accord is at the heart of *Joy* (Origin), a collaboration between American saxophonist **Benjamin Boone** and the **Ghana Jazz Collective**. Boone was on a Fulbright to



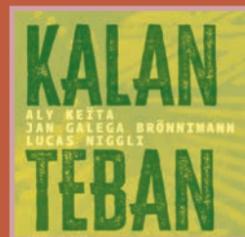
study the music of Ghana when he found a jazz-informed coterie of Ghanaian musicians, with whom he conspires on this seven-track album brimming with funk, jazz and West African spirits. Funk-fusion informs "The 233 Jazz Bar" (a hopping venue in Accra, Ghana), "Curtain of Light" spotlights bassist Bright Osei, and the lovely R&B-laced "Without You" showcases vocalist Sandra Huson. The fittingly named title track boasts strong soloing from Boone on soprano sax and Victor Dey Jr. on piano.

Nimble guitarist **Lionel Loueke** has been a prominent African jazzier for years, playing alongside Herbie Hancock and lending his limber electro-acoustic stylings and sophisticated touch to many situations. Among his more personal projects is the intriguing multicultural trio **Gilfema**, with Hungarian drummer Ferenc Nemeth and Swedish-Italian bassist Massimo



Biolcati. *Three* (Sounderscore), the group's third album, deftly blends influences from West Africa with other global and contemporary influences. Loueke mixes acoustic and synth sonorities, and works naturally in odd-meter landscapes. His roots are evident in the buoyant West African feel of "Brio" (in 5/4) and "Fleuve Congo," before the trio slides into the snaky, funky stuff of "Algorhythm and Blues."

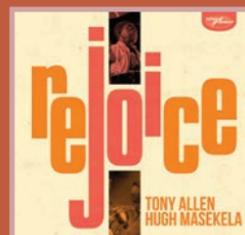
A very different trio configuration arrives with the meeting of famed Ivory Coast-born *balafon* (African xylophone) player



**Aly Keôta**, woodwind player **Jan Galega Brönnimann** and percussionist **Lucas Niggli**. Their second album, *Kalan Teban* (Intakt), delivers a lean, evocative textural mix with African overtones and undertones. Of Malinke Griot lineage, Keïta — who's played with Joe Zawinul and Jan Garbarek

— is at once foundation and centerpiece. Brönnimann's bass clarinet and Niggli's subtle, supple percussion also seduce the ear, from the lyricism of "Bafut" to the playful kinetic joy of "Riddim" to the sweetly simmering "Mogo-Sobe," replete with Keïta's gentle vocal chant.

From the unburied treasure annals comes *Rejoice* (World Circuit), a fascinating confabulation of African masters — drummer and Afrobeat pioneer **Tony Allen** and trumpeter **Hugh Masekela**, one of Africa's best-known musicians, who



died in 2018. In 2010, producer Nick Gold facilitated a long-dreamed-of studio collaboration, fruits of which have only now been released with contributions from young London-based musicians. Allen's Nigeria meets Masekela's South Africa via the latter's innately melodic horn and

the former's delicate and detailed yet preternaturally funky drums. The pair dialogue on a deep level on tracks such as "Obama Shuffle Strut Blues," the funk-salted "Slow Bones" and "Never (Lagos Never Gonna Be the Same)." It's a grand, intimate and now immortal Afro-jazz summit.

## POUND-UP

finding solace in the realization that disappointment can be transcended with "a spare set of wings ... watch me fly!"

The singer also taps into the socially conscious part of his artistry with a deceptively easy-flowing, low-key jab at child-slavers on "Merchants of Paradise," and on the eye-and-ear opening "Mr. Holland," an insightful horn- and organ-fired narrative thanking the white father of his girlfriend for overlooking the color of his skin and promising no trouble. The album title is a self-fulfilling prophecy.

— Jonathan Widran

### Theo Hill *Reality Check* (Posi-Tone)

On his third album for the mainstream-oriented Posi-Tone label, pianist Theo Hill expands from a trio format to include vibraphonist Joel Ross and also broadens his keyboard palette to include Fender Rhodes and occasional light coatings of synthesizer.

While it may be seen as a coup to recruit Ross, one of the hot young names in jazz, for the 10-track set of mostly Hill originals, the two estimable players often make for an uncomfortable pairing. They routinely trade phrases and solo simultaneously. These extended segments of interlaced piano and vibes — rarely played in harmony or unison — cause musical congestion. And the two instruments have enough tonal similarity to confuse matters even further. And further still, Hill often plays with a heavy,



Photo by William Brown

insistent left hand, which can dominate the sound field and thus stifle the twosome's attempts at refined interplay.

When Hill and Ross uncoil and use a more conventional approach — by playing the lead melody together or alone, and each taking solo turns — the music breathes better. The breezy "Guardians of Light" most effectively demonstrates this more orderly division of labor. On "Swell," Hill takes a winning, relaxed solo on Rhodes. Ross then steps in with his own measured energy, but then the two conclude by swapping busy short solos and driving into a traffic jam, undermining the tune's charm.

Ross sits out during a four-minute

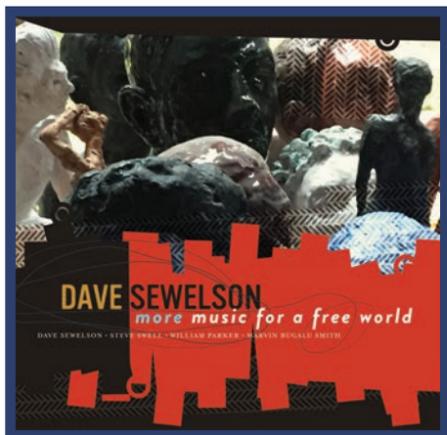
cover of Stevie Wonder's "Superwoman." Hill plays the sweet melody on Rhodes, then incorporates a piano solo and ladles on some subtle synth colorings. The performance may not break new ground, but it's an affectionate rendition of a lovely pop song that's nearly five decades old.

Bassist Rashaan Carter (on upright and electric) and drummer Mark Whitfield Jr. provide able, sympathetic support. Neither of them solos. *Reality Check* is clearly Hill and Ross' show, and while both acquit themselves as accomplished musicians, they tend to get in each other's way more than comprise a complementary team.

— Eric Snider



Theo Hill



**Dave Sewelson**  
*More Music for a Free World*  
(Mahakala)

You could call Dave Sewelson's new *More Music for a Free World* old-school avant-garde. That is, unlike the more detailed strategies of player-composers such as Henry Threadgill, Vijay Iyer and Mary Halvorson, the baritone saxophonist and his cohorts just rear back and blow. Indeed, the music here is described as "completely improvised."

Working without a chording instrument, Sewelson's band — with trombonist Steve Swell, bassist William Parker and drummer Marvin "Bugalu" Smith — is free even from the minimal constraints of harmony. But "free" doesn't mean no limitations; with no written charts or agreed-upon form, the musicians are entirely dependent on each other to create and sustain musical interest, which this crew does with stirring aplomb.

What becomes clear following the opening dissonant blast of "Memories," the first of three spontaneous tracks that make up this 59-minute set, is the intense listening among the players. Within moments, Sewelson and Swell are off on a heady overlapping dialogue. Marked by a mix of broad gestures and questing asides, its declamation and sly humor recall Archie Shepp's jousting with Roswell Rudd, utilizing a loose call-and-response as ancient as the African-American tradition itself. There's elegance, too, in an elastic "walking" solo

from Parker and in Smith's delicately dotted-rhythm cymbal.

It doesn't hurt that three of these guys have been fellow travelers on the downtown New York scene for decades, Sewelson and Swell as members of Parker's Little Huey Creative Music Orchestra, and Smith as a veteran of Shepp's and Sun Ra's bands.

All three tracks offer abundant rewards: Sewelson's mastery of the full range of the big horn, from his glorious bottom register to his tart *altissimo* (check his a cappella intro to "Reflections"); the band's spontaneous arrival at common ground in "Dreams"; Parker's astute rhythmic and harmonic responses; and Smith's mix of textures and patterns. In this band's world, free gestures can be the most disciplined and eloquent of all.

— Jon Garelick



**Lara Driscoll**  
*Woven Dreams*  
(self-released)

Warm and engaging, *Woven Dreams* is pianist Lara Driscoll's charismatic debut. Here Driscoll demonstrates a mix of

sophistication and subtle yet definite virtuosity, as well as superlative writing skills. Her lyrical originals comprise most of this intimate album, which, along with carefully chosen standards, form a contextually cohesive work.

Driscoll interprets Billy Strayhorn's "Isfahan" unaccompanied by her trio mates, bassist Paul Rushka and drummer Dave Laing. Her left hand softly percusses resonant chords while her right deconstructs the mystical melody. With elegant pianism, Driscoll renders the essence of this classic in a singular style, making the piece her own while retaining Strayhorn's indelible mark. Equally poetic are the exchanges between Driscoll and her sidemen on her own captivating "ECMT Blues." She embellishes the main theme with brilliant spontaneity and a tender touch. Rushka improvises with lithe eloquence while Laing contributes a passionate and restless solo.

On display throughout, the trio's internal synergy is one of the delights of the recording. For instance, Rushka and Driscoll open the bittersweet "Siblings" with a stimulating dialogue. The collective performance that follows is fluid and graceful and belies the mercurial intelligence of the individual expressions that emerge from it

Another highlight is the hypnotic title track, a soulful and indigo-hued lullaby. Driscoll constructs the main motif with dense chords and peppers it with dulcet chiming notes. Laing's rustling brushes and Rushka's sparse, reverberating thumps enhance the mellow, nocturnesque ambience.

On her superb freshman effort, Driscoll showcases her immense talents and particularly her unique artistic voice, which is rare in a musician so early in her career. Driscoll's gentle approach to the keys is mesmerizing, her compositions fascinating. And her seamless camaraderie with the other trio members adds another enjoyable layer to the release.

— Hrayr Attarian



**Oded Tzur**  
*Here Be Dragons*  
(ECM)

If this set's title seems to indicate a ferocious affair, think otherwise. Tel Aviv-born, New York-based tenor saxophonist Oded Tzur's sublime quartet's first ECM outing is more a talisman for peace than a forecast of doom. On ancient maps, "HIC SVNT DRACONES" was a warning to mariners concerning uncharted waters. But here, it alludes to the unknowns of musical improvisation, particularly when using wide-open minimalist ragas as a basis for group development.

The slowly developing title track, and the even more meditative "20 Years," are Tzur's creations, which carefully meld ragas over Petros Klampanis' kinetic double bass. Pianist Nitai Hershkovits fills musical voids by tastefully balancing complex rhythms and harmonically adventurous notes against the group's more static moments. Drummer Johnathan Blake, best known for his aggressive stick work with pianist Kenny Barron and saxophonist Ravi Coltrane, tempers his drum beats and cymbal splashes with brushes that color and texturize.

Most impressive of all is the sound emitted from Tzur's tenor. As the set opens with "Here Be Dragons," the uninformed listener might think Tzur's first long tones are coming from an electric guitar being picked with the volume off, then swelling, using a volume pedal. Ambiguity of sound seems a

priority for Tzur, whose highly liquid, oft flute-like timbre is likely resultant from 12 years of study with *bansuri* master Hariprasad Chaurasia.

Just as this set seems to be leaning toward predictability, three miniature pieces stray from any pattern, with each featuring an unaccompanied band member. The first features pianist Hershkovits, the second, bassist Klampanis, with Tzur on the third — all highly individual, all seemingly 100 percent improvisatory, all thoroughly cohesive statements. Tzur closes the album with the Elvis Presley hit "Can't Help Falling in Love," a ballad initially played unaccompanied by the saxophonist via Skype in a successful attempt to woo his wife-to-be.

— James Rozzi



Lara Driscoll



**Kassa Overall**  
*I Think I'm Good*  
(Brownswood)

Trumpeter Wynton Marsalis effectively started the Young Lions movement upon the release of his 1982 self-titled debut, arguably saving traditional acoustic jazz as we know it in the process. Drummer/vocalist/producer Kassa Overall, born that same year, has since become the kind of genre-blending artist that Marsalis started that movement to fend off. The Brooklyn resident's 2019 debut, *Go Get Ice Cream and Listen to Jazz*, was a mashup of hip-hop and jazz that succeeded in equal parts because



Jen Allen

of Overall's creativity and the element of surprise. Without the latter factor, his sophomore release, *I Think I'm Good*, comes across as more of a hodgepodge.

For starters, *I Think I'm Good* is more introspective than Overall's debut. Too much so. Now 37, he is to be credited for overcoming a manic episode and hospitalization as a student. But moody, sparse, bottom-heavy tracks such as "Visible Walls" and "Please Don't Kill Me" border on self-obsession despite the estimable efforts of keyboardist Mike King, acoustic bassist Stephan Crump and vibraphonist Joel Ross.

"Find Me" raises the bar with the help of vocalist J Hoard and pianist Aaron Parks, yet the soundtrack-worthy tone poem starts an up-and-down pattern that continues throughout the album.

For every highlight like the dramatic "Show Me a Prison," with a voicemail snippet from political activist Dr. Angela Davis, there are as many lowlights.

The plodding "Halfway House" meets halfway between acoustic jazz and sample-laden hip-hop, yet gets stuck in neutral in the process.

Essentially a therapeutic musical autobiography, *I Think I'm Good* is salvaged late via Overall's frenetic drumming and spoken-word performance on "Landline," a duet with brother and tenor saxophonist Carlos Overall, and Vijay Iyer's electric piano on "Was She Happy," Overall's closing ode to the late pianist Geri Allen, who employed him in her band for seven years.

— Bill Meredith



### Jen Allen *Sifting Grace* (Next Level)

Jen Allen may not be a familiar name. Her only other recording as a leader came in 2011, as she's been engaged as an active composer and educator during the past decade. Still, it's impressive how assured the pianist sounds on *Sifting Grace*, her new release, exhibiting the relaxed confidence of an established presence.

Strong melodicism and an easy swing guide these seven original tunes. And this is highly personal material, dealing with the tough work required in moving on with one's life while dealing with grief. Perhaps that's why the aptly titled "Begin Again" comes across as cautiously upbeat, with a bouncy rhythm underpinned by a melody that suggests an uneasy optimism.

As carefully constructed as Allen's compositions are, the results never come across as merely tasteful. That's thanks to the warmth of the melodies and the performances by the rest of her quartet, which features Allen's husband, Kris Allen, on alto and soprano saxophones, bassist Marty Jaffe and drummer Kush Abadey. "Easy Peasey" begins by building on Jaffe's three-note motif, but the harmonic palette quickly expands in unexpected directions, so that what starts out as a groove-forward piece blooms into something more contoured and complex. "Prickly Pear" is as close as the group comes to an all-out burner, and

Photo by Lindsey Victoria



Kassa Overall

Photo by Duane E. Savage

## AUDITIONS

its old-school rhythmic and melodic drive is instantly infectious.

Allen's solos are masterclasses in sly economy and dramatic development. On the title track, she wades in tentatively, gradually moving to the upper registers, suggesting a slow movement from darkness to light. And her lyrical style seems especially suited for a ballad like "Climbing Ivy." Her chords whisper beneath Jaffe's solo, then grow more dramatic in supporting Kris Allen's soaring soprano turn. On this concise and cogent set, Allen demonstrates that the most direct statements are often the most effective. — John Frederick Moore

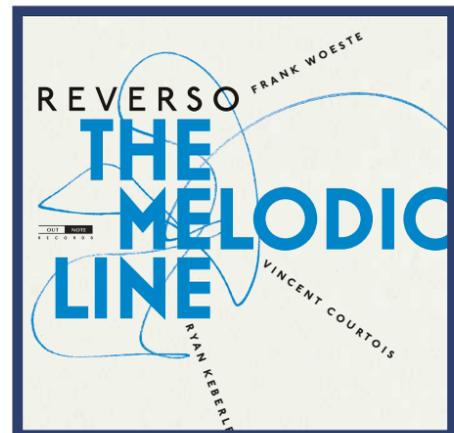
### Reverso

#### *The Melodic Line*

(Out Note)

Merging jazz and classical music isn't exactly a new notion. But seldom has the concept been realized with more sophistication than on *The Melodic Line*, the second studio recording by the Reverso team of trombonist Ryan Keberle and pianist Frank Woeste, who are joined here by cellist Vincent Courtois.

Keberle is American, while Woeste and Courtois are French. But the three are clearly comfortable negotiating divides, be they cultural or musical, that might trip up lesser collaborators. Moreover, the Reverso brain trust made a canny decision between the combo's debut, *Suite Ravel*, and their sophomore effort by leaving drums out of the equation.



Joey Alexander

This less-is-more approach results in an unconventional chamber trio that effectively splits the difference between jazz and classical. Another plus: Unlike *Suite Ravel*, which drew for inspiration upon composer Maurice Ravel, *The Melodic Line* uses as its jumping-off point Les Six, an early 20th-century French collective responsible for a canon much less familiar to listeners on this side of the pond.

The opener, "Blue Feather," serves as something of a sonic invitation to the project as a whole. Courtois lays down a bold riff that's shadowed by Woeste prior to the entry of Keberle, who delivers the main melody with smooth confidence. The combination makes for jaunty fun, as well as an indication that expectations should be set aside for the remainder of the album.

The variety of what follows is bracing. "Exemplar" gets dark thanks to a middle section in which Courtois flirts with atonality; "Up North" lays out lines

that are enthrallingly rich and elegant; "Montparnasse" showcases Woeste's impeccable sense of time; "Absinthe" intoxicates by way of a contrapuntal arrangement that's downright danceable; and the concluding "Clara" finds Keberle reminding us how beautiful a trombone can sound when it's being manipulated by a master.

— Michael Roberts

### Joey Alexander

#### *Warna*

(Verve)

This fifth release by Joey Alexander, the 16-year-old Balinese phenom, once again showcases the young pianist's prodigious technical skills, and it's not without satisfying moments throughout. On *Warna's* 12 cuts, 10 of which are original, Alexander is warmly supported by bassist Larry Grenadier and drummer Kendrick Scott. Percussionist Luisito Quintero

# HEAR THE INTERVIEWS

JAZZIZ.COM

# SOUNDBITES

By Eric Snider



## Kat Edmonson

### *Dreamers Do* (Spinnerette)

With her fey, girlish voice, Edmonson imbues a series of Disney (and Disney-esque) tunes with engagingly fresh treatments of vintage swing, orchestral cabaret and wistful ballads. A sinister, tabla-driven reinvention of “When You

Wish Upon a Star” highlights a sly subversiveness that courses through the entire album.



## Avishai Cohen

### *Big Vicious* (ECM)

Eschewing the meditative “ECM sound” of his first two records for the label, Cohen expands his sonic palette to include electronics, full-tilt rock guitars, psychedelic sound sculptures and more — all while keeping his full-bodied

trumpet front and center. A different kind of fusion album that really works.



## Connie Han

### *Iron Starlet* (Mack Avenue)

Pianist Han places her considerable chops in the service of risk-free, by-the-book post-bop on her hour-long second album. Tenor saxophonist Walter Smith III and trumpeter Jeremy Pelt contribute credible work — and the 23-year-old Han

wisely mixes in Rhodes on a couple of tunes — but overall the music feels curiously inert.

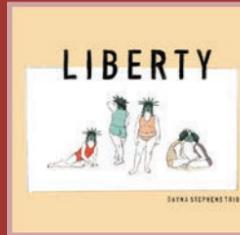


## Brian Landrus

### *For Now* (BlueLand)

There's an easy elegance to this romantic quintet session, highlighted by Landrus' splendid work on baritone sax, bass clarinet and alto flute. His nine original tunes (along with three standards) are straightforward and lovely. A string

quartet adds lushness to several tracks.



## Dayna Stephens

### *Liberty* (Contagious Music)

In the ever-expanding world of tenor trio albums, *Liberty* is neither mangy dog nor show pony, although it tilts toward the latter. Stephens, drummer Eric Harland and bassist Ben Street showcase a relaxed, open chemistry, letting the

music meander while keeping it cohesive.



## Kirk Knuffke

### *Brightness: Live in Amsterdam* (Royal Potato Family)

Cornetist Knuffke, drummer Bill Goodwin and bassist Mark Helias form a potent trio, confidently wandering down whatever thematic avenue beckons during this 45-minute live set. They use

space with aplomb and provide each other ample room to explore, both individually and collectively.



## Nina Simone

### *Fodder for My Wings* (Verve)

Recorded in the early '80s while Simone was exiled in Paris, this reissue of an obscure French release is a fascinating portrait of an erratic artist under duress. The album features several bright calypsos and Afro-grooves, but Simone's

underlying anger and sadness are palpable.



## Walter Smith III & Matthew Stevens

### *In Common 2* (Whirlwind)

Saxophonist Smith and guitarist Stevens, long-time collaborators, have made a terrific 40-minute quintet album built around ear-grabbing melodies and inventive rhythms, elevated by tight, accomplished solos and deft interplay. The music, which hews to current post-bop conventions, finds just the right blend of

sophistication and accessibility.



joins the group for three numbers and works seamlessly with Scott. Two cuts feature Anne Drummond on flute, and her contribution on “We Here” lends considerable charm to the tune.

At this point in his life, Alexander has greater success getting into a composition than getting out of one. He knows how to set a groove and how to create ambiance. He listens deeply and responds compassionately to his fellow bandmates. His sense of fearlessness is evident in everything he undertakes. But his vamping can be tedious, and sometimes — especially when he tries to be dramatically syncopated — his phrases simply sound misplaced and jarring. His two free-form improvisations, “Affirmation I” and “Affirmation III,” end more with abandonment than resolve. Ultimately, there's more for him to absorb regarding subtlety and resolution, but there's plenty of time for that.

Of the two covers, Sting's “Fragile” doesn't leave much of an impression. But Alexander's rendition of Joe Henderson's “Inner Urge” — the most memorable piece on *Warna* — presents the pianist at his best. His delight is tangible as he parties through the changes, celebrating the Blue Note classic with passion and whimsy. Grenadier provides a melodic solo, as does Scott, who rolls and rollicks with great artistry. More than any other, this is the cut that speaks to the name of Alexander's new label: Verve. Here's to more of that.

— Sascha Feinstein

Photo by Claudia Mcdade



Ibrahim Ferrer

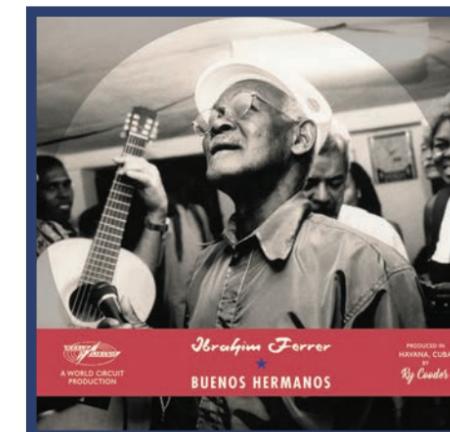
## Ibrahim Ferrer

### *Buenos Hermanos* (World Circuit)

The world could use a little enchantment, ambiance and vintage Caribbean swagger right about now, and they're delivered in abundance by the late Cuban crooner and Buena Vista Social Club alum Ibrahim Ferrer. The reissue of *Buenos Hermanos*, Ferrer's late-life solo masterpiece, is just what the doctor ordered in these decidedly dystopian times. First released in 2003, during the *sonero's* fabled second act, the new and improved version, re-imagined by producer Ry Cooder, is an exquisitely remastered and remixed second coming.

The collection of boleros and danceable confections includes four previously unearthed tracks culled from

the vaults of the iconic Egrem Studios in Havana, where the album was originally recorded. Lauded the world over as an essential album that charted a new course within the island's fecund musical traditions, the reissue rounds out the





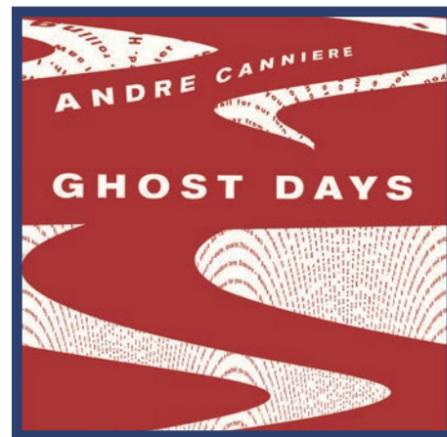
Andre Canniere

original's bold aesthetic with new layers of sentimental nuances conjuring the elegance and grace embodied in Ferrer's effortless vibrato.

New tracks include the wistfully bewitching "Mujer," written by legendary Mexican composer Agustín Lara; and "Ojos Malvados," a smoldering torch song written by Cristina Saladrigas — one of the few women who stood out in the early days of Cuban *trova* — and featuring the supple surf-guitar sound of Manuel Galbán, formerly of the 1960s Cuban doo-wop group Los Zafiros. Each expands on the romantic pathos of previously released songs such as "Mil

Congojas" and "Perfume de Gardenias." The newly included "Me Voy Pa' Sibanicú" is a jubilant *guaracha* that pairs well with album opener "Boquiñeña," a swinging, big band number that rides on a lean horn section, soaring chorus and percolating percussion. "Ven Conmigo, Guajira," also newly released, is a retro, country vamp that has Ferrer's velvety vocals improvising over a steady chorus and blaring brass. The world is coming apart at the seams, but at least Ferrer is back, lulling us into the kind of devastating mood many of us long for.

— Lissette Corsa



### Andre Canniere

*Ghost Days*  
(Whirlwind)

"Suicides," the first track of *Ghost Days*, sports a percolating funk line for bass and electric piano, on top of which Andre Canniere places tightly tailored riffs for his trumpet and Tori Freestone's tenor sax. But the riffs, and the barreling horn solos that follow, show up only after Brigitte Beraha begins singing the short poem that inspired the composition. "My room is an orange graveyard/Ladybirds come here to die, each day a new corpse," the piece begins. It ends two stanzas later with "I watch them practice death in their red funeral dresses/As dusk rapidly descends." Not what you'd expect from the opening notes, although it's somewhat leavened by the knowledge that "ladybirds" is Brit-speak for the insects we call ladybugs.

*Ghost Days* abounds in such contradictions. The U.S.-born, London-based Canniere has used his fiercely intelligent, tuneful writing to convey thought-provoking poetry, most of it expressing regret of one kind or another (though not as darkly as on that first track). Smartly energetic or post-rock reflective, his songs occupy a sweet spot between pure jazz and a welter of other genres, which leave their mark without overshadowing the band. The lineup sports an all-U.K. rhythm trio including drummer Andrew Bain, whose thunderous beats define the more

alt-rock-adjacent material. Canniere's clean technique and clarion sound — reminiscent of Freddie Hubbard, a main influence — make his improvising a joy, but he doesn't hog the spotlight. He seems just as happy playing catchy section parts with Freestone, whose passionately acrobatic solos reflect and refract Canniere's own. Still, the spotlight falls largely on the poems, individually penned by Malika Booker and Rebecca Lynch; on the startling range and control displayed by vocalist Beraha; and especially on how Canniere has knitted them together. The anthemic "Colours" has Beraha backed by a multitracked wall of horns; on the relaxed-shuffle "My Star," Canniere supports her with a strong countermelody. On "Suicides" and "Erasure," the voicings evoke classical composer Steve Reich's blended singers and instruments in some of his 1980s works. Canniere doesn't live in the past on *Ghost Days*, but neither does he shrink from its valued lessons.

— Neil Tesser

### Eldar Djangirov

*Rhapsodize*  
(Twelve Tone Resonance)

Eldar Djangirov is a remarkable pianist, one with phenomenal technique and a quick mind. Now 33, he began playing piano when he was just 3, performed at festivals in the Soviet Union when he was 9 and, after moving with his family to Kansas City, Missouri, appeared on Marian McPartland's Piano Jazz at age 12. Djangirov has been a major force on the jazz scene



since he turned 18, and *Rhapsodize* is at least his 10th album as a leader.

To say that *Rhapsodize* is a high-energy affair is an understatement. Djangirov, who is teamed with bassist Raviv Markovitz and drummer Jimmy MacBride, begins the program with a powerhouse version of "A Night in Tunisia." One cannot imagine Dizzy Gillespie sounding comfortable at this rapid pace, but Djangirov almost makes it sound natural. That performance serves as a warmup for the pianist's dramatic "Airport" and the intense "Anthemic," both of which are unrelenting in their passion. While his power and command of his instrument are admirable, it is a bit of a relief when Djangirov calms things down on "Willow Weep for Me." He allows the ballad standard to breathe during his relatively melodic version, even when he throws in some runs worthy of Art Tatum.

The hard-driving "Burn" and "Black Hole Sun" (which recalls McCoy Tyner in spots) raise the temperature again. "Variations on a Bach Prelude" is an explosive showcase that succeeds due to the strong Bach melody, which gives the pianist a strong foundation to work off of. The moody ballad "In July" and three other energetic originals conclude the set.

Djangirov sounds better on the more familiar material than on his episodic originals, although one cannot deny his virtuosity. Overall, the album would benefit from a greater variation of moods.

— Scott Yanow

### Paul Jones

*Let's Get Tropical*  
(Outside In Music)

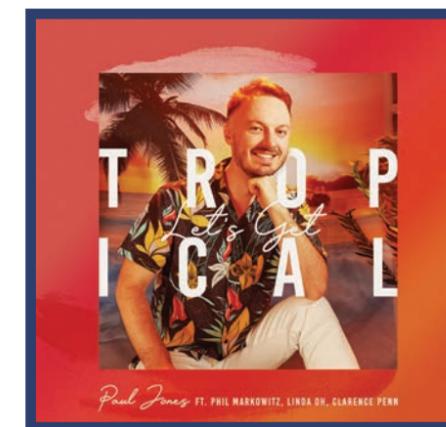
The whimsical title of saxophonist and composer Paul Jones' eight-song quartet date — graphically illustrated by the leader's sunny smile, flashy Hawaiian shirt and a backdrop of palm trees — suggests a frothy, fun-filled soundtrack for sipping mai tais on the beach. However, with the exception of the title track, a catchy Latin-esque outing set to a generic bossa beat, the program is devoted to decidedly more edgy and

intellectually curious fare.

Jones and company — pianist Phil Markowitz, bassist Linda Oh and drummer Clarence Penn — explore a wide range of influences that makes each track distinctive. "Glacier Lake," thematically dark and probing, reflects an austere Euro-jazz vibe, enhanced by the spare language of contemporary classical stylings. Jones' tenor sax is tart and airy while Markowitz's delicate and precise voicings exude the confidence and refined technique associated with a recital hall performance. Elsewhere, Jones taps a more stylistically exuberant reference, as on "Trio 3" and "MR 4," where he stakes out each composition's personality trait via repetitive, rapidly articulated two-bar phrases. "MR 2," one of the session's most evocative tracks, channels the inciting spirit of a vintage John Coltrane quartet date. The leader's tenor attack is fiery and strapping against the rhythm section's thrashing backdrop, and Markowitz pays homage to McCoy Tyner with a barrage of percussive comping. Throughout the program, the pianist's contributions are technically dazzling and arrestingly creative.

The set closes with Benny Golson's classic "Stablemates," a nod to the mainstream and a chance for Jones and the group to shine in a hard-bop setting. *Let's Get Tropical* is a challenging but always engaging listen. And it frequently delivers what has long been a hallmark of memorable improvisational music: a genuine sense of surprise.

— Mark Holston



## A Jazz Man Passes

*On April 1, jazz pianist and educator Ellis Marsalis Jr., 85, died of complications related to COVID-19. The following day, his second eldest son, trumpeter and composer Wynton, publicly shared the following letter, which, with condolences to Wynton and the Marsalis family — and with Wynton's kind permission — we now share with you.*

**M**y daddy passed away last night. We now join the worldwide family who are mourning grandfathers and grandmothers, mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers — kinfolk, friends, neighbors, colleagues, acquaintances and others.

What can one possibly say about loss in a time when there are many people losing folks that mean so much to them? One of my friends lost both her mother AND father just last week. We all grieve and experience things differently, and I'm sure each of my five brothers are feeling and dealing in their own way.

My daddy was a humble man with a lyrical sound that captured the spirit of place — New Orleans, the Crescent City, The Big Easy, the Curve. He was a stone-cold believer without extravagant tastes.

Like many parents, he sacrificed for us and made so much possible. Not only material things, but things of substance and beauty like the ability to hear complicated music and to read books; to see and to contemplate art; to be philosophical and kind, but to also understand that a time and place may require a pugilistic-minded expression of ignorance.

His example for all of us who were his students (a big extended family from everywhere) showed us to be patient and to want to learn and to respect teaching and thinking and to embrace the joy of seriousness. He taught us that you could be conscious and stand your ground with an opinion rooted "in something" even if it was overwhelmingly unfashionable. And that if it mattered to someone, it mattered.

I haven't cried because the pain is so deep ... it doesn't even hurt. He was absolutely my man. He knew how much I loved him, and I knew he loved me (though he was not given to any type of

demonstrative expression of it). As a boy, I followed him on so many underpopulated gigs in unglamorous places, and there, in the passing years, learned what it meant to believe in the substance of a fundamental idea whose only verification was your belief.

I only ever wanted to do better things to impress HIM. He was my North Star and the only opinion that really deep down mattered to me was his because I grew up seeing how much he struggled and sacrificed to represent and teach vital human values that floated far above the stifling segregation and prejudice that defined his youth but, strangely enough, also imbued his art with an even more pungent and biting accuracy.

But for all of that, I guess he was like all of us; he did the best he could, did great things, had blind spots and made mistakes, fought with his spouse, had problems paying bills, worried about his kids and other people's, rooted for losing teams, loved gumbo and red beans, and my momma's pecan pie. But unlike a healthy portion of us, he really didn't complain about stuff. No matter how bad it was.

A most fair-minded, large-spirited, generous, philanthropic (with whatever he had), open-minded person is gone. Ironically, when we spoke just 5 or 6 days ago about this precarious moment in the world and the many warnings he received "to be careful, because it wasn't his time to pass from COVID," he told me, "Man, I don't determine the time. A lot of people are losing loved ones. Yours will be no more painful or significant than anybody else's."

That was him, "in a nutshell," (as he would say before talking for another 15 minutes without pause).

In that conversation, we didn't know that we were prophesying. But he went out soon after as he lived — without complaint or complication. The nurse asked him, "Are you breathing ok?" as the oxygen was being steadily increased from 3 to 8, to too late, he replied, "Yeah. I'm fine."

For me, there is no sorrow only joy. He went on down the Good Kings Highway as was his way, a jazz man, "with grace and gratitude."

And I am grateful to have known him.  
—Wynton



# BLUESOUND IS THE SOUND OF VINTAGE SESSIONS IN HIGH RES.

**BLUESOUND IS THE PREMIUM WIRELESS HIGH RESOLUTION MULTI-ROOM HIFI SYSTEM**  
DISCOVER LIVING HIFI AND THE ALL-NEW GEN 2 PRODUCT FAMILY AT [BLUESOUND.COM](https://www.bluesound.com)

# SUMMER 2020 COLLECTION



## INCLUDES MUSIC FROM:

**Jimmy Greene**

**Christian McBride Big Band**

**Connie Han**

**Erroll Garner**

**Tower of Power**

**Roberto Fonseca**

**Benny Green**

**Harold Lopez-Nussa**

**The Soul Rebels**

**Randy Bernsen**

**Yonrico Scott**

**Brand X**

## **ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:**

Chick Corea, Theo Croker, James Francies, Marquis Hill, Michael League, Aubrey Logan, Donny McCaslin, Ted Poor, Sara Serpa, Matthew Shipp, Tommy LiPuma, Raul Midón, Maria Schneider, Liberty Ellman, Omer Avital, Gregory Porter, Kassa Overall, Lara Driscoll, Ibrahim Ferrer, Wynton Marsalis and more.