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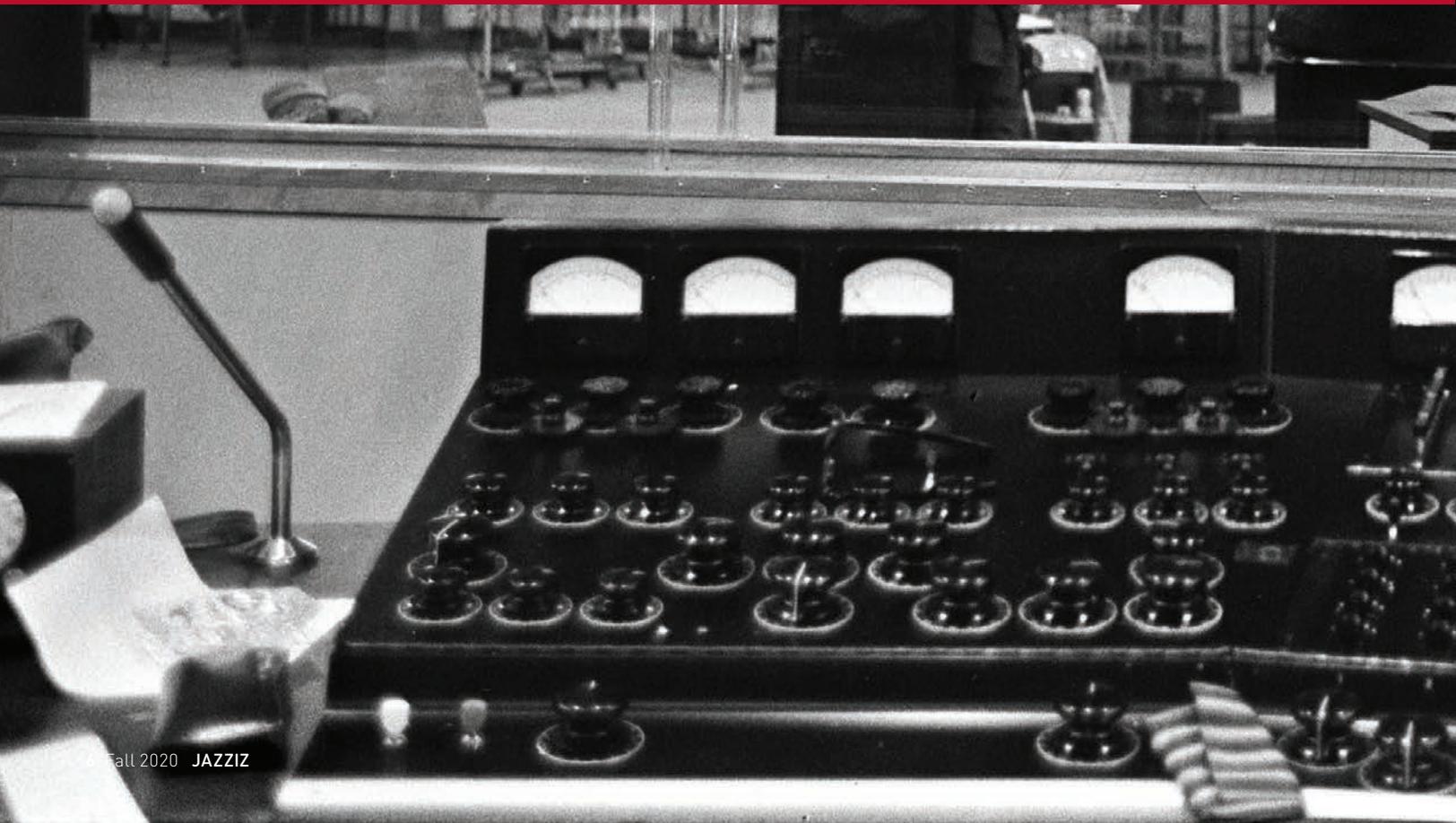


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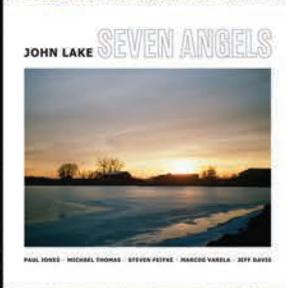
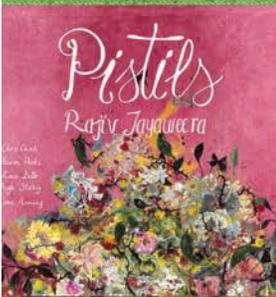
Photographer Don Hunstein captured Thelonious Monk in the playback room of CBS/Columbia's 30th Street Studio, a.k.a. "The Church," in New York City in February 1963.







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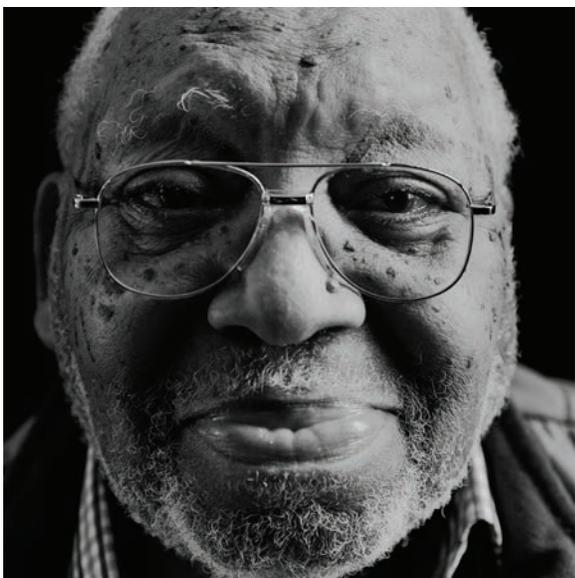
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# JAZZIZ

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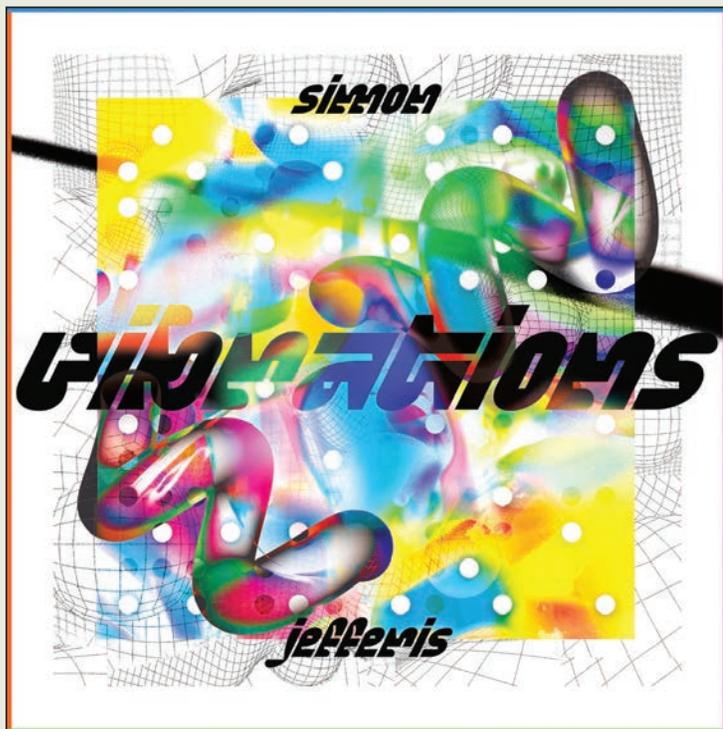
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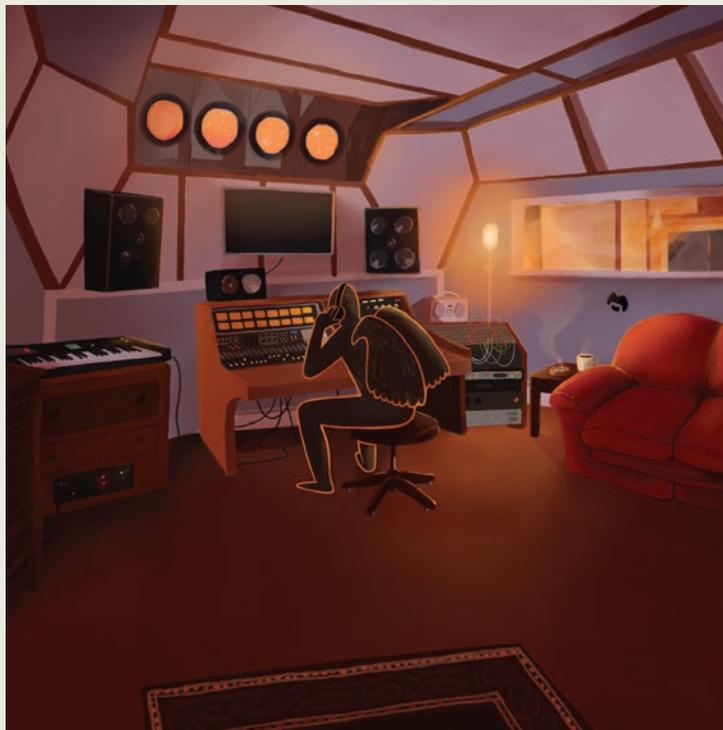
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# Elvis Has Left the Building

This issue marks the last edition for the longest-running managing editor at JAZZIZ, David Pulizzi. When I interviewed David in 2000, he told me that he wasn't suited for the job, that he didn't know much about jazz. The entire office staff was reminded of this often during David's early days with the magazine, when he'd go on about Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen and Elvis. He'd sing their praises, and sometimes their songs, on the way to his desk. The reason I hired David was that he was focused on assigning compelling stories to our freelancers and editing their work for clarity — to make every story a “good read.” He was the first editor to show me that, while there were a lot of writers and critics who know jazz deeply and intimately, not all of them write especially good stories. He made it his job to put their knowledge and expertise in service to publishing winning, well-told stories. He was also the first editor I employed to abruptly cut off any publicist's pitch for coverage of a new album by responding, “A new album is not a story!” Though I often tried to get David to write for the magazine he managed, he was usually reluctant to do so — which is unfortunate because he happens to be a magnificent writer. Many times I've had the urge to publish one or more of the classic rants he'd email me. In the 20 years I've known David, he has never been shy about voicing his opinion, and he's always done it with style and, yes, perfect clarity. His parting words as managing editor can be seen of page 98 of this issue.

Beyond his skills as an editor and writer, what I enjoyed most about David was his wit, humor and cynicism, all of which combined with an undeniable warmth and compassion for others. We've been through a lot together, personally and professionally. Truth be told, my eyes welled up when he told me it was time for him to retire. But I'm comforted knowing that he and I will remain friends until the end, and he'll be contributing from time to time in the future.

David followed in the footsteps of some other extremely talented editors at JAZZIZ over the past four decades — from our first editor, Michael Jarrett, who insisted that we step up our editorial a notch so as to separate ourselves from other jazz magazines (and who later became an English professor at Penn State, York), to Larry Blumenfeld, who helped mold the magazine into an authoritative voice in jazz, and who remains a key contributor. I'm pleased to note that Michael, Larry and David all have pieces in this issue. Bob Weinberg, who's worked closely with David over the past 10 years, and Brian Zimmerman will fill David's shoes. Those two also have stories in this issue.

I've told so many people whenever David comes up in conversation that I've been so blessed to have him as my editor and my friend, and I always say he could've “easily been the editor of *Vanity Fair*.” Yes, he's that good. For now, I won't say goodbye to David. Instead, I'll just leave it at “talk to you later.”

—Michael Fagien



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# PRELUDE



# Django Reimagined

Rez Abbasi considers the compositions of Django Reinhardt.

Django Reinhardt is revered as a virtuosic guitarist and a pioneer of so-called “Gypsy jazz,” but as a composer he often remains walled off within that narrow genre label. On his latest album, *Django-Shift* (Whirlwind), guitarist Rez Abbasi does his part to remedy that oversight, reimagining Reinhardt’s compositions through his own voice, without the reverent imitation practiced by so many bands with “Hot Club” in their names. Delving into the less-explored corners of Reinhardt’s catalogue, Abbasi takes an inventive look at Django the composer, with Neil Alexander on organ and electronics and Michael Sarin on drums. —Shaun Brady

## **THIS IS A DIFFERENT KIND OF PROJECT FOR YOU. HOW DID IT COME ABOUT?**

Peter Williams, the curator at Freight and Salvage in Berkeley, California, was planning a Django festival and he thought of me to put together a project. First, of course, my limited brain said, “I don’t really play that kind of style” — Gypsy jazz, or as I prefer to call it, Romani jazz. Then it dawned on me that if Peter was asking me, he knew I wouldn’t go in with that mentality.

## **WAS DJANGO EVER AN INFLUENCE ON YOU?**

There are a host of guitarists that I’ve spent time with. Django’s definitely one of them,

Wes Montgomery’s another. Jim Hall was probably the biggest. Then others, like Barney Kessel, George Benson, what have you. Django didn’t necessarily take any more real estate than those others, but I definitely recognized that he had a very unique sound and was definitely an innovator.

## **THIS SEEMS TO TIE INTO YOUR INTEREST IN REINTERPRETING YOUR INFLUENCES, WHICH YOU’VE DONE IN EQUALLY SURPRISING WAYS WITH ’70S FUSION AND SOUTH ASIAN TRADITIONS.**

The paradigm whenever I do other people’s music is this idea of making music so it sounds and feels like it was my own. That’s what I strive for. In the case of Django, my idea was to explore his whole catalogue first as a listener and not as a composer, an arranger or a musician. That gave me the spark that I was looking for: What really hits me as a listener? A lot of his music is really joyful and bouncy, even when he played ballads. As much as I love that about music, I also like the darker side, so one of my criteria was whether I could add a touch of darkness to some of these tunes.

## **HIS MUSIC SEEMS TO BE SO ISOLATED FROM THE JAZZ MAINSTREAM, NESTLED AWAY UNDER THE “GYPSY JAZZ” LABEL. WAS IT A CHALLENGE TO APPROACH HIS WORK FROM A NEW PERSPECTIVE?**

Definitely. But the real slap-in-the-face surprise that I got when I started listening to his music was discovering how many great tunes he composed that were fresh to my ears. I’d always thought of him more as an amazing guitar player with a few hip tunes. Because of that freshness, I could then take a fresh approach to adding my own voice. ■





REQUISITE

**Wes Montgomery**

*Full House* (Riverside, 1962)

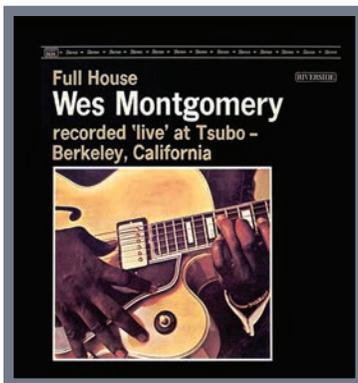
After a string of successful studio albums on Riverside, label chief/producer Orrin Keepnews was champing at the bit to record guitarist Wes Montgomery live onstage, as he'd first heard him. All the stars aligned in June 1962. The Miles Davis Sextet was in San Francisco at the same time as Montgomery, who borrowed Davis' rhythm section of pianist Wynton Kelly, bassist Paul Chambers and drummer Jimmy Cobb. Tenor saxophonist Johnny Griffin was also in town, and Montgomery was eager to explore some tunes with a quintet.

A hopping Berkeley coffeehouse, Tsubo, was booked for the recording. Keepnews and recording engineer Wally Heider set up their equipment in an adjacent storeroom of the club, as capacity crowds flowed into the parking lot and jammed to the sounds emanating from the makeshift control booth.

The excitement of the evening spills onto the recording, which captures Montgomery at the peak of his powers, his warm tone and astounding agility unspooling on lengthy improvisations. The rhythm section is dynamic and responsive, and Griffin once again proves to be among Montgomery's best collaborators. The group goes long on

the energetic, bluesy title track and the sprightly island-tinged "Cariba," sounding laid-back yet completely vital. Accompanied solely by Cobb's whispering brushes and Chambers' delicate bass notes, Montgomery also offers a lovely read of "I've Grown Accustomed to Her Face," spicing up the tune with a Spanish-classical intro and outro. It's easy to hear why Keepnews wanted to capture live the artist who became a cornerstone of his label.

—Bob Weinberg





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# Partners in Song

Longstanding friends **Ran Blake** and **Christine Correa** record their sixth album together.

For some, Billie Holiday's *Lady in Satin* documents a great artist in decline. For others, like vocalist Christine Correa, it's an exemplar of pathos and heartache. "Although her vocal strength is waning by this point, she reaches a pinnacle in her expressive powers," Correa says. "If I had to look for music with deep emotional impact, I would gravitate to *Lady in Satin*."

No surprise, then, that Correa chose to interpret songs from that album for *When Soft Rains Fall* (Red Piano), a duo recording with her longtime collaborator Ran Blake, the legendary pianist known for his cinematic style. Correa notes that Holiday handpicked each of the songs specifically for their lyrics. While Holiday's interpretations were imbued with her life experiences, Correa was going for a more direct approach. "For me, I was just really trying to interpret the lyrics, and trying to deliver them in a way that felt true," she says. "It's like speech really, the way I would articulate in speech. To me, singing is just an extension of one's speaking voice. I just wanted to make sure the words were clear and delivering it as honestly as possible."

Indeed, Correa's speaking voice is every bit as mellifluous as her singing voice (you can hear it for yourself on "The Day Lady Died"). Or as Blake put it in a separate phone interview, "Her voice is the salt of the earth."

He would know. Their friendship goes back to August 1979, when Correa moved from her native Mumbai to attend the New England Conservatory of Music, where Blake was the founding chair of what is now called the Contemporary Improvisation

Department. Since then, they've recorded six albums together. That long-running connection often leads to unexpected musical directions. Their take on "I'll Be Around," for example, ended up having a much more playful air than Correa had anticipated.

"If we do multiple takes of the same song, they tend to be so completely different that choosing the right take is more about choosing the flavor rather than which take was impeccably executed," Correa says. "The way Ran plays, with his unique style and his approach, the music always goes deeper somehow."

At 85, Blake is getting a lot of mileage out of his enduring relationships. He's also recently released *Gray Moon* (Red Piano), a duo recording with pianist Frank Carlberg, another frequent collaborator. The connection runs deeper — Blake introduced Carlberg and Correa to each other at NEC. Now they're married

with two children, both of whom currently attend NEC. "It's just an incredible experience working with both of them," Blake says of Carlberg and Correa. "Both of them are very important in my life, and I really treasure my friendships with them."

—John Frederick Moore



# Call of the Wild

**Ike Sturm and Jesse Lewis venture beyond studio walls.**

For guitarist Ike Sturm and bassist Jesse Lewis, who comprise the New York-based acoustic duo Endless Field, the beauty and mystery of the music heard on *Alive in the Wilderness*, their beguiling new album on the Biophilia label, is directly connected to the circumstances under which it was made — on location in the wilds of Utah. And thanks to portable studio equipment, which the pair and their crew physically carried to an assortment of spectacular settings documented in accompanying clips shot by a *National Geographic* videographer, nature often added its own accompaniment. “You could hear birds having a literal dialogue with us as we were playing,” Sturm says.

The players’ self-titled 2017 debut was largely cut in New York’s Catskill Mountains, albeit under more typical studio conditions. The original plan for their sophomore effort, which benefits the Natural Resources Defense Council, was to bring their instruments and assorted technology outdoors in the same region. But Mother Nature had a different idea. “We did a test run in the Northeast, but there were passing thunderstorms every day,” Lewis recalls. “Being out with all our gear in the weather, we realized quickly we had to do it somewhere very dry, with almost no humidity.”

Utah fit the bill perfectly, and while getting to the most inspirational spots was sometimes practically

an athletic feat, their resulting exhaustion had its advantages. “We would sometimes be physically destroyed by hiking into places, and in some ways that would take the edge off, and the mental game that happens in a recording was eased,” Sturm says. “You wouldn’t have that nervous energy — but definitely some energy when it looked like the bass might slide off the cliff we were standing on.”

The risks paid off. Lewis’ bass solo piece “Wolfhead” is so resonant, in part, because it was captured for posterity in a slot canyon whose walls towered hundreds of feet above them. Likewise, “The Well” brims with instrumental interplay that’s all the more astonishing given that neither band member was confident a single note would be heard. “We spent many hours lugging all our gear up this mountain to a waterfall,” Lewis says. “But the water was so loud in the microphones we didn’t know if it was going to work. That was a situation where the mix was a challenge — to try to get the waterfall to be as quiet as possible.”

Fortunately, the waterfall cooperated. —**Michael Roberts**





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### DISC ONE: TRADITIONS

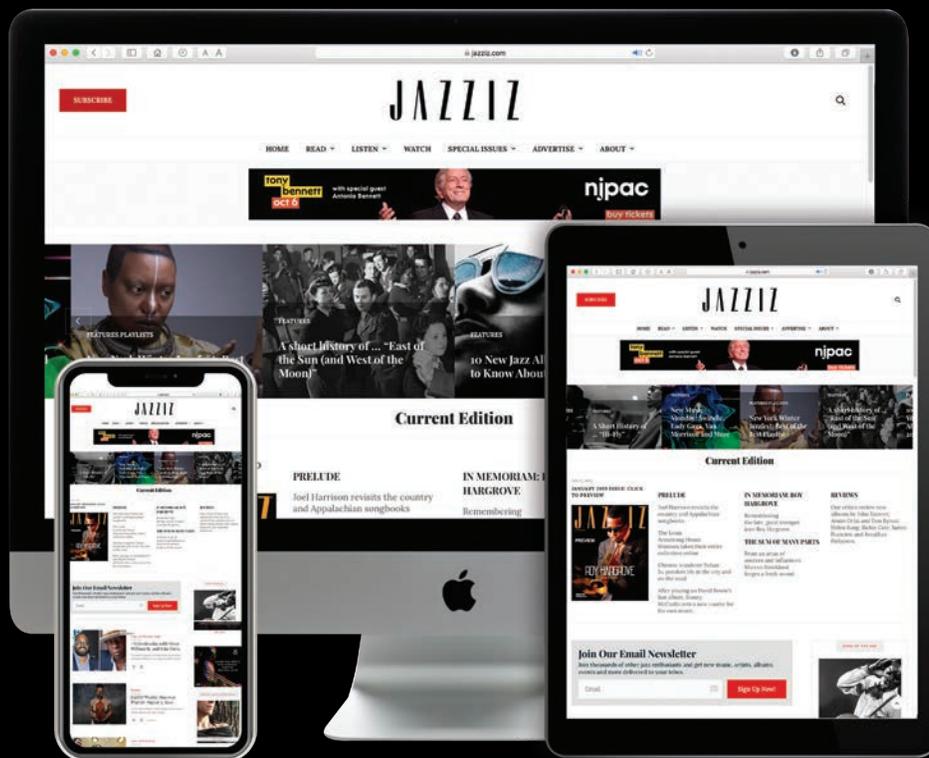
- 1 **Eddie Henderson** "Shuffle and Deal" *Shuffle and Deal* (Smoke Sessions)
- 2 **John Stein** "The Kicker" *Watershed* (Whaling City Sound)
- 3 **Chet Baker** "Polka Dots and Moonbeams" *Live in London, Volume II* (Ubuntu)
- 4 **Bobby Watson** "Keepin' It Real" *Keepin' It Real* (Smoke Sessions)
- 5 **Alexa Tarantino** "Through" *Clarity* (Posi-Tone)
- 6 **Javier Nero feat. Shelly Berg** "Freedom" *Freedom* (Outside In Music)
- 7 **OWL Trio** "Life of the Party" *Life of the Party* (Newvelle)
- 8 **Maggie Herron** "Watching the Crows" *Your Refrain* (Herron Song)
- 9 **Posi-Tone Swingtet** "You Dig" *One for 25* (Posi-Tone)
- 10 **Joe Farnsworth feat. Wynton Marsalis** "The Good Shepherd" *Time To Swing* (Smoke Sessions)
- 11 **Jana Herzen & Charnett Moffett** "Round the World" *Round the World* (Motéma Music)
- 12 **Tim Ray feat. Terri Lyne Carrington and John Patitucci** "Paint It Black" *Excursions and Adventures* (Whaling City Sound)
- 13 **Avi Adrian Trio** "Strange Ground" *Songs From a Dream* (Oded Broshi Music)
- 14 **Ellis Marsalis and Jason Marsalis** "For All We Know" *Ellis Marsalis and Jason Marsalis The New Orleans Collection* (Newvelle)

### DISC TWO: CONTEMPO

- 1 **Special FX feat. Chielì Minucci** "Mr. Marzipan" *AllStars* (Trippin 'N' Rhythm)
- 2 **Mark Egan & Danny Gottlieb** "Cabarete" *Electric Blue* (Wavetone)
- 3 **Donny McCaslin** "Head of Mine" *Head of Mine/Tokyo* (Motéma Music)
- 4 **Michael Silverman feat. Jeff Lorber** "Keys to the City" *Human Spirit* (Autumn Hill)
- 5 **Skinny Hightower** "Blue Moon" *Blue Moon* (Trippin 'N' Rhythm)
- 6 **PYJEN feat. Blue Lab Beats** "Sage Secrets" *Sage Secrets* (DeepMatter)
- 7 **Rajiv Jayaweera feat. Lara Bello** "Pistils" *Pistils* (Outside In Music)
- 8 **Gideon King & City Blog** "Go Along To Get Along" *Love Knot* (Self Release)
- 9 **Yulia Musayelyan** "Finding Ana" *Unsaid* (Outside In Music)
- 10 **Bach to the Future** "Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2" *Bach to the Future* (Autumn Hill)
- 11 **Simon Jefferis** "Vibrations" *Vibrations* (DeepMatter)
- 12 **Jim Robitaille Trio** "Natural Selection" *Space Cycles* (Whaling City Sound)
- 13 **Gindy Bradley** "Snack Grouch" *The Little Things* (Trippin 'N' Rhythm)
- 14 **JerK** "Earthrise" *Some Cosmic Shift* (DeepMatter)

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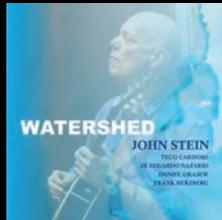
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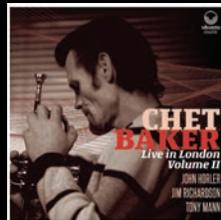
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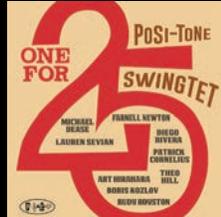
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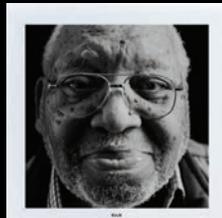
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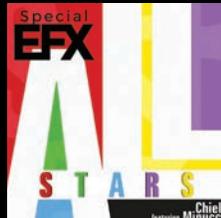
**TIM RAY**  
Excursions and Adventures



**AVI ADRIAN TRIO**  
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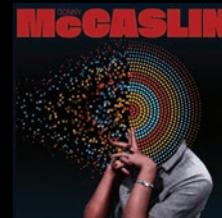
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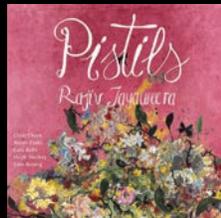
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**GIDEON KING & CITY BLOG**  
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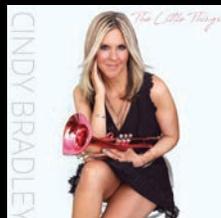
**BACH TO THE FUTURE**  
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# Setting the Record Straight

**Rosetta Reitz fought for women's place in jazz history and made some herself.**

By Bob Weinberg

The picturesque Dutch city of Leiden seems an unlikely place to find a tribute to a Jewish jazz and blues impresaria from New York. About 30 miles southwest of Amsterdam, it's the birthplace of Rembrandt and boasts a centuries-old university and cathedral and a towering windmill museum on the banks of the Rhine. And yet, residents recently rededicated a street in honor of the late Rosetta Reitz, an author, activist and concert presenter who championed early jazz and blues women on her Rosetta Records imprint.

How this came to pass, Reitz's daughter Rebecca Reitz assures, would have delighted her mother. The Reitzstraat, a neighborhood thoroughfare, had previously been named for Francis W. Reitz, a leader of the Dutch colonists known as the Boers, who systematically oppressed blacks and people of color through apartheid in South Africa. So a small group of people who live in the area — mostly women, according to a letter notifying Rebecca Reitz of the honorific for her mom — took it upon themselves to select a more-deserving tributee, preferably a woman, with the surname Reitz. Researching online, they discovered Rosetta and the die was cast. Rather than waiting for official sanction from the city council, the group placed stickers on street signs along the Reitzstraat, obscuring the previous dedication and reading (translated from Dutch) "Rosetta Reitz, 1924-2008, author, historian, owner of Rosetta Records."

The grassroots nature of the gesture, Rebecca Reitz says, synchs perfectly with her mom's sensibilities. "They could have submitted the rededication idea to the council — which I gather they will do — and waited for a couple of years, but they just went ahead and did it," she says by phone from her home in New York City in late May. "And Rosetta would have loved that, because she believed in going ahead and doing what you are called to do."

Among the many passions that called to Rosetta Reitz,

securing the legacy of women jazz and blues performers was close to her heart. Growing up in Utica, New York, she developed an interest in jazz early on, although it was an experience curated by boyfriends and then her husband. Later, she'd write about the jazz loft scene in New York City for *The Village Voice*. But histories of the music downplayed the role of women, which piqued her curiosity during the height of the women's movement in the 1970s. "Where were the women?" she wanted to know, explaining why she began her research in Ava Lawrence's 2005 article in *The ARSC (Association for Recorded Sound Collections) Journal*. "Since I'd been a jazz buff all my life, why is jazz a male domain? So I started hunting about and looking for the women. ... But were they only vocalists? Who were they? What were they singing about? Turns out they were there all the time. They just weren't given attention or considered important."

Reitz set out to correct that misrepresentation, initially starting work on a book. However, as she explored the music of women blues and jazz pioneers — many of whom wrote their own material, selected their sidemen (including the likes of Louis Armstrong and Fletcher Henderson) and became major celebrities — she realized not many of her readers would recognize the songs or the artists beyond the friends and family members whom she gifted homemade cassettes. An idea began to percolate, and in 1980, she launched Rosetta Records, an imprint dedicated to the rediscovery of women artists, many of whom were lost to time.

The first album she released, *Mean Mothers, Independent Women's Blues, Volume 1*, collected performances by singers such as Ida Cox, Bertha Idaho and Harlem Hannah, dating from the 1920s to the 1940s. Rather than feature downtrodden laments, Reitz assembled a set list that revealed the power and agency



**Troy Roberts**

**Stuff I Heard (Toy Robot Music)**

Saxophonist Troy Roberts engages in scintillating musical conversation with drummer Jimmy Macbride, the pair synching separately in the studio, pre-COVID lockdown. Roberts formed his own sax section by overdubbing horn parts, and laid down acoustic and electric bass lines before sending the music to Macbride for percussive embellishment. The results are organic and exciting, and Roberts' playing and writing shine throughout. Sunny Latin groover "Little Room," the fun but menacing "Harry Brown" and the soaring "Solar Panels" reveal the saxophonist's versatility. Whether this method of recording is the way of the future or an artifact of the times, *Stuff I Heard* hardly suffers from social distancing.

**NOW PLAYING**

of the singers. "There was every kind of blues for every kind of life experience," she explained in her detailed liner notes, a staple of the 19 albums she produced. "This album focuses on [independent women's blues] because they have been neglected in favor of the victim variety blues."

Nobody's doormat, these women asserted themselves in both tone and text, demanding satisfaction from their lovers and informing them of the consequences if they didn't measure up. Accompanied by her cornet-led jazz band on the 1926 recording "You Ain't



Gonna Feed in My Pasture Now," Maggie Jones lets her man know he's no longer welcome at her table or in her bed and informs him that he's been replaced. "I've just found a man who will treat me right," she sings, rubbing salt in the wound. "He's mighty good by day but best at night." Then there was Rosa Henderson, accompanied by pianist James P. Johnson on her 1931 recording "Can't Be Bothered With No Shiek," on which she declares she has no time for trifling dandies: "Don't want no man who stands around and looks cute/I want a real man and not a substitute."

Other themed albums would follow: *Women's Railroad Blues*, *Red White and Blues: Women Sing of America* and *Piano Singer's Blues*. Reitz also spotlighted overlooked jazz instrumentalists such as trumpeter Valaida Snow, piano virtuoso Dorothy Donegan and the all-female big band International Sweethearts of Rhythm. A one-woman operation, Reitz researched and selected material, secured rights, designed rather striking album covers, penned liners and mailed records to customers from her apartment on 16th Street in Chelsea.

"She would walk around the corner [to the post office] with her packages, which she would ship out," Rebecca, away at college at the time, remembers,

**"She would walk around the corner [to the post office] with her packages, which she would ship out. She had a wonderful relationship with the postal workers; she used to make them tapes of old blues songs about postal workers."**

explaining that her mom's warehouse was actually an extra bedroom. "She had a wonderful relationship with the postal workers; she used to make them tapes of old blues songs about postal workers."

Reitz's involvement with the USPS didn't end there, as she lobbied for — and won in 1994 — a stamp dedicated to Bessie Smith, an accomplishment of which her daughter says she was justifiably proud.

Reitz continued to highlight women performers through recordings, articles and lectures, as well as in concerts such as 1980's *Blues Is a Woman* at Avery Fisher Hall, which featured Sippie Wallace, Big Mama Thornton, Nell Carter, Koko Taylor and others. The book she had begun, *Women's Blues & Jazz: Their Magic, 1920 to 1950s*, remains unpublished, although its introduction can be read on Rebecca's tribute site to her mom ([rosettattribution.weebly.com](http://rosettattribution.weebly.com)), which also contains a link to the Duke University Library's collection of her liner notes. Reitz's accomplishments sang loudly enough to be heard across the sea in Leiden, where a street now bears testament to her legacy. "She was a self-invented person," Rebecca notes. "She was an interesting person because she was an interested person. And she followed her interests." ■

From left: Allison Miller, Renee Rosnes, Noriko Ueda, Ingrid Jensen, Cécile McLorin Salvant, Anat Cohen and Melissa Aldana



# The Magnificent Seven

**Artemis, a true supergroup, releases its debut.**

By Jonathan Widran

In the year of COVID-19, where once-thriving festivals and live music events are becoming increasingly distant memories, the story of how seven internationally acclaimed female jazz stalwarts joined forces to create the band Artemis stands out as a poignant triumph of will and spirit. Having first discovered and demonstrated their powerful chemistry on festival stages throughout Europe in 2017, the group — pianist Renee Rosnes, clarinetist Anat Cohen, saxophonist Melissa Aldana, trumpeter Ingrid Jensen, bassist Noriko Ueda, drummer Allison Miller and vocalist Cécile McLorin Salvant — recently released its self-titled debut album on the Blue Note imprint.

Indeed, the group's formation dates to 2017, when a European promoter tasked Rosnes with assembling a group of top musicians for a dozen or so appearances that would be billed as "Ladies in Jazz." Subsequently Rosnes reached out to an array of seasoned, widely lauded talent. The fact that the group ultimately assembled for the tour had a distinctly international flavor — Rosnes and Jensen hail from Canada, Miller and Salvant from the United States, Cohen's from Israel, Aldana's from Chile and Ueda is from Japan — was more serendipitous happenstance than willful intention. Rosnes had performed previously with Cohen, including during a Japanese tour in 2011, and had also been joined by Aldana for appearances at the Village Vanguard and Dizzy's at Lincoln Center.

"This was an extraordinary opportunity," Rosnes says, "and I simply wanted to work with musicians I had long respected. Of those I had not yet played with, I was familiar with the careers of Noriko and Allison, and Ingrid is a longtime friend from British Columbia. Yes, there's versatility as far as our origins go, and I love the fact that there was such cultural and musical versatility. But once we started playing, it was refreshing just to be on the bandstand with this amazing female energy, making music at this high level."

"Those road trips, with their 5 a.m. lobby calls and other stressful elements between the shows, allow you to hang with people every day, for good and bad," Cohen says. "It's like a marriage, where there are tense moments amidst the camaraderie. But what we discovered was that not only was it a blast to be onstage with them and getting those great audience responses, but it was just as much fun hanging off stage, which is not always the case with groups on tour. No matter who you travel and play with, the bottom line is, you've got to be cool and easy to get along with, and you have to play your asses off. With Artemis, it's all about presenting the excellence of seven women aspiring to be the best at their craft."

During the European tour, the still-unnamed band was focused on gigging and no one spoke of extending it into a long-term project. But everything jelled a year later when the

musicians regrouped for a performance at the Newport Jazz Festival, a show NPR broadcast on *Jazz Night in America*. Blue Note President Don Was caught the performance and quickly got the ball rolling toward signing the band to the famed jazz label. By then, Jensen had conceived the perfect moniker to capture the group's empowering vibe and forward-thinking mission: Artemis, who in Greek mythology is the daughter of Zeus and Leto and the twin sister of Apollo. "Known as the 'Goddess of the Hunt,' she is also an explorer, a torch bringer and protector of young children," the trumpeter says. "Her character perfectly reflects the energies and wide array of tapestries that the band brings to the stage and our debut."

While Jensen's sensual, hard-swinging arrangement of The Beatles' "The Fool on the Hill" and the lush, soulful spin on Stevie Wonder's "If It's Magic" (featuring Salvant's caressing vocals) are holdovers from the live gigs, the other songs Artemis brought to the rehearsal and recording sessions at Oktaven Audio in Mount Vernon, New York, were fresh to the repertoire. These include Rosnes' slow-simmering re-imagining of Lee Morgan's "Sidewinder" and Salvant's gentle, torchy twist on the obscure 1948 Maxine Sullivan gem "Cry, Buttercup, Cry." The album's track list is rounded out by one original composition apiece from Rosnes, Miller, Aldana, Cohen and Ueda.

"By default, I am considered the musical director and producer, but I don't really like those terms," says Rosnes. "I function as more of an organizational force to bring the artists, songs and

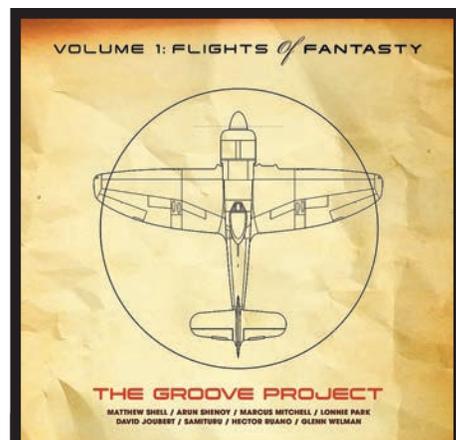
sonic elements together. Beyond further expressing our great collective energy, since we became a full-fledged band I wanted everyone's compositional voice to be heard and their individual artistry showcased. Everyone had a voice in terms of what they enjoyed playing, and the goal was to take everyone's feelings into consideration in putting the perfect set list together."

Acknowledging the band's spirit of open discussions and Rosnes' role in directing them, Cohen says, "In every democracy, there's a prime minister. In my own band, I never tell other musicians specifically what to do. You have to be sensitive to their individual personalities and abilities. If you give them freedom, they'll bring in concepts you never could have dreamed about. Renee let us run the sessions for our own songs. When 'Nocturno' [the song that Cohen contributed to the album] came up, I led the band for two hours. Then I took that hat off and passed it on. It was all based on sharing ideas and helping one another achieve their original visions."

Though Rosnes and Cohen insist they don't consciously think about feminist-related issues when they're onstage or in the studio, they acknowledge that Artemis can play an important cultural role in serving to expand people's perceptions of what women can accomplish in a traditionally male-dominated field.

"As the song goes, the times are a-changing," says Rosnes. "There seems to be a greater awareness these past years about the issues, with more women in high political positions and

**"No matter who you travel and play with, the bottom line is, you've got to be cool and easy to get along with, and you have to play your asses off. With Artemis, it's all about presenting the excellence of seven women aspiring to be the best at their craft."**



### The Groove Project

#### Volume 1: *Flights of Fantasy* (Narked)

Seven years after scoring a Best Pop Instrumental Album Grammy nomination for his debut album *Rumbadoodle*, Indian-born, Singapore-based composer, producer and guitarist Arun Shenoy takes the rare step of creating a smooth-jazz concept album under the moniker The Groove Project. Easing away from the exotic global-fusion vibe of his previous group's *A Stagey Bank Affair* (2016), he and an ensemble of international musicians trade files from the United States, the United Kingdom, Venezuela and Norway to create a collection of funky, urban-flavored tunes whose titles, melodies, grooves and sonic touches are inspired by famous quotes about aviation.

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making progress in other professions, like chefs and astronauts. It's only a matter of time before groups like Artemis won't be viewed as the exception, and there will be even more women playing instruments besides piano. When I conduct master classes at universities, I'm encouraged by the large percentage of women playing jazz now. Artemis prefers to not concern ourselves with how others might want to label us based on gender. We want the music to speak for itself. If people listen with open minds and hearts, we trust that the sheer power of it will transcend all such limitations." ■

# Locked-Down Listening

Pi Recordings releases a trove of new — and old — music.

By Larry Blumenfeld

Steve Lehman carried his Selmer Mark VI alto saxophone and his iPhone SE into his 2011 Honda CR-V, and played. He did that every day for an hour, between March 25 and April 15. As with the rest of us, Lehman's life has been upended by the coronavirus pandemic. His gigs had disappeared. The idea of getting together to make music with his colleagues, let alone for an audience, was becoming a distant memory. As in most families, his two young children were now being schooled at home. His teaching at the California Institute of the Arts had become a series of Zoom sessions. Just finding a quiet space to practice his instrument was a challenge. "In the midst of everything, I set aside one hour each day to work on solo saxophone repertoire," he says. "I recorded each session." His Honda, parked in the carport behind his Los Angeles apartment complex, was now his studio.

When the lockdown came, jazz fans needed no starker symbol of the arrested state of affairs than the red double doors on Seventh Avenue South in Manhattan that lead to the Village Vanguard club, which were locked on March 16. The music was paused, or at least redirected to online streams, mostly from homes. Music labels were similarly thrust into a new and unsettling reality. "We talked to all the artists," says Seth Rosner, a partner in Pi Recordings, a label that is home for musicians including Pulitzer Prize winner Henry Threadgill. "No one was sure when anything would start up again or when they would step on a plane again."

Rosner and his partner at Pi, Yulun Wang, took stock. A recording session to complete singer-multi-instrumentalist Jen Shyu's album

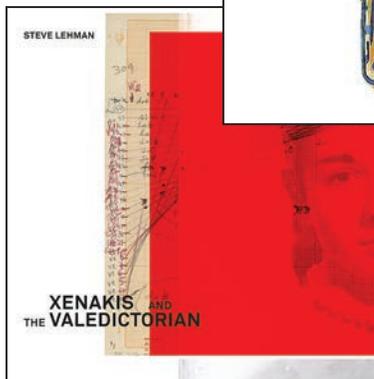
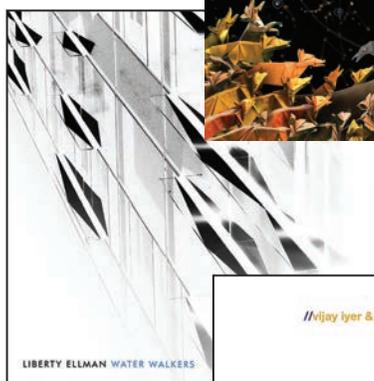
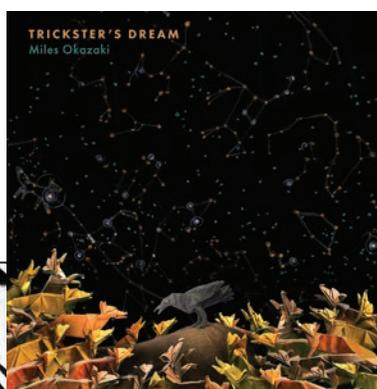
had to be canceled; the musicians couldn't fly into New York. A release from Threadgill's Zooid ensemble had to be delayed. So, too, for one from drummer Dan Weiss' Starebaby band, whose ambitious tour had been canceled. "But I was listening to

anything I could get my hands on," Rosner says, "and I knew I wasn't alone. There was a hunger for new music, but what would an album mean right now? How should it get done? We were stranded, but we wanted to get music out there and get money flowing into artists' hands."

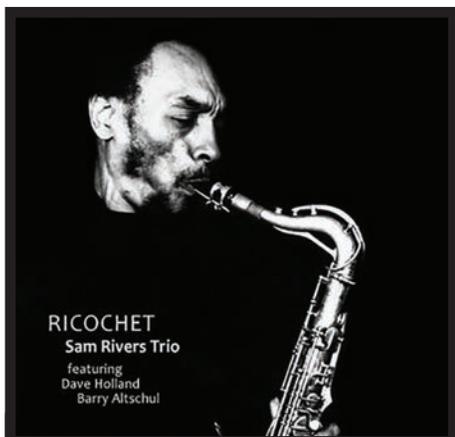
For Pi, the answer was "This Is Now: Love In the Time of COVID," a digital-only series available through Bandcamp, released on appointed Fridays when, owing to the pandemic's effects, the online platform waives its customary fees. The artists receive 100 percent of the proceeds, with the idea that they would share this income with others in need. The first edition, saxophonist Lehman's EP *Xenakis and the Valedictorian*, released on April 24, was drawn from those sessions in Lehman's car. On the last of these 10 concise solo tracks, "CR-V," the clicks and thumps of saxophone keys form percussion. The sounds of Lehman's breath are prominent. The tight confines become a benefit rather than a compromise. Nothing is heard except the sound of the sax in the

car. Throughout the entire EP, Lehman points out, "There is no effects processing or editing of any kind."

In late April, Lehman was frustrated by the fact that he couldn't travel to New York City to celebrate his mother's 80th birthday. Throughout his childhood, Sheila Lehman had introduced him to a wide range of music, including that of Anthony Braxton, who is



one of Lehman's musical mentors, and whose 1969 solo release, *For Alto*, was one inspiration for this new music. Sheila, who had been her high school's valedictorian, had also introduced him to composer Iannis Xenakis' music — hence the album's title, *Xenakis and the*



**Sam Rivers Trio**  
**Ricochet (NoBusiness)**

Nothing has highlighted the absence of live music during the COVID crisis more than recordings made at great jazz gigs. Little of locked-down life — or of life before that — can match the radiant joy and sheer energy of the 52 minutes and 14 seconds of continuous music on this, the third (and best, so far) edition of “The Sam Rivers Archive,” a planned six-volume series. Until his death in 2001, at 88, Rivers blazed a singular trail through jazz. Playing tenor and soprano saxophones, or flute, he sounded edgy, or warm, or both simultaneously, exuding authority yet never settling into anything conventional. His piano playing was just as distinctive and unbound. Rivers' big-band music is important and wondrous stuff, but his trio work is equally thrilling to behold. Here, he's caught live leading his best trio, with bassist Dave Holland and drummer Barry Altschul, in its heyday, at San Francisco's Keystone Korner club in 1978.

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*Valedictorian*. This EP would be Sheila's present from afar, he decided, the proceeds from which he distributed to musicians he knew that simply needed cash.

When Rosner reached out to Liberty Ellman for the series, the guitarist had been looking forward to a number of Spring engagements, including a project in France with Threadgill (of whose Zooid ensemble he's a longtime member). Just as the lockdown had taken hold, in late March, Pi had released Ellman's *Last Desert*, a searching and often searing sextet album that showcases Ellman's creativity as a composer. Before Ellman made that recording, he had begun recording tracks leading a trio with his longtime associates bassist Stephan Crump and drummer Damion Reid. He loved the energy of that music, its freedom and promise. “I'd been meaning to get back into the studio with that trio,” Ellman says. “And then I realized this was a different moment, and that these four tracks are what I had to say right now.” *Water Walkers*, the resulting EP in the series, highlights the subtle grace of Ellman's playing. The music is complex, yet its effect is simple, like a clarifying moment during anxious times.

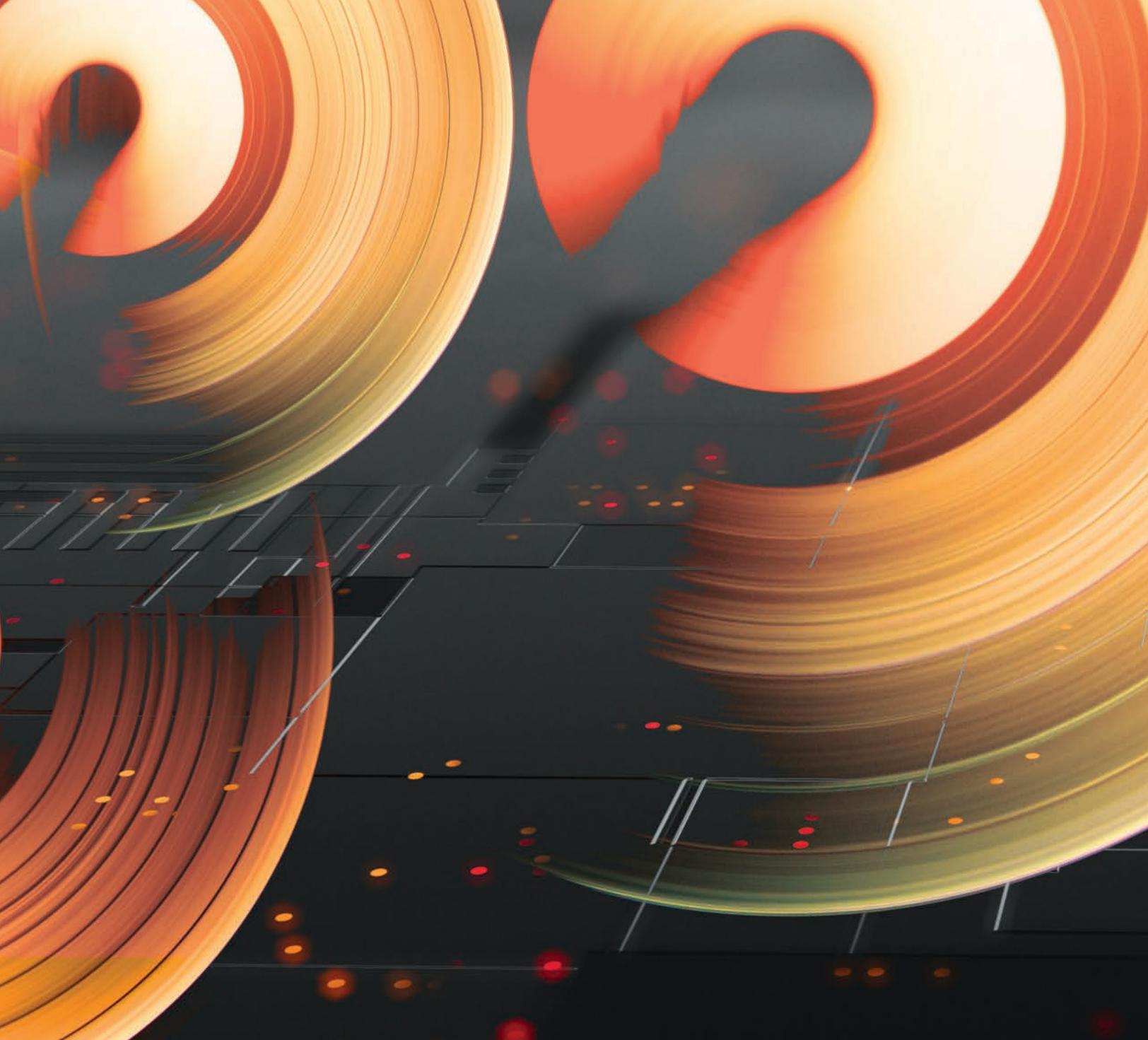
Guitarist Miles Okazaki gathered his quartet, virtually, from their individual homes, for the fourth volume of the “This Is Now” series, *Trickster's Dream*. The album Okazaki writes, is an “imagined live concert” and a way to keep his band working in the wake of a canceled six-week tour. To add to the feeling of a performance, he released the music with an accompanying video. “The idea here was to provide something for audiences who might have come out to shows,” he writes, “with an energy that reflects on the state of things, living with the

strange combination of forced isolation and the imperative for collective action.”

Another volume in the COVID series, *InWhatStrumentals: Music from In What Language?*, presents previously unreleased instrumentals from pianist Vijay Iyer's 2003 spoken word-and-music multimedia collaboration with poet-producer Mike Ladd, and features an all-star sextet, of which Ellman is a member. “The original work confronted realities of the post-9/11 world that today seem frighteningly ordinary,” Iyer says. It was a meditation on, among other things, mounting intolerance and racism, callous neoliberal agendas of globalization and disaster capitalism, and the consolidation of power exploiting fear under the banner of nationalism. Specifically, it considered how airports had become frontlines for conflict — how, as Iyer wrote in a liner note, “these formerly optimistic spaces of encounter and adventure swiftly devolved into irrational zones of anxiety, suspicion, surveillance, and the hyper-policing of Black and brown bodies.”

“When Seth Rosner asked me to contribute to this series,” Iyer says, “I'd been thinking back to that earlier time of crisis, and how we had managed to make art in the face of it. Something about 2020's rolling tragedy has led me back to these old, haunted, nearly empty rooms of sound. In 2003, I hadn't imagined that this music, so tied to its original context, could mean something 17 years later.” The proceeds from the release were split between three social-justice nonprofit organizations. The moody, sometimes lovely, sometimes jarring music sounds like both a mesmerizing relief from our current news cycle and a timely soundtrack for newly troubled times. The very fact of its release seems like an act of hope. ■

**“I was listening to anything I could get my hands on, and I knew I wasn't alone. There was a hunger for new music, but what would an album mean right now? How should it get done?”**



# MOVING THE NEEDLE

FROM WAX MASTERS TO DIGITAL EDITING, THE ART OF THE ALBUM TRANSCENDS TECHNOLOGY.



In April of 1923, King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band filed into the tiny Gennett recording studio in Richmond, Indiana, and waxed the first recordings to ever feature Oliver's protégé and second cornetist, Louis Armstrong. According to Laurence Bergreen in his book *Louis Armstrong, An Extravagant Life*, the facilities were less than ideal. Little more than a wooden shed behind a piano factory, the studio was bordered by the rushing Whitewater River on one side, an adjacent and noisy pumphouse on another, and a railroad spur that ran just a few feet from the building's front entrance. Reportedly, the acoustics were so poor inside the studio (a space of 125 x 30 feet) that the musicians had to shout to communicate and complained that they couldn't hear one another play.

Add to that the primitive recording system — the band played into a large umbrella-like megaphone which funneled soundwaves into a cone, then through a mechanism that held a stylus that etched impressions into a wax master disc — and it's a wonder that this music was preserved for posterity, let alone heralded Armstrong as the sound of the future (thanks to his startling solo on "Chimes Blues"). When Armstrong recorded with his Hot Seven band four years later, the music was captured by a then-new electric recording process, via microphone, which remained the standard for decades.

Technological developments during the past century have intrinsically influenced the way listeners consume and conceive of music and those who make it. Wax cylinders gave way to flat discs, 78s gave way to 45s, 45s to LPs, LPs to cassettes, cassettes to CDs, CDs to digital streams. Recordings made it possible for people to hear performers that they might never have otherwise encountered, as physical distance and racial segregation were no longer impediments to enjoying the music of someone who lived across the country or across the tracks.

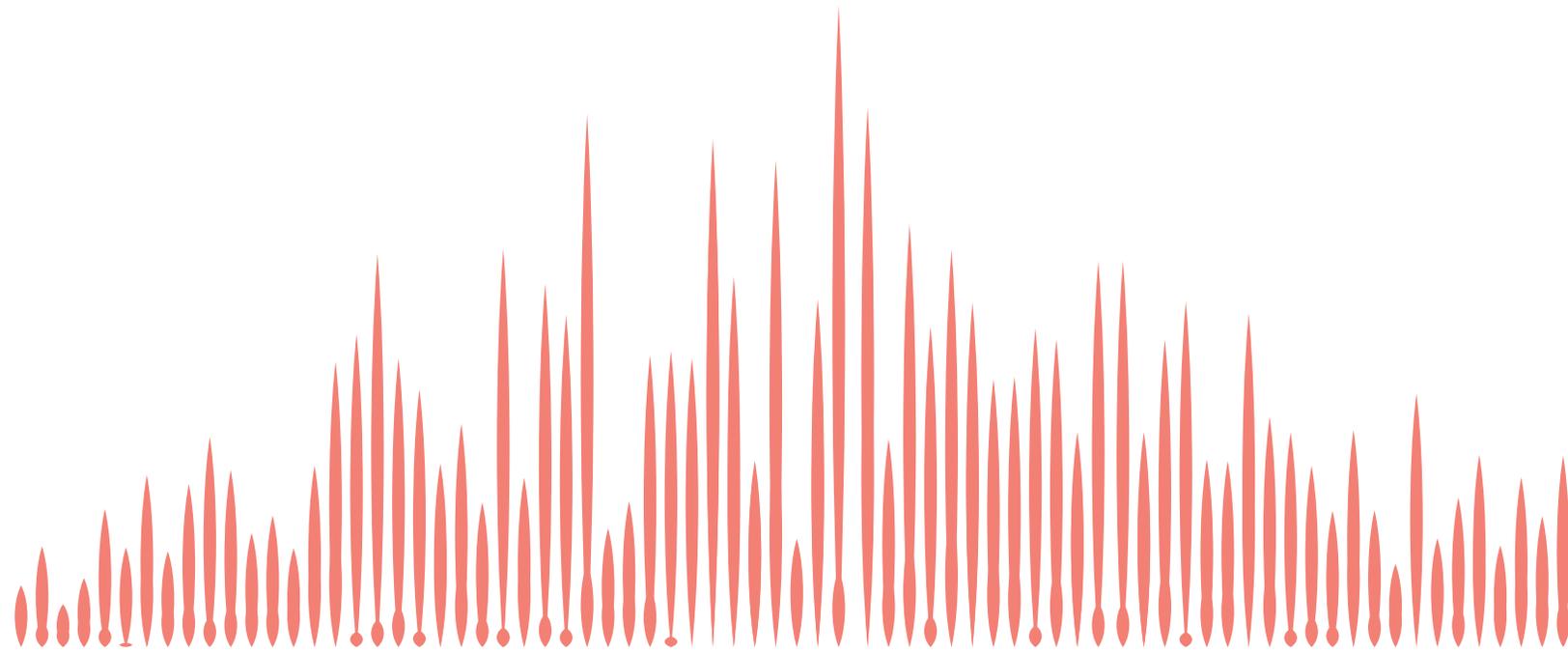
Album cover art, which arguably reached its creative zenith in the LP era of the 1950s and '60s, also guided perceptions,

whether through photographic portraiture, illustration style or snazzy typography, much of which was carefully designed to imbue a certain mood or ethos. Liner notes educated listeners about the musicians, the music and the circumstances of the recording, frequently listing personnel and composer credits. And while the 12-inch-by-12-inch canvas of the album cover shrank precipitously with the advent of cassettes and CDs, and has become increasingly marginalized in the world of digital streaming, the romance of album art has enjoyed a resurgence with the renewed interest in vinyl records, which have outsold CDs in recent years.

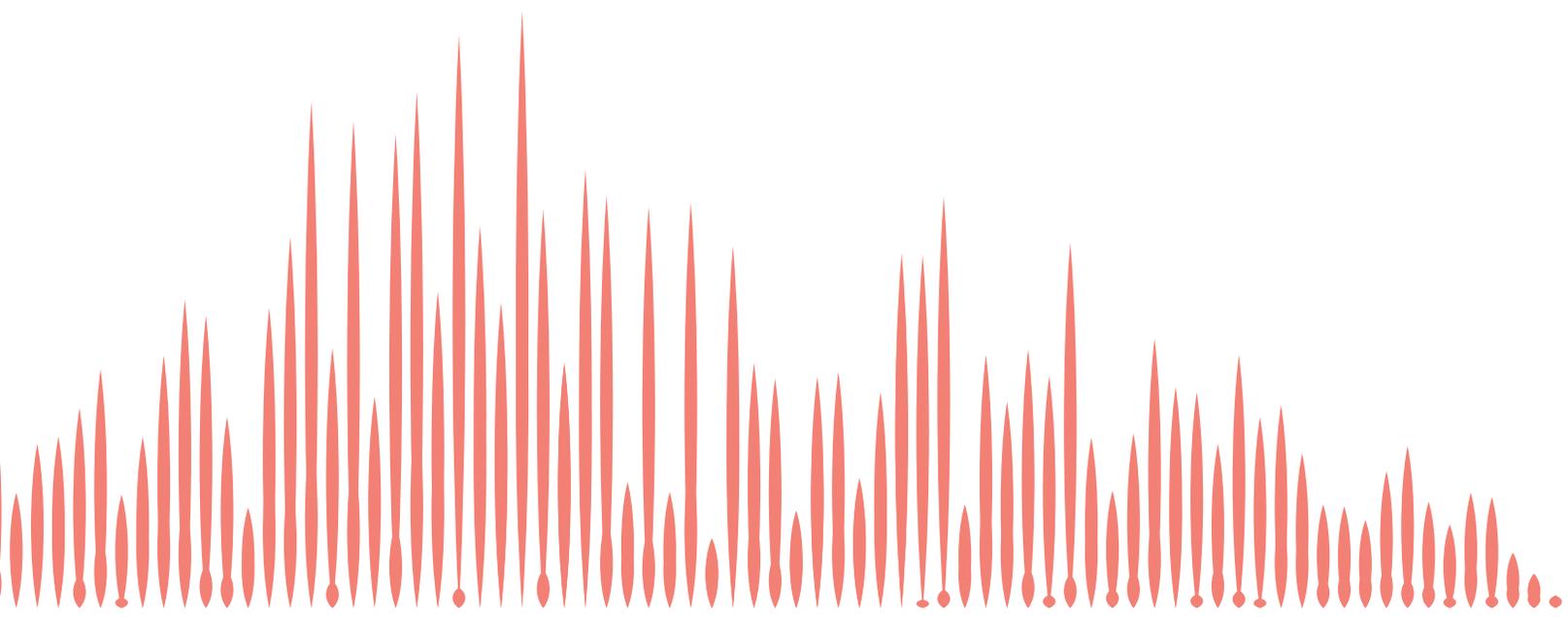
Like most technology, innovations in recording have grown exponentially. Whereas engineers once had to meticulously splice tape with a razor to fix errors or substitute a superior solo, digital editing has made both tape and razor obsolete. Musicians needn't even be in the same space to record together, something that's become increasingly important during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Physical objects such as LPs and CDs, prized by earlier generations, are not nearly as valued by younger listeners, who can download libraries of music that would have once spilled off their shelves and cluttered their closets. Companies that do manufacture physical products have had to literally think outside the box. Recognizing an ecological imperative not to introduce more plastic into the environment, the Biophilia label has innovated a model whereby they offer artfully designed, origami-like sleeves that contain not a CD, but a download code for the music. Experimental artist Evicshen recently released a vinyl single for the American Dreams label in which the album sleeve, when connected to an amplifier and placed in front of a magnet, turns into a speaker.

Ultimately, though, the aim of recording remains the same since Thomas Edison first captured sound on wax: to move listeners' hearts, minds and booties in a way that becomes indelibly etched in their consciousness. And to sell a few units in the process. ■



# TALE OF



# THE TAPE

MICHAEL JARRETT'S *PRESSED FOR ALL TIME* PEEKS INTO THE STUDIO DURING SOME OF JAZZ'S MOST IMPORTANT RECORDING SESSIONS.



Michael Jarrett



Using a rather primitive recording device — a suction-cup microphone attached to a telephone receiver, its sound picked up by a cassette recorder — music journalist Michael Jarrett chronicled the history and techniques of some of jazz’s most celebrated record producers. In his book *Pressed for All Time: Producing the Great Jazz Albums From Louis Armstrong and Billie Holiday to Miles Davis and Diana Krall* (University of North Carolina

Press, 2016), Jarrett traces the trajectory of the technology and psychology employed by the producers who created enduring art that set the template for much of what followed. Jarrett’s conversations took place during a 25-year-period while writing for outlets such as *Pulse!* and *JAZZIZ*. A professor of English at Pennsylvania State University, York, Jarrett has published several books about music.

The following edited excerpts are from *Pressed for All Time*’s second chapter, which chronicles a particularly fertile time in jazz recording. The section begins with Jarrett’s historical analysis then features producers’ commentary about some of the most storied albums in jazz.

## ROLLING TAPE: PRODUCING JAZZ LPS, 1950-1966

In 1947, Bing Crosby, who had invested heavily in the newly established Ampex Company, recorded his nationally syndicated radio show — not to standard 16-inch transcription discs (cut at 33 1/3 rpm) but to magnetic tape. (Allied troops had “discovered” tape machines when they liberated Berlin.) Then, a year later, Columbia Records introduced the vinyl LP or “long-playing record.” Discs that used this new medium

“Ellington wrote compositions specifically for 78s, and improvisers — Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young, for example — learned to work brilliantly within the 78’s time limitations. But such adaptations resembled a forced exercise: something like requiring epic poets to write only in haikus printed singly on index cards.” — MICHAEL JARRETT

played quietly at 33 1/3 revolutions per minute, and they began to replace the shellac 78-rpm record, which had been the industry standard for half a century. A 10-inch LP — the format initially reserved for popular music — could now hold 35 total minutes of music; both sides of a 10-inch, 78-rpm disc held a grand total of five and a half minutes. Call it a revolution in recording technology. That’s exactly what it was — but one with a caveat. Producers could now capture for reproduction and sale on records music that had routinely happened for many years only on various stages. Recording technology had, at long last, caught up with the actual practice of making jazz music. It therefore utterly transformed how jazz was formatted to records, though it scarcely affected how jazz musicians made music outside recording studios.

No one was better positioned to take advantage of the revolution in recording technology than George Avakian, head of Columbia’s Popular Album Department. In 1948, he produced *The Voice of Frank Sinatra*, the first 10-inch LP. In 1950 — after transferring Benny Goodman’s 1938 *Carnegie Hall Concert* to tape (from a stack of transcription discs) — Avakian produced the first 12-inch LP, a double album, of that historic concert. For *Louis Armstrong Plays W. C. Handy* (1954), Avakian — working with one-track or monophonic tape — had Armstrong sing and,

“When I saw Sonny Rollins was playing his ass off, I’d give him a high sign. Other times, I’d show him the stopwatch and throw it on the couch. That meant, ‘Play, man. Ignore the clock.’” — BOB WEINSTOCK

Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young, for example — learned to work brilliantly within the 78’s time limitations. But such adaptations resembled a forced exercise: something like requiring epic poets to write only in haikus printed singly on index cards. Great poetry could result, but

at the same time, accompany himself on trumpet. When the Ellington Orchestra played Newport in 1956, Avakian employed the still-new medium of tape, not only to record on location but to capture soloists — such as Paul Gonsalves on “Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue” — in full flight. The resulting album exemplified new possibilities for the jazz album. A year later, with Miles Davis’ *Miles Ahead* (1957), Avakian exploited the artistic possibilities of cut-and-paste editing to create (or to enable) an ideal performance. And, of course, he used tape splicing to fix the occasional mistake — the flubbed note. With the above and other LPs — by Erroll Garner, Dave Brubeck, and Buck Clayton — Avakian, in effect, created the jazz album as a format commensurate with jazz as an art form.

Which means, with Avakian as the great exemplar, the jazz record producer came into his own as something much more than the A&R man of the 78-rpm era. The technology that introduced new mediums (tape and the LP) enabled the development of a new format (the record album) and the arrival of a new kind of artist (the record producer). Foiling any theory of technological determinism, the new recording mediums and formats didn’t bring about significant new performance practices for jazz musicians. Rather, for at least 30 years — since the 1917 recordings of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band — there had been a distinct lack of fit between jazz as performed on stage and jazz as retooled for the recording of 78-rpm records. Certainly, musicians had accommodated the old recording medium. Indeed, by formatting their music to meet its severe restrictions, they had developed an art form: the jazz record. For example, Ellington wrote compositions specifically for 78s, and improvisers —

at a substantial cost.

Tape and the long-playing album arrived, therefore, as a wish fulfillment. Jazz could be recorded as it was actually made on stages and in jam sessions. But realizing and developing the potential of new mediums and new formats is no small thing, and that is why Milt Gabler, Avakian, Bob Weinstock (at Prestige Records) and the musicians they produced were so innovative. To coin a tautology, they made jazz more what it already was.

If the album is understood as a form for organizing music on LP (an electronic medium) — analogous to the sonata form organizing music on a score (a literary medium) for performance in symphony halls — then its development divides fairly neatly into the two eras surveyed in this chapter and the next. The period of one- and two-track recording can be regarded as the jazz album’s classical era (1950-66); the period of multi-track recording as its baroque era (1967-90). Although I wouldn’t live or die by these distinctions, they do align the story of the jazz album with a conventional opposition used to conceptualize art history, and they make sense of the stylistic gulf that separates, for instance, Miles Davis’ *Round About Midnight* (1957) and his album *Get Up With It* (1974).

## MILT GABLER

Ella Fitzgerald, *Ella Sings Gershwin* (1950, Decca)

As far as the record company was concerned, the man responsible for the sessions was the producer. They didn’t use that term. It was just in the A&R department, artists and repertoire. I used to say, “I don’t play the horses. I bet my job every day, by picking the songs and the people who are going to perform them.”

# VINYL CLUB



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# JAZZIZ



[Ella Sings Gershwin] was my idea. Ellis [Larkins] was one of my favorite piano accompanists. The singers loved to have him play behind them. To keep it pure, I used just Ellis and Ella — not even a drummer.

My job was to get a proper balance between the two. Sometimes we got it [a master] in two takes,

sometimes three, sometimes one. That's why the historians or those who go into the archives sometimes find more than one take of a tune. I had to like the performance, figure they couldn't do it better or determine that was the best they had that day. They never argued with me if I asked for another take, or if I made a suggestion. I very seldom had to tell Ella to go for another take. If you play different takes that she made in the studio on a particular session, the performances and the interpretations are almost identical on all of them. It was hard to choose. I chose the performances I liked the best at that instant in the studio and had them processed. I had stampers made and sample pressings. Then I had to approve which take was the master take — the first choice. When I left the studio, what was on those lacquers was what came out on records.

## GEORGE AVAKIAN

Louis Armstrong,

*Louis Armstrong Plays W.C. Handy* (1954, Columbia)

My idea was to do packages, what they now call concept albums. The first one was *Louis Armstrong Plays W.C. Handy*. Louis was in love with the idea. The second one was built on Fats Waller songs.

How did Armstrong prepare for the *Handy* album?

He said, "I haven't played too many of those tunes. You've picked a couple that I've heard only vaguely. We'll have to work them up and do them on the road. Then, I'll let you know when



we're ready. We'll book the studio when I'm in New York or Chicago."

That's the way it came about. I think it took maybe five or six months of on-and-off rehearsing on the road before Pops called and said, "I'm ready. We've got three or four days off in Chicago. Can you do it?" We did. The preparation

involved learning the tunes that he'd never played before, like "Chantez-les Bas," which is a very obscure tune, though Artie Shaw had recorded it. Louis trusted me completely. He asked me how I wanted the routines to go on some of those songs. "You decide," I told him.

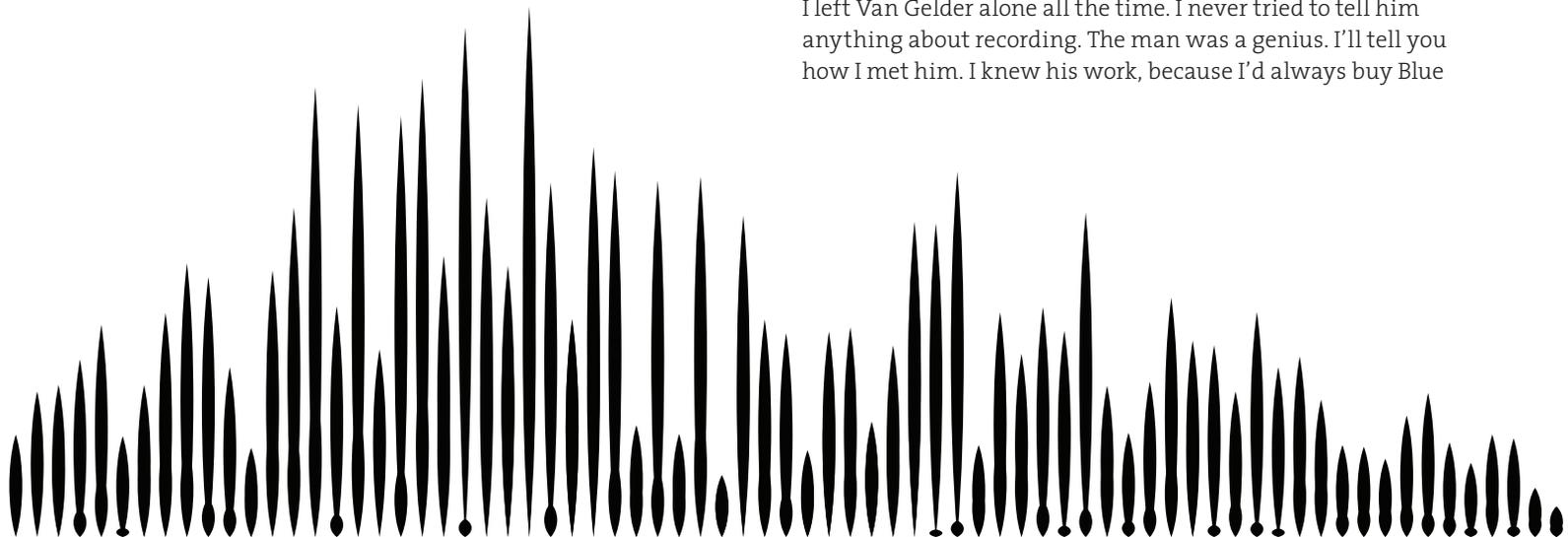
He said, "No, no, no. I don't want us to fall into the pattern that we do with stage performances where everybody has a good idea of what he's going to do on the next chorus, and all that." So on a lot of the routines he left it up to me. I felt that was a pretty big responsibility. But you couldn't go wrong with Pops anyway. Whenever an idea was a little bit unusual, I'd take a chance and try it anyway. Of course, it was fun doing things [with tape] like correcting situations where somebody didn't back up Louis' vocal with as much closeness to the mic as he should have. I had Louis play behind his own vocal. I even had him scat behind his trumpet.

## BOB WEINSTOCK

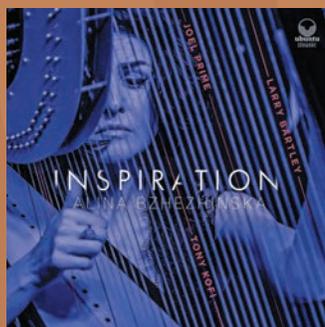
Sonny Rollins, *Saxophone Colossus* (1957, Prestige)

Tommy Flanagan, Doug Watkins, and Max Roach: Sonny came in with the group he wanted to record. We agreed. But once he was there [Rudy Van Gelder's studio], it was like a ball game. The team's either hot or cold. And that's the way I played it, like the middle of a Stanley Cup, seventh game, with Mario Lemieux playing against Wayne Gretzky.

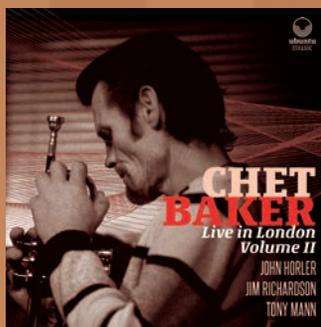
I'd sit out in the studio. I'd be out there with the musicians. I left Van Gelder alone all the time. I never tried to tell him anything about recording. The man was a genius. I'll tell you how I met him. I knew his work, because I'd always buy Blue



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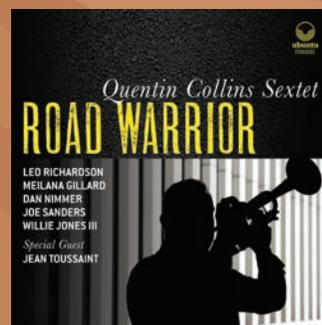
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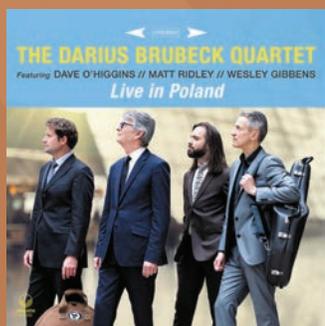
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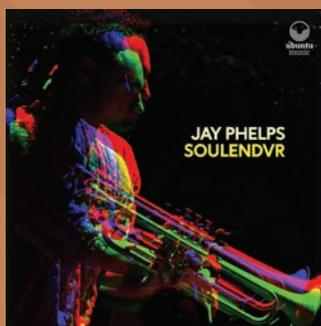
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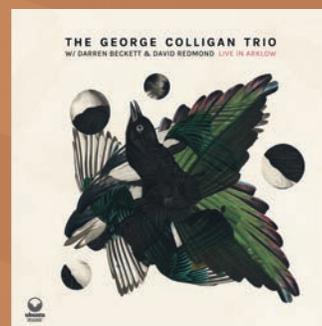
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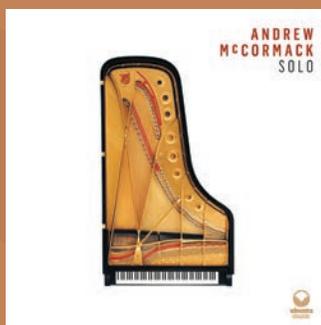
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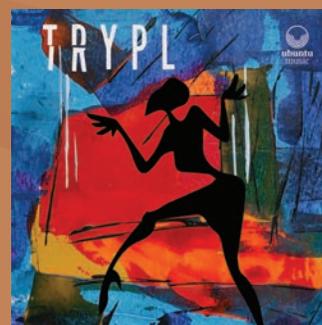
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Bebop Spoken Here



Charles Mingus

Note records. I kept seeing “Van Gelder recording” on the record credits. I lived in Teaneck, New Jersey, and it was 1954. One day I was walking down the main street and noticed a sign: Optometrist Dr. Rudolph Van Gelder. I went in and asked to see him. He came out, and I asked, “Are you the Rudy Van Gelder who’s recording Blue Note? I’m Bob Weinstock.”

He said, “Come in. I know all about Prestige.”

“Well, I’ve been listening to your stuff for six or eight months, maybe a year.” I talked to him and asked, “How do you do it? It sounds different — better.”

“I have my techniques,” he said. “I don’t discuss it. It’s there on the records. If you hear it and you like it, fine.”

I asked him, “Are you under contract to Blue Note? Can I do something with you?”

“I can record anybody,” he said. “Call me. We’ll set up a session.”

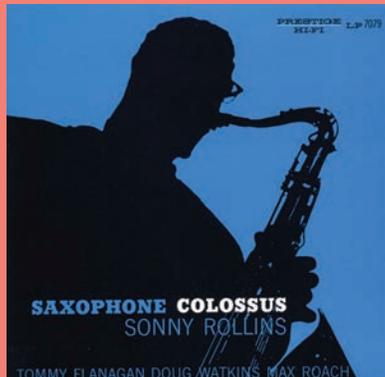
So I got Miles to record with him first. We went in there, and Rudy took over. I didn’t say a word. I listened to the playback, and it was great. You could hear the drums, the bass. It sort of sounded like an echo, but it wasn’t a deliberate echo chamber. He just added dimension to the recording.

So back to *Saxophone Colossus*. You get to “Blue Seven,” which to me is a classic, I heard it building and building. When I saw Sonny Rollins was playing his ass off, I’d give him a high sign. Other times, I’d show him the stopwatch and throw it on the couch. That meant, “Play, man. Ignore the clock.”

I did that to Lucky Thompson. He played twice as much as Miles, I think, on Miles’ “Walkin’” session. He nodded, closed his eyes, and kept playing and playing. To me, we were in a game. Spontaneity ordered it.

I’ve had bands, like the great Gil Evans, a monster arranger, one of the best in the history of jazz. He came in and did a session [*Gil Evans and Ten*, 1957]. Lee Konitz was there. Good people. I took him aside. “Gil, nothing’s happening. I don’t know why,

man.” He said, “I know.” “What can we do to make it swing and cook?” “Let me forget the charts,” he said, “and play like we were just playing.” But it still had



the Gil Evans stamp. It was free and swinging. We eliminated the collar that was around the music. That was my style. My underlying thing was it had to be happy. It had to cook and swing. It had to be funky, too, little by little even with some of the modernists. I always tried to mix a variety of players from different schools. They liked it, and they inspired each other.

## TOM DOWD (ATLANTIC ENGINEER)

Charles Mingus, *The Clown* (1957, Atlantic)

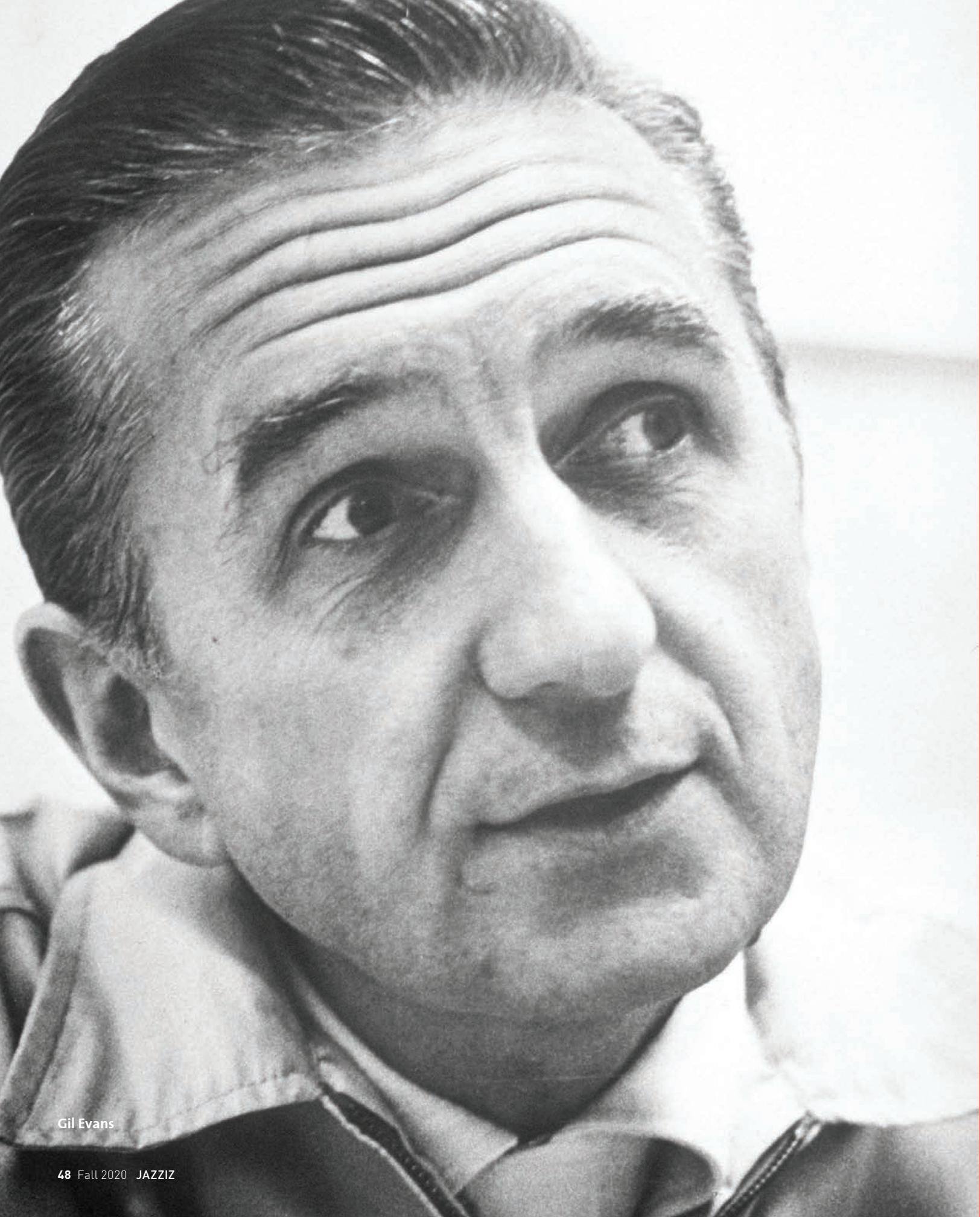
Mingus was the worrier. He was overpowering and demonstrative, but he always wanted spontaneity. When we were doing *Pithecanthropus Erectus* [1956], I had devised a means of taping a microphone onto the tailpiece of Mingus’ bass so he could rotate and turn around. Keeping him still while he was trying to look at this or that guy, give them a head motion, was tough. I couldn’t keep him on microphone; so I managed to fasten the microphone to the instrument. He could roam around, rotate, or do whatever he wanted.

We were doing this one selection. It might have been “Haitian Fight Song” or something like that [on *The Clown*]. It was something dynamic. Mingus is playing. He looks over and gets the piano player’s eye. And he gets the drummer’s eye, but he can’t get the horn players’ attention. He keeps motioning to them.

Finally, he picked up the bass while he was playing, and he did a peg-leg across the room, up to where the trombone player stood. It’s Jimmy Knepper. He played something, and Mingus

pulled the horn away and punched him in the nose and went back to playing. He’s like, “I was trying to tell you not to play there, dummy.” It was that kind of expression. Knepper was so deeply entranced in what he was doing. All of a sudden, he’s got a fist in his face. That was Mingus.





Gil Evans

## ESMOND EDWARDS

Eric Dolphy Quintet, *Outward Bound* (1960, New Jazz)  
You didn't need to do much with Eric except tell him that he had a session on a certain date. He was a nice, easy-going, very dedicated guy. He didn't want anything to stand in the way of his music. He wasn't much interested in anything else. That was his life.

In some situations it may have been improper to impose restrictions or philosophies on what he was doing. Some artists are so unique in their abilities that they just do what they do. If you want to record them, you record them. You take them as they are. If not, you leave them alone.

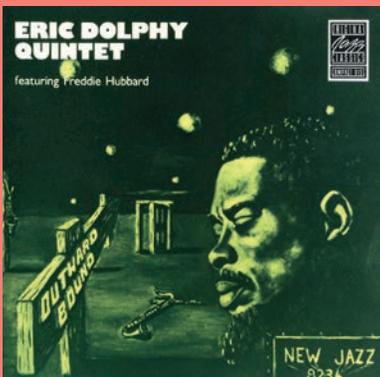
The only problem I had was between Eric and Rudy Van Gelder. Rudy is a great engineer and a real martinet in the studio. You couldn't smoke in the control room because the tars and nicotine would clog up his switches. You couldn't ask him any questions about what kind of equipment he used. They were custom-built, and he didn't want anyone to know what kind of speakers he was using, stuff like that. Which was OK.

But in the studio he had rather strict parameters as to how he wanted to set up his microphones. Here's Eric doubling on an alto [saxophone] and a flute on a tune, and Rudy wanted to mic the alto primarily. When Eric was to play his flute solo, he had to almost bend double to be close to where the mic was set up for the alto. He protested vehemently. Rudy was adamant. He didn't want to move the mic. It was quite a crisis. I think Rudy

prevailed. I don't want to sound like I'm putting him down. Rudy was an excellent engineer. He set the tone, no pun intended, for jazz recording.

*You served as intermediary between engineer and artist.*

That's always one of the producer's functions. When you're in the control room,



you're looking out for the artist, and it's your responsibility to see that the artist's sound is captured on the tape as truly as possible, or if you are not trying for a true sound, then you want some kind of distortion of what would be a "true" sound to get that. But it's one of the producer's functions to see that the sound gets on the tape as desired.

## CREED TAYLOR

Gil Evans Orchestra, *Out of the Cool* (1961, Impulse)  
I thought that the audience for jazz was, generally, of a higher level of intelligence with more access to money to purchase albums. That audience I perceived as being more aesthetically oriented: "What does my record come in? Does it look good on the coffee table? Are the notes informative?"

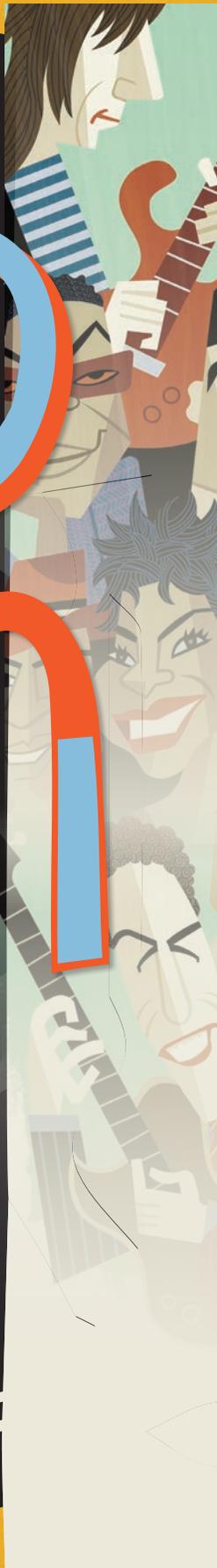
By the way, I was going to call the label Pulse! That didn't clear with the copyright or trademark office. So I came up with Impulse. It fit the idea of improvisation. I wanted to set apart the label from all the other genres of records which were on ABC-Paramount, the parent of Impulse. That was Lloyd Price, Danny and the Juniors, Frankie Avalon, Eydie Gormé, and Paul Anka. I was trying to put something together that would really distinguish it from the other packages.

Also, we didn't release anything until I had four packages together [in 1961]. They were Oliver Nelson, *Blues and the Abstract Truth*; Ray Charles, *Genius + Soul = Jazz*, the Basie Orchestra with Quincy's arrangements; Kai Winding and J. J. Johnson, *The Great Kai and J. J.*; and Gil Evans, *Out of the Cool*, which, if you recall the cover, had a photograph of Gil seated on a stool. He's holding a manuscript. It was set up to have the look, the class, of Madison Avenue, to give him an entrée. Instead of the shadowy, artistic type of photograph that depicted jazz musicians as, at that time, moody or whatever. "Oh, he's a pretty good-looking guy. He's intelligent-looking. I thought jazz was down-in-the-basement and seedy."

The gatefold sleeve was a unique physical concept for LP packaging at that time. Maybe classical records had been done that way, but generally, even aside from the graphics, it made the packages stand out. Also sheet lamination gave it that glossy look that you couldn't get from spray lacquer. ■



# SOUND DESIGN





## WHAT MAKES AN ALBUM COVER IMMORTAL? FIVE CONTEMPORARY ILLUSTRATORS WEIGH IN.

BY BRIAN ZIMMERMAN

It's a sensation familiar to many jazz fans: An album catches your eye from a record store window, or from a crate at a yard sale, or from the bookshelf of a music-loving friend. It's almost magic, the way it invites you in and beckons to be played before you've heard a single note. If you've experienced that pull, you likely owe the sensation to the album's cover art, a ubiquitous design element now but an innovation back in 1940, when Alex Steinweiss, art director for Columbia Records, superimposed a photo of Broadway's Imperial Theatre onto the sleeve of *Smash Song Hits by Rodgers and Hart* and created the world's first graphic cover.

Early 78-rpm records were sold as single shellac discs, each containing roughly five minutes of music. Most were packaged in paper or cardboard sleeves, adorned with little more than the song's title. By the 1940s, however, labels began marketing records in multi-disc collections that were named for photo albums and designed for a similar purpose: to compile a set of records unified by a common artist, genre

or theme. In time, long-playing records (LPs) would increase the amount of music that could be etched onto a single disc, diminishing the need for multi-disc packaging. But the concept of the unified "album" stuck, and cover art was added to provide a much-needed visual component to an album's theme.

Jazz has had its fair share of iconic album covers and cover designers over the years. The work of designer Reid Miles and photographer Francis Wolff, for example, created an aesthetic that defined Blue Note Records for decades. The same could be said for David Stone Martin, whose stark and imaginative line drawings became a hallmark of Verve Records. Even today, when streaming services have rendered albums down to bits and bytes, there is a host of artists and designers working to ensure that jazz albums carry a certain visual magic.

We spoke with five modern designers about their artistic process, asking them to comment on one of their recent album covers. We then asked them to analyze a historic album they felt was particularly influential, or a contemporary album they found especially noteworthy for its design. Excerpts from those conversations follow.

# KEITH HENRY



**K**eith Henry Brown's interest in art and music have always been fully intertwined. From as early as he can remember, Brown wanted to be a comic book illustrator. For nearly as long, he has been a jazz devotee. "I saw jazz musicians as heroes, too," he says. "And it didn't hurt that they were Black, that I could see myself in them." Realizing his childhood dream, Brown worked briefly as an illustrator for Marvel Comics, drawing for titles like *Black Panther* and *Captain America*. In 2001, he was handpicked by Wynton Marsalis to serve as Creative Art Director at Jazz at Lincoln Center for its grand opening. In April 2019, he and author Kathleen Cornell Burton published the children's book *Birth of the Cool: How Miles Davis Found His Sound*.

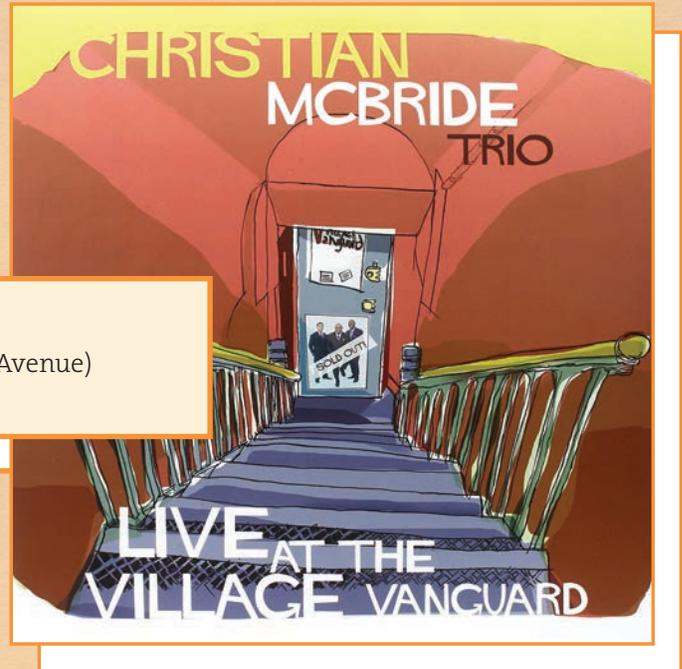
“*I saw jazz musicians as heroes, too...And it didn't hurt that they were Black, that I could see myself in them.*”

# BROWN

## CHRISTIAN MCBRIDE TRIO

*Live at the Village Vanguard* (Mack Avenue)  
Cover by Keith Henry Brown, 2015

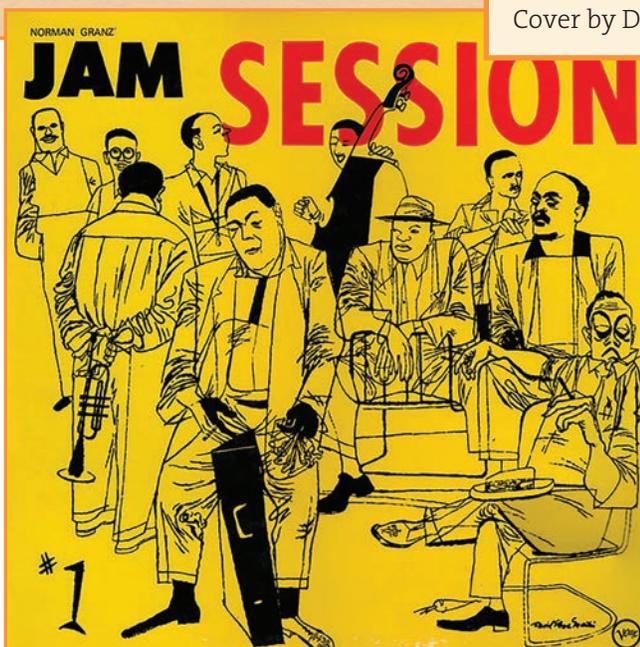
I was trying to capture the experience of going to the club itself. I looked at a bunch of covers that have been done in the past, including one of my favorites, John Coltrane's *Live at the Village Vanguard*. And I didn't want to just draw the band, to just draw musicians. I wanted to depict what it's like to go down into that red abyss. At the Village Vanguard, there are these red walls, and then you go down into this basement, and then you open a door, and then all of a sudden you're in this magical place. I was trying to give you that feeling of being on the street and looking down there at the bottom, the anticipation of the concert. Originally,



I submitted another design that featured the neon sign that hangs outside the club, but I'm glad Christian didn't go with it. This one plays to my strength as a cartoonist. I liked the idea that you're immersing yourself in the music through a sense of place. Even if you've never been there, you get it.

## VARIOUS ARTISTS

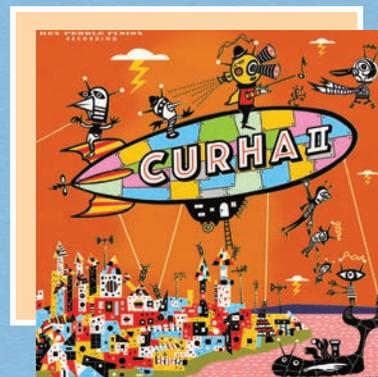
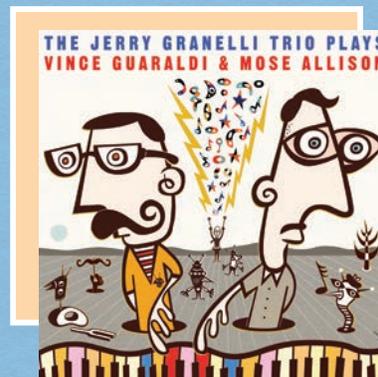
*Norman Granz's Jam Session #1* (Verve)  
Cover by David Stone Martin, 1952



David Stone Martin has this really beautiful, bold line. I love the way he has the different musicians overlapping each other and running into each other, how he captures their likeness with just a few lines. He creates the personalities. I also appreciate how you can read it all so clearly, even though the forms are kind of clumped together. They're very clean, but also abstract. It's clear that these figures aren't realistic, but they're

not cartoons either. I've seen drawings of jazz artists from the '40s and '50s that make Black musicians look like caricatures, like what some particular people think Black people look like. But with Stone Martin, there's this beautiful respect in the way he draws them. Even though they're cartoons, there's a dignity to his line. They're not majestically drawn, like the way a royal portrait would be. But he makes me feel like they're important.

# STEVEN



Illustrator Steven Erdman has long been enamored by the power of comics to engender human emotion. “I remember falling in love — like literal, heart-fluttering love — with a girl in a *Dondi* comic strip,” he says. Though he originally set out to become an architect — working for several prominent firms — Erdman’s love for alternative comics ultimately led him to the

children’s television network Nickelodeon, where he designed props for promo videos. He has since exhibited in galleries near his home in the Catskills and designed album covers for Philip Glass. In addition to his design work, Erdman performs under the stage name Lard Dog with his art-rock group, The Band of Shy. A double album featuring Jamie Saft, LaLah Brooks and others is due out soon.

# ERDMAN



## JAMIE SAFT QUARTET

*Blue Dream* (RareNoise)

Cover by Steven Erdman, 2018

It pulls from Dada, Surrealism school, first and foremost. I wanted to take the album name literally, a dream that was blue. So I wanted to go for something that was a bit Salvador Dalí, a bit Joan Miró. I wanted it to look like something that came from my favorite era, which is the '40s, '50s and early '60s. So I had this idea to put the titles of all the tracks on the front cover, which people don't do anymore but was big back in the day. Those amoeba-like shapes for those two figures are also straight out of the '50s. They could be from an Alexander Calder mobile. Now, whether the female figure was saying something to the male figure that was enchanting or annoying is for the audience to determine. Are they fighting? Did she say something intriguing? It's up to you. And then I just love to throw in oddball creatures. This morphed, Panda-animal thing hanging on in this strangely designed tree, I use that little guy a lot. It's a representation of somebody I will not reveal. Well, maybe on my deathbed.

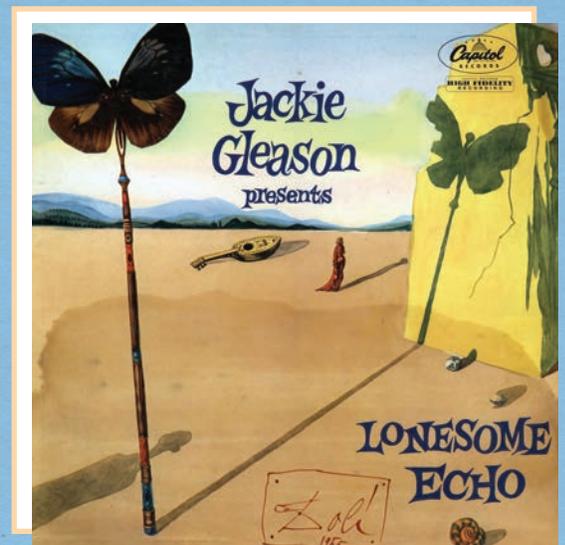
“When insecurity creeps in, you tend to over-design. But on this one, it's hard to describe in words, really. The only word you can give it is 'magic.'”

## JACKIE GLEASON ORCHESTRA

*Jackie Gleason Presents Lonesome Echo* (Capitol)

Cover by Salvador Dalí, 1955

This whole thing is just mind-blowing. I mean, that's Salvador Dalí working for Jackie Gleason! How crazy is that? Honestly, the music doesn't really float my boat, but this cover just can't get any better. It's the genius of artists like Dalí to use less and convey more. That's always the hardest thing. When insecurity creeps in, you tend to over-design. But on this one, it's hard to describe in words, really. The only word you can give it is “magic.” There's something about it that grabs your heart. I'm sure a lot of that has to do with Dalí's personality, this just crazy talented, lovable, funny guy. Now, I don't know what the symbology was. And I'm not even sure that's the point, because for me, this stuff has the magic. And then the real mind-blower is turning the cover over to see Gleason and Dalí having that famous handshake, like Elvis Presley and Richard Nixon. There's almost a distance between them, but it was also just the most beautiful thing.



**D**avid Cowles was born in Rochester, New York, and got his start in illustration in the art department of his local newspaper. "If the editor gave me a map or graph to design, it had to be finished, photographed and on the page by deadline," he says. "I learned to not overthink things." In the late-'80s, Cowles did a series of paintings for *Musician* magazine depicting popular musicians — Sting, U2, Madonna — in the style of historic artists. Cowles has since designed covers for jazz pianist Bill Charlap and the alt-rock group They Might Be Giants. He has also worked on projects for Disney, *Sesame Street* and Cartoon Network, and he regularly designs posters for his hometown Rochester International Jazz Festival.



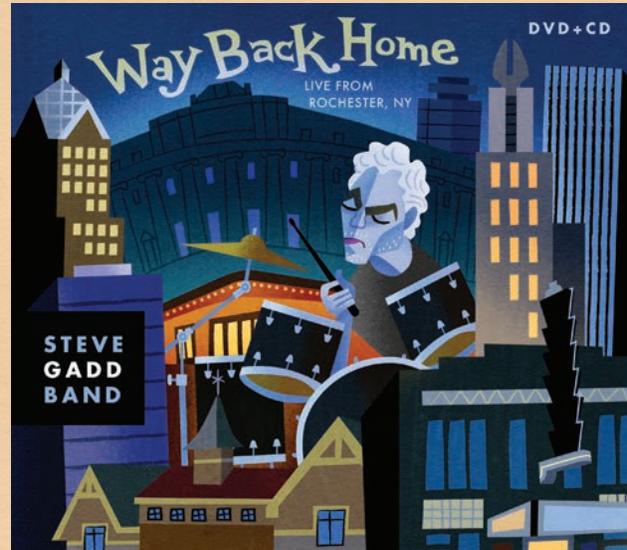
# DAVID COWLES

## STEVE GADD BAND

*Way Back Home: Live From Rochester, NY* (BFM Jazz)

Cover by Steven Erdman, 2018

For this album cover, I really wanted to convey the expression Steve would have on his face when he's drumming — that concentration, that almost angry look, even though we know that's not what he's thinking. It's this great intensity that I think is really the key. When the label contacted me, they wanted to show Steve surrounded by Rochester, by the skyline and architectural landmarks. Those buildings are pretty close to what I've been doing ever since I got heavily into the work of [Mexican illustrator] Miguel Covarrubias, stuff where it's kind of Cubist, kind of retro '20s and '30s. That's the Eastman Theater looming high up in the background. There's the Bausch and Lomb building to the far left, and the Xerox building to the far right. After I'd put each building in place, I'd have to see how the colors were reacting, whether they're standing out too much or blending too much. Once you get in there, you're constantly comparing what's in your head to what's on the page. That's just part of the artistic process.



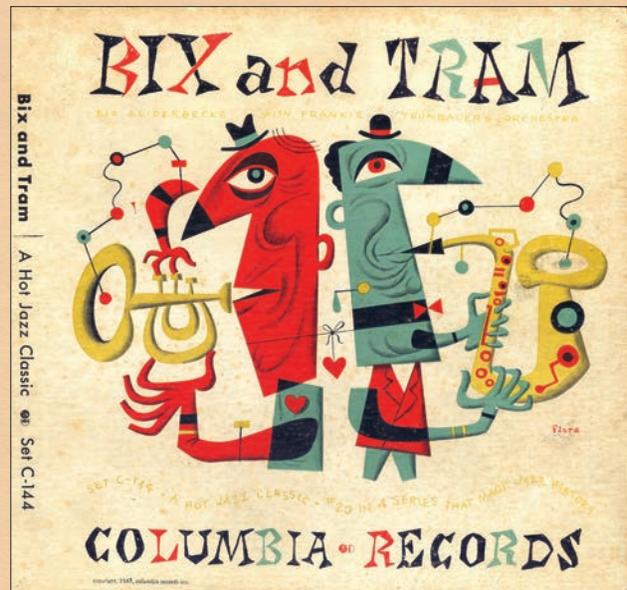
“That is what the best album art does. It draws you in and makes you want to listen to the music.”

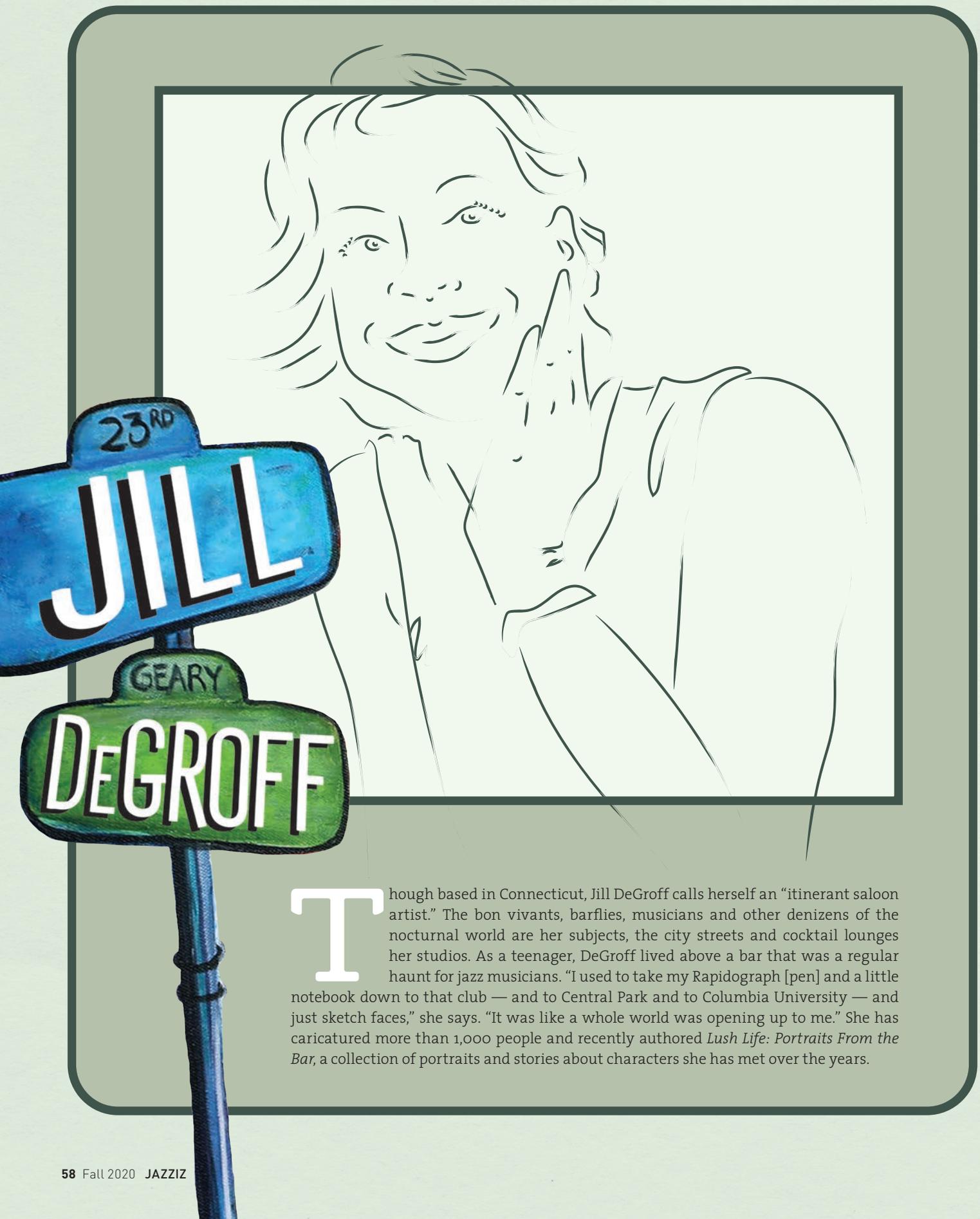
## BIX BEIDERBECKE WITH FRANKIE TRUMBAUER'S ORCHESTRA

*Bix and Tram* (Columbia)

Cover by Jim Flora, 1947

This album was just sort of around the house when I was growing up, though I don't know that I actually played it. As a kid, I thought it seemed so odd, obviously not too far removed from some of the cartoons that I was watching at the time, Hanna-Barbera stuff, those UPA cartoons. And though I didn't know anything about the musicians themselves, it just prompted so many questions: What is this? What is going on there? That is what the best album art does. It draws you in and makes you want to listen to the music. I just love the simplicity of the colors that Jim Flora used, even though I know that was probably for budget reasons. “Use what you got” — it was the same when I worked at the newspaper. I also love the shape of these faces. I love the profile with the one eye, the little detail like that ear, the way it looks like the handle on an instrument case, or like a coffee cup. Those little things coming out of their instruments, those “Tinkertoys” connecting back to their arm or their mouthpieces. Everything about this is fantastic.





**T**hough based in Connecticut, Jill DeGroff calls herself an “itinerant saloon artist.” The bon vivants, barflies, musicians and other denizens of the nocturnal world are her subjects, the city streets and cocktail lounges her studios. As a teenager, DeGroff lived above a bar that was a regular haunt for jazz musicians. “I used to take my Rapidograph [pen] and a little notebook down to that club — and to Central Park and to Columbia University — and just sketch faces,” she says. “It was like a whole world was opening up to me.” She has caricatured more than 1,000 people and recently authored *Lush Life: Portraits From the Bar*, a collection of portraits and stories about characters she has met over the years.

“I used to take my Rapidograph [pen] and a little notebook down to that club — and to Central Park and to Columbia University — and just sketch faces... It was like a whole world was opening up to me.”



**ARTURO O'FARRILL SEXTET**

*Boss Level* (Zoho)

Cover by Jill DeGroff, 2016

I first came across Arturo O'Farrill during one of his shows at Puppet's Jazz Bar in Brooklyn. I got a really good sketch and I sent it to him. We spoke on the phone and he gave me this incredible story about life as a musician in the '70s — the little jams he would play at and the hangs where they would shoot the breeze. He was describing a moment that was frozen in time, and that seems to be rapidly disappearing in this world. I wanted to capture the spirit of that moment for this album cover. This is Manhattan. Jazz is such an urban phenomenon, the beat, the rhythm, the spirit. So even before you have music, I wanted to convey that energy in the automobiles and the traffic and the architecture. Arturo's music has set that sense of craziness, energy. It reminds me of listening to Gil Scott-Heron. Or to Arturo's father's music, Chico O'Farrill. If you look closely, you can see a little portrait of Chico in the streetlight.

**GIVETON GELIN**

*True Design* (self-released)

Cover design by Autumn Steele, photography by Rambo Elliott, 2020

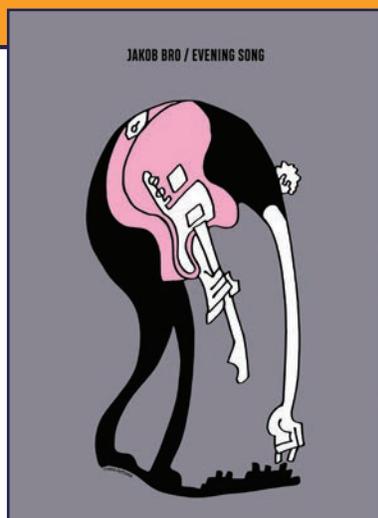
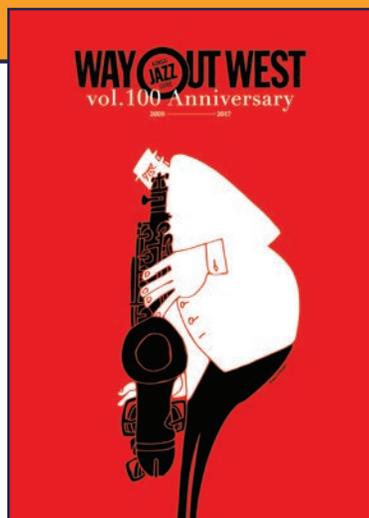
My attraction to this album cover is on an emotional level. It's just so perfect in its way, and for this time. I don't have to listen to a note, but I know this is a man who just wants to share his art. He's so subdued, he has his trumpet in his hand, and it's like, "Give me a chance to live and play my music and share my music." And I love that he's surrounded by nature, and the texture of that nature, the way things overlap, like how textures of jazz overlap with other music — the music of the Bahamas, in Giveton's case. And Giveton has definitely made his way in the jazz world. He's played in New Orleans, in New York. He's become a rising star. But I just love the quietness of the cover. The album may contain so much beautiful music, but there's a sense of



silence to the cover that draws you in, and you can almost hear him whispering, "Hey, give me a chance. I've got a lot to say."

# TAKAO

# FUJIOKA



**T**okyo-born graphic designer Takao Fujioka fell in love with jazz in 2007, after his first trip to New York City. “I could feel my emotions welling up,” he relates by email, translated from his native Japanese. He was so enraptured by the music that he began drawing his impressions of the musicians in his notebook. On that same trip, he caught the eye of Dale Fitzgerald, co-founder

of the Jazz Gallery. Fitzgerald was smitten with Fujioka’s designs, and the following year, the Jazz Gallery held a solo exhibit of his work. Fujioka, who studied art in Osaka, finds particular inspiration in the work of Reid Miles. But he also draws influence from the manga series *Dragon Ball* and its primary animator, Akira Toriyama. “My manner is rooted in the distortion used in some Japanese comics,” he says. Fujioka also runs the monthly jazz paper *Way Out West*.



### STAN GETZ

*Moments in Time* (Resonance)  
Cover by Takao Fujioka, 2016

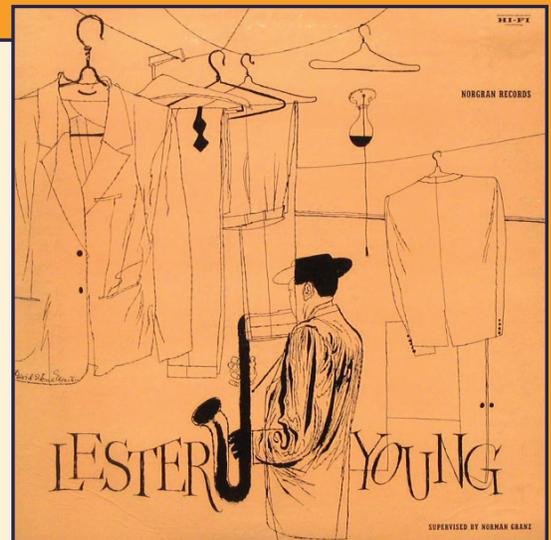
This album is special for me because I love Stan Getz's improvisation. I take pride in representing the essence of Reid Miles and David Stone Martin — their work is essential to me. As for the design, I was trying to convey the atmosphere of the 1970s in as simple a way as possible. [The album features never-before-released music recorded by Getz in 1976 at the Keystone Korner in San Francisco.] Zev Feldman, the producer of Resonance Records, has trust in my craftsmanship. He and I have established a good partnership, which is very important for artists. There are some producers who, historically, have shown great appreciation for the arts, like Alfred Lion or Norman Granz. This piece became a major turning point for me.

“My manner is rooted in the distortion used in some Japanese comics.”

### LESTER YOUNG

*Lester Young* (Norgran)  
Cover by David Stone Martin, 1955

It's hard to choose just one, but this Norgran release from Lester Young is absolutely beautiful. I found it at a record shop in Osaka. It's by David Stone Martin, and it's a masterpiece. The composition is wonderful, and I love the way he drew the connection between art and everyday life in a humorous way. It's perfectly balanced, and I hold it so highly.





# ZEN AND THE ART OF AUDIO PRODUCTION

**DON WAS** DISCUSSES HIS JOURNEY FROM THE STUDIOS OF DETROIT TO THE TOP OF POP CHARTS TO THE HELM OF ONE OF THE MOST RESPECTED LABELS IN JAZZ.

B Y B O B W E I N B E R G



**“ONE OF MY FIRST  
DAYS ON THE JOB,  
ROBERT GLASPER  
CAME IN WITH  
ROUGH MIXES OF  
*BLACK RADIO*. AND  
YOU COULD TELL  
THAT THIS WAS  
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TOLD HIM I GOT THE  
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THE FIRST  
TIME I HEARD  
PHAROAH SANDERS’  
*KARMA* ALBUM.”**

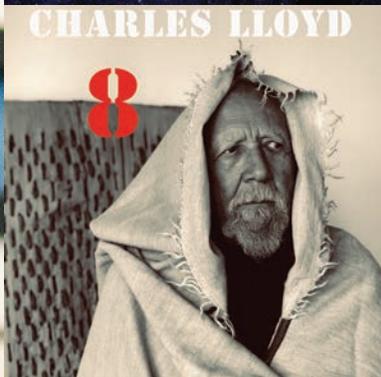
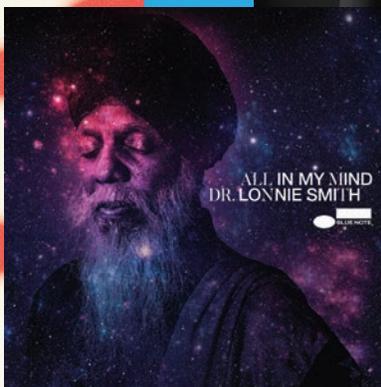
The first time most people caught a glimpse of musician and producer Don Was, he was the high-haired cat in sunglasses playing a leopard-print bass on the Was (Not Was) video for the 1988 dance hit “Walk the Dinosaur.” He’d parlay the success of that song into high-profile gigs with Bonnie Raitt and The B-52s, producing their enormously successful albums (*Nick of Time* and *Cosmic Thing*, respectively), and go on to helm recording sessions by The Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan and Willie Nelson, among other icons.

While those credits might not suggest it, Was (born Don Fagenson) grew up in Detroit as a die-hard jazz fan, saving his hard-earned coin to buy coveted Blue Note albums by the likes of organist Larry Young and saxophonist Joe Henderson. In fact, the first album he produced was *Mirror, Mirror*, a funky slab of 1970s soul-jazz by Detroit saxophonist Sam Sanders on the Strata label.

Breakfast with an old friend in 2012 landed Was a gig he could never have dreamed of as a young engineer scrambling around the studios of Detroit — president of Blue Note Records. In New York to produce a John Mayer album, Was suggested to his pal Brian Macleod, president of Capitol Records, that then-rising-star singer Gregory Porter would be a good fit for Blue Note, which was under the Capitol umbrella. Unbeknownst to Was, Blue Note president Bruce Lundvall was having health issues and couldn’t continue in his role. “And I came in with an idea on a day that they had to decide what they were going to do with Blue Note,” Was recalls, talking by phone from his home in Santa Monica, California, in early June. “They were looking for a way to take the label forward. So [Macleod] said, ‘Ahh, you should sign him!’ He offered me the job, basically.”

Shepherding Blue Note into the future, Was, 68, keeps the 81-year-old imprint vital with forward-looking artists such as Robert Glasper, Derrick Hodge and Ambrose Akinmusire, while staying loyal to legacy artists such as Charles Lloyd and Dr. Lonnie Smith. His tenure has also included modernizing the mighty Blue Note archive via an audiophile reissue series and assuring that 90 percent of the catalogue (thus far) is available for streaming.

Was reminisced about his early days in the studio, sharing his hard-won wisdom and underlying philosophy about making records, and relayed his thoughts about Blue Note’s past and future.



**“IF YOU CAN’T AFFORD AN 80-PIECE ORCHESTRA, YOU HAVE TO FIND SOMETHING ELSE TO FILL THE SPACE AND YOU HAVE TO RELY ON REAL EMOTION AND REAL FEELING TO COVER IT. YOU CAN’T JUST HIRE SOME PEOPLE TO COME IN AND PUT A COAT OF HOUSE PAINT ON IT. I THINK THAT’S WHERE GREAT STUFF COMES FROM.”**

**DO YOU REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME YOU ENTERED A STUDIO?**

My buddy David Was [Was (Not Was) partner David Weiss] and I went down together, we were probably 12 years old. His parents were voice-over actors, and they worked all the time. So they took us to the studio one time and they were doing a commercial or something, and it was a studio called United Sound, which is still standing; it’s where John Lee Hooker cut “Boogie Chillen” [1948]. It’s got an incredible history. George Clinton had it on lock down in the ’70s and ’80s. Anyway, they took us down there, and I walk into one of those big rooms. They had big mic stands and cables and it was just the coolest place. I wanted to spend as much time in that environment as I could.

**HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN STUDIO ENGINEERING?**

In the early ’70s, I was probably 20, I took a class that was sponsored by the Recording Institute of America, at United Sound. It was just an inaugural session of something they were trying to do, which was to make a trade school for recording engineers. And I just remember being in love with that room and everything about it. The school was fuckin’ terrible! They didn’t know how EQ works. It was a little goofy. But when I finished the class, which was only like four or five weeks, I was able to go to a guy named Jack Tann in Detroit, who had opened a little eight-track studio. And I conned him into believing that I knew how to be an engineer. So I just went in there and used the little bits I knew and a whole lotta bullshit, and I was able to put in a lot of time.

The very first [session] I did was for a jazz-saxophone player named Sam Sanders. Ed Pickens was the bass player. The guy who picked up the Strata catalogue [Amir Abdullah] bought it off of [Strata founder and pianist] Ken Cox and released the album that I cut [*Mirror, Mirror*, in 2013]. I got a new vinyl copy of it.

**LISTENING TO IT NOW, IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WOULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY?**

When you don’t know what you’re doing, you sometimes do your best stuff. Especially if you don’t have the resources to pay somebody to come in who does know what they’re doing, you have to come up with a solution. And that’s how many cool-sounding records are made, so many of the records that really stand the test of time. Just out of Detroit, you could cite Motown and Fortune Records. Those are two labels that the minute the music comes on, you may not know which artist it is, but you recognize the sound from those two particular studios. And it’s funky and it’s raw and if you were approaching it from an audiophile standpoint, you’d say it was shitty. But it’s fuckin’ amazing, because it’s so evocative. If you can’t afford an 80-piece orchestra, you have to find something else to fill the space and you have to rely on real emotion and real feeling to cover it. You can’t just hire some people to come in and put a coat of house paint on it. I think that’s where great stuff comes from.

**IS THERE ANYTHING TO THE “MAGIC OF THE ROOM” THEORY, REGARDING STUDIOS?**

Yeah, the walls are really significant. There are a number of great rooms still standing with the original walls. And basically, it’s all about reflections. You’re not going to avoid getting sound waves bouncing off surfaces and coming back into the microphone. So a great room is a room where the reflections are harmonically pleasing, they’re not dissonant. I think that there’s a science of design, but it doesn’t always hit it; there’s some magic involved, and just luck.

Think of [the late Blue Note engineer Rudy] Van Gelder. Architecture students who were disciples of Frank Lloyd Wright designed his room [in Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey]. And he wasn’t a physicist or anything. There were some things that were there for reasons of design. There’s like a cathedral wooden ceiling! And there’s something about it, you make some sound and it floats up and stays there and doesn’t come back down, and that allows him to record without a lot of baffles and without a lot of separation, and really without people having to use headphones. He told me that they didn’t even start using headphones until the ’70s in there, and it changed everything. If you look at all the [Blue Note founder] Francis Wolff photos, no one’s wearing cans. Headphones change *everything*, man. I’m not saying that they’re bad; it’s a way different experience than standing right on top of somebody and feeling the sound pressure hitting your body.



**WERE YOU TRYING TO REPLICATE THAT EXPERIENCE ON THE RECENT DERRICK HODGE ALBUM, *COLOR OF NOIZE*, RECORDING THE MUSICIANS LIVE IN THE STUDIO?**

Oh yeah, they were in a circle, man. You can see each other, you can hear each other, you can feel the air moving from the drums. You gotta be on top of each other. I think it's really important; you want the drums to bleed into the piano mics. You get a sense of the space from that. Room ambience translates to intensity and there's an emotional quality; it gives it an edge.

My favorite is Art Blakey's *Free for All* [Blue Note, 1964]. That's such a timely piece for this week [of Black Lives Matter protests] — it's a timely piece for every week, unfortunately. And you could feel that [Blakey] was wound up, and he's playing so fuckin' loud that it bleeds into every microphone, and it's actually distorting the mics. It's how the MC5 sound — it's like a jazz punk album. And it sounds different from any other Van Gelder record, even though it's the same mics, the same space, the same [studio set-up] — he had a set place for where the drums went, the place where the saxophone player stood. And yet it's got its own quality, and I think it's because Art was playing so loudly in everybody's microphone.

**DID VAN GELDER MIC EACH PIECE OF THE DRUM SET?**

I doubt that he did it like they do nowadays. [Van Gelder] was so secretive that you couldn't really ask him about that shit. You have to rely on looking at photographs. And there are no multi-tracks from that era; he mixed everything live. I'm guessing there were probably stereo [mics] and a couple of overheads in the bass drum, or something like that. Nothing's too tight, which I think is a really good thing. One of the things that happened in the '70s was that multi-track technology increased logarithmically. So for purposes of competition between studios, a record plant could say, "Well, don't go to Capitol. We've got 24 tracks. And you can put eight mics on the drums." But that doesn't mean you should put eight mics on the drums. [laughs]

**“MY FAVORITE IS ART BLAKEY’S *FREE FOR ALL*. YOU COULD FEEL THAT BLAKEY WAS WOUND UP, AND HE’S PLAYING SO LOUD THAT IT BLEEDS INTO EVERY MICROPHONE, AND IT’S ACTUALLY DISTORTING THE MICS. IT’S HOW THE MC5 SOUND — IT’S LIKE A JAZZ PUNK ALBUM.”**

If you think about it, a drummer never puts his ear like an inch from the snare drum to see what the snare drum sounds like. The drummer's sound is where he's sitting. One time, I

tried an experiment. I thought, Let's get the sound the way the drummer hears it, the way the drummer probably wants everyone to hear it. So I took a knit cap — this was for The Black Crowes, by the way — and put it on the drummer, Steve Gorman, and duct-taped two microphones right above his ears. And I thought, Let's get what you're hearing. Now, it worked fuckin' great until he moved his head. It made you nauseous. The whole thing kept shifting and you couldn't use it. The next day I figured out, Well, let's just put two stationary mic stands about where his ears are, and it sounded pretty great.

**TOM DOWD TALKED ABOUT FASTENING A MIC TO CHARLES MINGUS' BASS BECAUSE HE MOVED AROUND SO MUCH IN THE STUDIO.**

That's a real problem for bass players. I have that problem a lot. You don't stand still, so you can go in and out; with two mics you can go in and out of phase, with one mic you can get off-mic really easily. [As a player] you want it to sound the way it sounds for you. There's nothing more disconcerting than going into the control room and hearing your instrument come back sounding differently than the way you wanted it to sound.

**WHEN YOU HEAR A CLASSIC SESSION, DO YOU EVER FEEL LIKE YOU WOULD HAVE DONE SOMETHING DIFFERENTLY?**

Whatever happened, it's probably good that it happened. I give in to that a lot with remastering. Sometimes you can brighten up the piano and make it stand out more, but that's not necessarily better. Because whatever was going on, whatever balances were placed that made it a classic, why would you impact that just so you could hear one instrument better? Maybe it was the fact that you couldn't hear it any better that made the finished record so great. So it's really dangerous turf, going in there and messing with it.

The most extreme instance of not editorializing on a remastering that I experienced was on Ornette Coleman's *Live at the Golden Circle, Part 1 and Part 2* [1965]. Now I bought that album when it was new. And I just love that record and it's quirky as fuck. We put it up in the mastering room when we redid it and rediscovered that the left and right side are out of phase with each other. So we put it in phase and all of a sudden, the bass had this great, rich tone and the cymbals sounded like regular cymbals; it was a revelation. But it lost the quirkiness. And it was a real dilemma; how do we get around this? Because now you can really hear David Izenon's tone on the bass; and that is what the band sounded like, but it no longer sounded like this record, which I think is one of the crown jewels of the Blue Note catalogue. In this instance, we put it back in correct phase, so you could hear the bass, but we messed with the EQ so that we could fuck the cymbals up again [cracks up]. It sounded too normal without that, but we were able to get the same effect. And that was the only time that I ever advocated for changing something that was always there.

# THE LATEST RELEASES

**SMOKE SESSIONS RECORDS**

**JOE FARNSWORTH**  
WYNTON MARSALIS KENNY BARRON PETER WASHINGTON

Time to Swing

**SMOKE SESSIONS RECORDS**

**EDDIE HENDERSON**  
DONALD HARRISON KENNY BARRON GERALD CANNON MIKE CLARK

Shuffle and Deal

**SMOKE SESSIONS RECORDS**

**ORRIN EVANS**  
AND THE CAPTAIN BLACK BIG BAND

The Intangible Between

**SMOKE SESSIONS RECORDS**

**BOBBY WATSON**  
JOSH EVANS GIVETON GELIN VICTOR GOULD CURTIS LUNDY VICTOR JONES

Keepin' It Real

**SMOKE SESSIONS RECORDS**

**WAYNE ESCOFFERY**  
RANDY BRECKER DAVID GILMORE DAVID KIKOSKI UGONMA OKEGWO RALPH PETERSON

The Humble Warrior

**SMOKE SESSIONS RECORDS**

**HAROLD MABERN**  
VINCENT HERRING ERIC ALEXANDER STEVE DAVIS JOHN WEBBER JOE FARNSWORTH

Mabern Plays Mabern

**SMOKE SESSIONS RECORDS**

**BOBBY WATSON VINCENT HERRING GARY BARTZ**  
DAVID KIKOSKI YASUSHI NAKAMURA CARL ALLEN

Bird at 100

**SMOKE SESSIONS RECORDS**

**NICHOLAS PAYTON**  
PETER WASHINGTON KENNY WASHINGTON

Relaxin' with Nick

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

**IS THERE A SENSE THAT YOU WANT TO MAINTAIN THE INTENTION OF THE ARTIST AND PRODUCER?**

You have a real obligation to do that. Sometimes when people will remaster or remix, like some of The Beatles stuff, you can hear things that you never heard before, and that's interesting. But I don't know if it's better. How are you gonna improve it?

**IT SEEMS AS IF BLUE NOTE FOUNDERS ALFRED LION AND FRANCIS WOLFF WERE MOST CONCERNED WITH CAPTURING THE UNIQUE EXPRESSION OF STRONG INDIVIDUALS LIKE THELONIOUS MONK, BUD POWELL AND ART BLAKEY.**

I think that's part of the signing process. You try to find people who have a unique voice, but also the ability to communicate something deep. The point of art, I think, is that we have inner emotional lives that are so complex that conversational language fails to convey the intensity of it. So when we can't rely on words, we find another medium to communicate that intensity, and that's what art is, basically. But the difference between good art and shitty art is that a great artist will convey something about his inner emotional life, and then someone 50 years later feels something. It may not be exactly what the artist intended for them to feel, but they feel something. And when it impacts you, it helps you make sense of your own life.

**HAS TECHNOLOGY COMPLETELY CHANGED THE WAY YOU MAKE RECORDS?**

Nah, because it was never really about the technology; technology's like a neutral shade. It's about capturing something real and moving, and that hasn't changed at all.

**BACK IN THE DAY, ENGINEERS WOULD LITERALLY CUT AND SPLICE TAPE WITH A RAZOR BLADE. NOW THAT EDITING FUNCTION IS DIGITAL.**

Because it's so easy and safe to do it now, you may do it more than you need to do it.

**AND WITH DIGITAL EDITS, YOU CAN SAVE COPIES, OFTEN NOT THE CASE IN THE PAST.**

Oh, man, it was crazy. Cutting a two-inch master that didn't have a safety copy was one of the most terrifying things. I got quite good at it. There was a way to do a "window edit," on a multi-track. In the two-inch [tape], you could figure out where a track was, then you'd take a razor blade and cut out a window just for that one track and then make a copy of something and drop that in. It was a way of flying like a single note over; now you just cut and paste [digitally]. [Back then] it was *literally* cut and paste; that was one of the most insane things we ever did.

It was a great feeling. There was a tremendous power that came from being able to edit things that really happened and reorder them out of sequence.

**“IT WAS NEVER REALLY ABOUT THE TECHNOLOGY. IT'S ABOUT CAPTURING SOMETHING REAL AND MOVING, AND THAT HASN'T CHANGED AT ALL.”**

their vision, whatever that's gonna require. I would have never said to [singer] José James, "I got an idea! Bill Withers covers!" It was totally his idea. He had a whole vision. The guys on Blue Note, they don't need a whole lot of direction. I never tell anyone what to do.

**BLUE NOTE HAS REALLY EMBRACED THE HIP-HOP AESTHETIC IN JAZZ. ARTISTS UNDER 50 GREW UP WITH THE MUSIC, SO IT'S OFTEN PART OF THEIR VOCABULARY.**

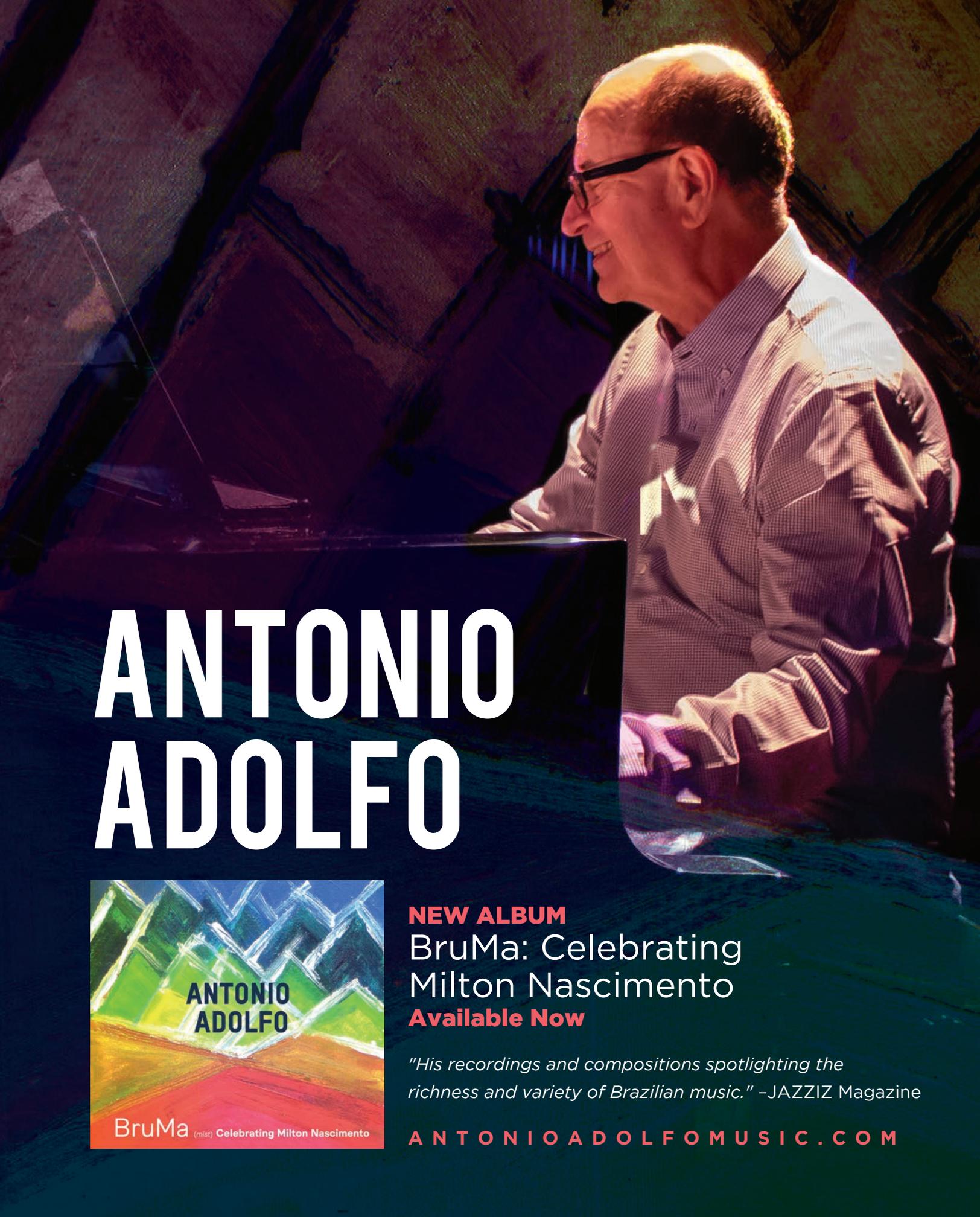
That's right. If you really want to find the common link going back to Alfred and Francis' early years, they were always choosing musicians who could not only reflect the times that they live in, but were reflecting those times in a way that pushed the envelope of contemporary music. Monk and Bud Powell are great examples. But so is Art Blakey and Horace Silver; they invented hard bop. No one was playing that before they put those guys together and let them do that thing. So were Wayne [Shorter] and Herbie [Hancock] in the '60s, so was Ornette, so was Cecil Taylor, so was Eric Dolphy. So was even Jimmy Smith, who was the big commercial artist on the label. What he was doing was pretty radical; nobody had played the B-3 like that, no one was doing the things he was doing, no one played bass like that on an organ. It was incredible. He did it first. And they got it first.

One of my first days on the job, Robert Glasper came in with rough mixes of *Black Radio* [2012]. And you could tell, just from listening to the roughs, that this was something that no one had ever done before. I told him I got the same feeling as the first time I heard Pharoah Sanders' [1969] *Karma* album. All the elements you'd heard before, but you never heard it put together the way Pharoah did on that record. I was transported listening to [Glasper's] rough mixes. I know exactly where I was sitting. I'll never forget that as long as I live.

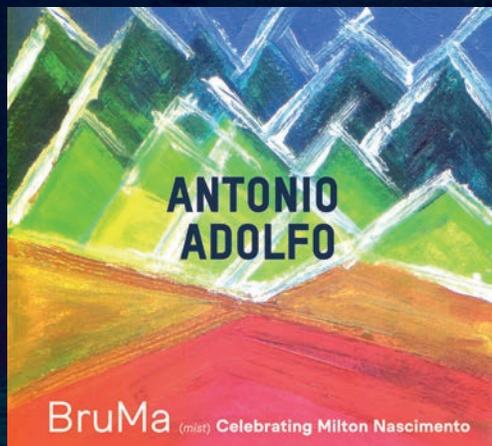
So if you want to really do the right thing for Blue Note Records, the worst thing you can do is have a bunch of people on the roster who are remaking 1960s records, even if they're remaking Blue Note style stuff, even if you went into Van Gelder's and cut it. That would be the antithesis of what the label was about. The label was about [recording] the people who reflected their times in their playing. ■

**IS THERE MUCH GIVE AND TAKE BETWEEN YOU AND THE ARTISTS YOU SIGN OR PRODUCE?**

My role as record company president is different from when someone asks me to be their producer. As record-company president, I try to just find artists whose instincts I trust and I try to enable them to chase down

A photograph of Antonio Adolfo, a man with glasses and a light-colored shirt, playing a piano. The background is a dark, abstract painting with geometric shapes and warm colors like orange and yellow. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the pianist's face and hands.

# ANTONIO ADOLFO



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One Notion Under a  
**Groove**

**JAZZ ARTISTS HAVE USED CONCEPT ALBUMS TO  
PAY TRIBUTE, SPIN STORIES AND RAISE HELL.**

BY NEIL TESSER

n Michael Jarrett's book *Pressed for All Time*, excerpted elsewhere in this issue, pioneering producer and invaluable commentator George Avakian explains how he in effect created the "concept album." "My idea was to do packages, what they now call concept albums," Avakian recalled. By "package" he meant a project in which the various tracks revolved around a central organizing principle. Avakian produced the first such project, *Louis Armstrong Plays W.C. Handy*, in 1954. The approach hadn't been tried before then, in part because long-playing (LP) vinyl records — which could so sleekly accommodate such an endeavor — had only begun to find an audience a few years earlier.

One jazz artist or group playing one composer's work — by today's standards, that seems almost trite. It encompasses recordings by the all-too-well-known of the all-too-well-known (*Ella Fitzgerald Sings the Duke Ellington Songbook*) to the numerous bands of which you've never heard presenting the compositions of a friend or colleague (however deserving) of whom you've also never heard. The concept behind the concept album has grown to include broader thematic frameworks — every Christmas album, for instance, can squeeze under this umbrella. But even so, a bright line can be drawn between Avakian's initial idea and the many albums that seemingly — but don't really — fit the bill.

*Giant Steps*, John Coltrane's first landmark disc, presented a slate of polished performances that summarized the work he had done during the previous few years. It's a grand statement of a new direction, a "Coltrane Plays Coltrane" snapshot — but then,

most albums of original compositions would fall into that category. Ornette Coleman's *Free Jazz* was a manifesto for a vital artistic movement, sure; but if that makes it a concept album, then any demonstration of new work would qualify. Same with *Bitches Brew*, the Molotov cocktail that Miles Davis lobbed at the jazz

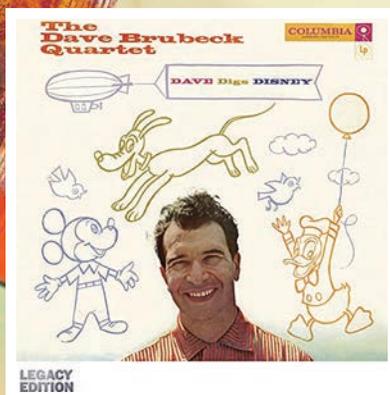
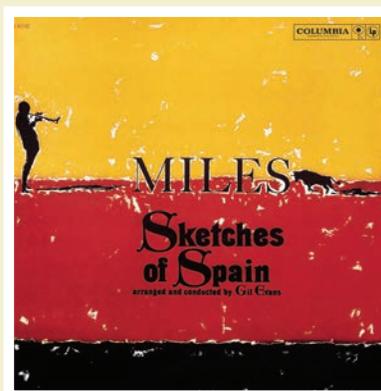
establishment in 1970; the album's art, along with song titles that invoke pharaohs and voodoo, enhance the music's magic and mystery. But it's a stretch to call that an overriding "theme."

Such recordings provide what we might call "proof of concept," evidence of a change in musical direction, or maybe a new harmonic philosophy or theoretical underpinning. All those descriptions fit *Kind of Blue*, which edges a little closer to the definition of "concept album." Much of the music does extend from an albeit generic theme, i.e., the blues. But the real foundation for *Kind of Blue* is its use of modal improvisation. And while the album proves that concept brilliantly, that doesn't make it a concept album.

The same holds true for Dave Brubeck's *Time Out*, the album that contained "Take Five," "Blue Rondo à la Turk," and several other pieces in meters not often found in the swinging jazz of the 1950s. But several years before *Time Out*, the Brubeck Quartet recorded three of the earliest concept albums in jazz. In *Jazz Impressions of the U.S.A.* (1957) and *Jazz Impressions of Eurasia* (1958), Brubeck grouped together musical impressions analogous to sketchbook drawings (in his words) to evoke aspects of his travels. And on *Dave Digs Disney* (1957), he one-upped the "artist plays composer" concept, assembling songs by not one but several composers, written for soundtracks to films from Walt Disney Studios. No one had previously come up with that sort of approach. What's more, people had yet to realize that Disney films would constitute a distinct songbook of their own: Brubeck presaged the raft of Disney-themed discs that arrived from the 1990s on, spurred by the wildly eclectic *Stay Awake* (1989), produced by the savant of latter-day concept albums, the late Hal Willner.

In 1959, Miles Davis released *Porgy and Bess*. It fit squarely in the mold of Armstrong's W.C. Handy salute, with Gil Evans' sumptuous orchestral arrangements framing Davis' update of the George Gershwin opera. Building an album around a stage show's repertoire was not uncommon. In 1956, the Shelly Manne Trio recorded

songs from the hit musical *My Fair Lady*, and the corresponding success of that concept album led to plenty of others. Oscar Peterson's trio covered the same show, and then music from *Fiorello!* And Peterson was just one of a host of artists to dance his way through *West Side Story* — as did Brubeck, Cal Tjader, Stan Kenton, and later, Bobby Sanabria, who in 2018 layered another concept atop the first by bringing authentic Latin rhythms into the mix. But Evans' writing placed Davis' *Porgy* in a category

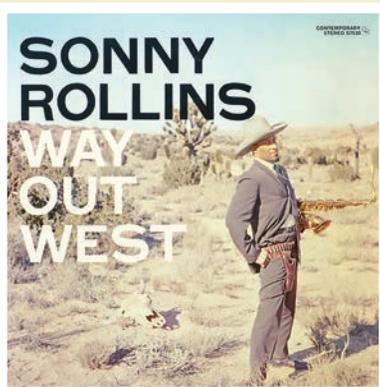


beyond the early small-group albums. The following year, their collaborative *Sketches of Spain* added another wrinkle by assembling two classical works, by pre-war Spanish composers, and several Evans compositions to evoke a still unrivaled sense of place and an expansion of the concept album boundaries.



Several other projects of the late '50s and '60s pushed the envelope further than what Avakian had in mind just a few years earlier. *Sing a Song of Basie* (1958), the debut album by the tongue-twisting trio Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, presented a showcase for these masters of “vocalese,” a process of fitting lyrics

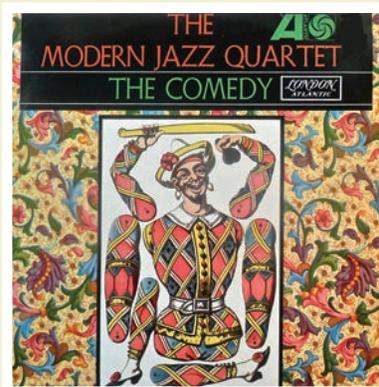
to previously recorded instrumental solos. A group of singers tackling another band’s repertoire? That’s meat-and-potatoes on the concept-album menu. Equally remarkable was the fact that the trio wrote lyrics for not just the solos but also the original Basie arrangements; and that they then used overdubbing to create a “trumpet section” of Annie Ross’ voice, with Dave Lambert handling the trombone parts and Jon Hendricks as “the saxophones.” The audacity of the concept vaulted them to fame.



Sonny Rollins’ universally admired *Way Out West* (1957) similarly served two purposes. It was the first recording to feature what we now think of as jazz’s “power trio,” an open-sky grouping of tenor sax, bass and drums. That’s the proof of concept: *Way Out West* demonstrated the harmonic freedom that a jazz combo could attain

once you removed the chordal instrument. But what made it arguably a concept album was the extramusical theme spelled out in the title. True, only two of the five tracks had a connection to the Wild West movies Rollins enjoyed as a kid, and even those came from Hollywood songwriters rather than the country music tradition. But the frontier loomed large in his imagination, and the iconic cover photo — Rollins, alone in the desert, attired in cowboy hat and gunbelt — framed this theme accordingly.

John Lewis, the musical director of the Modern Jazz Quartet, took a far more rigorous approach on the MJQ’s 1962 disc *The Comedy* — hardly surprising, given his classical leanings and respect for compositional form. The album comprises a seven-part suite. Most suites, by their nature, are held together by a



common theme; in jazz, this most often involves evocations of place (Brubeck’s *Impressions* albums, Ellington’s *Far East Suite*, Charles Mingus’ *Tijuana Moods*). In *The Comedy*, though, Lewis used this structure to portray characters and settings found in the centuries-old Italian theatrical tradition *commedia dell’arte*, the songs ordered to suggest the standard plot of those theater pieces. The fact that *commedia dell’arte* depended heavily on improvisation helped fuel Lewis’ interest. Three years later, Herbie Hancock’s unassailable *Maiden Voyage* captured the rhythms and fluidity of the oceans, in a suite of five compositions.



such as “Vulcan Worlds” and “Theme to the Mothership”; later, he tried telling jazz fairy tales on the programmatic albums *The Leprechaun* and *The Mad Hatter*.



bassist Fred Hopkins, scored an unexpected success with *Air Lore* (1979), a concept album in the original sense. The trio used early 20th-century compositions by Scott Joplin and Jelly Roll Morton as catalysts for celebratory free improvisation. In a similar vein, the current generation of jazz masters has used the long history

common theme; in jazz, this most often involves evocations of place (Brubeck’s *Impressions* albums, Ellington’s *Far East Suite*, Charles Mingus’ *Tijuana Moods*). In *The Comedy*, though, Lewis used this structure to portray characters and settings found in the centuries-old Italian

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The fusion scene of the 1970s, with its debt to contemporaneous rock, was fertile ground for album concepts, particularly as nurtured by Chick Corea. On the fantasy-inspired *Hymn of the Seventh Galaxy* (1973), he pointed the electrified edition of his band Return to Forever toward the stars, with song titles

such as “Vulcan Worlds” and “Theme to the Mothership”; later, he tried telling jazz fairy tales on the programmatic albums *The Leprechaun* and *The Mad Hatter*.

As often happens on such projects, the concept tended to hamstring the music — a criticism also leveled at *The Comedy* a decade earlier — which might explain why many avant-garde artists of the '70s steered clear of the practice. Nonetheless, the AACM trio Air, comprising reedist Henry Threadgill, drummer Steve McCall and

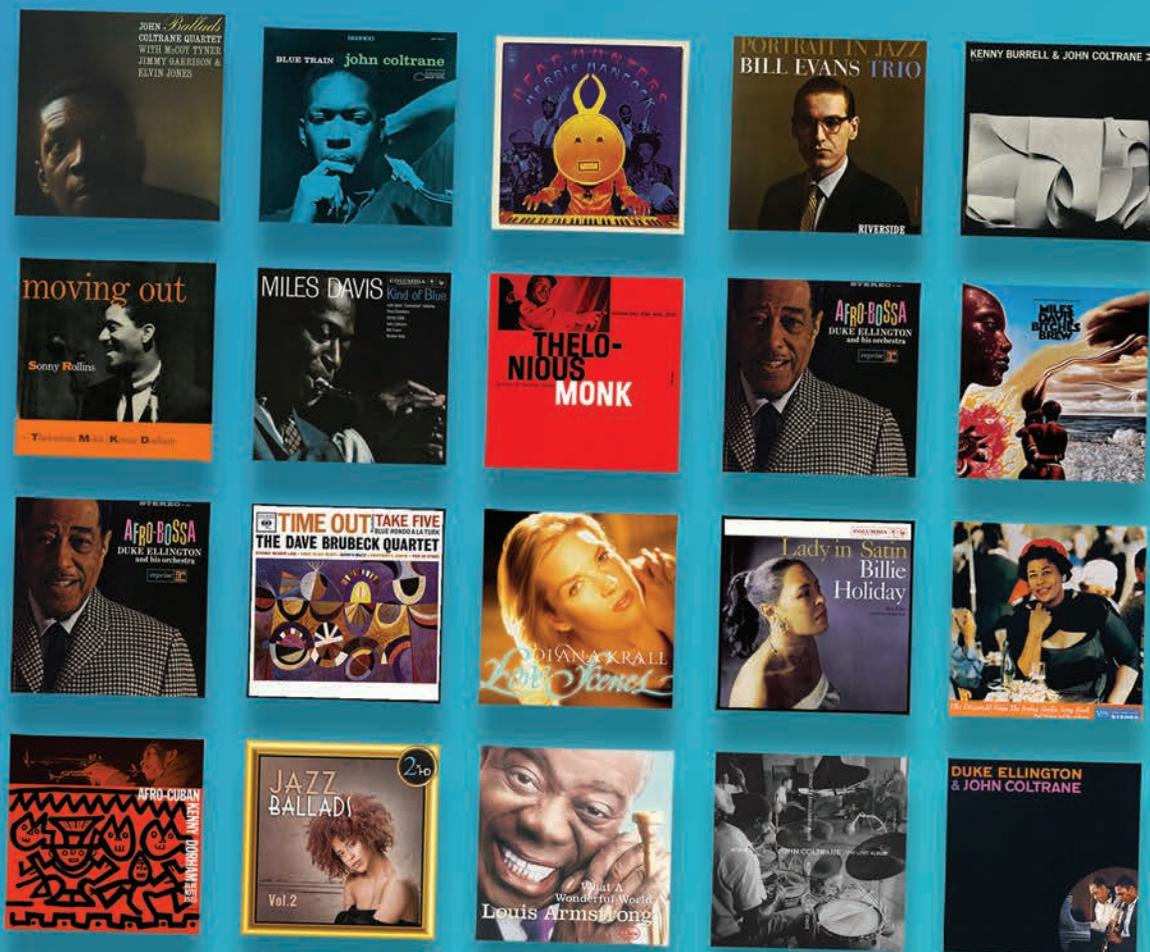
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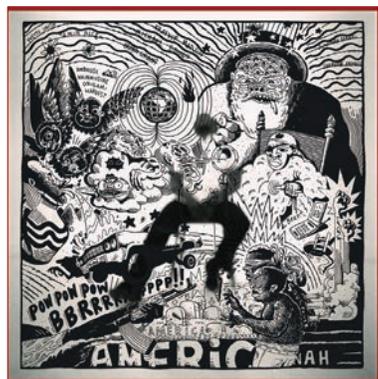


of jazz's first century — and the instant availability of hundreds of thousands of tracks digitally — to explore the work of other ancient icons. Consider 2014's *All Rise*, pianist Jason Moran's "joyful elegy for Fats Waller," whose brief career had ended more than 70 years earlier.



recordings in a way that would illuminate and protest the evils of discrimination and predation toward people of color. In 1960, Max Roach issued *We Insist!* (subtitled *Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite*), the first of several albums that the drummer and composer issued in reaction to Black people's oppression. It covered ground from the antebellum South back to modern Africa, landing in the seat of apartheid, Johannesburg. And in 1972, Archie Shepp's *Attica Blues* memorably spoke to the condition of Black Americans at that time.

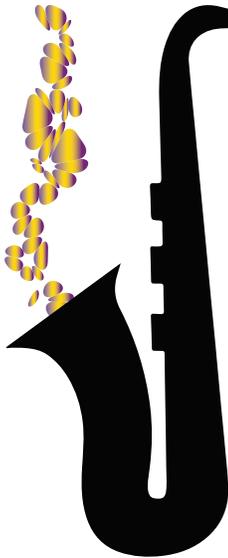
But ever since Eric Garner uttered the words "I can't breathe" in 2014, the phrase echoed by George Floyd in 2020, jazz artists have increasingly turned to issues of race in America. Most often, they have devoted one or several tracks to honoring individual victims of white-on-black murder — Trayvon Martin,



Michael Brown, Laquan McDonald, and others in this tragic litany — but two albums stand out for their overall adherence to this theme: Terence Blanchard's *Live* and Ambrose Akinmusire's *Origami Harvest*, both released in 2018.

These musicians have shown that the concept album can reach beyond its initial intent to encompass subjects and concerns that were once considered extraneous to the music. Still the idiom remains subject to abuse. Countless such discs have collapsed under the weight of their own conceptual ambitions. Nonetheless, the concept album has evolved into a powerful and adaptable medium for using music to amplify sentiments beyond what the sounds themselves might convey. ■

*Way Out West* demonstrated the harmonic freedom that a jazz combo could attain once you removed the chordal instrument. But what made it arguably a concept album was the extramusical theme spelled out in the title.



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# auditions



# Afro Blue Immersion

LENI STERN CONTINUES TO EXPAND HER TONAL PALETTE WITH THE SOUNDS OF AFRICA.

BY MICHAEL ROBERTS

The vibrant artwork that adorns the cover of *4*, the new recording by New York-based guitarist and vocalist Leni Stern, may not seem to explicitly evoke Senegal and Mali, the West African nations whose sounds and rhythms are central to its boundary-defying appeal. But for Stern, the image visually captures her approach to the project.

"In its colorfulness, it was a perfect match with the musical expression," Stern says. "When I come back from Africa, I always think there's so much color missing. It's really the Garden of Eden, as far as I'm concerned."

Stern first fell under the sway of African styles after hearing Youssou N'Dour performing alongside Peter Gabriel in the 1980s, and her love for the continent's rich musical history has only deepened over time. "The drums and the clarity and layering of the rhythm: I just really connected to that," she says.

This tie was strengthened during a 2006 appearance at Mali's Festival in the Desert. "There was a competition for young African sound engineers that UNICEF and Universal Records started, and a sound engineer approached me at a hotel and asked if I would volunteer. So I called all my new friends from the festival and recorded with these great African musicians four hours north of Timbuktu."

The resulting tracks, heard on the 2007 EP *Alu Mayé*, which

benefited the UNICEF program, were thrilling to Stern, as well as to her husband, guitarist Mike Stern. "He said, 'Bird, what have you done?'" she recalls with a chirping laugh that explains her avian nickname. "I fell into it by just trying to do a good deed."

Since then, Stern, who also plays the *n'goni*, an African stringed instrument, has devoted much of her career to further exploring this territory with the assistance of two Senegalese transplants, bassist Mamadou Ba and percussionist Alioune Faye. On *4*, this trio is supplemented by new member Leo Genovese, a keyboardist from Argentina.

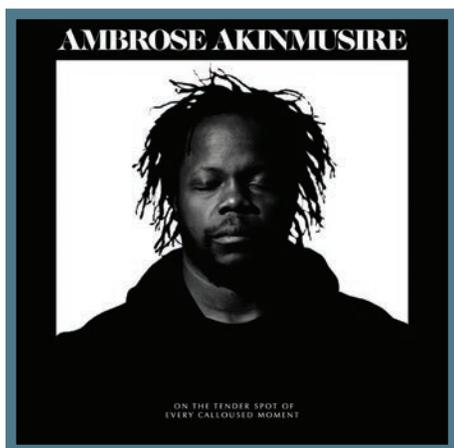
"Leo was our favorite guest," Stern explains, "and when he would come and sit in with us, he would bring all the harmonies of South America that were actually my first love: Jobim and all the great Brazilian artists."

Genovese wrote two compositions for the new album, including the darkly evocative "Japalema," while Ba penned the hip-swinging "Habib," on which Mike Stern guests in memorable fashion. Leni Stern is responsible for five fresh numbers, highlighted by the warm, deeply felt "Chartwell," a tribute to the late Chartwell Dutiro of the group Timbila, who was among her most treasured teachers.

As her own producer, Stern was responsible for getting these various contributions to cohere. One key is the group's camaraderie, she says: "We meet at least once a week, and most times twice a week, to shape our sound. And we work together to create the arrangements for everyone's compositions. Like on Leo's 'Zamba,' Mamadou and Alioune made a Senegalese version of the Argentinian rhythm." But she also credits engineer Glenn Ianaro with helping her make disparate sounds play nicely together. In her words, "I was looking to mix the best of New York recording and the wonderfully earthy sounds that African recording engineers get."

The package was completed by Stern's pal Sandrine Lee, an artist also known as Nu Som, who not only created *4*'s cover but helmed a video for the non-album track "Love" that superimposes bright splashes of watercolor over Stern's face using a very old-school method. "I had to lie under the moving pigment and hold still," says Stern, chuckling. "But it's fabulous. Lucky for me, I have great artists for friends." ■





**Ambrose Akinmusire**  
*on the tender spot*  
*of every calloused moment*  
 (Blue Note)

Trumpeter Ambrose Akinmusire rebukes the notion that musical abstraction is inherently cerebral. Within *on the tender spot of every calloused moment*, he lapses from intricate compositional tightness into bouts of freedom that uncannily imitate the ways in which feelings manifest in the body. “Tide of Hyacinth” opens the record with scribbled trumpet lines like knots in the diaphragm — stark piano arpeggios rippling upward like a heavy heartbeat. Here, with perhaps his most experimental offering to date, the bandleader is also at his most emotionally direct.

Akinmusire’s approach to his instrument is similarly corporeal; transcribing his playing would capture little of what makes it iconic. “Blues (We measure the heart with a fist)” reveals the depth with which the trumpeter has probed extended techniques. The spacious intro teems with pops, fizzes, whines and polyphonic whispers that seem random before the other instruments frame the dexterity within the chaos.

But Akinmusire’s tonal brilliance is even more evident in the organic nuance of his more straightforward playing. On “Moon (the return amplifies the unity),” the album’s busiest composition, his notes spill out of one another with

pillowy raggedness, exquisitely loose like an aged voice or an impressionist’s brushstrokes. Pianist Sam Harris and bassist Harish Raghavan take turns doubling the melody to substantiate each note’s attack as drummer Justin Brown skitters around the kit, carving out space. Ballads like “Yessss” and “Roy,” on the other hand, allow Akinmusire to evince the crooning side of his instrumental artistry. So much of the record’s drama stems from his ability to morph between sounds within a single held note — the trumpeter can swallow a piercing edge or condense a breathy rasp as gracefully as light shifting.

This density of detail allows for shorter pieces, with half the tracks clocking in under four minutes. The album as a whole remains cohesive, elegantly paced up until the bare finale, an arresting solo Rhodes dirge called “Hooded procession (read the names outloud).”

— Asher Wolf

**Arturo O’Farrill and The Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra**  
*Four Questions*  
 (Zoho)

Jazz is inherently revolutionary, steeped in African-American struggle and nurtured by inclusivity. Pianist and composer Arturo O’Farrill has long upheld this sacred pillar, crafting a career that has fostered diversity and



social commitment through music while challenging the status quo.

*Four Questions*, O’Farrill’s latest release with his 18-piece Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra, is his first album of all originals. The bandleader seizes the moment with unyielding conviction during a time in which solutions to racial inequality are as essential as the healthcare workers fighting a global pandemic. O’Farrill draws inspiration from W.E.B. Du Bois’ book *The Souls of Black Folks*, which touches on universal issues of integrity in the face of oppression and which frame and propel the album’s eight tracks.

The title track, a more than 16-minute tour de force, features activist/philosopher Dr. Cornel West expounding on Du Bois’ conundrums in a spoken-



Arturo O’Farrill

word riff fueled by his own book *Black Prophetic Fire*. O’Farrill’s assertive orchestra galvanizes behind him, catapulting the urgency of his words with scorching big band intensity.

Opener “Baby Jack” rides an undercurrent of hope swept up in a roller coaster of layered complexity. At first swinging and whimsical, the piece turns somber, casting an inward look that ascends into a liberating flight goaded by ruminating bass lines, suspenseful brass and nimble piano crescendos. Evolving from a circular piano passage, it segues into vibrant textures that oscillate between swirling, cacophonous meanderings and punctuating pockets of polished orchestral bursts. Half way through, O’Farrill applies avant-garde strokes; at once cohesive and disjointed,

they offer a reflection of the ebb and flow of the human condition.

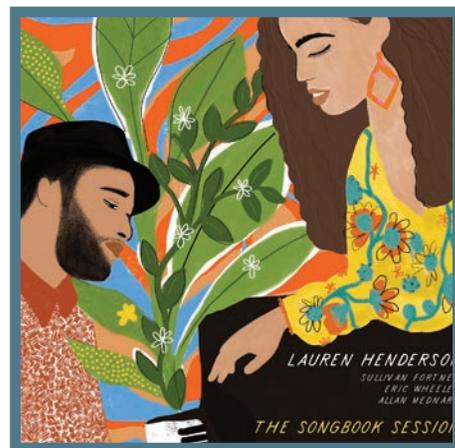
Vocals are central throughout. On “Elijah – 1 Kings 19: 13,” a sorrowful horn intro climaxes into a beautifully cascading chorus, while sopranos Aubrey Johnson and Edda Frandsdottir’s solos on “A Still, Small Voice” offer a compelling end to an album that resonates with a shared sense of purpose.

— Lissette Corsa

### Lauren Henderson *The Songbook Session*

(Brontosaurus)

Vocalist Lauren Henderson’s last two albums were rangy affairs that included standards and jazz tunes, some ear-grabbing originals and lovely surprises (such as a lesser known



Blossom Dearie composition and one by Amy Winehouse). They also offered a rainbow of instrumental settings and vibrant arrangements which, unfortunately, tended to impose on the

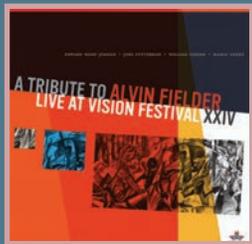


# FREEDOM IN THE MARGINS

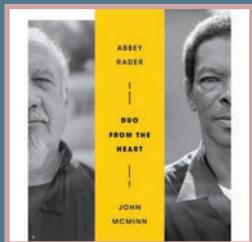
Avant-garde jazz remains vital if overlooked.

By Josef Woodard

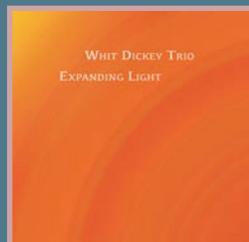
Despite its relative marginalization in terms of mainstream visibility, avant-garde and free-jazz notions are alive, well and enjoying both healthy mutation and a legacy of a “tradition” dating back to the 1960s. Small, sometimes artist-run labels and festivals tend to stoke the music’s fires and serve a small but devoted audience, as this selection of recent releases illustrates.



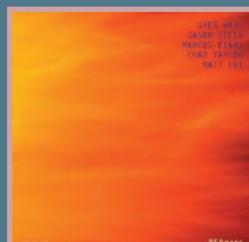
*A Tribute to Alvin Fielder, Live at Vision Festival XXIV* (Mahakala), captures a 2019 gathering of variously aged free-jazz veterans paying tribute to a fellow jazz hero — AACM-linked drummer Alvin Fielder — over the course of one long and rambling, yet engaging and musically variegated, 45-minute set. Fielder, who died in 2019 at age 83, had been a close ally of mighty and sonorous saxophonist **Kidd Jordan**, in powerful (but never overpowering) form here. Bassist William Parker and drummer Hamid Drake assert a rumbling twin force in the rhythm section while interacting with pianist Joel Futterman. But ears lean into Jordan’s work, as he blends ferocity with lyricism and gamely quotes “Crepuscle With Nellie,” “What’s New,” “Motherless Child” and recurring, anthem-like strains of “Nature Boy,” as if to check in with jazz tradition along the path to a world of musical freedom.



**Abbey Rader and John McMinn’s** *Duo From the Heart* (Abray) is a prime example of what can happen when spontaneous musical combustion is backed by symbiotic listening, depth of musical instincts, wisdom and a hunger for discovery. Seasoned drummer Rader, who worked with Mal Waldron and David Liebman, teamed up with the luminous improviser John McMinn, on tenor saxophone and a slightly out-of-tune piano, in McMinn’s Miami living room one day, with no plan other than to improvise a work into existence. Piano-and-drum pieces punctuate the seven-track outing, including the twin centerpieces “Acknowledging the Roots” and “Freedom With Roots.” Said roots include the Coltranes, John and Alice, among others, along the subsequent free jazz trail.



On *Expanding Light* (Tao Forms), drummer **Whit Dickey**, longtime ally of free-thinking pianist Matthew Shipp, leads a sensitive powerhouse of a trio. The “chordless” and generally uncharted group, in tight accord (tightness of concept and will, not structure), features flexible bassist Brandon Lopez and impressive alto saxophonist Rob Brown. Dickey’s shambling force, keeping rhythm a felt presence rather than a strict linear guide, anchors yet liberates the trio’s ensemble identity. The epic title cut expands and contracts through melodic contours and outside venturing, with Brown’s lines tracing arcs of fire and lightness; while “The Opening” (actually the album closer) explodes into a cathartic collective starburst, full of Brown’s craggy overblowing and an ecstatic embrace of freedom. It’s an articulate groupthink wail, bringing free-jazz impulses into the 2020s.



While the other albums in this review heed the free-jazz ethos of “in the moment” impulses and generate heat within an all-acoustic context, the Chicago collective **85bears** approaches its task with an attitudinally freer hand, and with electro-acoustic textures in the swirl. On their self-titled debut for the Ears and Eyes imprint, alto saxophonist Greg Ward steps out brightly with an Ornette Coleman-ish brio on the 58-second opener, “Lament for Sweetness” (i.e., Chicago Bears’ Walter Payton), against an electronic wash of sound. On the following 10 tracks, Ward empathetically interacts with bass clarinetist Jason Stein, while Matt Lux metes out limber grooves on electric bass, and drum tracks come courtesy of Marcus Evans and Chad Taylor, the latter of whose tracks were flown in two years after the initial recording. Echoes of Eric Dolphy dance with inferences of groove, a Cubist bluesiness and post-avant-garde atmosphere.

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Thomas Morgan, Bill Frisell and Rudy Royston

intimacy of Henderson’s suede timbre and feathery phrasing.

By contrast, *The Songbook Session* features just a piano trio, stripping out the horns, guitar and organ that brought flamboyance to previous releases. It doesn’t lack for excitement; the pianist, Sullivan Fortner, can cover more than enough territory on his own. But the sparer context enhances Henderson’s soft power, supporting her voice rather than surrounding it. It’s an approach especially well-suited to *The Songbook Session’s* repertoire of Great American standards, clearly designed to place Henderson in the lineage of classic jazz vocalists.

“Great American” does not pertain to this continent alone. Henderson boasts Caribbean, as well as African-American, ancestry. She also holds a degree in Hispanic studies, and she handles Spanish and Portuguese lyrics flawlessly, on the Mexican favorite

“Bésame Mucho” and on Jobim’s siren “Meditação” (“Meditation”), respectively. Her command goes beyond elocution and extends to her mastery of the rhythmic nuances and their underlying cultural ethos. As on previous albums, she sews up various influences with an English-language standard sung in Spanish — in this case, a languorously seductive version of “Tenderly.”

Henderson gets top billing, of course, but this album belongs equally to Fortner, who has played on all her full-length albums. Henderson sticks largely to the melody, expressing herself via a golden instrument and small interpretative touches rather than outsized improvisation. She leaves the fireworks to Fortner; he devours the keyboard and pushes the tracks beyond the typical songbook envelope, while staying true to the mood and atmosphere of each track (in seamless sync with bassist Eric

Wheeler and drummer Allan Mednard). Fortner and Henderson have evolved a gracious and engaging symbiosis. It comes to the fore on this session, in a context that would suit Henderson’s impressive originals, as well.

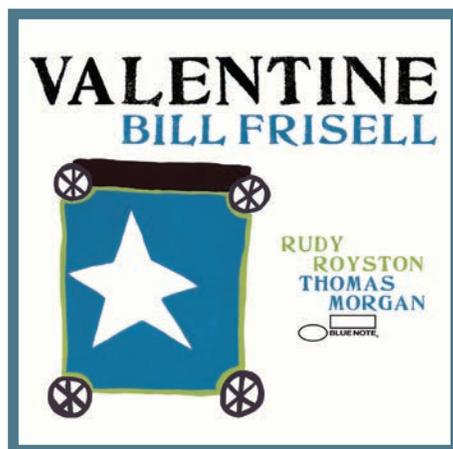
— Neil Tesser

## Bill Frisell *Valentine*

(Blue Note)

For his second album as a leader on Blue Note, Bill Frisell returns to the format that may suit him best: the trio. While last year’s *Harmony* was a collection of songs featuring vocalist Petra Haden, cellist Hank Roberts and guitarist/bassist Luke Bergman, *Valentine* teams the guitarist with just drummer Rudy Royston and bassist Thomas Morgan, showcasing a telepathy developed from more than two years as a live unit.

The album puts Frisell’s inimitable playing front and center throughout a set of 13 tunes, eight originals mixed with an eclectic group of covers. The music is largely contemplative, probing and profoundly beautiful. With too many albums and credits to bother counting, Frisell has established himself as a guitar anti-hero, far more interested in sound, color and melody than six-string stunt work. *Valentine* would benefit from a bit more fire, the sort that can be heard on 2005’s live trio effort *East/West*. But, at age 69, Frisell is comfortable being who





Mark EGAN  
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he is, and that's someone who approaches music omnivorously and holistically. He's never been just a jazz guy.

Frisell is a player of songs, deeply exploring their possibilities rather than using melodies as mere launch pads for solos. He's assembled a stellar program, starting with a splendid version of Boubacar Traoré's "Baba Drame," where the guitarist breaks opens his whole bag — the warbly, shimmering tone; spiky high notes, rumbling low ones; thick, slurry chords; ringing harmonics — all while referencing the melody. Royston roams the tom-toms, accenting with cymbals, adding character by eschewing a straight mid-tempo groove.

The title tune, an original, begins with a jagged melody in the Monk mode and slyly morphs into an easy-strolling swing. Frisell nods to his beloved

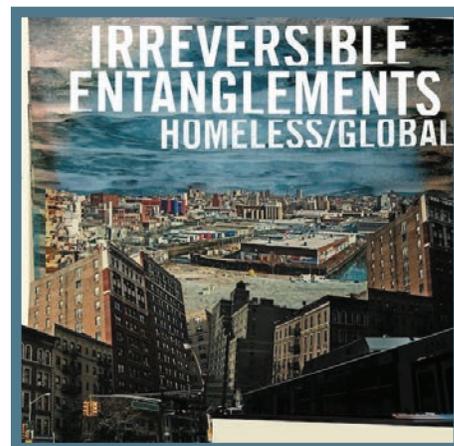
Americana on the brief and lovely original "Where Do We Go?," interlacing his acoustic guitar with Morgan, who subtly prowls the neck of his bass. The trio closes with the civil rights anthem "We Shall Overcome," taken at slow tempo as they languidly unfold the melody. A poignant statement of hope in troubled times.

— Eric Snider

## Irreversible Entanglements *Who Sent You?*

(International Anthem)

This New York/Philadelphia/D.C.-based quintet delivers messages concerning black struggle and Afro-futurist liberation, delivered in expansive arrangements that embrace free improvisation, funk and spiritual jazz. In other words, it's music that's part of the black radical tradition and profoundly



suiting to this moment in time. And there's not a false step to be found.

Camae Ayewa, a poet and experimental musician who also performs as Moor Mother, leads the charge with her spoken-word vocals. Her voice, deep and earthy, is loaded with controlled fury.



Irreversible Entanglements: (from left) Keir Neuringer, Aquiles Navarro, Luke Stewart, Camae Ayewa and Tcheser Holmes



# TIM RAY

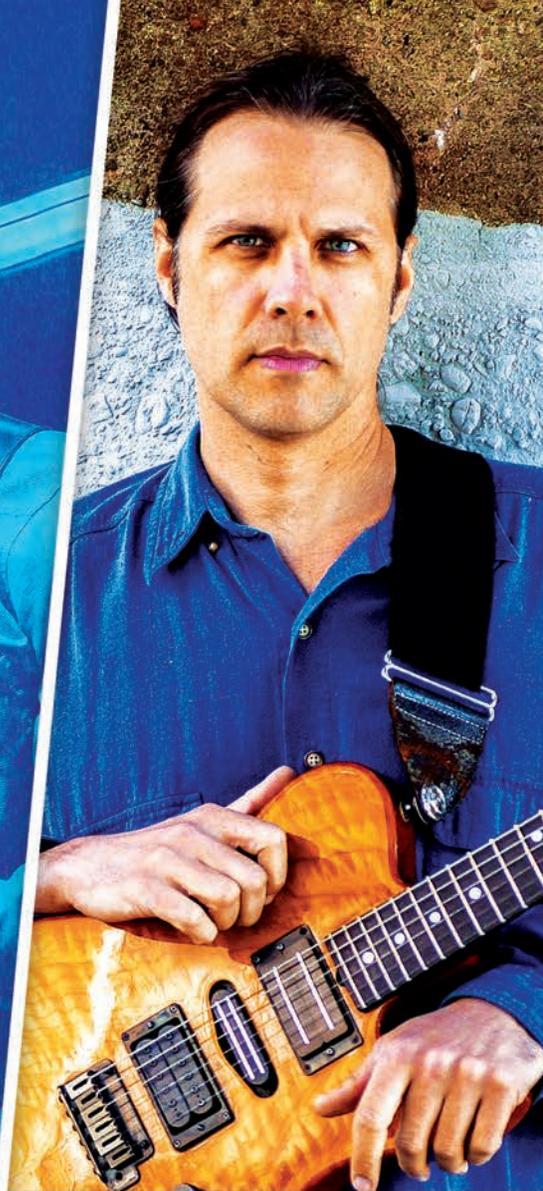
EXCURSIONS AND ADVENTURES

It's a delight to hear three supremely talented musicians find common ground, especially in their very first recording together. Ray, along with Jazz Journalists Association **2020 Musician of the Year** Terri Lyne Carrington and John Patitucci join forces on 'Excursions and Adventures,' a powerful inaugural recording session for this trio that often transcends description with its gorgeous fidelity, colorful arrangements and fabulous nuanced performances. Much of this gorgeous session defies description, and requires your uninterrupted attention.



# John Stein WATERSHED

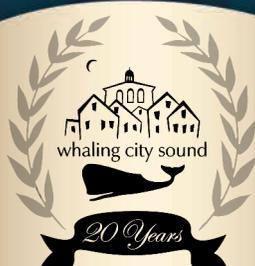
There's really something to the idea that experience helps you see things more clearly. On the transcendent 'Watershed,' guitarist John Stein and his band realize this set of deep grooves with remarkable clarity. Along with Frank Herzberg, Zé Eduardo Nazario, Daniel Grajew and Teco Cardoso, Stein reveals the magic hiding in these grooves and rhythms, with each of Stein's accompanists contributing to that discovery. Stein demonstrates a sturdy resolve to lay bare the soul and the spirit of these songs, as well as the delicate beauty in his band's performance.



# JIM ROBITAILLE

TRIO SPACE CYCLES

After a brief interlude in a group format, Jim Robitaille is back inside the sparse and generous spaces of his trio on 'Space Cycles.' He sounds as if he's returned home after being away for a while. The colors throughout these arrangements pulse and glow, embracing a vivid spectrum of musical emotion. Robitaille's guitar tone also explores the range of what is possible within the framework he's set for himself, while bandmates Bill Miele (bass) and Chris Poudrier (drums) provide sturdy, confident rhythm and gentle explorations of their own. From the moody opener "Natural Selection," the session is dazzling, understated, beautiful... at times sublime.



Listen to "Paint it Black" by Tim Ray, "The Kicker" by John Stein and "Natural Selection" by Jim Robitaille on the JAZZIZ Sampler Disc included with this issue.

Sometimes that voice is accusatory, as on the title track, where Ayewa interrogates a police officer: “Did they teach you to walk around with your finger on the trigger?” Other times, it’s a call to action. On “The Code Noir/Amira,” she implores, “At what point do we stand up?/At the breaking point?/At the point of no return?”

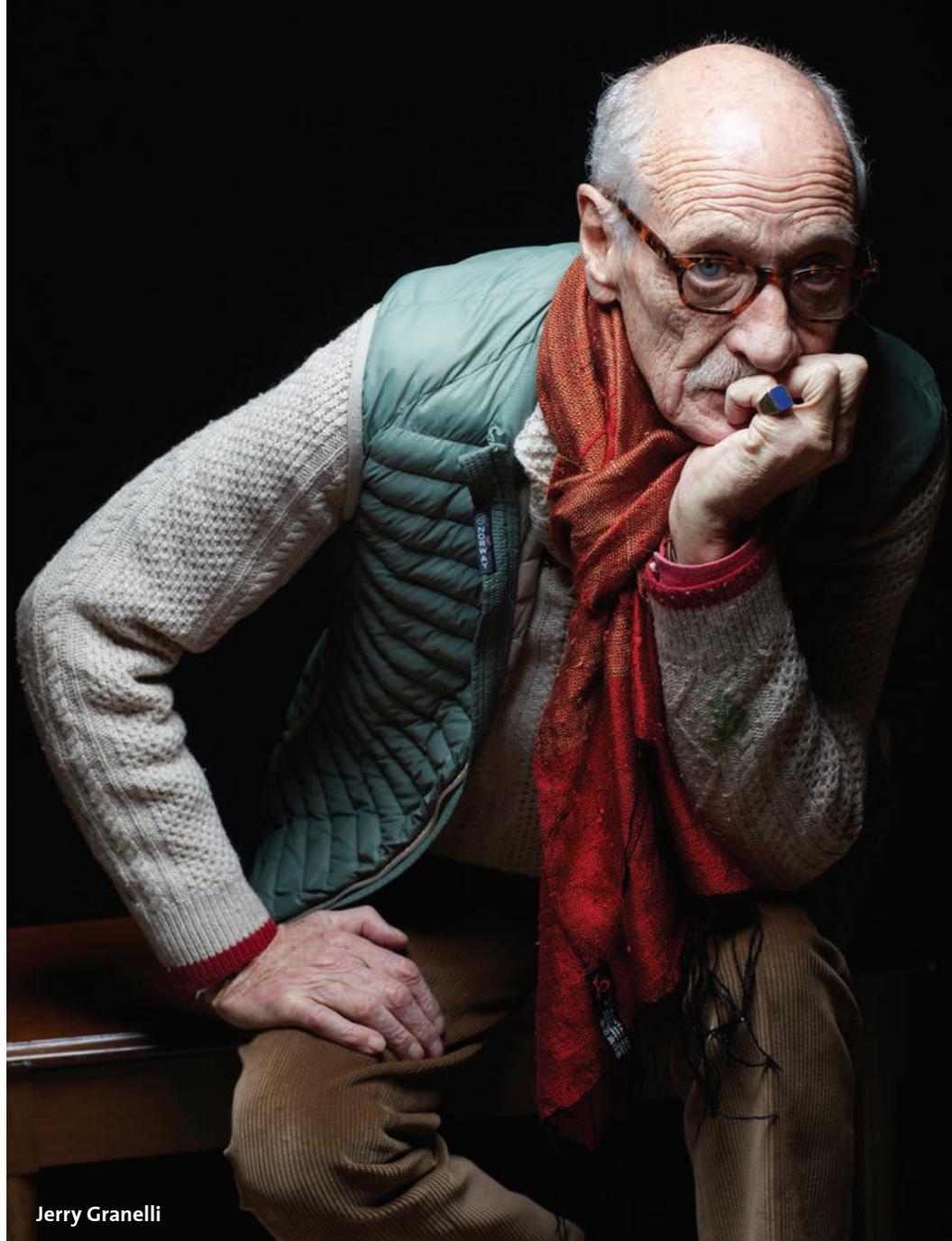
The band adeptly shifts gears from full-throated cacophony to tight grooves to trancelike passages without losing its sense of urgency. On “The Code Noir/Amira,” saxophonist Keir Neuringer and trumpeter Aquiles Navarro’s flowing unison lines create a plaintive cry that floats on top of Stewart’s propulsive ostinatos, creating a tension that underpins Ayewa’s recitation. The funky drive of “No Más” begins with Neuringer and Navarro echoing each other’s Coltrane-like incantatory phrases. The pair eventually meet in unison as bassist Luke Stewart and drummer Tcheser Holmes anchor the driving groove.

Of course, these pieces were completed before the names George Floyd, Ahmaud Aubery and Breonna Taylor became rallying cries. Even without that context this record would be required listening — for the group’s intensity, passion and exuberance. But the fact is, this record came to life at a period when Americans, once again, took to the streets chanting “no más.” That’s even more reason to listen, and then listen some more.

— John Frederick Moore

### The Jerry Granelli Trio *Plays Vince Guaraldi & Mose Allison* (Rare Noise)

For his own projects, Jerry Granelli largely has resisted focusing on the music of two of his most popular bandleaders. The journeyman drummer worked with “Peanuts” composer Vince Guaraldi in the ’60s, and began playing with Mose Allison in the ’70s, continuing to join the pianist and singer intermittently until his passing in 2016. Thankfully, Granelli has relented. On the eve of turning 80, he recruited pianist Jamie Saft and



Jerry Granelli

bassist Bradley Christopher Jones for an engaging set that handily connects the dots between the two composers, refracting and reflecting their work through the lens of his own more open-ended approach to music.

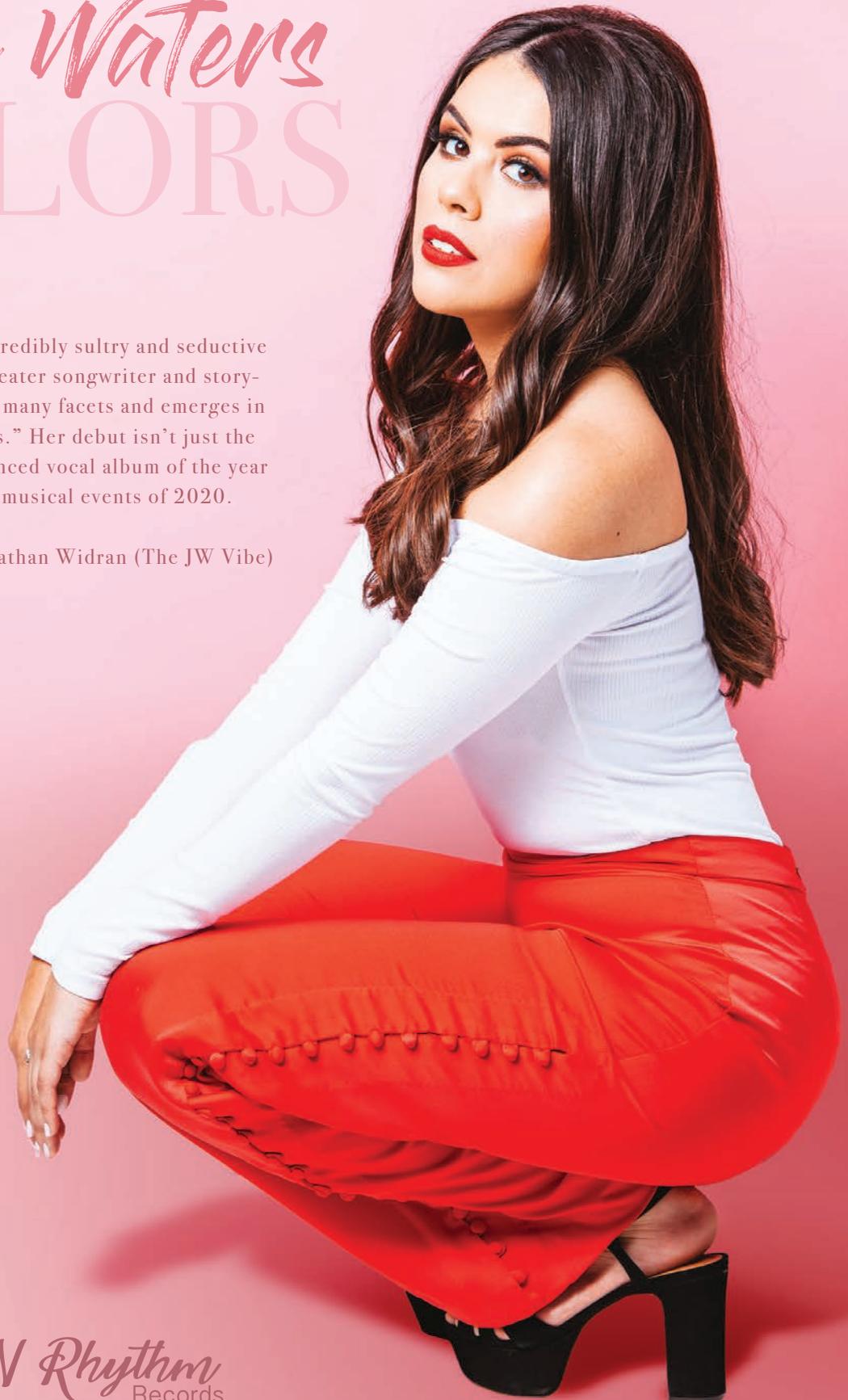
Granelli bookends the disc with Guaraldi’s two best-known compositions. “Christmas Time Is Here,” the original 1965 recording of which featured Granelli, works beautifully as a sonic balm for the turbulence of our times. The trio taps into the poignancy and beauty of the original, with the addition of a folk-tinged improvisation by Jones and a fluttering,



# Catie Waters COLORS

Catie Waters is an incredibly sultry and seductive singer, but an even greater songwriter and storyteller whose truth has many facets and emerges in a multitude of “Colors.” Her debut isn’t just the best urban jazz influenced vocal album of the year – it’s one of the great musical events of 2020.

-Jonathan Widran (The JW Vibe)



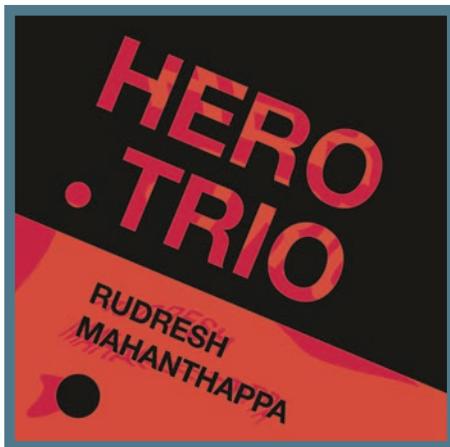
trippin *N Rhythm*  
Records

pensive coda. Opener “Cast Your Fate to the Wind,” which thrives on loose-limbed rhythmic momentum, is front-ended with a free-floating introduction underscored by the bassist’s bowed line, and finishes with a chill-down section.

Allison’s tunes are similarly reimagined. An upended version of “Your Mind Is on Vacation” only hints at the melody, and a funky, eight-minute soul-jazz take on “Parchman Farm” stops midway through for an unaccompanied piano workout. “Everybody’s Cryin’ Mercy” — a potential 2020 theme song — is all bluesy, rootsy groove digging. And Big Joe Williams’ “Baby Please Don’t Go” benefits from Granelli’s rumbling, tumbling ministrations, Saft’s take-no-prisoners attack and Jones’ beefy solo.

Granelli also scores with a pair of intriguing original compositions, “Mind Prelude 1” and “Mind Prelude 2,” which are creative, muscular duets by the drummer and Jones.

— Philip Booth



### Rudresh Mahanthappa

#### *Hero Trio*

(Whirlwind)

Imaginative saxophonist and composer Rudresh Mahanthappa pays tribute to his various influences on the lean and taut *Hero Trio*, his 16th release as a leader. Covering works by Charlie Parker, Ornette Coleman, June Carter Cash, Stevie Wonder and others, Mahanthappa imbues the

music with his distinctive style as he arranged the majority of the tracks.

A notable exception, Mahanthappa’s poignant cinematic interpretation of Wonder’s “Overjoyed,” was arranged by Danilo Pérez. Bassist François Moutin contributes a lithe extemporization as Mahanthappa vigorously embellishes the main theme, and drummer Rudy Royston’s percolating beats drive this provocative take on a pop classic.

On a medley of Parker’s “Barbados” and John Coltrane’s “26-2,” Mahanthappa builds on the first part’s angularity with vibrant tones, and deconstructs the second with sinewy lines and reverence. Moutin bisects the piece with an eloquent solo, and the trio’s freewheeling collective improvisation brims with electrifying virtuosity and refreshingly new ideas.

Moutin opens Coleman’s “Sadness” with a hypnotic con-arco drone. Mahanthappa adds to the mournfulness of this three-minute piece with his serpentine lines, as Royston creates a haunting ambience with his sparse cadence and splashing cymbals. Simmering exchanges among the musicians reveal both erudition and poetry.

The trio’s read of “Ring of Fire” is similarly brief yet memorable. Mahanthappa pushes the boundaries of the melody with confident spontaneity, and though he flirts with dissonance, he keeps the song’s mellifluous core in sight. Moutin echoes the altoist with his agile reverberations while Royston lays down an elegant groove.

Simultaneously bold and intimate, *Hero Trio* bears Mahanthappa’s uniquely personal touch. With his synergistic bandmates, the saxophonist has created a perfect homage to musical giants, one that highlights the ingenuity of the source material while maintaining his own singular sound.

— Hrayr Attarian

Rudy Royston, Rudresh Mahanthappa and François Moutin



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Raw Poetic, Archie Shepp and Damu the Fudgemunk

## Archie Shepp, Raw Poetic and Damu the Fudgemunk *Ocean Bridges*

(Redefinition)

For decades, hip-hop artists have engaged in their own brand of fusion by drawing on the canons of jazz greats such as Dizzy Gillespie, whose “Night in Tunisia” was sampled in the 1989 Gang Starr standard-setter “Words I Manifest.” Usually, though, these icons have been passive participants in the process, as opposed to helping to shape new works. But legendary saxophonist Archie Shepp is a key contributor to *Ocean Bridges*, which teams him with nephew Jason Moore, a.k.a. rapper Raw Poetic, and producer/DJ Earl “Damu the Fudgemunk” Davis, and his bold aesthetic clearly inspired this fascinatingly free-form exploration of the places where the genres intersect.

The casually linked pieces are based on musical improvisation by Shepp and a gifted group of collaborators. Davis contributes on drums and vibraphone in addition to turntable-scratching, and he’s joined by guitarist Pat Fritz, bassist Luke Stewart, tenor saxophonist/percussionist Jamal Moore, drummer/percussionist Bashi Rose and Aaron Gause, whose playing on synthesizer and Wurlitzer electric piano generates an irresistibly funky atmosphere. But Shepp stands out, particularly on a series of seven tracks dubbed “Professor Shepp’s Agenda,” during which he delivers the raw, unfiltered emotion (along with



John Scofield

occasional pointed commentary) that’s long been his stock in trade.

Just as vital are Shepp’s efforts on tunes in which lyrics are at the forefront. Moore’s fierce rhymes on tunes such as “Sugar Coat It,” in which he spits about “gunshots, bullets that grip air/despair, love in violent air,” underscore a socially conscious kinship with the man who made recordings such as *Attica Blues*. And Shepp obviously feels the connection. On “Aperture,” his sax blasts goad Moore to even greater heights, resulting in a sonic blend that erases the distance between generations and musical styles. All that remains is passion, and it’s beautiful.

— Michael Roberts

## John Scofield *Swallow Tales*

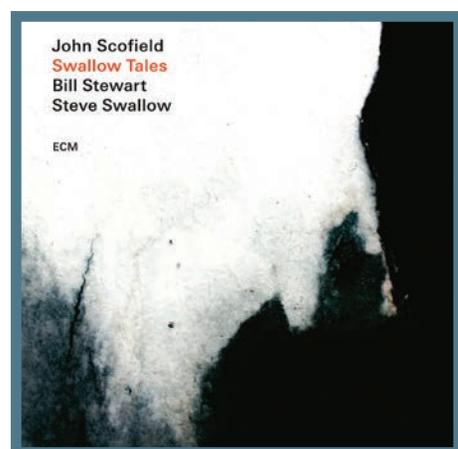
(ECM)

Longtime pals and musical colleagues John Scofield and Steve Swallow recorded their latest project in a single afternoon last year, after preparing for four decades, as the guitarist quipped. Indeed, a certain lightness, vitality and synchronicity characterize the sound and vibe of the pair’s collaboration with drummer Bill Stewart on a journey through nine tunes

from bassist Swallow’s extensive songbook.

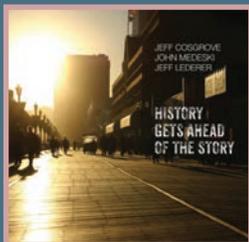
“Falling Grace” is one of several pieces here that Swallow introduced while playing in Gary Burton’s 1960s groups. Like other Swallow compositions, it’s built on a circular structure that feels like a loop. A few bars of an unhurried drum intro and a dash through the melody precede Sco’s typically winding but surprising improvisation. He then passes the torch to the composer for a series of creative phrases, cleverly interconnected.

“Eiderdown,” Swallow’s first composition, also hails from his time with Burton. The catchy, bluesy-to-bop



# SOUNDBITES

By Eric Snider



**Jeff Cosgrove**  
*History Gets Ahead of the Story*  
(Grizzley Music)

Drummer Cosgrove has concocted an invigorating organ trio album of a different stripe, expanding and subverting the traditional format. That he has organist John Medeski and saxophonist Jeff Lederer in his corner — both in freewheeling, chance-taking form — makes the project a stone winner.



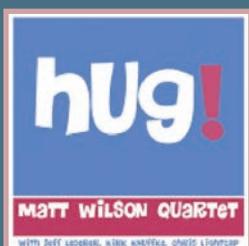
**Brecker Brothers**  
*Live and Unreleased* (Piloo)

A newly unearthed 1980 live set — 90 minutes of funky fusion, marked by long tunes, *loooooong* solos and unrelenting chops displays — proves to be an endurance test. It's what their fans wanted four decades ago, but the music has not stood the test of time.



**Marcin Wasilewski Trio & Joe Lovano**  
*Arctic Riff* (ECM)

Despite what the title may suggest, both Polish pianist Wasilewski (who's due broader recognition) and American tenor man Lovano play with consummate warmth, mirroring each other with flowing sublimity. To the album's benefit, a few tracks are friskier than typical ECM fare.



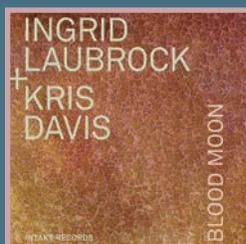
**Matt Wilson Quartet**  
*Hug* (Palmetto)

An ace lineup cuts loose and has some fun. Drummer Wilson, saxophonist Jeff Lederer, trumpeter Kirk Knuffke and bassist Chris Lightcap play winning originals (and an affectionate version of Roger Miller's "King of the Road"), dancing in and out of harmonic strictures while swinging with effervescence and humor.



**Harold López-Nussa**  
*Te Lo Dije* (Mack Avenue)

The Cuban pianist/composer mashes up jazz and a panoply of Afro-Cuban rhythms and styles — including a handful of celebratory vocal tracks — into a dizzyingly eclectic project that brims with whimsy, surprise and joy. A party album with expert musicianship.



**Ingrid Laubrock + Kris Davis**  
*Blood Moon* (Intakt)

Two stalwarts of the contemporary avant-garde — saxophonist Laubrock and pianist Davis — join forces in a duet effort. While there is superb playing and interplay found in these nine pieces, the set never fully coheres or achieves lift-off. A bit too much probing, not enough momentum.



**Carolina Calvache**  
*Vida Profunda* (Sunnyside)

Colombian pianist/composer/arranger Calvache delivers an achingly beautiful, unrepentantly romantic set of originals that features 10 guest vocalists — including Ruben Blades, Claudia Acuña and Sara Serpa — pouring out their hearts, mostly in Spanish. Lush arrangements and concise solos underpin passionate singing in a ballad-heavy collection.



**Bobby Watson**  
*Keepin' It Real* (Smoke Sessions)

The Blakey legacy has legs. Alto saxophonist Watson, the Messengers music director from 1977-'81, leads a new quintet of (mostly) up-and-comers in a program of hard-swinging, blues-and-gospel-infused post-bop. Watson, 66, proves he still has plenty of fire in his belly.



Bobby Watson

Photo by Jimmy Katz

## AUDITIONS

melody provides plenty of room for sprawling, twisty solos, including an extended turn from Stewart and then Scofield's buzzy, bending, dissonance-spiked outro, which concludes with a gritty, air-hanging chord.

There are other musical flavors, as well, including the gorgeous, slow-moving ballad "Away," and a pair of sly waltzes — "She Was Young" (originally set to a Robert Creeley poem), replete with a blistering coda, and "Hullo Bolinas." "Awful Coffee," initially conceived of as an up-tempo piece, is remade as a laid-back charmer, and features one of Swallow's prettiest, most melodic solos. These well-told tales close with the zig-zagging burner "Radio," bolstered by the guitarist skating across chord changes nearly as speedy as those in "Giant Steps." — Philip Booth

### Micah Thomas

#### *Tide*

(self-released)

On his debut album as a leader, pianist and composer Micah Thomas can perhaps best be described by the title of the closing tune, "Wanderer." As a writer, Thomas provides clear frameworks for his trio with bassist Dean Torrey and drummer Kyle Benford. But these eight tunes — all originals, recorded live at New York's Kitano Hotel in March 2019 by Jimmy Katz — wander freely from their themes, shifting time and tempos, alternating



Micah Thomas

swing and free rhythms, and sometimes taking some very long trips indeed.

Opener "Tornado" is typical. Less a tune than a cycle of chords, it's as if "Giant Steps" had gone sideways (in a good way). It pulses with bebop phrasing, but is informed by post-bop's tonal and rhythmic ambiguities, making an exuberant shift from a rubato opening to a fast 4/4 swing, the speedy single-note phrases breaking into the splintered figures of early Cecil Taylor. "The Game," inspired by Mahler's Sixth Symphony, hints at that composer's traversal of moods, with long ruminative passages, a section of fast "walking" and a grand tremolo-inflected coda before segueing without a break into the calm of "The Day After."

Perhaps the piece that adheres most to standard song form is the anthemic,

sprightly "Grounds," with the trio playing the theme in cheerful unison. Yes, they explore adjacent keys, and gathering clouds threaten dissonant explosions, but the tune is never far from view, and the sure interplay of the band always sets them on a common course.

A touring professional when he was a high school sophomore in Columbus, Ohio, Thomas is still in his early 20s. He quickly moved on to the New York jazz scene in 2015 while attending Juilliard, playing in guitarist Lage Lund's band, among others. This album shows maturity in all the best ways: technical prowess matched with intellectual rigor and emotional openness. Form, feeling and freedom are all equal parts of the mix.

— Jon Garelick



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# Twenty Years, Zero Regrets

By David Pulizzi

Bruce Lundvall and the author, Barcelona, Spain, 2010

I began working at JAZZIZ in the year 2000, not long after the great non-event of the new millennium, Y2K, failed to royally screw up the civilized world, as predicted. For 20 years I've labored for a good man, JAZZIZ Publisher Michael Fagien, who has always treated me well and who I'll always regard as a beloved friend. During those two decades, mostly as Michael's managing editor, I've done my best to help him and our co-workers produce what I've long considered, as objectively as I'm able, the world's most handsome, compelling and substantive general-interest jazz magazine. With the publication of this issue, my tenure at JAZZIZ officially concludes.

It's been a great, occasionally thrilling, ride. As you've probably noticed, the jazz world is full of smart, interesting people, most of them endowed with a heightened sense of beauty and compassion. Some are gifted practically beyond compare. I remember standing in the back of a packed theater during the 2009 edition of the Montreal Jazz Festival, listening to Charles Lloyd and his sublime quartet, overwhelmed and moved to tears by the depth and eloquence of the group's collective expression. It was yet another unforgettable demonstration of the power and reach of music when it's rendered with skill and soul. Music is often beyond the ability of words to describe, and yet, at its finest, there it is, entering your innermost self, driving you to tears and sadness and hope and elation and wondrous visions of life fully and passionately considered. As a species, where would we be without such art?

A couple weeks ago, feeling a touch sentimental about my imminent departure from JAZZIZ, I retrieved my old Olympus microcassette recorder and a dozen or so cassettes from a shoebox in my bedroom closet. Over the next several days I listened to what I had recorded 10, 12 and 15 years ago. A few contained scratch recordings of songs I've written. Those made for curious, sometimes embarrassed, listening. The other cassettes contained long interviews I've done with George Wein, Bruce Lundvall, Lorraine Gordon, Hugh Hefner, Dee Dee Bridgewater, bluesman John Hammond, Mike and Leni Stern, René Marie and other notables. Two 90-minute cassettes contained nothing but

excerpts of an immensely pleasurable — and, in retrospect, entertaining — conversation I had with a then mostly unknown 23-year-old Esperanza Spalding at her modest home in Jersey City, New Jersey, in April 2008. There's something about that experience — driving to Jersey City from my home in central Pennsylvania on a lovely spring morning, then hanging out for a fun and deeply enriching few hours with a supremely gifted and luminous young musician — that typifies my best memories of working for and on this magazine. It felt like something well worth doing and, afterward, in the magazine, sharing.

"Sooner or later — probably sooner — Spalding will be famous," I wrote in the ensuing cover story we ran about Esperanza. "If it isn't inevitable, it's right next door to inevitable. ... She makes playing jazz look and sound like exquisite, exotic fun. In a world half-starved for joy and release, there's something in Spalding's approach — which is to say, something in her generous spirit — that endears her to people."

Let it not be said that I didn't occasionally strike the nail squarely on the head (or that I often failed to recognize the blatantly obvious).

I take my leave from this venerable publication with a headful of wonderful memories and with more gratitude than I'm able to fully express. Truth is, when I started working at JAZZIZ, I knew a fair amount about editing and producing a magazine but not much about jazz music and culture. I endeavored to learn all I could as quickly and efficiently as possible, and countless co-workers, freelance writers, publicists, promoters, musicians and others kindly offered invaluable assistance along the way. To those fine people, so many of whom I now consider friends, I'm forever indebted.

To our readers, I wish you the best and bid you a fond farewell. For the past 20 years, it's been a pleasure and privilege to explore the jazz world while helping to produce a magazine intended to provide both quality entertainment and meaningful intellectual sustenance. Truly, thanks for reading and supporting our endeavors. The good life I've known would've been far different without you. ■

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## INCLUDES MUSIC FROM:

**Eddie Henderson**

**Chet Baker**

**Alexa Tarantino**

**Jana Herzen & Charnett Moffett**

**Donny McCaslin**

**Jim Robitaille Trio**

**John Stein**

**Bobby Watson**

**Joe Farnsworth feat. Wynton Marsalis**

**Mark Egan & Danny Gottlieb**

**Simon Jefferis**

**Cindy Bradley**

## **ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:**

Rez Abbasi, Ran Blake & Christine Correa, Ike Sturm & Jesse Lewis, Artemis, Leni Stern, Ambrose Akinmusire, Artruo O'Farrill and the Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra, Bill Frisell, The Jerry Granelli Trio, Rudresh Mahanthappa, Archie Shepp, John Scofield, Kidd Jordan, Abbey Rader & John McMinn, Jeff Cosgrove, Brecker Brothers, Harold López-Nussa, Ingrid Laubrock & Kris Davis, Bobby Watson and more.

THE FALL COLLECTION IS AVAILABLE ON VINYL, COMPACT DISC AND HI-RES STREAMING