HANK MOBLEY
A MOSAIC OF MOBLEY

DIGITAL ONLY EDITION

JOE MORRIS
MARcin WASILEWSKI
RA KALAM
BOB MOSES
JYMIE MERRITT
Originally, after a couple of months of lockdown, we thought to have a more light-hearted edition, inspired by Sesame Street: this issue was brought to you by the letter M—saxophonist Hank Mobley (On the Cover), multi-instrumentalist Joe Morris (Interview), pianist Marcin Wasilewski (Artist Feature), drummer Ra Kalam Bob Moses (Encore), bassist Jymie Merritt (Lest We Forget) and More Is More (Label Spotlight).

But, with the pandemic raging and the economy in free fall, a third crisis has come to this country. While the first could have been mitigated and the second inevitable and necessary, the third is akin to that old jazz cliché: new wine in old bottles. The killing of George Floyd is, tragically, unremarkable in this country, given a history of racism and use of force by those in power throughout U.S. history, much less the past few years. What has been remarkable is that the pace of response—even when faced with the dangers of COVID-19—has been astonishing and heartening, but only if something lasting and positive comes out of his and many others’ senseless deaths. One could theorize that the intensity of the movement is a direct comment on those at the top of the power chain who have done little to fix the systemic problems and have, in many cases, exacerbated it for their own short-term political gain.

Simply put, you cannot pick up this gazette, professing an interest in jazz, without having a concurrent interest in Civil Rights. While we may try to remove the individual personality from his or her artistic output in the case of some problematic figures, to say that jazz and the history of African-American struggle can be separated somehow is to say that Olivier Messiaen’s Quatuor pour la fin du temps could have been written anywhere, at any time.

However you choose to register your protest, it is your duty to do so. Jazz may be entertaining but it is not entertainment. Those that suffered to bring it to us and inspired the generations that followed need to know that the world of the future can be better than the one they knew.
JAMES BRANDON LEWIS – CHAD TAYLOR
LIVE IN WILLISAU
James Brandon Lewis: Tenor Saxophone
Chad Taylor: Drums, Mbira

INGRID LAUBROCK – KRIS DAVIS
BLOOD MOON
Ingrid Laubrock: Saxophone
Kris Davis: Piano

ALEXANDER HAWKINS – TOMEKA REID
SHARDS AND CONSTELLATIONS
Tomeka Reid: Cello
Alexander Hawkins: Piano

OMRI ZIEGELE TOMORROW TRIO
ALL THOSE YESTERDAYS
Han Bennink: Drums

TIM BERNE’S SNAKEOIL
THE FANTASTIC MRS. 10
Matt Mitchell: Piano | Ches Smith: Drums, Vibraphone | Oscar Noriega: Clarinet
Marc Ducret: Guitar | Tim Berne: Alto Saxophone

ARUÁN ORTIZ WITH ANDREW CYRILLE AND MAURICIO HERRERA
INSIDE RHYTHMIC FALLS
Aruán Ortiz: Piano, Voice | Andrew Cyrille: Drums
Mauricio Herrera: Percussion, Voice

OHAD TALMOR NEWSREEL SEXTET
LONG FORMS
Ohad Talmor: Tenor Saxophone | Shane Endsley: Trumpet | Miles Okazaki: Guitar
Jacob Sacks: Piano | Matt Pavolka: Acoustic Bass | Dan Weiss: Drums

EVA PARKER – PAUL LYTTON
COLLECTIVE CALLS (REVISITED) (JUBILEE)
Evan Parker: Tenor Saxophone
Paul Lytton: Drums
Pianist Dan Tepfer blends conservatory training with improvisation and technology. For a recent live-stream performance (Jun. 6th), he used a series of self-programmed digital algorithms (from his latest project, Natural Machines) to control his Yamaha Disklavier. Seated at his state-of-the-art player piano, Tepfer becomes a cyborg, the instrument a biomechatronic extension of his body and imagination. The first piece, using a program called “Complex at the Octave”, generated a second voice, 12 tones apart, creating the unusual effect of Tepfer in nervous conversation with himself. On an improvisation using an algorithm called “Inversion”, digital images of the computer’s responses (projected on the right side of the screen) popped up and morphed into different shapes and colors, a visual metaphor for Tepfer’s thought process. A piece set to “Tremolo” combined a classical psalm with theremin-like glissandi. “Intervals”, based on a folksy tune in E Major, was amplified by eccentric arpeggios that skated across the keys as if mortal hands ever could. Watching the keys play automatically—with no finger touching them—as Tepfer played alongside, was like watching him duet with a ghost, the self-depressing keys the visible traces of an invisible machine mind. “Triad Sculpture” allowed Tepfer to modulate hymn harmonies; “Demonic March” added trailing accents to a baroque theme; “Constant Motion” spun out short ideas into lingering loops; and a final piece trilled tastefully in F minor.

—Tom Greenland

Entering its second decade, Joel Harrison’s Alternative Guitar Summit camp has gone online, necessitated by COVID-19. One important ramification is that, due to the inherent latency of digital broadcasts, musicians can’t play in time together unless they’re in the same physical space. This didn’t prevent guitarist Nir Felder and Tim Miller, two of the featured faculty this year, from turning in some captivating solo performances on the opening night (Jun. 18th) of the three-day event. After exchanging chitchat and mutual compliments from their respective rooms, Felder started into a rocking/bopping excursion on “I Fall In Love Too Easily”. Miller answered his challenge in this ever-so-friendly cutting contest with an expose on panoramic chords laced with internal melodies over a progression that turned out to be “Stella by Starlight”. Unfortunately, Felder’s equipment malfunctioned and Miller’s audio and visual signals were not as clear as Felder’s, but he played some inspired harmonies on E Major, was amplified by eccentric arpeggios that skated across the keys as if mortal hands ever could. Watching the keys play automatically—with no finger touching them—as Tepfer played alongside, was like watching him duet with a ghost, the self-depressing keys the visible traces of an invisible machine mind. “Triad Sculpture” allowed Tepfer to modulate hymn harmonies; “Demonic March” added trailing accents to a baroque theme; “Constant Motion” spun out short ideas into lingering loops; and a final piece trilled tastefully in F minor.

—Tom Greenland

One wonders if other professional fields where there is often marriage among co-workers have had similar approaches as jazz to getting through the pandemic. Are married lawyers, bereft of opportunities to litigate in a courtroom setting, engaging in mock-trials in their living rooms? Are spousal stockbrokers jumping over each other in their pajamas, keeping the muscles strong for an eventual return to the trading floor? Anyhow, as part of Arts for Art’s live-streaming series, saxophonist Ingrid Laubrock and drummer Tom Rainey expanded their regular duoship by adding bassist Nick Dunston, participating in his own apartment, the threesome connected by video but, more importantly, headphones (though Laubrock seemed a tad encumbered by hers), allowing for a surprisingly fluid mini-set of two improvisations. There were technical glitches as far as switching between streams but that did not negatively affect the music. Dunston, fearless as ever, pushing himself nicely into a partnership of long standing. His feed was a closeup and viewers had a chance to see his muscular approach and deep concentration (though his sound did clip at times). The environment was not adversarial, however, more cathartic, ranging from spiritual to gleeful and it was a relief, echoing Burton’s observation, to see people in a room that wasn’t their kitchen.

—Andrey Henkin

The one lost opportunity was that Rainey, in his post-concert reflection. It also marks the pianist’s return to an ensemble, standing member of groups led by legendary jazz artists such as Kansas City and settling in New York City, Cardenas’s path was only natural that Cardenas would pick friend and long-time collaborator. Bassist Desmond White had been a regular collaborator with the pianist since college and drummer Allan Mednard has been a favorite time-keeper on many stages.

www.sunnysiderecords.com

GLENN ZALESKI
THE QUESTION
SSC 1591
AVAILABLE 7/17/20

The summer of 2019 brought pianist/composer Glenn Zaleski to a new milestone in his life. As he left his twenties, he turned out to be what he expected his first child. This led Zaleski to a period of reflection. He began to reexamine his youthful early interpretations of the world, the media and life in general, preparing himself for this transitional period. Zaleski discovered that his initial concerns might not have been the ones he should be focusing on. He may have been distracted from his path and might not have been asking the right questions. Zaleski’s new recording, The Question, explores the mood during this period of uncertainty and reflection. It also marks the pianist’s return to an ensemble, his development.

Zaleski’s choice of instrumentalists was easy and inspired. He knew that he wanted to feature the incredible sound of tenor saxophone and trumpet as leading voices. Saxophonist Lucas Pino is one of the pianist’s oldest friends and collaborators, so there was no question about his involvement. Trumpeter Adam O’Farrill is a more recent acquaintance but one that Zaleski wanted to revisit after first playing with O’Farrill seven years ago.

The rhythm section includes two musicians that Zaleski has long admired and performed with. Bassist Desmond White has been a regular collaborator with the pianist since college and drummer Allan Mednard has been a favorite time-keeper on many stages.
Within the pains of social distancing and club closures, this old new milieu offers a unique opportunity for informal teach-ins “onstage”, something rarely seen in New York nightlife before. Once a level of normalcy returns, we may find that the views absorbed in this period may have worked to the positive. Brooklyn Raga Massive has been among those presenting enticing lecture/performances painting a world of sound. Wessel, the guitarist who spent a dozen years with Ornette Coleman, has dedicated much time to North Indian classical music, however, he’s yet actually to study it formally. “I’ve collaborated with many Indian musicians, particularly Badal Roy. As a jazz musician, I seek points of intersection and departure with this music,” he explained to the audience (Jun. 9th). Discussing the subject with host David Ellenbogen, Wessel outlined a comparative short-list between Indian classical and Western jazz, including the spiritual connection and, of course, improvisation. It all came together when Wessel launched into a fascinating 5/4 version of “Solar” (Miles Davis, or Bill Evans or Chuck Wayne?) against a two-measure click pattern, which must have caused convulsions in drummers. Flowing over the expanded melody line in shades of purple and blue, Wessel admitted he’d stumbled once, but recovered well. “When Ornette attended an Indian classical concert and was questioned later, he would only say, ‘They’re all sweatin’ to get to it’.”

After his atmospherically pretty melancholic ballad “Showdown” showcased his drummer’s one time boss, McCoy Tyner. Iverson’s reminiscient of the spiritual character of some works by "Teule’s Redemption", a lively modal outing at times propelling authoritative tenor and piano solos that engaged arrangement of “Giant Steps”. It opened improvised prelude introduced a harmonically with Coltrane-ish intensity. Iverson’s classically tinged bandmates tenor saxophonist Mark Turner, pianist Luis Perdomo and bassist Ben Street had opened up their set with Iverson’s “South Hampton”, a bluesy homage to the late Hampton Hawes, Turner blower with Coltrane-ish inflections. Iverson’s classically tinged improvised prelude introduced a harmonically engaging arrangement of “Giant Steps”. It opened eutherne, buoyed by Hart’s effervescent brushwork, before swinging straightahead as he switched to sticks, propelling authoritative tenor and piano solos that mined the Coltrane classic for fresh melodic twists and rhythm turns. A malleted druon solo initiated Hart’s “Teule’s Redemption”, a lively modal outing at times reminiscent of the spiritual character of some works by the drummer’s one time boss, McCoy Tyner. Iverson’s pretty melancholic ballad “Showdown” showcased his nuanced melodicism and Hart’s painterly mallet and brush backing. The drummer dedicated his “Duchess”, a bouncy melody with a soulful bassline "to all the grandmothers of the world" while his atmospherically exotic “Song For Balkis”, a feature for Turner’s airy tenor, fted the Queen of Sheba. The set concluded with “Neon”, a commanding Iverson composition, brimming with an optimism much needed in these troubling times.

Composer/guitarist John King is among the many seeking to break the silence of COVID-19 lockdown. His series of Sonic Gatherings have, true to form, united a variety of genres and schools of thought, from the composed to the wholly improvised (Jun. 3rd). King’s “electrified e-bow guitar” painted large swaths of the soundscape, at points creating a field that had little in common with standard guitar (one could think there was a hidden bank of keyboards), yet at other points, he dispensed with such timbres and simply tore into the music. In any case, the concept was to mingle his rich palette with the deep, throaty trombone. Three of them, in fact. Chris McIntyre, already well versed in the use of electronics for sound-shifting, was a fitting companion in this sojourn as was German trombonist Stephan Kirsch, broadcasting from his home in Mannheim. Though both are well known to TNYCR readers, the third, Steve Swell, had to cancel at the last moment. Hard not to be disappointed as Swell’s presence anywhere is nothing short of masterful, with the pair with King cast textures at once enveloping and gripping. On front, the poly-rhythms of drummer Andrew Cyrille found a companion in trombonist Alex Metzger, whose lines linked with Wessel’s core。“It definitely feels so good to actually get out of the house and go to a venue to do a gig. Even though there is nobody here, I feel the energy of everybody watching,” Luis Perdomo announced to the audience viewing to his live-streamed performance at Brooklyn’s Soapbox Gallery (Jun. 11th). Nattily attired for the occasion in a black suit, the Bronx-based, Venezuela-born pianist had gotten the recital started with a stirring, classically-tinged reading of the standard “I Fall In Love Too Easily”, followed by his own “Unexpected”, a lilting rhapsodic melody well served by the full bodied sound of the room’s Yamaha grand piano. He continued with a dramatic, deliberately paced extended free improvisation flowing into the Lennie Tristano classic “Lennie’s Pennies”. Declaring, “I’m not really sure what I’m going to play next, but I’ll figure out soon,” it didn’t take long for him to find his way into an appealing interpretation of “I Thought About You”, which had him interjecting stride piano passages. He then introduced his “very, very special guest”, longtime bassist partner Mimi Jones. Picking up the pace, the pair got started with a version of Ellis Marsalis’s “Swinging At The Haven” that lived up to its title. Jones’ engaging “Baby Steps” opened eutherne before resolving into a briskly swinging rhythm changes romp. The duo dug into Perdomo’s Latin roots with an exciting rendition of his “Berimvela” before closing out with an encore, Dave Brubeck’s beautiful “In Your Own Sweet Way”.

Composer/guitarist John King is among the many seeking to break the silence of COVID-19 lockdown. His series of Sonic Gatherings have, true to form, united a variety of genres and schools of thought, from the composed to the wholly improvised (Jun. 3rd). King’s “electrified e-bow guitar” painted large swaths of the soundscape, at points creating a field that had little in common with standard guitar (one could think there was a hidden bank of keyboards), yet at other points, he dispensed with such timbres and simply tore into the music. In any case, the concept was to mingle his rich palette with the deep, throaty trombone. Three of them, in fact. Chris McIntyre, already well versed in the use of electronics for sound-shifting, was a fitting companion in this sojourn as was German trombonist Stephan Kirsch, broadcasting from his home in Mannheim. Though both are well known to TNYCR readers, the third, Steve Swell, had to cancel at the last moment. Hard not to be disappointed as Swell’s presence anywhere is nothing short of masterful, with the pair with King cast textures at once enveloping and gripping. On front, the poly-rhythms of drummer Andrew Cyrille found a companion in trombonist Alex Metzger, whose lines linked with Wessel’s core.“It definitely feels so good to actually get out of the house and go to a venue to do a gig. Even though there is nobody here, I feel the energy of everybody watching,” Luis Perdomo announced to the audience viewing to his live-streamed performance at Brooklyn’s Soapbox Gallery (Jun. 11th). Nattily attired for the occasion in a black suit, the Bronx-based, Venezuela-born pianist had gotten the recital started with a stirring, classically-tinged reading of the standard “I Fall In Love Too Easily”, followed by his own “Unexpected”, a lilting rhapsodic melody well served by the full bodied sound of the room’s Yamaha grand piano. He continued with a dramatic, deliberately paced extended free improvisation flowing into the Lennie Tristano classic “Lennie’s Pennies”. Declaring, “I’m not really sure what I’m going to play next, but I’ll figure out soon,” it didn’t take long for him to find his way into an appealing interpretation of “I Thought About You”, which had him interjecting stride piano passages. He then introduced his “very, very special guest”, longtime bassist partner Mimi Jones. Picking up the pace, the pair got started with a version of Ellis Marsalis’s “Swinging At The Haven” that lived up to its title. Jones’ engaging “Baby Steps” opened eutherne before resolving into a briskly swinging rhythm changes romp. The duo dug into Perdomo’s Latin roots with an exciting rendition of his “Berimvela” before closing out with an encore, Dave Brubeck’s beautiful “In Your Own Sweet Way”.

Composer/guitarist John King is among the many seeking to break the silence of COVID-19 lockdown. His series of Sonic Gatherings have, true to form, united a variety of genres and schools of thought, from the composed to the wholly improvised (Jun. 3rd). King’s “electrified e-bow guitar” painted large swaths of the soundscape, at points creating a field that had little in common with standard guitar (one could think there was a hidden bank of keyboards), yet at other points, he dispensed with such timbres and simply tore into the music. In any case, the concept was to mingle his rich palette with the deep, throaty trombone. Three of them, in fact. Chris McIntyre, already well versed in the use of electronics for sound-shifting, was a fitting companion in this sojourn as was German trombonist Stephan Kirsch, broadcasting from his home in Mannheim. Though both are well known to TNYCR readers, the third, Steve Swell, had to cancel at the last moment. Hard not to be disappointed as Swell’s presence anywhere is nothing short of masterful, with the pair with King cast textures at once enveloping and gripping. On front, the poly-rhythms of drummer Andrew Cyrille found a companion in trombonist Alex Metzger, whose lines linked with Wessel’s core.“It definitely feels so good to actually get out of the house and go to a venue to do a gig. Even though there is nobody here, I feel the energy of everybody watching,” Luis Perdomo announced to the audience viewing to his live-streamed performance at Brooklyn’s Soapbox Gallery (Jun. 11th). Nattily attired for the occasion in a black suit, the Bronx-based, Venezuela-born pianist had gotten the recital started with a stirring, classically-tinged reading of the standard “I Fall In Love Too Easily”, followed by his own “Unexpected”, a lilting rhapsodic melody well served by the full bodied sound of the room’s Yamaha grand piano. He continued with a dramatic, deliberately paced extended free improvisation flowing into the Lennie Tristano classic “Lennie’s Pennies”. Declaring, “I’m not really sure what I’m going to play next, but I’ll figure out soon,” it didn’t take long for him to find his way into an appealing interpretation of “I Thought About You”, which had him interjecting stride piano passages. He then introduced his “very, very special guest”, longtime bassist partner Mimi Jones. Picking up the pace, the pair got started with a version of Ellis Marsalis’s “Swinging At The Haven” that lived up to its title. Jones’ engaging “Baby Steps” opened eutherne before resolving into a briskly swinging rhythm changes romp. The duo dug into Perdomo’s Latin roots with an exciting rendition of his “Berimvela” before closing out with an encore, Dave Brubeck’s beautiful “In Your Own Sweet Way”. 
Joe Morris is a composer/improviser who plays guitar, double bass, mandolin, banjo, banjouke, electric bass and drums. He is also a recording artist, educator, producer, concert curator and author. DownBeat magazine called him “the preeminent free music guitarist of his generation”. Between 1975-86 he was active on the Boston creative music scene as a performer and concert organizer. In 1983 he formed his own record company, Riti, and recorded his first LP Wrapparound. Between 1986-89 he lived in New York City, then Boston and in 2001 he returned to the New Haven, CT area. In 2019 he began his “Instantiation” project, recording the first four parts of the multi-part work, which uses the properties of free music in new ways with various ensembles. He is featured as leader, co-leader and sideman on 150 recordings to date. In 2012 he published the book Perpetual Frontier: The Properties of Free Music and has authored many articles. He has taught at Harvard, Princeton, Dartmouth, University of the Arts, Berklee College of Music, Tufts University Experimental College, Southern Connecticut State University and the Longy School of Music at Bard College. He is a faculty member at The New School and New England Conservatory of Music.

The New York City Jazz Record: Did you grow up in a musical household?

Joe Morris: Not exactly. My father’s oldest brother Johnny Morris was a drummer, singer and bandleader who was very successful starting back in the 1920s. He played with Benny Goodman, Eddie Lang, Bix Beiderbecke, Frankie Trumbauer, Tony Pastor, Artie Shaw, etc. He was hero in my family. My mother’s parents played music. Her mother played piano and has authored many articles. He has taught at Harvard, Princeton, Dartmouth, University of the Arts, Berklee College of Music, Tufts University Experimental College, Southern Connecticut State University and the Longy School of Music at Bard College. He is a faculty member at The New School and New England Conservatory of Music.

The New York City Jazz Record: How did you come to music?

Joe Morris: I always wanted to play music. I took trumpet lessons at school when I was 12, but I had school issues and there was no money for lessons. At 14 a friend showed me some guitar chords and I got hooked. I saved and borrowed money to buy a crappy guitar and an amp for $99 and started playing.

The guitar was like learning philosophy. It was so important to me as a kid. I needed something that I could really concentrate on to have a sense of calm and organization in my life and music has always done that for me. It’s always given me a focus. It really helped me a lot to grow. You hear music and it speaks to you and you want to be involved. Especially for people in their adolescence, having something that they can express themselves with that demands some skill, that gives them something to deal with, is really healthy. It gives them a lot of self-respect. But mainly I just loved music. I think with my ears.

The New York City Jazz Record: How did you teach yourself to play music?

Joe Morris: I got books and did my best to understand what was in them. The few lessons I had gave me a good start. I think many people older than me were self-taught. As a guitarist it was common, except for those important to me as a kid. I needed something that for me. It’s always given me a focus. It really helped me a lot to grow. You hear music and it speaks to you and you want to be involved. Especially for people in their adolescence, having something that

The New York City Jazz Record: Can you talk more about West African string music and its influence on you?

Joe Morris: They all did for the reasons that are very apparent to anyone who hears their music. They were different and deep, they were all connected by a very specific idea. I also got a lot from Ornette Coleman, Don Cherry, Django Reinhardt, Anthony Braxton, Jimmy Lyons, René Thomas. So many, everyone. Charles Ives, Olivier Messiaen, Evan Parker, Barre Phillips. So many.

The New York City Jazz Record: Tell me about your time in Boston in the ’70s.

Joe Morris: It was confusing, exhilarating and inspiring to hear him. His influence made me study and practice in a different way. It changed us and made us listen to Miles Davis, which connected to Chick Corea and then to Anthony Braxton and on and on... We learned to do it because we wanted the skill but didn’t think it would define us. We thought we’d define ourselves our own way. Playing along with those records taught me how to play modal music.

The New York City Jazz Record: You cite the following as major influences: Cecil Taylor, Eric Dolphy, Leroy Jenkins, Thelonious Monk, Jimi Hendrix and West African string music. Who else influenced you?

Joe Morris: They all did for the reasons that are very apparent to anyone who hears their music. They were different and deep, they were all connected by a very specific idea. I also got a lot from Ornette Coleman, Don Cherry, Django Reinhardt, Anthony Braxton, Jimmy Lyons, René Thomas. So many, everyone. Charles Ives, Olivier Messiaen, Evan Parker, Barre Phillips. So many.

The New York City Jazz Record: John McLaughlin was pivotal for you.

Joe Morris: At a critical point I was concerned about right-hand technique for solo music. I didn’t think classical guitar music was the way to go. Instead, I focused on the Delta blues players who had a different way. I was attempting to deal with the model that Cecil Taylor’s piano playing presented and do what I could with that on guitar. That required density. Anyway, the blues technique led me to go to the deeper source, which was African string music, in particular Kora music [West African harp built from a gourd]. That helped me with the guitar problem and the Cecil problem. But I wanted to be an American musician, which is a synthesis of all kinds of things. I’m just trying to participate in a thing that’s compelling. I think everyone in the U.S. should follow the lead of people who do good things.
I'm just amazed by what they did, how jazz spread all over the world. You can hear how deep they were into this music to survive, to fight, through such hard lives for so many years. And still there is racist behavior.” Pianist Marcin Wasilewski was speaking on the phone from his home in Warsaw, Poland, in the middle of June, two weeks into the steady, worldwide demonstrations against racism. The agonizing ironies, that such a demand must be made to begin with and that America, where African-American musicians built the foundation of so much of the nation’s culture, was both the focal point and the match that lit the fire, were not lost on Wasilewski. “I think the people who discovered this sound and this music. How they suffered, how they built this music, blues, jazz, gospel...it’s just amazing for me because I’m playing the music of Black [musicians] mixed with European musical traditions”, which came via European settlers and immigrants. “Without the African-American traditions it wouldn’t be...they brought this rhythmic tradition, which is most important, with blues.”

Easy, powerful swinging and fluid, rock-flavored rhythms are one of the trademarks of Wasilewski’s trio with bassist Sławomir Kurkiewicz and drummer Michał Młynarski, whom followed up their scintillating 2018 ECM release Live with Arctic Riff, featuring tenor saxophonist Joe Lovano, released in late June. Wasilewski related a capsule history about how a young Polish musician came to collaborate with one of the leading contemporary American jazz musicians. Wasilewski began playing jazz as a teenager. “I was 13, I was a jazz festival with a classmate and still my bassist Sławomir. It was the 1989 International Jazz Festival in Warsaw. Every year there was a formula, many great American jazz musicians, European jazz musicians and Polish jazz musicians. There were so many amazing musicians, Gene Harris, Ray Brown, Joey Calderazzo Quartet with the great Michael Brecker.” The experience left such a deep impression that the young men “decided to play this music, started to learn how to play this music.”

Like most neophytes, they did a lot of learning through records. “I was listening to a lot of American and European jazz musicians. Then I discovered that there were these great Polish musicians, pianist and film composer Krzysztof Komeda, [trumpeter] Tomasz Stańko…we started to have contact with them and we started playing with them and it was the best way to learn, to play with better musicians, like Stańko. When we were teenagers, we met Stańko and that’s how we started to play with such a great musician.”

The trio backed Stańko on the trumpeter’s ECM albums Soul of Things, Suspended Night and Lontano, the first recorded when the rhythm section were in their 20s. Stańko was an indispensable mentor. When they first met him, “We were still in high school. Stańko’s approach to the music—so free—we didn’t know in the beginning how to play this, what was this free music, how do you play it? We were playing conventional music. “But we were listening to the Miles Davis Quintet with Wayne Shorter and we were wondering how to play like this, it was conventional but also very open, very free. Our focus was to connect these two approaches to improvising. Stańko was very free and we wanted to connect [our] rhythmical playing with his approach. He liked it, we liked it and we were discovering such great freedom from him in the music. We tried to connect our world to his.”

That fruition can be heard on Arctic Riff. Lovano has long been comfortable playing both inside and outside song form and harmonic rhythm and the trio are as at ease and responsive on the two takes of Carla Bley’s “Vashkar” as they are on the grooves and riffs of “L’amour Fou” and midtempo ballad “Fading Sorrow.” With Lovano’s warm sound and the soul the trio brings, the album comes off as a worthy successor to the label’s recordings of Keith Jarrett’s European Quartet.

And how did Wasilewski and his band start playing with Lovano? It had to do with another jazz festival. “We first met in 2006” at the Lotos Jazz Festival in Bielsko-Biała, Poland. Lovano was scheduled to play in a duo with pianist Hank Jones, but had to reschedule late. “He chose us as his rhythm section, we had already crossed paths through touring with Stańko, so he had heard us playing. The concert went very well!”

The polish of the new album belies the fact that the musicians did not meet to play again until they assembled in the studio in the late summer last year. Since the tracks were laid down, the world has changed immensely, with all sorts of playing opportunities set by the wayside due to the COVID-19 pandemic. “We were planning a September tour with Lovano, but we had to postpone it to February 2021. But we still don’t know what’s going to happen” if the virus continues, or returns in future waves. The trio does have one live date coming up: “We will play an opener in July,” Wasilewski explains, “a concert for the [second anniversary] of Tomasz Stańko’s death. We will play some special projects” of the trumpeter’s. Still, right now, Wasilewski says, “it’s scary to be a musician, the whole world is scary. We don’t really know what’s going to happen” after the pandemic. “Things have collapsed in the music industry.”

And then there’s the intense roiling in the public, which is not confined to America. “Of course it’s very scary what’s happening with our government” in Poland, he says. “They have focused on nationalism, a feeling that I thought was far behind us in history.”

“I have been in America, but just for short trips,” he adds, pointing out that he doesn’t know how it really feels to live here, “but I know they are still, still faced with racism. It’s incredible, I don’t understand why [George Floyd was killed].” Wasilewski is clearly troubled by the balance between a culture he admires and a savagery he loathes. “Improvised jazz music, it’s so beautiful, so fantastic that the music spread out all over the world. Everybody wants to play this beautiful music coming from America.”

For more information, visit marcinwasilewskitrio.com

Recommended Listening:

- Simple Acoustic Trio—Komeda (Lullaby For Rosemary) (GOWI-Not Two, 1995)
- Tomasz Stanko Quartet—Soul of Things (ECM, 2001)
- Tomasz Stanko Quartet—Lontano (ECM, 2005)
- Marcin Wasilewski Trio—January (ECM, 2007)
- Marcin Wasilewski Trio—Live (ECM, 2016)
- Marcin Wasilewski Trio/Joe Lovano—Arctic Riff (ECM, 2019)
The casual jazz fan doesn’t usually ask Siri to play Hank Mobley, who would have turned 90 this month, but hears him whenever jazz radio plays an early Jazz Messengers track or Horace Silver’s early hits like “The Preacher”. The tenor saxophonist on them is Mobley. He’s also the tenor you hear on a lot of trumpeter Lee Morgan’s recordings, as well as those of guitarist Grant Green and trumpeter Donald Byrd, notably the latter’s A New Perspective. From 1955-70, Mobley recorded prolifically as both a sideman and leader, helming 24 albums for Blue Note alone during that decade, as well as over 50 as a sideman on various labels.

Yet for many, Mobley remains the aural equivalent of “invisible in plain sight.” In many ways, he was the hardbop tenor saxophonist, pioneering and establishing the style with the original Jazz Messengers and Silver and later with Art Blakey’s Jazz Messengers, Max Roach and even Miles Davis, in whose quintet he held the tenor chair after John Coltrane.

It was Roach who discovered Mobley playing at a Newark NJ club in 1951 (Mobley hailed from nearby Elizabeth, NJ) and brought the 21-year-old to the Big Apple with his band. Mobley remembered those early years in an interview he did with John Litweiler in DownBeat in 1973: “To the best of my knowledge, Sonny Rollins, Sonny Stitt, myself, Jimmy Heath, John Coltrane—we called ourselves the ‘Five Brothers’, you know, the five black brothers—we all started playing alto, but Charlie Parker was such a monster that we all gave up and switched to tenor. I wasn’t creating anything new, I was just part of a clique. When we listened to Fats Navarro and Bud Powell, when we were 20, 21, all of us were learning together. We weren’t trying to surpass Parker or the heavyweights. But when you get older you start finding different directions. At the time it was like going to college. It was just doing our thing, playing different changes, experimenting…”

Bird was the lodestone of Mobley’s generation. “I played with Parker a lot of times,” he told Litweiler, “and he told me a lot of things. To a young person he wouldn’t say much, but what he said meant a whole lot. He didn’t say, ‘Practice these scales, do this or do that—he just said ‘Baby, you’d better learn those blues; can’t play enough of the blues. Where do you think everybody got the blues from? Did you ever hear [Parker’s] ‘Just Friends’ and tap your foot to it? [My] ‘Soul Station’ is the same thing, just like walking down the highway, it sounds like somebody’s saying ‘Oh, man, I’m tired of this town, got to get away from this.’ Parker played the modern blues; what he’s saying is that so much of modern jazz, structures, harmonic progressions, they’re all based on the blues.”

A tenor saxophonist known for his blues-rooted playing, Houston Person avidly followed Mobley on records as he learned and honed his craft in the south, before moving north in the late 60s. “Hank was one of the influences on my sound,” Person remembered over the phone. “He was my one of the main guys. He was phenomenal; the way he used space and silence and his compositions were distinctive. But his sound was the kind that I liked when I was approaching jazz, a sound somewhere in the middle—not Trane or Rollins, not so stark—I wouldn’t quite describe it as smoother, but a big, burnished sound, like another of my favorites, Zoot Sims.”

Of the Five Brothers, Coltrane (1967) and Stitt (1982) died before Mobley (1986, although he stopped actively recording in 1970), but Coltrane had the biggest influence on tenors of them all and both Rollins and Heath continued to add to their considerable legacies in the 21st Century. Coltrane’s impact was so overwhelming that many of his contemporaries aped or adapted his style, not always with the best results. “I was surprised some of my really respected horn players tried to go the way of Trane,” says Person. “Harold Land tried out Trane and I said, ‘what in the hell is he doing?’ But Hank never faltered, he was always Mobley. He was THE first hardbop tenor and a great ballad player too.”

And one of Mobley’s most persistent tales, notes Person, was his adaptability. “He could blend in with and adapt to the other guys [in the frontline],” says Person. “Hank was great with trumpeters like Lee Morgan and with other saxophonists like Johnny Griffin and Trane.”

It’s no accident that almost all of Mobley’s own recordings feature him sharing a frontline with other horns, unlike those of the other four Five Brothers. Mobley’s ability both to blend with and enhance the roles of trumpet players, especially, is what makes his recordings so timeless and worth hearing. Trumpetmen from Kenny Dorham to Morgan, Bill Hardman to Byrd and Woody Shaw to Blue Mitchell, all shine in his presence on records he made for Blue Note and now available on two Mosaic boxed sets, the most recent The Complete Blue Note Sessions 1963-1970. Yet most of his instrumentally ever heard outside of those sets. As Person notes, “people sort of give Mobley a backseat, as they do Johnny Griffin [and many other saxophonists of that era]. We take the Big Three, so to speak, and then try to pigeonhole everybody else, but we can’t do that. Like people just forget about [James] Moody and I’ll never understand that.”

Mobley revealed his strategy for a personal sound and approach to Litweiler when remembering an uncle who “always used to say, ‘Listen to Lester Young.’ When I was about 18 he told me: ‘If you’re with somebody who plays loud, you play soft, if somebody plays fast, you play slow. If you try to play the same thing they’re playing you’re in trouble.’ Contrast. If you play next to Johnny Griffin or Coltrane, that’s hard work. You have to out-psych them. They’d say, ‘let’s play ‘Cherokee,’ I’d go, ‘no, naw, naw, ah, about a little ‘Bye Bye Blackbird’? I put my heavy form on them, then I can double up and do everything I want to do.”

The critic Leonard Feather effectively hammered the metaphoric nail in the coffin of Mobley’s reputation when he referred to him as the “middleweight champion of the tenor saxophone”, a comment often seen as disparaging him as not a “heavyweight” like Coltrane, Rollins or Dexter Gordon. If only Feather had called him the “Sugar Ray Robinson of tenors” instead, Mobley’s legacy might be completely different.

Or maybe not. For like many of Bird’s admirers, Mobley also followed Parker into heroin addiction. But he was a late starter, as he told Litweiler: “I had the knowledge. When I got strung out it was my own fault. A person getting strung out at 18; that’s a problem. He doesn’t even have a chance to learn what life is about. By the time I got strung out I had learned my instrument, I was making money.” Mobley was incarcerated twice for drug use, once in the late ’50s and again in 1964.

When Mobley returned from Europe in 1970, tenor saxophonist Leo Johnson, a stalwart on the Newark, NJ jazz scene and a player whose sound has been influenced by Mobley, remembers a homecoming celebration for him at the Tremont Lounge in East Orange. “Hank didn’t have a horn, so I lent him my Selmer I had just bought recently in Paris,” remembers Johnson, who adds “he played it, but I stayed very close to him”, not wanting Mobley to lose or pawn it. Drugs and later alcohol, would curtail Mobley’s career. He stopped playing and reportedly was homeless for long periods until his death. But Mobley’s career might also have suffered from his his extreme reticence.

Sonny Greenwood, a Canadian jazz titan known for his Trane-like playing on guitar, appears on a 1967 Mobley septet album, Third Season. “I got a call to be on the date because I knew Lee Morgan [also on the date]. At the rehearsal it was a real party atmosphere, a lot of people were there [who weren’t on the record] like Kenny Burrell and Duke Pearson. Hank himself was a very quiet, quiet person, almost invisible. I got a feeling he was interested in doing another session with me—we went along real well musically—but we did very little talking. He was very quiet throughout.”

The introverted Mobley’s reticence was no match for achieving success at Blue Note. The company recorded him prolifically, but many of the album sessions he cut never saw the light of day until years later, some being released only in Japan or posthumously. “I’m tired of people saying, ‘Do a record date’ and you go through all the effort,” he told Litweiler. “You write something good that should be heard and they sit on it. What’s the point of it all?”

He goes on to mention a “brass ensemble” record with trumpets, trombones, French horn, baritone horn and tuba that was never green lighted. Five tracks from a session with five horns, including euphonium and tuba, from 1966, can be found on the aforementioned 1963-1970 set, just another tantalizing example of the under-appreciated artistry of Hank Mobley.

For more information, visit bluenote.com/artist/hank-mobley

Recommened Listening:
• Horace Silver—And The Jazz Messengers (Blue Note, 1954-55)
• Art Blakey & The Jazz Messengers—At The Jazz Corner of the World, Vol. 1-2 (Blue Note, 1959)
• Hank Mobley—Soul Station (Blue Note, 1960)
• Miles Davis—In Person Friday and Saturday Nights At The Blackhawk (Complete) (Columbia-Legacy, 1961)
• Hank Mobley—Dippin’ (Blue Note, 1965)
• Hank Mobley—A Slice of the Top (Blue Note, 1966)
Following six entirely instrumental releases, in an unexpected but welcome stylistic shift, the acclaimed Victoria, BC-based harpist JULIA CUNNINGHAM releases Songs from the Harp – her first full jazz vocal album. Masterfully recorded by noted producer Joby Baker, Songs from the Harp represents the culmination of a two decade-long creative dream.

Drawing heavily on the Great American Songbook and featuring the absolute cream of Victoria’s jazz fraternity, Songs from the Harp is an essential addition to the sultry late night jazz catalogue.

You can find Julia’s music on Apple iTunes and Amazon Music or scan the respective QR code below:
The man formerly known as the jazz drummer Bob Moses, active since the '60s and on albums by everyone from Gary Burton to Henry Kaiser, is now Ra Kalam. The new name was bestowed upon him by Bapuji Tisziji Muñoz, a spiritual guide to many musicians and also a killer guitarist.

When Kenny G put his Los Angeles farmhouse on the market in 2018, the asking price was $4 million. By contrast, Moses lives in a Quinacy, Massachusetts apartment he shares with two roommates. He doesn’t have a lot of possessions and doesn’t go out much, but he’s happy. “We live in the funkiest house on the block,” said Moses, 72. “I don’t have a TV or take vacations, but creatively, spiritually, this is the best time for me.” Can Kenny G say as much?

We need to start with Muñoz, because his counsel is very central to the centered being Moses is today. They play together as regularly as they can and talk extensively as a leader. “I sat in and whispered the phrase “no time” with a beatific smile,” Moses said. “I know because I was one of them. He’s happy. “We live in the funkiest house on the block,” said Moses, 72. “I don’t have a TV or take vacations, but creatively, spiritually, this is the best time for me.” Can Kenny G say as much?

Moses showed an early aptitude for music and picked up several instruments before settling on the drums at age 10. He played with Rahsaan Roland Kirk and Steve Lacy and recorded on “If I Were a Carpenter” and “Talk with the Spirits” (1965). Moses’ first group, after playing salsa in Puerto Rican groups when he was 13, was The Free Spirits, who lived up to their name by being into everything: rock, jazz, blues, free jazz, Bob Dylan, The Beatles and The Rolling Stones. Along for the ride were both guitarist Larry Coryell (who ended Moses’ short career as a jazz snob) and saxophonist Jim Pepper. Coryell got hired away by Gary Burton and soon Moses also joined the vibraphonist’s band. He was on board by 1967, in time to play on the groundbreaking “Lofty Far East” album and was later made a member of Mosaic (1968). They later worked together on two more for ECM in the ‘70s. His brief taste of record company money was when his jazz fusion band Compost (with Harold Vick, Jumma Santos, Jack Gregg and Jack DeJohnette) signed to Columbia in the early ‘70s.

Moses was up and running. He formed close collaborations and recorded with many postbop players, including Dave Liebman, Paul Bley, Pat Metheny, Steve Kuhn, Michael Gibbs, Gunter Hampel, Tomas Fujiwara, Emily Remler and Steve Swallow. He’s still doing that work today, but he also recorded extensively as a leader. Bittersweet in the Ozone, released in 1975, is a favorite (both of Moses and this writer). The drummer on it is Billy Hart, because Moses found it difficult to play the skins and conduct at the same time.

In the early ‘80s, Moses wasn’t finding much work in New York and got offered a teaching gig at the New England Conservatory. He moved up there around the time his son was born (1985) and has stayed put. “I thought it might be good for my gigging career,” he says, with some delight. “It didn’t work out that way. So here I am living in Quincy, on a dead-end street, with no culture around, no great musicians to play with and no girlfriend and I’m in my most creative place.”

I asked drummer Billy Martin, of Medeski, Martin & Wood, for an assessment of his friend: “I love him,” Martin said. “I can’t imagine what my life would be like without him in it and we’ve visited each other over three decades. He’s a true artist who is both playful and timeless.”

Moses has been putting out records on his Ra-Kalam label, the most recent being a collaboration from the early ‘70s (discovered on an old cassette) with keyboard player Mike Nock playing early synthesizers. The recording was enhanced with overdubs from recent collaborators, including horn players Stan Strickland, Daniel Bitran, Jorrit Dijkstra and Edmar Colon. Moses said the new musicians played in reaction to the old tape; they couldn’t hear what the other guests were doing. Now that’s free!

And Moses is free. He doesn’t have much money, but he gets by—drum lessons via Skype are one avenue. “It’s a hard time for the earth and I feel the sadness of people, but it hasn’t affected how I live all that much,” he said. “I love being alone. I’m playing my drums almost every day and I have eight or nine new paintings.”

For more information, visit nativemusic.com/ra-kalam-bob-moses-records

Recommended Listening:
• Steve Marcus – Tomorrow Never Knows (Atlantic, 1967)
• David Liebman – Open Sky (PM, 1972)
• Pat Metheny – Bright Size Life (ECM, 1975)
• Bob Moses – When Elephants Dream of Music (Gramavision, 1982)
• John Medeski/Tisziji Muñoz – Beauty as Beauty (Anami, 2008)
• Ra Kalam Bob Moses – The Skies of Copenhagen (Ra-Kalam, 2012)

Sonny Clark – Sonny Clark Trio (Blue Note, 1958)
• Art Blakey and The Jazz Messengers – Moanin’ (Blue Note, 1958)
• Dizzy Reece – Comin’ On (Blue Note, 1960)
• Wayne Shorter – Visions (Blue Note, 1962)
• Modern Jazz Quartet – Members, Don’t Git Weary (Atlantic, 1968)
• Lee Morgan – Live At The Lighthouse (Blue Note, 1970)

Morgan’s Live at The Lighthouse (1970) features Merritt’s compositions “Absolutions” and “Nommo”, written for drummer Max Roach, with whom he worked from 1965-68, the former that appears on Roach’s 1968 album Members, Don’t Git Weary and the latter on 1966’s Drums Unlimited.

Professionally active throughout his life, Merritt has been recognized by awards that include the Don Redman Heritage Award in 2008, sponsored by the Harpers Ferry Historical Association and the Jefferson County NAACP under the auspices of the Don Redman Heritage Society of Piedmont, West Virginia; and in 2009 the Jazz Heritage Award, presented to him by the late Philadelphia bassist Charles Fambrough at the Philadelphia Jazz Fair. Merritt also received the Clef Club of Philadelphia’s Living Legend Jazz Award, bestowed upon him and fellow bassist Reggie Workman in 2013.

For more information, visit mikenerr.merritt.com/lp?page_id=310

Recommended Listening:
• Sonny Clark – Sonny Clark Trio (Blue Note, 1958)
• Art Blakey and The Jazz Messengers – Moanin’ (Blue Note, 1958)
• Dizzy Reece – Comin’ On (Blue Note, 1960)
• Wayne Shorter – Visions (Blue Note, 1962)
• Modern Jazz Quartet – Members, Don’t Git Weary (Atlantic, 1968)
• Lee Morgan – Live At The Lighthouse (Blue Note, 1970)
MORE IS MORE
BY JOHN SHARPE

It’s not an exaggeration to say that trumpeter Peter Evans is one of those rare musicians identifiable after a single note. He’s one of a select cohort who has taken his instrument to levels undreamed of by previous generations, especially in the realm of solo playing. His debut under his own leadership was a striking unaccompanied outing titled More Is More on Evan Parker’s Api imprint in 2006 and he’s also used that as the banner for his own label.

Why did he choose that name? “I thought at that time that it reflected the aesthetic as well as being a kind of a riff on a common phrase.” It’s an aesthetic that still has currency as Evans affirms: “I like works of art that give the experiencer more than they can chew on at first sittings.” And that depth and richness of material applies to much of the music on the label, whether solo, duo or ensemble, although he goes on to explain: “It doesn’t mean I just put out records of super-dense music.”

Of course, musician-run outlets are no rarity. The impetus for Evans to found More Is More in 2011 came with the self-recorded Ghosts. Although he had multiple releases under his belt on a variety of labels without any misfortunes, he found the experience of shopping Ghosts around labels and fitting in with long release schedules demoralizing. “I didn’t want to wait around and because I didn’t start the label until I’d been around a little bit, some people knew who I was and I had some contacts, so that record did really well and it made it seem like, OK this isn’t actually that hard.”

Subsequent recordings have tracked the evolution of his astonishing solo trumpet music, beginning with Lifeblood in 2016, on through The Veil (2018) and latterly Into The Silence (2020), as well as the dæredevil expression of his quintet, which made Ghosts, Destination: Void (2014) and Genesis (2016), along with other projects like Rocket Science and Pulverize The Sound. The label remains primarily a vehicle for Evans’ own efforts, although there is one album in the catalogue by another artist, a solo session by New York saxophonist Aarón O’Connor.

Evans takes a purposeful approach to what he puts out. “I decide way ahead of time I’m going to do this thing. And if it doesn’t work, then I don’t put it out. Sometimes these things take years and other times they are really quick. So with The Veil, I had these specific ideas I wanted to do, I practiced for these pieces for a couple of months and then recorded them.”

There are benefits from operating small-scale, Evans finds: “It keeps the costs down. An album like Lifeblood, I would say a third of the record is live. The title track is a live solo gig from Cleveland, which I didn’t even know was going to be recorded. At that time I was going for a certain thing. After the gig I asked for the recording and it came out well. So I attached it to the other stuff that I had. I spent some money on it but that album did well. With the ensemble records it’s more difficult. I always pay musicians, especially if it’s a studio thing. So I’m just about making the cost back.”

Evans shares the logistics with his wife and he has a de facto team for production. “Any record that Sam Pluta is on he usually mixes, because it’s just the way that music works with live processing, the way that it comes from background to foreground, it might be a bit difficult for someone to mix that. Then once I started recording with Jason LaFarge at Seizure’s Palace, because he was there and does a really good job, I had him mix them. And Weasel Walter does all the mastering. So I don’t have to think about it.”

By this stage, the label is largely digital, although he has experimented with USB drives for albums with longer running times. As the next two releases fit comfortably on an LP they’ll also be issued on vinyl.

In 2020 Evans releases albums by two contrasting outfits, Being & Becoming is the first from an acoustic jazz quartet with three younger players from the New York scene: up-and-coming vibraphonist Joel Ross, bassist Nick Joziwki and drummer Savannah Harris. “They are all really open and they seem interested in doing anything I throw at them. Every time we played it was something different. We do a gig that was all free improvisation, or all standards and not like free standards, or new compositions. After six months I thought OK there’s certain things that work and are slam-dunks, things that are maybe a bit too easy. So I wrote specifically for the record. I’ve just tried to get variety in there, tried to make sure that everybody has a moment to shine, that we do some of the expected things, but also some of the unexpected things.”

Then on August 15, Evans drops Horizons by a different, more radical quartet, comprising violinist Mazz Swift, percussionist Levy Lorenzo and the keyboards of Ron Stabinsky, which grew out of his (CONTINUED ON PAGE 13)

VOXNEWS

SILENT NO MORE
BY SUZANNE LORGE

Singer/composer Sara Serpa’s silken voice stands in contrast to the theme of her June release Recognition: Music for a Silent Film (Biophilia). This soundtrack from Serpa’s affecting 2017 multimedia project Recognition, takes to task 500 years of colonial abuses her native Angola from a family archive.

Throughout the footage of bombings and military parades, Serpa interspersed text from the writings of Amílcar Cabral, the anti-colonial thinker credited with overthrowing Portuguese dominance in the African colonies. The relevance of these provocative texts to the legacy of African slavery in modern-day America is hard to miss and Serpa’s disturbing images alongside these textual overlays have only become more distressing in the few years since she debuted the project. Without these additional media, however, her music takes on a wholly different character. What emerges from the audio-only experience is simply the elegance of Serpa’s interventional vocal lines and the impressionistically interplay of harp (Zeena Parkins), saxophone (Mark Turner) and piano (David Virelles) on tracks like “The Multi-racialism Myth”, “Civilizing Influence” and “Unity and Struggle”. Thus the album, as a stand-alone, shows how beauty works as a tool of protest.

Banjo player/singer Don Vappie revitalizes a nearly forgotten New Orleans musical tradition on The Blue Book of Storyville (Lejazzetal), a collection of 17 banjo-centered tunes. Backed by a trio of guitar (Dave Kelbie), bass (Sébastien Girardot) and clarinet (David Horniblowl), Vappie champions the Créole contribution to the exquisite blend of ragtime, marches, hymns and blues that became New Orleans jazz. “I really wanted to advance the banjo in a more melodic role as I perceived it was in some of the Caribbean and African styles”, Vappie explains in the liner notes. With this in mind, he turned out the bawdy, blue-tinged title track, one of four originals on the album; happy jags like the traditional “Mo Pas Laimé Ça”; more well-known originals like “Swing Thing” and “New Morning Blues” Clayton used electronic effects in real time to enhance the textures of her wordless vocals—a tricky technique that few do as well.

But Clayton, who also teaches, is more than willing to share what she knows—she recently signed on as a coach with jazzvoice.org, vocalist Alexis Cole’s new educational site for vocal jazz. Born of lockdown necessity, the site is unusual for the access it gives new and established jazz singers to study privately with the likes of Karrin Allyson, Paul Jost, Jane Monheit and Tierney Sutton, among equally impressive others. Subscribers can participate in master classes with pros like John Proulx and Catherine Russell and free-access educational videos can help aspirants understand how jazz singers approach feel, vibrato and scatting.

THE NEW YORK CITY JAZZ RECORD | JULY 2020 11
Drummer Jimmy Cobb, usually described in reductionist terms as the last surviving member of Miles Davis’ *Kind of Blue* band but who was active for years before and decades after, died May 24th at 91.

Wilbur James Cobb was born Jan. 20th, 1929 in Washington, DC. Recalling his youth to our own Russ Musto in December 2018, Cobb said, “there was music coming out of everywhere...Baptist churches, little places that would have people come into town on the weekend, jazz places... And there was the Howard Theater.” Cobb became interested in playing drums while listening to jazz records and he’d “bang on the side of the table.” His first professional engagements were in a band that included the slightly older saxophonist and Washington, DC stalwart Buck Hill. Then he supported other up-and-coming locals like Charlie Rouse and Lee Parker.

After moving to New York, Cobb joined alto saxophonist Earl Bostic’s band and it was with him and his singer Dinah Washington that Cobb got his first recording credits. More work would follow with Cannonball Adderley, Wynton Kelly and Paul Chambers on albums made for EmArcy, Mercury, Riverside and Vee-Jay. It was through Adderley that Cobb would be connected to Davis, the drummer stepping in for an absent Philly Joe Jones on occasion. He then got the gig full-time when “Miles calls me up and says ‘Well Joe’s not going to be in the band... I asked when the next gig was going to be and he said, ‘Well, actually I’m working tonight.’ I said, ‘Oh yeah, when?’ And he said Boston. I said ‘Boston?’ And it’s ‘Well, actually I’m working tonight.’”

Other notable sessions included those with Wayne Shorter, Nat Adderley, Art Pepper, Bobby Hackett, Michael Garrick, Marvin Hannibal Peterson, Gil Evans, Charlie Watts, Mick Pyne in the '70s-80s and recorded with Jacques Pelzer, David Bee, St. Tropez Jazz Octett, Fats Sadi, Belgian Big Band, Victoria Jazz Band and others. Sandy died May 13th at 98.

John Cumming (Sep. 30th, 1948 - May 17th, 2020) The British jazz impresario and OBE recipient founded the Blacknell Jazz Festival, Camden Jazz Week, managed John Surman and Sandy Sheppard, was an original member of the European Jazz Network and, most notably, began and ran the London Jazz Festival from 1993-2017. Cumming died May 17th at 71.

Henry Estrada (Jul. 25th, 1936 - May 10th, 2020) The saxophonist was one-third of the titular Estrada Brothers, which had albums on Chazz, Rumba Jazz, Milestone and Cougar in the '90s and recorded with Gary Leibevre in the '80s. Estrada died May 10th at 83.

Mory Kanté (Mar. 29th, 1950 - May 22nd, 2020) The Guinean kora player and vocalist had albums since the ‘80s on Barclay, Syllart and other labels plus recording credits with Manu Dibango, Azikimen, Sofi Hellborg and others. Kanté died May 22nd at 70.

Lennie Niehaus (Jun. 1st, 1929 - May 28th, 2020) The St. Louisan alto saxophonist was a West Coast jazz fixture from the ‘50s onwards, both through bands for Contemporary and EmArcy and work with Stan Kenton’s various ‘50s groups as well as Howard Rumsey’s Lighthouse All-Stars and Shiny Rogers but known most to the general public for his helping composing for Clint Eastwood-directed movies like *Unforgiven*, * Mystic River* and *Million Dollar Baby*. Niehaus died May 28th at 90.

Bob Southern (May 21st, 1934 - May 31st, 2020) The French horn player and flutist contributed to dozens of albums in the late ’50s-60s by Art Farmer, Gil Evans, Thelonious Monk, Dizzy Gillespie, Billy Byers, John Coltrane, John Lewis, Julius Watkins, Milt Jackson, Michael Legrand, Oliver Nelson, Quincy Jones, Donald Byrd, The Jazz Composer’s Orchestra, McCoy Tyner, Charlie Haden, Sun Ra and others as well as his own few albums for Strata-East and Divine as Brother Ah, the moniker he used to host his weekly jazz radio program in Washington, DC. Northern died May 31st at 86.

Bob Pilsbury (1927 - May 12th, 2020) The pianist was a member of the Black Eagle Jazz Band, active since the ‘70s with albums on G.H.B., Stomp Off, Philips and other labels, plus his own 80s date for Dirty Shame. Pilsbury died May 12th at 93.

Hollis Ross (1957 - May 9th, 2020) The vocalist was a founding member of the String Band, and The Royal Bopsters quartet, wrote lyrics sung on albums by Mark Murphy, Claudio Roditi, Giacomo Gates and others and directed the jazz vocal ensemble at Montclair State University. Ross died May 9th at 63.

Herman Sandy (Nov. 15th, 1921 - May 13th, 2020) The Belgian trumpeter had his own entry in the *Innovation* En Jaz series in 1955 and recorded with Jacques Pelzer, David Bee, St. Tropez Jazz Octett, Fats Sadi, Belgian Big Band, Victoria Jazz Band and others. Sandy died May 13th at 98.

Carei Thomas (1938 - May 28th, 2020) The composer, pianist and sometimes-vocalist’s Feel Free Ensemble released a 2002 album on Roaratorio and had a record under his name for Innova in 2005, all featuring his original music. Thomas died May 28th at 81.


Don Weller (Dec. 19th, 1940 - May 30th, 2020) The British saxophonist recorded with Stan Tracey in the ‘70s-90s, Harry Beckett, Michael Garrick, Marvin Hannibal Peterson, Gil Evans, Charlie Watts, Mick Pyne in the ‘70s-80s and Tina May in the ‘90s, all this to go along with his own handful of albums since the late ‘70s on Affinity, Emanem, 33 Records and Trio. Weller died May 30th at 79.

Jürgen Wucher (1948 - May 1st, 2020) The German bassist was active in the New York scene and worked with Michael Sell, Hans Koller, Bob Degen, Heinz Sauer, Herbert Joos, Vienna Art Orchestra, Gunther Klatt and Uwe Oberg, leading his own dates for View, Sporeprint and his own JW imprint and was integral to the founding of the Jazz Institute in his hometown of Darmstadt. Wucher died May 1st at 72.

### MEMORIAM

**Jimmy Cobb**

*By Andrey Henkin*

The jazz great died May 1st, 2020. Before he passed, he was the subject of an upcoming feature film. For the full story, visit [The New York City Jazz Record](https://thenyjc.com).
who went to Berklee back then. And they all sort of played the same way. So, I think it helped me to figure it out on my own way.

TNYCJR: What’s distinctive about your style and voice as a musician?

JM: I’ll leave it up to other people to draw their own conclusions about that, but I will say that I am influenced by a unique set of people and ideas. I incorporate things and draw from them in a creative way. My output is varied to the point of confusing people about who I am and what I do and there is a lot of it because I try to never repeat myself, which makes every day a beginning of my musical life. Also, my sense of what I feel is melodic seems to confound many listeners who hate what I do. So, my best effort to entice people to enjoy my music as a way to have a new experience seems to annoy more people than I would have ever expected. I’ve been heavily criticized for decades for not sounding like other people and I’ve been praised for the same thing.

TNYCJR: What kind of gear do you use and does that affect your sound?

JM: I used to play a ‘71 Les Paul Custom [Black Beauty] plugged into a Fender Deluxe amp for years, but that was burned in a fire. That was the only guitar I ever really loved. Later, I got another Les Paul but about 20 years ago I got interested in archtop guitars and then worked for a long time to have a way to sound as acoustic as possible and still loud enough to be heard. I have a Heritage Eagle and an Eastman AR810 that I have modified with piezo pickups added with the floating pickup. I use a DPA mic sometimes too. My preferred amp for that is an Acoustic Image Clarius combo. I have some Moogerfooger effects, a ring modulator and a fandango, which I add expression pedals to. I use an old feedback pedal sometimes and a delay and octafuzz. Mainly I prefer the most active use of pedals through the expression pedals. They allow me to improvise with sound rather than just stomp them and leave them on. I like the mystery offered by using the pedals that way. I separate all of my guitar playing, techniques and gear based on what I expect to play and with whom. So my guitar playing is never one thing, never fixed to make the same point and as often as possible, with every allowance for redundancy, open to discovery on the spot. I also have very studied techniques that I use when I need or want it.

TNYCJR: Talk about the record label you started and teach private lessons.

TNYCJR: What projects are you currently working on?

JM: I made 13 recordings so far in 2020. Four more are due. But my main big thing is the first volume of my “Instantiation” music: four CDs, Paradoxical, Versioning, Local and Switches. “Instantiation” is a composition for improvising musicians’ projects. I plan to continue with the next volume of recordings as soon as society opens up again. I’ve been thinking about how I might configure melody differently so that it functions as a different type of template for different kinds of improvisations. That’s something I’m working on right this minute. I also work a lot on technique so that I have the facility on my various instruments so that I can execute what I’m hearing and thinking. And this whole “Instantiation” project is a way of combining regular notation with graphic notation that I invent to get groups of people to have a certain kind of control over needing no control to get new things. This last group of records that I made with this concept are all pretty different but have the similarity based on how the compositional material steers them. But still, 99% of the music is improvised. I’m interested in things like that.

I have a new record coming out with Tomeka Reid the cellist, I’m on [vocalist] Fay Victor’s new record and I am constantly putting out things on my Bandcamp label. I have a lot of different projects, they’re all sincere, there isn’t one part of it that is less important to me than the other. That’s what I do. The similarities and variety of it, that’s who I am, that’s what I’m trying to do. It’s a bigger objective than trying to do one thing and perfect it.

TNYCJR: How are you adapting to the pandemic?

JM: My life is pretty normal so far, because I live in the woods, isolated from people, and I’m used to being here a lot when I’m not teaching or performing. I miss playing with people and lately it’s hit me that this is probably the longest length of time without that in decades. My understanding of myself and what to do is more dependent on playing with people than I thought. But I have made a couple of recordings remotely with [keyboard player] Jamie Saft. [Drummer] Mike Pride is on one of them. I’ve been getting caught up on mixing and releasing recordings for release on my Glacial Erratic Bandcamp page.

TNYCJR: Thoughts about the future?

JM: Keep going. “Instantiation” will be a big part of that. Playing more bass, new duos with Tomeka Reid and Ken Vandermark, special things coming up with Jamie Saft. Playing gigs on drums, which I started doing more last year. Hoping like hell that the world settles back to its earlier messed-up level and we can get back to doing everything possible to change things by playing music together.

For more information, visit jomorris.com

Recommended Listening:

• Joe Morris Trio — Symbolic Gesture (Soul Note, 1993)
• Joe Maneri/Joe Morris/Mat Maneri — Three Men Walking (ECM, 1995)
• William Parker/Joe Morris/Hamid Drake — Elopng With The Sun (Riti, 2001)
• Joe Morris/Barre Phillips — Elm City Duets (Clean Feed, 2008)
• Joe Morris — Solos Bimbaux (Relative Pitch, 2013-14)
• Mary Halvorson/Joe Morris — Traversing Orbits (RogueArt, 2018)

LABEL CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11


ci

WBGO ILLUSTRATES THE POWER OF MUSIC TO EDUCATE AND UNITE.

88.3FM WBGQ.org

THE NEW YORK CITY JAZZ RECORD | JULY 2020 13

"WBGO ILLUSTRATES THE POWER OF MUSIC TO EDUCATE AND UNITE."
Three releases are interesting examples of what some Canadian jazz contemporaries are up to these days. They are a mélange of English and French-Canadian cultures (with a tinge of avant-garde edginess) fitting nicely in the country’s duality (Happy Canada Day—Jul. 1st).

“Recording Songs from the Harp was by far the most fun I’ve had making a record and a long held dream.” So says Victoria B.C.-based harpist/singer Julia Cunningham. Starting with a prestigious musical dream.” So says Victoria B.C.-based harpist/singer Julia Cunningham. Starting with a prestigious musical dream.”

For more information, visit soulharp.com, mikroclimat.bandcamp.com and dianapanton.com

John Fedchock NY Sextet
Tuesday, July 28
7 & 9:30 PM
Birdland
315 W. 44th Street
New York, NY
212-581-3080

***CD RELEASE CELEBRATION***

Timeless hard bop, free of cliché

*CD REVIEW*

**El Contorno Del Espacio**
Sebastián Greschuk (ears&eyes)
New Improvised Music from Buenos Aires
Various Artists (ESP-Disk’)

Buenos Aires, Argentina has long supported creative impulses, from classical to tango to free improvisation. Three releases—two recent, the third a sampler of the previous eight years—show several directions these impulses have taken (Happy Day de la Independencia—Jul. 9th).

Trumpeter Sebastián Greschuk’s *Paisaje* swims in the mainstream tradition of postbop, adapting its vocabulary and mannerisms with a certain personal flair. The music on this evenly paced set is both relaxed and urgent, the melodies drawn from the serpentine architecture of bop and peppered with flat-five intervals, all provided along with gentle syncopation. “La Aspéra”, rendered on buttery flugelhorn, is an affecting tune, the solo showing Greschuk’s penchant for sequenced ideas and gently squeezed grace notes. Avoiding the highest register, he prefers to speak in the warmer, gruffer tones available to the lower regions of the horn. Pianist Nicolas Boccanares trades between acoustic and electric instruments, like Greschuk showing a penchant for patterned lines, yet equally fond of fluid, textural gestures. Bassist Mathias Crouzeilles is something of a sleeper here, making his strongest moves later in the game: a persuasive soliloquy of sliding double-stops introducing “Boomerang”; then a swinging solo over the tune, adeptly complemented by drummer Sebastián de Urruzqa (just before Boccanares joins them for an interactive threesome); and finally a third turn on the impressionistic closer “Motongo-Cherry”.

The SLD Trio, an acronym for pianist Paula Shocorn, bassist Germán Lamonega and drummer Pablo Diaz, has been active in Buenos Aires’ free improv scene for five years. El Contorno Del Espacio, their third disc, recorded in the studio, is a relatively structured effort, with three compositions by each member and a cover of Duke Ellington’s “Melancholia”. Like a successful television sit-com, where the ensemble moves towards a young couple or a marriage proposal, this disc has a familial chemistry is immediate and persuasive, from the understated tension of the title track, to the collective climax and spun-out release of “Jiwasa”, continuing through a gamut of mutual motions both dense and spacious, scattered and smooth, until the impressive denouement to Shocorn’s intense outpouring on “Máquina Verde”—an effortless yet immaculate deconstruction of the ‘groove’. The last piece, “Caida Libre”, shows Shocorn’s proficiency in permuting and through-thinking a motive (this one reminiscent of the Mission: Impossible TV theme) in the manner of Beethoven, John Coltrane or Thelonious Monk.

New Improvised Music from Buenos Aires is an anthology of (mostly) studio pieces featuring a rotating cast. The SLD Trio is here, three-fifths of a quintet with cornet player Enrique Norris and tenor saxophonist Pablo Moser on “Improvisation on Graphic Score”, which transitions from bangings and tinklings to rock/ swing and back. Shocorn duets with Norris on the pretty “Libre”, showing a penchant for patterned lines, and on the grandly contrapuntal piano improv beginning with rapid, scampering lines, which, for all their speed, never lose clarity, settling into a more stately and rhapsodic mood towards the end. Diaz reapplies on “Improvisation 068”, a short, forceful trio piece with tenor saxophonist Miguel Crozzoli and bassist Juan Bayon; and on “La Playa Pequeña”, a fast freebop number with Norris (employing an Ellington-esque growl tone) and bassist Maximiliano Kirsnzer. Other cast members of note include reedplayer Luis Conde, who pairs with pianist Fabiana Galante on three short vignettes (“Relámpagos—I-III”) and whose booming bass saxophone makes an indelible impression on “Primer Jugo Bovino”, a duo with guitarist Ramiro Molina; on “1818”, a duo with clarinetist/synthesizer player Jorge Chikiar; and on “Transicion”, the final track with Galante, flutist José María D’Angelo and bandonéon player Eliseo Tapia, who pumps with the power of a runaway train.

For more information, visit carsundejesrecords.com, forecords.net and espdisk.com

---

**RECOMMENDED NEW RELEASES**

- **Aardvark Jazz Orchestra**—*Faces of Souls* (Leo)
- **Ambrose Akinmusire**—*on the tender spot of every called moment* (Blue Note)
- **Jay Clayton/Fritz Pauser/Ed Neumeister**—*3 For The Road* (Meisteromusic)
- **Agustí Fernández**—*Cancelleria* (Spiralita)
- **Billiard Greene**—*Spirituals* (Unseen Rain)
- **Ray Manilla**—*Rebirth* (Savant)
- **The Necks**—*Three* (Northern-Spy)
- **Gonzalo Rubalcaba/Aymée Nuviola**—*Viento y Tiempo—Live at Blue Note Tokyo* (Top Stop Music)
- **Marc Schmolling**—*Suvenyr* (SCHMOLLINGSTONES)
- **Susana Santos Silva**—*The Same Is Always Different* (s/r)
- **Laurence Donohue-Greene, Managing Editor**

**RECOMMENDED NEW RELEASES**

- **Angles 109 – Today Is Better Than Tomorrow** (Underflow)
- **AVA Trio—Digging the Sand** (Maroco Music)
- **Omer Avital Qantar—New York Paradox** (Zamzama)
- **Brecker Brothers—Live and Unreleased** (Piolo)
- **Grenscó Collective Special 5** (with Ken Vandermark)—*Do Not Slam The Door* (BMC Records)
- **Mark Helias—Available Light** (s/r)
- **Bob James—Once Upon a Time** (Savant)
- **Jorge Roeder—El Suelo Mío** (s/r)
- **Josh Sinton’s What Happens in a Year—cérémonie musique* (Form Is Possibility)
- **Charles Tolliver—Connect** (Gearbox)

Andrey Henkin, Editorial Director
Buckingham’s also-doubled solo. A sudden beat drop and spooky reverb settles into chill reggae with small percussion that trades with far-off honky tonk for the unadorned “Tickle Toe.”

“Port of Entry” is a lovely tribute to Jaco Pastorius. Haslip, who for the rest of the album makes departures from a strict interpretation of the bass chair, switches to fretless and expertly cops the sound of the revered bassist.

For more information, visit whirlwindrecordings.com

### THE NEW YORK CITY JAZZ RECORD | JULY 2020 15
Swiss trombonist Samuel Blaser, who turns 39 this month yet has almost two-dozen compelling albums under his belt since 2008, and French guitarist Marc Ducret began a musical partnership in 2009 and it seems to get stronger with each year. Ducret first appeared on Blaser’s quartet record Boundless (hatOLOGY, 2010) and Blaser returned the favor as a member of Ducret’s group on MetaNoton (Ayler, 2014). But perhaps their bond is best exemplified in the trio the two share with Danish drummer Peter Bruun. They released the live Taktlos, Zurich 2017 on hatOLOGY to great reviews and toasted the album.

They now have a second disc, ABC, Vol. 1, self-released by Blaser in digital-format only. Each player contributes material and it marks a step further in their development. The opener is an epic 25-minute version of Ducret’s “L’Ombra Di Verdi”. It develops into a three-way improvisation alternating between the spacious and the dense; at the midway point, all build to a fever pitch and seamlessly lock into a repeated riff, which demonstrates how attuned these players are to one another. Bruun contributes “Svever”, a slowly developing, brooding piece with the melody handled by trenchant trombone. Blaser’s arrangement of a brief Stravinsky piece, “Fanfare For A New Theatre”, (originally a miniature, scored for two trumpets) is also found on the Taktlos disc. But whereas that earlier version serves as a prelude to a Ducret piece, here it is given a full nine-minute treatment with the brief theme cropping up throughout in fragments and reprocessed at the end. Blaser’s “The Rain Only Drums At Night” is a beautiful piece with the composer and Ducret harmonizing on the melody as Bruun artfully splashes cymbals to accompany them. This is a remarkable trio. Blaser has a number of projects in his arsenal but this is one of the best.

The first meeting of Blaser and Ducret as a duo happened in 2009. And while they’ve played together in several formats, the duo has continued throughout. Audio Rebels stems from a tour of Brazil they did in 2013. This set is from the Rio de Janeiro performance and it’s a corker. The seven tracks sound like a mixture of complete pieces and excerpts. But they are all discrete and play well as excerpted. Both players are sonic texturalists and vary their sound throughout. In this performance one can really appreciate Blaser’s use of harmonics and deft handling of mutes. Ducret uses the occasional attachment (particularly effective is a gnarly fuzz) but many of the textural shifts stem from the handling of his instrument’s strings and fretboard. Opening with the title track, it’s quiet, almost tentative with the two seemingly feeling each other out. But they quickly find their mark and they’re off. Blaser does some remarkable muted work during this section as the two intertwine around each other.

“La Voie Grise” is a beautiful interlude with a bittersweet melody. It’s not quite three minutes long yet still a complete piece unto itself. It’s hard to tell if its fade is engineered or natural. The album closes with a more compact version of “L’Ombra Di Verdi” (5 minutes vs. 25 found on ABC, Vol. 1) and while not quite as satisfying as the trio version it’s a perfect way to close out this album.

For more information, visit samuelblaser.com

When many people are talking at once, it’s hard to be heard, even harder to make one’s point. Such is the challenge for large improvising ensembles. New releases show how the challenge was met in Canada, Norway and Finland.

Le Grand Groupe Régional D’Improvisation Libéré (GGRIL) is based in Rimouski, Québec, well off the urban grid inhabited by most big bands. These small-town Québécois have notably “big ears” and, of the groups reviewed here, show the most open-ended approach to improvisation. Plays Ingrid Laubrock interprets three of the German-born saxophonist’s pieces. “Silent Nights” blends acoustic and electric strings with percussion, suggesting a large factory in spasm, while “Igor’s Lament” opens with “Premium Processing Plee” – a series of cued hits, a chaotic group squall, then off into a limping waltz (every fourth bar is a beat short), ending with four horns howling like wolves. “Boitekonni” swings in 6/8, with gentle chorales and dynamic tenor saxophone solos by Per “Texas” Johannson and Kjetil Møster. “Teppen Dance” and “Bytta Bort Kua Fikk Fela Igjen”, which adds basses up front before busting out the funk, capped by “Byta Bort Kua Fikk Fela Igjen”, which adds tribal and disco touches to even fiercer funk figures.

The Espoo Big Band, under the baton of Finnish composer/arranger/guitarist Marzi Nyman, fêtes its home base on Espoo Suite. Of the albums under review, it hews closest to the classic Count Basie lineage in its juxtaposition of trumpet, trombone and saxophone sections, though the twin drumkits, electric bass, keyboard and guitars (one often played with a slide) lend it a more progressive aspect. Nyman’s charts have spry background figures behind the soloists (heard on “Quiet Flows the River”, “Moonshine Chase” and in the middle of “Finale”) and painterly touches to a Duke Ellington (as on “Quiet Flows…” and “Igor’s Lament”). There are also bits of techno, heavy metal, R&B, even Roma music. “Espoo Blues”, the ‘encore’ of this studio set, contains oddly accelerated phrases deftly executed by the soloists and the band.

For more information, visit circum-disc.com, odinrecords.com and galileo-mc.de.
His distinctive use of vamps and ostinatos has made him both influential (on musicians like Miles Davis, John Coltrane and Keith Jarrett) and a bête noire (literal meaning intended) for a certain kind of critic who can't understand jazz that's genuinely popular or genuinely original. Jamal may have also suffered for achieving a certain perfection in his '50s trio with bassist Israel Crosby and drummer Vernel Fournier.

This solo recording dates from 2017, when Jamal was already 87, but there's nothing to suggest decline in his skills as he explores a program including personal standbys, enchanted ballads and scattered originals, occasionally with his regular bassist James Cammack joining in. The music can pass for sweetly decorative, but it's also music by a man who would open a jazz club, in Chicago circa 1960, which didn't serve alcohol and was called the Athamba for that Andalusian encyclopedia of geometric pattern and infinite reflection, a temple of perfectly chiseled text. Sometimes the music doesn't seem strong on shape or drama, but Jamal is a master of a dense chromaticism overlaid on beautiful tunes and he shapes adjoining, shifting segments by drawing from that chromatic wealth, moving from overlays of exotic modes suddenly to reveal the original composer's particular and perfect harmonic sequence, as in "Poinciana", a tune with which Jamal has undoubtedly spent vastly more time than its composer, Nat Simon, who jotted it down on a restaurant table cloth and seems to have adapted it from a Cuban folk song. The same gifts are applied to repertoire like "So Rare" (Jimmy Dorsey), "I Should Care" (Axel Stordahl-Paul Weston-Sammy Cahn), "What's New" (Bob Haggart-Johnny Burke), "Spring Is Here" (Richard Rodgers-Lorenz Hart) and "Johnny Mandel's "Emily". A song so beautiful that Jamal barely deigns to exploit its melody.

There's a sense of reverence, of reflection, everywhere here. A well-known moment in Ken Burns' Jazz is when Duke Ellington, being interviewed at a piano and playing sporadically, remarks, "This isn't piano. This is dreaming." That's precisely what Jamal offers here.

For more information, visit ear-music.net
The Complete Morton Project
Andrew Oliver/David Horniblow (Lejazzetal)
by Scott Yanow

All over the world, although often below the radar of the jazz press, talented musicians have long been exploring vintage jazz from the 1920s. England has a particularly viable classic jazz scene, which includes pianist Andrew Oliver (originally from Portland, Oregon) and clarinetist Dave Horniblow. The talented pair have recorded together in several groups including The Dime Notes, The Vitality Five and Horniblow’s Hot 3.

Oliver and Horniblow love the music of Jelly Roll Morton, ‘jazz’ first great composer, arranger and pianist, who died 79 years ago this month. In 2018 they performed all 93 of Morton’s compositions as YouTube videos. Their single CD, The Complete Morton Project, unfortunately does not live up to its title but does contain 15 of Morton’s pieces.

The emphasis is on Morton’s lesser-known works, with only “Shreveport Stomp”, “Black Bottom Stomp” and “Mr. Jelly Lord” coming close to being standards. Most intriguing are two numbers never recorded by the composer. While “Croc-O-Dile Cradle” is very much in the tradition of his 1920s compositions, “Gan Jam” from around 1940 is quite modern, influenced by classical music and a bit eerie.

Oliver can sound close to Jelly Roll Morton but is generally creative within Morton’s style rather than closely copying what the pianist did on records. Horniblow, who is heard on bass clarinet on two numbers and bass saxophone during one other, plays clarinet very much in the 1920s style, hinting at Johnny Dodds, Omer Simeon and their contemporaries but mostly sounding like himself.

In addition to enjoying the frequently hot playing, a listen to The Complete Morton Project allows one to admire the wide range of Morton’s writing, from the futuristic one-chord piece “Jungle Blues” and lowdown “I Hate A Man Like You” (which Morton recorded with singer Lizzie Miles) to the virtuosic “Finger Buster” and exciting “Black Bottom Stomp”.

Now if only Oliver and Horniblow could be persuaded to record the other 78 Morton songs.

For more information, visit lejazzetal.com

and a half and made one album, MoodSwing, in 1994. There are pros and cons to all-star bands. Typically, they offer major solo firepower. Typically, they lack the cohesion and purpose of a working ensemble. But the group here, 26 years on, is still tight.

Round Again is an impeccably executed recording, especially so given the tricky program material. Redman takes some formidable solos, primarily on his second horn, soprano, and bassist Christian McBride and drummer Brian Blade, the latter who turns 50 this month, know countless ways to swing.

But it is a curious album. You ask yourself, “Why don’t I care more about this very nice record?” Maybe because it is only a very nice record. Maybe because of the tunes. There are seven well-crafted, forgettable originals, with contributions from each member of the quartet. This band could have eaten seven standards alive, but their own tunes are mostly like Redman’s “Undertow”: vaguely familiar melodies and erudite arrangements with fudgy, convoluted, precise unisons by Redman and pianist Brad Mehldau. Redman’s “Silly Little Love Song” is, unfortunately, just that. “Floppy Diss”, McBride’s kinky blues, is clever and cute. The best tune is the simplest and shortest. Blade’s ballad “Your Part to Play” is unfolded with sincerity by Redman on tenor.

The player who is least well served in this format is Mehldau. He usually sounds like he is in a box.

When they made MoodSwing 26 years ago, these guys were less sophisticated and much less famous but more likely to convey the exhilaration of discovery and the passion of inner necessity.

For more information, visit nonesuch.com

The eighth album by Gato Libre, since 2015 a trio consisting of trumpeter Natsuki Tamura (who turns 69 this month), Yasuko Kaneko on trombone and Satoko Fuji on accordion, is a minimal and delightful contrast for the patient charm of Tamura’s compositions. By turns mysterious and whimsical, improvisational elements bring out the rapport of the trio, one built on deep listening, while prewritten material exploits their ability to hone in on what is most essential.

In that respect, the album’s title (Japanese for “kitten”) gives some insight into the blend of mystique and playfulness one experiences in these eight feline-themed scenes. Each track, in fact, is named for a different kind of cat. On the one hand, we encounter programmatic gems like “Ieneko” (domesticated cat) and “Bakaneko” (silly cat), both of which sport a range of textures and emotions while exhibiting Tamura’s painterly brilliance, as well as the avant-gardism of his formative years. On the other hand, we join the “Noraneko” (stray cat) and the “Yamaneko” (wild cat) on their nocturnal adventures, rendered in exquisite reverberations to shine through, we can be sure that in the background. And because the recording is only subtly processed, allowing for instruments’ natural reverberations to shine through, we can be sure that every meow is heard.

For more information, visit liberecords.com

C. M. Musictrain (Revisited)
Carsten Meinert (Spectator-Stunt)
by Steven Loewy

This expanded reissue of Danish tenor saxophonist Carsten Meinert’s long out-of-print C. M. Musictrain album from 1969 comes as a welcome surprise. Barely remembered outside of Denmark, Meinert was an early adopter of some of the new waves from the ’60s, absorbing the influence of John Coltrane, as evidenced by Meinert’s full-throated rendition of “Naima” on his seminal To You album, released the year before. The CD edition includes photos from the original session, in which a total of 15 players participated and modest, though valuable, new liner notes from Ole Matthesius, who performed on the original album on Ampiano (electric piano), and, as producer of the reissue, enhanced the sound. The only person in the band who built a noteworthy international career was a young guitarist named Pierre Dørge, who went on to record dozens of albums as a leader, but for whom his contributions to C. M. Musictrain were so obscure that his role as a sideman is rarely, if ever, listed in his discographies.

The recording is made up of the original five tracks, including a 30-second snippet for “I’m Going to Valby by the Railroad Track”, plus three additional takes of minor interest. What distinguishes the album are the original compositions and arrangements by Meinert, whose writing revels in a stew of fusion, funk and avant garde saxophone, all with an almost danceable beat. As a result, the album is surprisingly accessible and although the sound is sometimes somewhat dated (largely due to the electric piano) it is nonetheless riveting and often exciting. To put the album in greater perspective, it was recorded around the same time as Miles Davis’ Bitches Brew and in some ways echoes its concept.

The catchy theme of the rhythmically powerful opener “San Sebastian” sets the tone, with lots of percussive support and strong keyboards, with Meinert soaring on his varitone-altered sax, a relic of the ’60s. It is not hard to consider the influences of not only Coltrane, but of Pharoah Sanders, Lonnie Liston Smith and others. “Before Sunrise” features an attractive and slow Sanders-like melody with an almost danceable beat. As a result, the album is surprisingly accessible and although the sound is sometimes somewhat dated (largely due to the electric piano) it is nonetheless riveting and often exciting. To put the album in greater perspective, it was recorded around the same time as Miles Davis’ Bitches Brew and in some ways echoes its concept.

The catchy theme of the rhythmically powerful opener “San Sebastian” sets the tone, with lots of percussive support and strong keyboards, with Meinert soaring on his varitone-altered sax, a relic of the ’60s. It is not hard to consider the influences of not only Coltrane, but of Pharoah Sanders, Lonnie Liston Smith and others. “Before Sunrise” features an attractive and slow Sanders-like melody with an almost danceable beat. As a result, the album is surprisingly accessible and although the sound is sometimes somewhat dated (largely due to the electric piano) it is nonetheless riveting and often exciting. To put the album in greater perspective, it was recorded around the same time as Miles Davis’ Bitches Brew and in some ways echoes its concept.

For more information, visit sundance.dk
This is Brian Landrus’ tenth album as a leader and marks quite a departure from his highly praised *Generations*, which was performed by a 25-piece orchestra. The Brooklyn-based multi-instrumentalist and composer specializes in low woodwind family, which makes him a much in-demand performer. Recorded on BlueLand, which Landrus founded some ten years ago, this CD goes back to a core quartet, which is augmented by the trumpet of Michael Rodriguez on a few pieces and a string quartet (violinists Sarah Caswell and Joyce Hammann, violist Lois Martin and cellist Jody Redhage-Ferber) arranged by Robert Livingstone Aldridge for about half of the 13 tunes, consisting of ten originals and three standards (Bronsilaw Kaper-Paul Francis Webster’s “Invitation” and Thelonious Monk’s “Round Midnight” and “Ruby My Dear”). Although the album conveys Landrus’ personal views on romance as gleaned from his own experiences, it provides for a varied and nuanced musical journey. The core quartet comprises Fred Hersch (piano), Drew Gress (bass) and Billy Hart (drums), all of whom require no further introduction. Hersch is a real asset with his subtle comping, graceful intros and exquisite solos. Gress is unfortunately penalized by a slightly off-balance sound and limited to a single solo outing, whereas Hart excels in subtleties and the capacity to adapt to and enrich every musical situation. As to the augmented quartet, the pleasant surprise is Rodriguez’ warm and supple trumpet sound and phrasing, of which it would have been pleasant hearing a bit more besides the brilliant solos in the opening “The Signs” and “J.J.”. The string quartet does not always mesh completely with the core quartet, but provides emphasis and depth besides dramatic intros, such as on the title track, “For Whom” and “The Second Time”. Caswell delivers a delightful solo on “Her Smile”. Landrus’ nimble baritone saxophone dominates the process, but it gets too close to the title, sometimes beingأد. The head “Round Midnight”, left hanging at the end without resolve, and an almost restrained reading of “For Whom”.

As noted, the program, while coherent, leaves ample room for variety: “The Signs” comes across like a postcard that could have been performed by Art Blakey and The Jazz Messengers in the ‘60s: “Clarity” is more of a ballad, well supported by the string quartet; “The Miss”, following Hersch’s exquisite overture, lands on a lightly bouncing waltz showcasing Hart’s nimble cymbal work; and “J.J.” delivers more evocative atmospheres. Last, but certainly not least, as both Landrus and Hersch wrap up the CD with a wonderful duo rendition of “Ruby My Dear”. There is much to listen to in Landrus’ most recent effort, and there is certainly more to come.

For more information, visit brianlandrus.com. Landrus will be discussing the album and performing solo Jul. 17th at 2 pm at youtu.be/G7Vt5vodamZI.

This vinyl-only release from the long-standing duo of multi-instrumentalist Michael Marcus (found here on clarinet) and trumpeter Ted Daniel comes from a July 2009 concert at Columbia University and features guest bassist and violinist Henry Grimes. As it turns out, this would be the last to be released during Grimes’ life; he passed away in April of 2020 from complications of COVID-19. It attests both to his still-underappreciated artistry and to a duo that should be more adequately documented.

There is no doubting the Daniel/Marcus chemistry, as can be felt when the openly modal improvisation “Reconciliation” eases its way into existence. The melodies liberally peppering the album also display a tightness and focus demonstrating the duo’s affinity, as does every diverse solo they play and every interaction in which they engage. Dig Daniel’s vast arsenal of articulations and the way he leaping from rhythm to rhythm. At the same time and a more fitting conclusion to the album is Marcus’ “Spiral Landscape” are also a wonder to behold, as is Daniel’s deliciously muted horn. Anchoring it all, from centerstage, is Grimes. As Marcus and Daniel navigate what multi-instrumentalist Cooper-Moore would call the neighborhood of history and influence, Grimes is right there with that stunning bass pizzicato and the timbrally complex arco, alternately crystalline and miles-deep, which travels all over the instrument with dexterity equaled only by invention. He is in his post-return prime on this date and lifts the group beyond itself as it creates a special kind of chemistry, as can be felt when the openly modal improvisation “Reconciliation” eases its way into existence.

Despite extraordinary playing throughout, including some delightfully humorous moments from Daniel, nothing prepares for the sublimated majesty and power of Daniel’s closer “Truth Telling”, as muted trumpet carries the gospel-soaked exhortation along, drenched deep in a blues that somehow seems ancient and comforting as it eases from the speakers. Grimes and Daniel emote as one instrument, each cry and moan somehow anguished and sage in equal measure, a thing of beauty whose rhythmic freedom and subtlety speaks to absolute mastery. While the trio gets down in the gutbucket at various points throughout the album, particularly in Daniel’s “Quiem”, this finale is one of the most trenchant, heartbreaking, uplifting and downright gorgeous pieces of music to grace these ears in some time and a more fitting conclusion to the album is difficult to imagine.

For more information, visit michaelmarcusmusic.com
Kurt Elling, 2020 Jazz Journalists Awards Best Vocalist winner, has long proved himself the thinking person’s jazz singer and poet/lyricist, combining intelligence and emotional accessibility in his work. His 2018 album *The Questions* tackled large social and political issues. *Secrets Are The Best Stories* takes that exploration further in an ambitious partnership and collaboration with Panamanian pianist/composer Danilo Pérez, whose music is found on several of the tracks; “Epilogue” the final piece, an evocative, soulful piano solo, smartly showcases his work. Bassist Clark Sommers, percussionist Rogério Boccato and drummer Johnathan Blake are joined on selected tracks by guitarist Chico Pinheiro, alto saxophonist Miguel Zenón and percussion master Román Díaz. *Secrets Are The Best Stories* is much more than the sum of its parts. This inspired voice of protest emphasizes the spoken word, mostly delivered as sprechgesang—an amalgam of plainchant, recitativo e parlando, demanding that close attention be paid. Each of the 11 tracks reflect the expressive compositions of Pérez as well as arrangements of Wayne Shorter, Jaco Pastorius, Vince Mendoza and others and with additional narrative input from a few other sources. From the outset, “The Fanfold Hawk (for Franz Wright)” to a Pastorius melody creates a sacred experience; with multi-tracked voices, Elling’s lyric is delivered like a hymn. Leading into track two, “A Certain Continuum” (Pastorius), Díaz’ percussion creates a primal, tribal experience. Two purely melodic works appear near the end of the album; “Rabo de Nube”, music and lyrics by Cuban artist Silvio Rodriguez, is sung by Elling in Spanish tinged with melancholy but still expressive of hope. It’s also the tune that demonstrates Elling’s rich baritone and vocal dynamism.

The clear standout of the album is “Beloved (for Toni Morrison)”, with brilliant full-ensemble playing and Elling intensively delivering a nuanced retelling of Morrison’s story through a narrative building to a stunning conclusion. Also significant is “Song of the Spiral Staircase” (Roy Webb) and end up on the iron lung. In the ’60-70s, LSD-inhaling jazzniks are making piles of money and in the ’80s in rehab complaining about gangsta rap. The common element is LiPuma’s sense of humor. Describing his childhood, he says: “My mother, bless her heart, could not carry a tune… and when she got a few bars into a song, apparently I told her, ‘That’s okay, Mommy, stop singing and I’ll go to sleep.’ After his father retired from bootlegging, Elling’s poetry forms the lyric to Lund’s title track “Northern Noir” is a deep walk through not only some notable film music but also songs that bridge the era (including The Thelonious Monk’s “Pannonica”) and originals, drawing every nuance from the period and the acoustics of the studio. The darkness at the heart of this genre is gorgeously portrayed through Blake’s expansive harmonies, stealth basslines and bedazzling passing tones, which blur harmonies much as the expansive harmonies, stealth basslines and bedazzling passing tones, which blur harmonies much as the shadows of the movies confound conception. Blake, he of the wide intergalactic gang and alternate use of space and choral clouds, loves the intimacy of duos. While he’s known for working with deeply expressive vocalists, for this outing his partner is Canadian tenor saxophonist (and film composer, not incidentally) Andrew Rathburn, whose instrumental voice is no less expressive.

Selections include powerful, perhaps definitive renditions of “Dr. Mabuse the Gambler” (Konrad Elfers), “The Spiral Staircase” (Roy Webb) and “A Streetcar Named Desire” (Alex North). David Elfers), “The Spiral Staircase” (Roy Webb) and “A Streetcar Named Desire” (Alex North). Alex North). David Rakison’s “Laur” is performed akin to a dream streamsoundtrack, designed to seduce and mesmerize, much like the film. And the adaptation of Bernard Herrmann’s “Vertigo” score, incorporating several themes, is initially played at tempo and true to the page, before taking the listener through a night journey.

The album both opens and closes with the stirring “Stay Awhile” (written by Abel Meeropol in 1938. Both versions capture the sad urgency built into its every fiber. How prescient a statement Blake and Rathburn emit (the recording was completed in 2018) as the nation is again embroiled in mass protests against racial injustice. And lynchings.

For more information, visit editionrecords.com and newvelle-records.com

An uncrowned gem in the music biography of the year, *The Ballad of Tommy LiPuma* is about record producer Tommy LiPuma (1936-2017) but is not a traditional biography—more compressed, more fun and less careerist. If biographies are beer then this is tequila. The man himself is mostly famous for having produced wildly popular jazz records in the late 20th Century. His style was unusual; he would remain on the same side of the glass as the musicians. The records he made this way were real commercial triumphs, but the highest highs of his production career are the lowest lows of the book; Natalie Cole, Paul McCartney, George Benson and Diana Krall, the artists that LiPuma won Grammys with, are great musicians but boring characters and Ben Sidran can’t wring much drama or humor out of the production process.

The real content of the book is its freewheeling stories of LiPuma’s personal life. The first of these begins when his father Sam moves from Sicily to America in search of the man who killed his father Giuseppe. He never succeeds. Instead he opens a barbershop in Cleveland and starts using hair tonic to make bootleg liquor. Soon he’s wrapped up in something called the Cleveland “Sugar Wars”, getting visits from the Feds. The book is filled with unexpected stories like this, of people going from the donkey trails of Sicily to the gangster wars of Cleveland, from the barbershop to the red carpet.

Throughout his storied career, the position of pianist Ran Blake, 2020 Jazz Journalists Awards Boston Jazz Hero Award winner, in the jazz pantheon has been singular, with one hand reaching into the well of modernism as a matter of course. But this isn’t “Third Stream” anything; the music stands alone, bathed in the richest blue-blacks and charcoal grays. It’s only fitting, then, that he’s a deep aficionado of all things Northern Noir, since the darkness at the heart of this genre is gorgeously portrayed through Blake’s expansive harmonies, stealth basslines and bedazzling passing tones, which blur harmonies much as the shadows of the movies confound conception. Blake, he of the wide intergalactic gang and alternate use of space and choral clouds, loves the intimacy of duos. While he’s known for working with deeply expressive vocalists, for this outing his partner is Canadian tenor saxophonist (and film composer, not incidentally) Andrew Rathburn, whose instrumental voice is no less expressive.

Selections include powerful, perhaps definitive renditions of “Dr. Mabuse the Gambler” (Konrad Elfers), “The Spiral Staircase” (Roy Webb) and “A Streetcar Named Desire” (Alex North). David Rakison’s “Laur” is performed akin to a dream streamsoundtrack, designed to seduce and mesmerize, much like the film. And the adaptation of Bernard Herrmann’s “Vertigo” score, incorporating several themes, is initially played at tempo and true to the page, before taking the listener through a night journey.

The album both opens and closes with the stirring “Stay Awhile” (written by Abel Meeropol in 1938. Both versions capture the sad urgency built into its every fiber. How prescient a statement Blake and Rathburn emit (the recording was completed in 2018) as the nation is again embroiled in mass protests against racial injustice. And lynchings.

For more information, visit bensidran.com
Swing is one of the building blocks of jazz, what sets it apart from other genres, especially with big band groups. As a result, big band music suffers a brand crisis as often feeling outdated. However, put the instrumentation in the hands of someone like trombonist Wycliffe Gordon, 2020 Jazz Journalists Awards Best Trombonist winner, and it feels as fresh as it ever has. On United In Swing: Wycliffe Gordon with the B# Big Band, Gordon and Co. brilliantly capture the fun of big-band music.

While the album does not bring anything new to big band repertoire, it’s a great example of the pure joy that big band music can bring. With the rhythmic and harmonic dexterity of the Australia-based B# Big Band behind him, Gordon’s rounded tone cuts right through the core of each and every tune. An early example is the second track, “In A Mellow Tone”, where the Duke Ellington-penned number showcases Gordon’s snap and snarl solo approach. At 2:04, Gordon begins his prologue of barks and growls and beautifully complements the ensemble’s interplay.

The group’s rendition of “Take the ‘A’ Train” further displays Gordon’s beautiful melodic demeanor; during his solo beginning at 1:56, he snaps, bristles and delights, displaying the sheer joy of this tried and trued jazz standard.

The rapport between Gordon and the ensemble is the clear dynamic on the album. The trombonist is most at home with the robust performance of vocalist Yvette Johansson. On “That Old Black Magic” the Harold Arlen-Johnny Mercer classic is invigorated by Johansson’s gorgeous burst of bombast and nuance; the result is pure bliss, simple and purposeful in its execution. The Ellington-penned “Cottontail” is Gordon at his most fun, lively and maintaining a joyful feel with the ensemble.

This album is a shining example of the charm big band music provides. While the band is dazzling, the added component of Gordon makes the release a heart-opening triumph that will not soon be forgotten.

For more information, visit bsharpbigband.com.au

---

**Orchard of Pomegranates Vocal Intensive II**

A weekend of vocal online workshops by a diverse group of internationally acclaimed artist-teachers

- for all levels, in a myriad of approaches - body-voice work and deep listening; VoiceNoise and experimental improvisation; Rhythmic approaches and a jazz masterclass

August 14-16 2020, 9:30am - 6:00pm

For information and registration: music@ayeletrose.com

---

**On Screen**

**Just One of Those Things**

Ella Fitzgerald (Eagle Rock Entertainment)

by Anna Steegmann

This gem of a film deserves a worldwide audience. Director Leslie Woodhead tells Ella Fitzgerald’s story through old black-and-white shots, images and music that evoke the feeling of the time, never before-seen performance footage, archival interviews as well as new ones with her drummer Gregg Field, pianist Kenny Barron (who played on her final album), Tony Bennett, Smokey Robinson, Hizhak Perelman, Fitzgerald’s son Ray Brown, Jr., Norma Miller and others. The film is visually and musically stunning and you’ll be longing for more after watching for 90 minutes.

In the opening scene, dancer Miller, age 98, recalls the Apollo Theater’s first amateur night in 1934. The audience laughed at Fitzgerald, a skinny 16-year-old in a dirty dress, when she came on stage. She had planned to perform a dance but changed her mind at the last minute. She never sung in public before yet won that night. Fitzgerald lost her mother at age 13 and spent time in a state reformatory school for young truants where she was beaten and kept in solitary confinement. She ran away to Harlem and was homeless for a while. Winning amateur night was her ticket to a new life. She started to sing with Chick Webb’s band in 1935. He was Harlem’s top bandleader at the time and became her mentor. Audiences loved her immediately. In 1938 she recorded “A-Tisket A-Tasket” with Webb’s orchestra.

The song became a blockbuster hit and reached #1 in the charts.

When Webb died at 34 Fitzgerald took over his band. Later she toured with Dizzy Gillespie and learned to scat improvise and use her voice like a bebop musician. She married bass player Ray Brown, adopted his son, divorced Brown but never stopped playing and touring with him.

Marilyn Monroe, a huge fan, helped her career by demanding that the prestigious Hollywood club Mocambo open its doors to Fitzgerald. The ‘50s brought her international acclaim. Her manager, Norman Granz, a righteous man and founder of Verve Records, was instrumental in her worldwide success, including her in his various Jazz At The Philharmonic tours; she performed on the world’s greatest concert stages and became globally synonymous with the Great American Songbook through her volumes (Cole Porter, Irving Berlin, the Gershwins, et al.) on Verve from 1956-64. As the most popular female jazz singer in the U.S. she sold over 40 million albums in her 60-year career and won 13 Grammy awards. She never complained about her punishing tour schedule and was happiest performing in front of people.

Fitzgerald (1917-96) never led a scandalous life. She did not fit traditional beauty standards. She excelled in multiple musical genres. Duke Ellington called her beyond category. This film shows you why.

For more information, visit ellafitzgeraldmovie.com. To watch this movie, visit watch.eventive.org/ellamovie.
Eponymous
Peter Evans Being & Becoming (More Is More)
Reality Check
Theo Iannotta (Posi-Tone)
The Concert: 12 Musings for Isabella
Jason Palmer (Giant Step Arts)
by John Sharpe

Although only 24, Chicago-born, New York-based vibraphonist Joel Ross is already towering heads. He won the Jazz Journalists Association Best Mallets Player 2020 award, although that may mean slightly less to him than the similarly affirmative signing to the Blue Note Records roster, which produced Kingmaker, the debut from his band Good Vibes last year. With his highly rhythmic approach allied to a precise focus on tone he’s inevitably in demand as a sideman too, vouched for by appearances alongside hometown talents drummer Makaya McCraven and trumpeter Marquis Hill. What’s refreshing is that he doesn’t limit himself, as shown by his participation in the three recordings at hand.

Out of left field is trumpeter Peter Evans’ Being & Becoming, by an acoustic jazz quartet completed by Ross and two other younger players from the New York scene, batucada extraordinaire and drummer Savannah Harris. Ross and Evans enjoy a predilection for both the insistently repeated motifs and sudden shifts of gear that pepper the trumpeter’s five originals. The ground tilts closer still to the tradition on The Concert by bassist Nick Jozwiak and drummer Kendrick Scott. Palmer’s inspiration for the dozen compositions on the double-disc set derives from a series of empty frames on display at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, the result of an audacious heist in 1990, which netted masterpieces by Rembrandt, Vermeer and Manet among others. His pieces reside in the modern mainstream, with nods to the hardbop vernacular among his involved unison themes and strings of subsequent solos. With selections hovering around the ten-minute median, there’s ample space for everyone to exhibit their wares. Ross gets to partake much of the time, either furnishing a lattice-like substructure with sparse accents or unfolding into longer features predicated on tension built and released. His spot on “Program for an Artistic Soiree (Degas)” provides one of the high points, as he dances a pas de deux with just bass at first, before easing into an outing full of characteristic snags and spurs. Then on “An Ancient Chinese Out”, a jittery feel encourages Ross to indulge in pugilistic interplay with Scott especially. While Palmer and Turner, like Scott and Perez a regular collaborator, share an unshowy yet delightful obsessions and one shared by Maret and Collin for jazz-rock fusion, with guest star Keith Richards channeling his inner Al Di Meola. Ha ha, no it isn’t. It’s a straight jazz album, with not a hint of “Jumpin’ Jack Flash”. And the guitarist is, once again, Frisell.

Ries has three daughters and they get three tunes. Ries’ wife, Stacey Shames, is a Juilliard-trained harp player and appears on two tracks. “Elisa’s Song” rivals “Naima” for tenderness and is so memorably haunting that film directors did perhaps give Ries the wherewithal to record a lovely album with myriad name players—in addition to Ries’ superb band, Schuller and pianist Matt Mitchell, Ross and two other younger players from the New York scene, bassist Edward Perez and drummer Kendrick Scott. Palmer’s inspiration for the dozen compositions on the double-disc set derives from a series of empty frames on display at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, the result of an audacious heist in 1990, which netted masterpieces by Rembrandt, Vermeer and Manet among others. His pieces reside in the modern mainstream, with nods to the hardbop vernacular among his involved unison themes and strings of subsequent solos. With selections hovering around the ten-minute median, there’s ample space for everyone to exhibit their wares. Ross gets to partake much of the time, either furnishing a lattice-like substructure with sparse accents or unfolding into longer features predicated on tension built and released. His spot on “Program for an Artistic Soiree (Degas)” provides one of the high points, as he dances a pas de deux with just bass at first, before easing into an outing full of characteristic snags and spurs. Then on “An Ancient Chinese Out”, a jittery feel encourages Ross to indulge in pugilistic interplay with Scott especially. While Palmer and Turner, like Scott and Perez a regular collaborator, share an unshowy yet delightful obsessions and one shared by Maret and Collin.

Ries explores his inner Al Di Meola. Ha ha, no it isn’t. It’s a straight jazz album, with not a hint of “Jumpin’ Jack Flash”. And the guitarist is, once again, Frisell.

For more information, visit peterevanstrumpet.com, posi-tone.com and giansteparts.org

Coincidences abound. Fact: yesterday, by chance I got to take in a screening of The Rolling Stones concerts at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, the result of an audacious heist in 1990, which netted masterpieces by Rembrandt, Vermeer and Manet among others. His pieces reside in the modern mainstream, with nods to the hardbop vernacular among his involved unison themes and strings of subsequent solos. With selections hovering around the ten-minute median, there’s ample space for everyone to exhibit their wares. Ross gets to partake much of the time, either furnishing a lattice-like substructure with sparse accents or unfolding into longer features predicated on tension built and released. His spot on “Program for an Artistic Soiree (Degas)” provides one of the high points, as he dances a pas de deux with just bass at first, before easing into an outing full of characteristic snags and spurs. Then on “An Ancient Chinese Out”, a jittery feel encourages Ross to indulge in pugilistic interplay with Scott especially. While Palmer and Turner, like Scott and Perez a regular collaborator, share an unshowy yet delightful obsessions and one shared by Maret and Collin.

Ries has three daughters and they get three tunes. Ries’ wife, Stacey Shames, is a Juilliard-trained harp player and appears on two tracks. “Elisa’s Song” rivals “Naima” for tenderness and is so memorably haunting that film directors did perhaps give Ries the wherewithal to record a lovely album with myriad name players—in addition to Ries’ superb band, Schuller and pianist Matt Mitchell, Ross and two other younger players from the New York scene, bassist Edward Perez and drummer Kendrick Scott. Palmer’s inspiration for the dozen compositions on the double-disc set derives from a series of empty frames on display at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, the result of an audacious heist in 1990, which netted masterpieces by Rembrandt, Vermeer and Manet among others. His pieces reside in the modern mainstream, with nods to the hardbop vernacular among his involved unison themes and strings of subsequent solos. With selections hovering around the ten-minute median, there’s ample space for everyone to exhibit their wares. Ross gets to partake much of the time, either furnishing a lattice-like substructure with sparse accents or unfolding into longer features predicated on tension built and released. His spot on “Program for an Artistic Soiree (Degas)” provides one of the high points, as he dances a pas de deux with just bass at first, before easing into an outing full of characteristic snags and spurs. Then on “An Ancient Chinese Out”, a jittery feel encourages Ross to indulge in pugilistic interplay with Scott especially. While Palmer and Turner, like Scott and Perez a regular collaborator, share an unshowy yet delightful obsessions and one shared by Maret and Collin.

Ries has three daughters and they get three tunes. Ries’ wife, Stacey Shames, is a Juilliard-trained harp player and appears on two tracks. “Elisa’s Song” rivals “Naima” for tenderness and is so memorably haunting that film directors did perhaps give Ries the wherewithal to record a lovely album with myriad name players—in addition to Ries’ superb band, Schuller and pianist Matt Mitchell, Ross and two other younger players from the New York scene, bassist Edward Perez and drummer Kendrick Scott. Palmer’s inspiration for the dozen compositions on the double-disc set derives from a series of empty frames on display at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, the result of an audacious heist in 1990, which netted masterpieces by Rembrandt, Vermeer and Manet among others. His pieces reside in the modern mainstream, with nods to the hardbop vernacular among his involved unison themes and strings of subsequent solos. With selections hovering around the ten-minute median, there’s ample space for everyone to exhibit their wares. Ross gets to partake much of the time, either furnishing a lattice-like substructure with sparse accents or unfolding into longer features predicated on tension built and released. His spot on “Program for an Artistic Soiree (Degas)” provides one of the high points, as he dances a pas de deux with just bass at first, before easing into an outing full of characteristic snags and spurs. Then on “An Ancient Chinese Out”, a jittery feel encourages Ross to indulge in pugilistic interplay with Scott especially. While Palmer and Turner, like Scott and Perez a regular collaborator, share an unshowy yet delightful obsessions and one shared by Maret and Collin.

Ries has three daughters and they get three tunes. Ries’ wife, Stacey Shames, is a Juilliard-trained harp player and appears on two tracks. “Elisa’s Song” rivals “Naima” for tenderness and is so memorably haunting that film directors did perhaps give Ries the wherewithal to record a lovely album with myriad name players—in addition to Ries’ superb band, Schuller and pianist Matt Mitchell, Ross and two other younger players from the New York scene, bassist Edward Perez and drummer Kendrick Scott. Palmer’s inspiration for the dozen compositions on the double-disc set derives from a series of empty frames on display at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, the result of an audacious heist in 1990, which netted masterpieces by Rembrandt, Vermeer and Manet among others. His pieces reside in the modern mainstream, with nods to the hardbop vernacular among his involved unison themes and strings of subsequent solos. With selections hovering around the ten-minute median, there’s ample space for everyone to exhibit their wares. Ross gets to partake much of the time, either furnishing a lattice-like substructure with sparse accents or unfolding into longer features predicated on tension built and released. His spot on “Program for an Artistic Soiree (Degas)” provides one of the high points, as he dances a pas de deux with just bass at first, before easing into an outing full of characteristic snags and spurs. Then on “An Ancient Chinese Out”, a jittery feel encourages Ross to indulge in pugilistic interplay with Scott especially. While Palmer and Turner, like Scott and Perez a regular collaborator, share an unshowy yet delightful obsessions and one shared by Maret and Collin.

Ries has three daughters and they get three tunes. Ries’ wife, Stacey Shames, is a Juilliard-trained harp player and appears on two tracks. “Elisa’s Song” rivals “Naima” for tenderness and is so memorably haunting that film directors did perhaps give Ries the wherewithal to record a lovely album with myriad name players—in addition to Ries’ superb band, Schuller and pianist Matt Mitchell, Ross and two other younger players from the New York scene, bassist Edward Perez and drummer Kendrick Scott. Palmer’s inspiration for the dozen compositions on the double-disc set derives from a series of empty frames on display at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, the result of an audacious heist in 1990, which netted masterpieces by Rembrandt, Vermeer and Manet among others. His pieces reside in the modern mainstream, with nods to the hardbop vernacular among his involved unison themes and strings of subsequent solos. With selections hovering around the ten-minute median, there’s ample space for everyone to exhibit their wares. Ross gets to partake much of the time, either furnishing a lattice-like substructure with sparse accents or unfolding into longer features predicated on tension built and released. His spot on “Program for an Artistic Soiree (Degas)” provides one of the high points, as he dances a pas de deux with just bass at first, before easing into an outing full of characteristic snags and spurs. Then on “An Ancient Chinese Out”, a jittery feel encourages Ross to indulge in pugilistic interplay with Scott especially. While Palmer and Turner, like Scott and Perez a regular collaborator, share an unshowy yet delightful obsessions and one shared by Maret and Collin.
A single descriptor for Newvelle’s fifth season of subscription-only LPs might be “crisp”, like the first taste of a dry martini. All six albums arrive in sleekly art-directed covers. The translucent 180-gram records seem almost futuristic. And then there’s the audiophile sound quality, which, even compared to other high-level production, captures in astonishing detail the roster of top-tier musicians populating the series. No common theme or style unites the albums, however, the clarity offered by Newvelle’s techniques lends itself to exploration of the subtler realms over excursions into the outer reaches, making for a trading, like on the snappy tune “The Hunt” and is equally adept at conveying nuanced emotional states as on the melancholic “Canons”, which marches forward at a somber pace while Staaf sculpts a poignant study in the interwoven threads of loss, beauty and regret. Book of Dreams, product of the Patrick Zimmerli Trio, is an evocative affair. Reedplayer Zimmerli’s aggressive style coupled with Kevin Hays’ insightful piano and Satoshi Takeishi’s expressionist percussion are displayed best on the album’s slower tempos. Percussion is famously difficult to record, but here Takeishi’s unique voice is revealed in exquisite detail, including elements often obscured, like the gentle overtones of cymbal work, the perfectly placed snare snap and the extended resonance of a bass drum reasserting the pulse. Life of the Party by OWL Trio concludes the season with a pleasurably old-school presentation accentuated by Kurt Elling’s unmistakable voice, his delivery and grain like a Bukowski poem. The title piece exhibits this in spades as the trio adroitly backs Elling’s reading of “The Guy Who Died” by Gregory Corso. The vocal pieces, however, are not all that define the album. The instrumental works provide a series of mellow constructions, including the aptly named “Melanchollie Willage”, on which Lage Lund’s cool, ever-lithe guitar lines blend seamlessly with saxophonist Will Vinson’s patient delivery.

Newvelle Season Five lives up to the elevated standards established in previous seasons. Every element of production is attended to from A to Z, aiding each of the estimable musicians in expressing the scope of their talents. Candy to the ears and sustenance for the mind, it deserves close attention.

For more information, visit newvelle-records.com

Your Gift To The Jazz Foundation Provides Emergency Support For Basic Needs To Our Beloved Community of Jazz and Blues Musicians.

It doesn’t seem like a fair fight, pitting four trombones against a single flute but if anyone could manage it, would be Frank Wess, one of the masters. He wrote two of the five pieces, the others being one by participating trombonist Henry Coker and a pair of standards. The trombone section is filled out by Bill Hughes, Benny Powell and Jimmy Cleveland, backed by pianist Rennell Bright, guitarist Freddie Green, bassist Eddie Jones and drummer Kenny Clarke. Wess, Coker, Powell, Green and Jones were all period players in Count Basie’s band.

Pianist Don Shirley was classically trained yet, given the racial politics of his era, couldn’t pursue a concertizing career, instead becoming a virtuosic jazz player with a slew of albums on Cadence from 1955-61, often in duos and trios (basist Richard Davis’ first recordings). This set, however, is a solo date with a program of standards plus “Russian Folk Song”, the latter a solo date with a program of standards comprising artists who led sessions in his era, couldn’t pursue a concertizing career, his life had its own tragedy. These three concert volumes represent his sole output as a leader, seven long tunes by the trumpeter essayed by an obscure band: Abdul Rahim Mustafa (trumpet), Dobbleke (tenor saxophone), Anthony Smith (piano), John Davis (guitar), Robert Bird (bass) and Jerry Griffin (percussion).