To paraphrase a koan, if summer came to the beach but there was no one there, would it have caused a suntan? Seriously—tragically—though, fall is upon us and New York City enters its seventh month of pandemic-related lockdown, with indoor live music a distant memory and changing regulations making its resumption a hazy vision into the future. And, if things weren’t bad enough, added to the health concerns, economic meltdowns and cultural malaise, we now fully enter presidential election season, where promise is everything and promises mean nothing. But as trumpeter Nicholas Payton (On The Cover) says, “What we do in this moment, in these next couple of months, these next few years, is going to be the determining factor on the next 50 years. So I think that it’s really incumbent upon us and what we bring forth. The choice is up to us.” Presidential elections are remarkably important in the best of times; with sickness, both bodily and spiritually, infecting our nation, the choices we make in November are even more significant than any in recent memory.

Maybe more jazz musicians should run for office. They know how to stretch a dime; understand the value of collaboration, of listening to what others have to say; are flexible within the moment; have a real grasp of history; come from disparate backgrounds; and have traveled the world, removing any nationalistic myopia from their vision. We could have done far worse than Dizzy Gillespie as president in 1964 and, frankly, anyone who has spent any time in a jazz group—putting aside ego for the greater good of music and reveling in the contributions of a kaleidoscopic populace—would be light years ahead of what we have now and, but for the grace of whatever you may believe in, could have for another four dark, dismal, divisive and death-ridden years.
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– Andrey Henkin, The New York City Jazz Record

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ERIC REED
For Such a Time As This

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When COVID-19 cleared out the city’s jazz venues, pianist/educator Barry Harris improvised, moving his Tuesday night midtown workshops online. Working from his home in Weehawken (once owned by Baronne “Nica” de Koenigswarter), he has held 12 workshops since the pandemic began, typically interacting with a dozen musicians and another hundred or so listening in, many overseas. On Aug. 1st, he began the session by showing how a whole-tone chord can resolve to three different diminished chords. As he explored different ideas, thinking out loud as his fingers, clearly visible in a separate display window, wandered across the keyboard, participants posted comments on the chat-line or called out suggestions. After arriving at an effective passage, he named several students to play it back to him, making corrections if he heard anything amiss. Though his left hand has slowed after a fall and he sometimes struggles to remember a song or record title, Harris (who turns 91 in December) has no trouble thinking in music or finding fresh insights into well-worn standard repertoire. When someone asked if a particular chord/ melody combination would work, he replied, “Of course, every note goes with everything.” Hearing a student’s uneven rendition of an example he prompted, “You gotta think of time all the time.” After working his ideas through several specific harmonic contexts, Harris ended the ambling yet lucid session with a look at tri-tone substitutions over “Sweet Georgia Brown”. —Tom Greenland

The format for Connection Works’ Me, Myself and Eye series had musicians performing solo among the paintings at 440Gallery. But that was the before-times. Now, the series has gone streaming and the participants provide their own inspiration. For Scott Robinson (Aug. 15th), that muse was the painter Richard Powers, whose sci-fi artwork has adorned many books and several of Robinson’s recent albums and shares with the multi-instrumentalist a homey futurism (Robinson plans a centennial celebration at Roulette in February, pandemic allowing). The stream originated from Robinson’s “temple of music”, the SciEnsonic Laboratory, and even more compelling than the paintings was the collection of instruments on display and in use, including Sun Ra’s bass marimba prominent in the background. To name everything polymath Robinson played would take up twice this column’s length but it ranged from the aforementioned bass marimba to a primitive tone generator to contrabass saxophone to organ to metal sheets to waterphone to theremin to percussion gourds and literally everything in between (one fears the sound if an earthquake ever hit his part of Teaneck). Despite the abstract nature of the artwork and Robinson’s movement among so many instruments a narrative flow was maintained and the experience became an immersive one, alternating between elegiac and apocalyptic. If, at the end of the 70 minutes, alien spaceships didn’t land on Robinson’s front lawn, then they don’t exist. —Andrey Henkin

The title of saxophonist/composer Adam Kolker’s new recording, Lost, comes from a composition by the legendary Wayne Shorter, an obvious master of thoughtful intention and extemporaneous expression. Kolker has sought to find a similar aesthetic in his own work and has achieved that on his new recording that finds him in the company of an ensemble of friends, making fantastic, explorative music without ego. The quartet of Kolker, Barth, Okehwo and Hart were able to play these pieces in performance and rehearsals leading to the recording date.

When frequenting Harlem’s jazz clubs to develop his character for Laurence Holder’s one-man Off-Broadway play Monk, actor/director Rome Neal fell in love with jazz jam sessions. Hoping to bring some of the magic down to Nuyorican Poets Café, where he runs the theater program, he started the monthly Banana Puddin’ Jazz Jam. To celebrate its 17th anniversary (Aug. 9th) Neal set the drama in cyberspace, emceeing from Bushwick, calling upon a roster of regular participants, 18 acts in all. There were the usual technical glitches: several performances suffered from disruptive echo effects and any time two musicians tried to sync up from disparate locations latency issues were inevitable. None of this damped the celebratory vibes, however. The roster, impressive for its talent and diversity, included seasoned artists like vocalist/tenor saxophonist Oscar Shorter’s “Adam’s Apple” on which he played; specially convened group (Mitchell playing his “Nonaah” with Ambrose Akinmusire, Junius Paul and Vincent Davis); or band with guests (the three McFerrin children singing their father’s “Sightless Bird”), thank-you speeches by each awardee; and a closing jam by most of the participants on “Lift Every Voice and Sing”. (AH)
With the pandemic all but eradicating opportunities to perform before live audiences in New York, Orrin Evans has taken matters into his own capable hands, instituting a series he’s dubbed Club Patio in his native Philadelphia: different bands under his leadership throwing down before a small group of socially distanced friends. Reconstituting the rhythm section of bassist Reid Andersen and drummer Nasheet Waits (colleagues in the bands The Bad Plus and Tarbab, respectively) that first came together two decades ago, the versatile pianist added saxophonist Immanuel Wilkins to the mix to deliver a fiery matinee (Aug. 9th). Playing an old Korg keyboard, which gave the quartet a tonal character recalling the sound of late ’60s Miles Davis Quintets, Evans opened the show with an ethereal prelude to his “When It Comes”. It built in intensity with serpentine drumming driving searing alto before warm bass brought things down for a soft landing. The set continued with Paul Bley’s “Awake Nite”, an earthy melody, which found Wilkins blowing brooding Ornette Coleman-ish lines over pulsating bass and dynamic brush work. Evans’ exotically infectious “For Miles” featured melodically soaring piano improvisation and solos by Reid and Waits hearkening to North and West Africa before Wilkins took off for the stratosphere. The pianist laid out for the alto saxophonist’s steeped-in-tradition reading of “Body And Soul” then returned, swinging Monk’s “Rhythm-A-Ning” to close the set. – Russ Musto

Jazz Standard couldn’t present the concert feting the 60th anniversary of Sketches of Spain (Aug. 6th) as an inhouse event, but via the wizardry of technology, the honor was realized “At Home”. Ryan Truesdell’s Gil Evans Project has been performing Evans’ revolutionary orchestration and compositions for the better part of a decade. When Truesdell takes on such projects he does so with near scientific focus, engaging in research of manuscript variations, rummaging files and lost recordings. For this performance of “Concerto de Aranjuez” (Joaquin Rodrigo, 1939), from the unforgettable recording by Miles Davis, Truesdell forged a version inclusive of Evans’ reworkings and perfections of the legendary score. The effect was one of brilliance, shimmer, an aerial swathe of sound. Regardless of the distance between members of the ensemble, the difficulty of which is made clear by the rubato sections, interconnectedness was unmistakable. Lead trumpeter Riley Mulherkar, founding member of The Westerlies and youth associate of Jazz at Lincoln Center, well demonstrated a mastery of the written parts as well as the aching sonic loneliness that was Davis’ trademark. Each sinewy, whipsey maneuver felt alive. Founding members of the Evans Project, bassist Jay Anderson and drummer Lewis Nash in the “roles” of Paul Chambers and Jimmy Cobb, respectively, shaded, colored, and slowly propelled this reverie, which breathed distinct awakenings into this reverie, which breathed distinct awakenings into an utter classic. – John Pietaro

Orrin Evans & Reid Andersen

Multi-talented Camille Thurman livestreamed a show at Smalls (Aug. 8th) that had the full range of her expansive abilities on display. Backed by drummer Darrell Green’s trio of Keith Brown (piano) and Thom DiCarlo (bass), Thurman kicked off blowing bold dark-toned tenor on a version of Cedar Walton’s “Holy Land”, which began with a rhapsodic piano intro. She switched to flute to play the melody of her “Claimin’ My Time” (a hard-hitting tribute to Congresswoman Maxine Waters), followed by a lyrical bass interlude “My Time” (a hard-hitting tribute to Congresswoman Maxine Waters) and a soaring bridge before warm bass brought things down for a soft landing. The set continued with Paul Bley’s “Awake Nite”, an earthy melody, which found Wilkins blowing brooding Ornette Coleman-ish lines over pulsating bass and dynamic brush work. Evans’ exotically infectious “For Miles” featured melodically soaring piano improvisation and solos by Reid and Waits hearkening to North and West Africa before Wilkins took off for the stratosphere. The pianist laid out for the alto saxophonist’s steeped-in-tradition reading of “Body And Soul” then returned, swinging Monk’s “Rhythm-A-Ning” to close the set. – Russ Musto

Flushing Town Hall (FTH, Aug. 12th), site of a monthly Jazz Jam, has quite the record of supporting the creative community residing in the area. One such member, flutist, saxophonist and journalist Carol Sudhalter, has organized many events in her adopted borough, the FTH Jams among them. Sudhalter’s regular quartet served as house band, which, pre-COVID 19, was the collaborative vehicle for the instrumentalists and vocalists filling the stately hall. Since April the series has been remote, allowing the locked-down regular opportunity to share their music with an audience broader than any Town Hall could hold. Keeping things welcoming, Sudhalter engaged participants in conversation before the 15 sets, starting with the quartet members. Pianist Joe Vincent Tranchina opened with a sweeping “Sunrise, Sunset”, followed by drummer Scott Neumann’s After Hours take on “When You’re Smiling” for which he pre-recorded vocals, bongos and percussion, partnering with tenor saxophonist Jonathan Moritz. Bassist Eric Lemon spoke of the Queens jazz heritage and played a solo “summoning” time and again. Thurman’s lovely voice was featured singing the alto before warm bass brought things down for a soft landing. The set continued with Paul Bley’s “Awake Nite”, an earthy melody, which found Wilkins blowing brooding Ornette Coleman-ish lines over pulsating bass and dynamic brush work. Evans’ exotically infectious “For Miles” featured melodically soaring piano improvisation and solos by Reid and Waits hearkening to North and West Africa before Wilkins took off for the stratosphere. The pianist laid out for the alto saxophonist’s steeped-in-tradition reading of “Body And Soul” then returned, swinging Monk’s “Rhythm-A-Ning” to close the set. – Russ Musto

The Detroit Jazz Festival has announced the 2020 virtual event lineup: live concerts will be streamed Sept. 4th-7th at all the festival social media channels and will include an opening night performance of an ensemble piece named “JUSTICE”, a tribute to the fight to end racism, the quest for equal rights and Civil Rights icon Rep. John Lewis; Pharoah Sanders; Robert Glasper; and a number of Detroit-based artists. For more information, visit detroitjazzfest.org.

“Milford Graves: A Mind-Body Deal”, an exhibition dedicated to the life and work of the drummer, is scheduled to be held virtually at Institute of Contemporary Art at University of Pennsylvania Sep. 25th – Jan. 24, 2021. For more information, visit icaplab.org/exhibitions/milford-graves-a-mind-body-deal.

The Louis Armstrong House Museum will host a virtual gala on Sep. 17th with Jason Moran, Catherine Russell, Bria Snodgrass and Director of Research Collections Ricky Ricard. For more information, visit louisarmstronghouse.org/gala.

As part of the ongoing centennial celebration of Charlie Parker, Hal Leonard will be publishing Charlie Parker The Complete Scores, note-for-note transcriptions of 40 performances for saxophones, trumpet, piano, bass and drums. For more information, visit halleonard.com/product/304598/charlie-parker-the-complete-scores.

Terence Blanchard will be given the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) Variety Artisan Award, “recognizing a distinguished creative who has excelled at their craft and made an outstanding contribution to cinema and entertainment” during this year’s festival on Sep. 15th, which will take place on all TIFF social media channels. For more information, visit tiff.net.

Roulette has announced its Resident and Commissioned artist for the 2020-2021 season: Sonya Blair and Matana Roberts. For more information, visit roulette.org.

Winners have been announced for the 2020 DCJazzPrix: Camilla George; DreamRoot; EJQ Band, Reis-Demuth-Wilgen; and Mike Casey. The groups will compete virtually Sept. 27th. For more information, visit dcjazzfest.org.

The second round of Jazz Coalition Commission Fund recipients have been named: Aaron Johnston, Allison Miller, Ari Brown, Arulan Durai, Ava Mendoza, Carla Bley, Carmen Staaf, Connie Han, Cygnus Aile, Darius Jones, Diego Urcola, E.J. Strickland, Edward Wilkerson, Jr., Eric Person, Eric Revis, Fabian Almazán, Fay Victor, George Schuller, Helen Sung, Immanuel Wilkins, JD Allen, Jorge Vijzel, Josh Sinton, Justin Brown, Justin Faulkner, Keyon Harrold, Lesedi Ntanse, Makaya McCraven, Marcus Finlayson, Tomas Fujiwara, Crystal Penalosa and Joel Ross have been selected for year-long residencies. Commissioned artists are: Leila Abu, Ganavya Doraiswamy, Darius Jones, Luisa Muhr, Teerapat Artikorn, Margaret Midon, Mark Wilson, Melanie Charles, Shelby, Maria Grand, Matt Wilson, Melanie Charles, Michael Formanek, Michael Mayo, Michelle Rosewoman, Milena Casado Faquet, Morgan Guerin, Nick Dunston, Sarah Sh-Sh-Sh-Sh-Sheboy, Arthur Blake, Tom Harrell, Wendy Eisenberg, Willem Deliuf and William Parker. For more information, visit jazzcoalition.org/commission-fund.

Submit news to info@nycjazzrecord.com
TNYCR: You were born in Paris and because of your touring and the nature of your career you can be based anywhere in the world. Why did you choose an American city, specifically Chicago?

MM: After I was born in Paris, my dad [jazz drummer Stephen McCraven] wanted me to grow up in America for the music, for his culture, the opportunities at the time, for him and for us. But now in my life, I kinda lived in multiple places. I moved to Chicago because of my wife. She got a job at Northwestern as a tenure-track position 10 years ago, so I embedded myself in the Chicago music community and it has become like family to me. At this point in time, we’re here, I don’t know what’s next but we’re here.

TNYCR: Do the social and racial issues in America inform your music?

MM: Absolutely. Maybe other people are different, but I can’t imagine it not. It definitely comes out in everything I do. I think when dealing with racial issues in America, we tend to just talk about America. America is a lot of world. But the liberation of oppressed people is a global discussion. That also becomes a big part of my music. Whether we’re talking about a variety of oppressed people and Black people, there are Black people all over the world in similar conditions. We have a special breed of violence here in America, which is scary, but these are global issues.

TNYCR: So, on the topic of jazz and gender, you have a number of women playing on your album. Did you make it a point to have women play on your album or were they organic collaborations?

MM: A little bit of both. It was definitely a conscious effort to reach out to a lot of women to work with. In general, and on this project particularly, it was something I’ve been thinking about and been in the larger conversations in jazz. I’ve been talking about doing some sort of thing with Brandee [Younger] and Tomeka [Reid] together for some years now. I’ve worked with both women in the past and have known them for quite a long time. It felt appropriate to make sure there is representation on the whole record. I would say it was quite organic yet there is an underlying effort to being, I hate to use the word, “inclusive”. Just do the work.

TNYCR: If you could predict the future of jazz in the next 10 to 20 years, where do you think it’s going?

MM: To the moon, baby!  

For more information, visit makayamccraven.com

Recommended Listening:
- Makaya McCraven—In The Moment (International Anthem, 2013)
- Makaya McCraven—Stay High (XL, 2019)
- Junius Paul—Ism (International Anthem, 2016-19)
- Antoine Berjeaut/Makaya McCraven—Moving Cities (I See Colors, 2017)
- Makaya McCraven—Universal Beings (International Anthem, 2017-18)
- Makaya McCraven—Gil Scott-Heron - We’re New Again: A Reimagining by Makaya McCraven (XL, 2019)
Stockholm-based Portuguese trumpeter Susana Santos Silva displays a relentlessly searching attitude and, as a result, has developed into one of the most daring European players, appearing with an increasingly starry circle of improvisers, including Fred Frith, Hamid Drake, Mat Maneri and Evan Parker. Though spending much of her time in free situations and collectives, she also leads the quintet Impermanence, which has just issued its second album.

Her love of music came from her grandfather, a marching band enthusiast, who taught Silva her first notes on the trumpet. Music school and college in Porto followed, first with classical, then later jazz studies, as well as further study in Germany and the Netherlands. But at the same time she got on-the-job training. “When I was 17 I joined the Orquestra Jazz de Matosinhos, which is a big band here in town.” It was there that her interest in jazz grew alongside an appreciation of the likes of Miles Davis, Clifford Brown and Freddie Hubbard. “I started to listen more and more and I discovered more things. It was like a very natural and slow process of falling in love with that music, only to figure out later on that I also wanted to move forward a bit on my own playing, maybe I didn’t have to exactly play what those folks played then.”

Her move into free improvisation was part of a natural evolution. “I was trying to figure out where was the truth for me in my own playing. Playing traditional music or when I played standards, it was super fun, but I never felt it was my own music. I just kept on exploring and trying to find things that really spoke with me. Then I discovered all kinds of musicians that play more freely, free jazz and even further away from that, totally improvised music. Somehow that is what made more sense to me, because then whatever came out it would be myself. And, of course, inside that playing are all the influences that I have since forever, all these trumpet players, all kinds of music I played and listened to. It really made sense to me. OK, I can do whatever I feel like and it will be right!”

She drew on that process of self-discovery during lockdown, which caught her away from Sweden but in the apartment she maintains in Porto, the outcome being the recording and digital self-release of an album of solo trumpet, The Same Is Always Different. “When I look out of my window it is always the same view I see every day, but if you sit and look outside there is always something new to discover.” On each track, Silva investigates a discrete sound world, exploiting myriad different techniques. Opener “The” is an astonishing nearly 20-minute circular breathed tour de force. “It’s a very minimalist in a way, but within that sound there are millions of things happening. I wanted to mirror my existence during this lockdown when we were stuck at home and every day was the same, but not really.”

She took a different approach for Life Is A Mystery on the Belgian Matière Mémoire label, which offers an almost psychedelic array of timbres. It’s part of a series of solo LPs by 20 different artists during 2020, with music on one side and artwork on the other. “It’s a super interesting thing that I was very happy to be invited to do, because most of the other musicians are maybe in the electronic world, as well as drones and noise sometimes. I also manipulated sounds on my computer. There’s some trumpet playing, there’s also some field recordings. That was also a lot of fun to do because it was something new for me that I didn’t do before.”

While much of Silva’s activity is as a free improviser, in a range of ad hoc and ongoing groupings, she also composes for her quintet Impermanence. “This is the only band I have that I actually write all the music that we play. Because for me it is really difficult to find the balance between what is written and the freedom that you give to the musicians and the improvisations. I’ve always been interested in trying to meld these two together in a way that you can’t really understand when one ends and the other begins.” The Ocean Inside A Stone sounds looser than the band’s eponymous debut, even though the personnel remain unchanged: Silva (trumpet, tin whistle, voice), João Pedro Brandão (alto saxophone, flute, piccolo), Hugo Raro (piano, synthesizer), Torbjörn Zetterberg (electric bass, voice, qraqeb) and Marcos Cavaleiro (drums). “From the first record to the second I tried to write even less, so the musicians are not so focused in the written music but they have space for improvisation.”

She also tweaked the instrumentation between records, seeking to emulate the input of sound artist Maïe Colbert on the first album. “I wanted to explore a little bit more this electronic world, but in a way without using computers, but use instruments that had that feature, like the electric bass with a bunch of pedals that Torbjörn uses, or the synthesizer together with the piano. So that was my idea so they could bring that characteristic to the music and we could go different places, instead of being completely acoustic.”

Coming up on Clean Feed Records is a release from another outfit to which Silva has contributed compositions, called Hearth, a collaborative project with Slovenian pianist Kaja Draksler, Danish saxophonist Mette Rasmussen and Argentinian saxophonist Ada Rave. “The music is pretty free, but we have concepts, some things that we worked out. Each one of us brought something to the table and we worked on that.”

While Silva was pleased to perform her first concerts in front of a live audience in Portugal in early August just days before talking, she still has regrets about an experience she missed out on as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. “I was going to play with Anthony Braxton in Lisbon and in Oslo. I was very happy to get the invitation of course. We were going to play trio with an accordion player from New Haven. It’s just very sad. So we will see if the future will bring it back.”

For more information, visit susanasantossilva.com

Recommended Listening:
- Susana Santos Silva—Devil’s Blues (Toap Music, 2010)
- Susana Santos Silva/Torbjörn Zetterberg—Almost Tomorrow (Clean Feed, 2012)
- Kaja Draksler/Susana Santos Silva—This Love (Clean Feed, 2015)
- Torbjörn Zetterberg & The Great Question—Live (Corbett vs. Dempsey, 2017)
- Susana Santos Silva—All The Rivers (Live at Pantanal Nacional) (Clean Feed, 2017)
- Susana Santos Silva—The Same Is Always Different (s/r, 2020)

“His natural swing and taste allow him to revisit well-throttled standards with gusto and originality… A welcome debut by an artist who definitely deserves wider exposure and appreciation…”

The New York City Jazz Record
Nicholas Payton
BLACK AMERICAN MUSIC
BY RUSS MUSTO

“About as cool as a Black man in America could be,” Nicholas Payton replies succinctly from his home in New Orleans when asked how he’s been doing since the COVID-19 pandemic has taken hold. Payton played his last gig before a live audience on Mar. 7th in Colorado Springs with his group The Light Beings and has had every gig scheduled for the remainder of the year cancelled. But that hasn’t prevented him from remaining productive. Since the lockdown began, he’s been streaming live performances from various NOLA locations as part of his Blue Note at Home weekly residency. And he’s released two new albums.

The first date, Quarantined with Nick (Paytone), an electronic outing featuring Payton on trumpet, keys, and bass with his trio of vocalist, looper, and beatmaker Sasha Masakowski and Cliff Hines on modular synthesizer, gives the date, in Payton’s words “a very hip-hop and deejay element.” He declares, “I think it speaks to the moment. It starts out with the uncertainty and angst around the shelter-in-place order that seemed to come out of nowhere and then about four tunes in it begins to warm up a little bit. But the idea behind that project was to produce an album that sounded like COVID, if that’s at all possible, and all the hysteria and politics surrounding it.” The second album, Maestro Rhythm King (Paytone), is a Quiet Storm-type solo effort on which he plays all the instruments and sings. He says, “It’s a vocal R&B album, so it imbues an overall warmer, more soulful feeling.”

Payton prefers to describe the art form in which he operates as Black American Music (BAM), eschewing the word jazz. He’s noted, it’s simply an acknowledgement of where the music comes from and not a pronouncement of who can and cannot play it. Growing up in New Orleans he was exposed to an expansive array of music, beginning in his own home. He says, “Music was always a part of the fabric of our household, not only because of my parents, who were both musicians [his father was the late great bassist-sousaphonist Walter Payton; his mother plays piano and sings] but obviously being in New Orleans, which is a cultural hotbed for so many great artists, who I admired and looked up to long before I made the decision to become a professional musician. These were just my elders and people who felt like family. So it was a resource.”

“As soon as I could crawl up on stuff I was playing music. I didn’t start formal music studies until I was about four and my first formal instrument was actually violin; not that many people know that. I started on Suzuki violin, but I really didn’t like that much, so I asked my father for a trumpet and for Christmas of my fourth year he bought me a pocket trumpet and, with the exception of maybe a year or so in my preteens, I’ve been playing it ever since.” Payton made his first “professional” gig at the age of nine. He remembers, “My father took me out with him to a Mardi Gras parade he was doing and asked me to bring my horn. It was with the Young Tuxedo Brass Band and it was under the leadership of the late great Herman Sherman and the guys let me sit in the whole parade and at the end of it they all chipped in a dollar a piece and gave me nine or ten dollars salary. I thought, I just had the time of my life for the last few hours and I got paid. So that made a lasting impression on me – how incredibly exhilarating it was and to actually be able to earn a living doing it.”

Payton studied music formally at McDonogh #15 Elementary School, an arts magnet school, where his father was the band director. “That was really a large part of how I became a multi-instrumentalist because my dad often stayed after school,” he recalls. “When classes were over I would hang with him and would pick up a lot of the instruments. After a while he noticed that I had developed a certain level of proficiency on many of them, so it became my job to tutor beginning students after school, which forced me to learn even more in depth.” When he was about 12 Payton started hanging out with Wynton Marsalis, getting lessons from him. He thinks it was probably through Wynton that the trumpeter’s father Ellis Marsalis first heard about him, which led to his cameo appearance on the pianist’s A Night At Snug Harbor, New Orleans (Somethin’ Else) album, at the age of 15.

Following his introduction to the international scene touring with master Clark Terry’s band, Payton’s first two high profile tenures were with pianist Marcus Roberts, the next with master drummer Elvin Jones. He recalls the enormous differences between the two: “Marcus was just beginning to leave Wynton’s group, so I went with him in the summer of 1990. He was fresh off doing that album Deep In The Shed where he had all these long-form, through-composed things with three horns and because he was blind there was no written music at that time. We would learn parts from him playing the piano, by ear... And he was very specific in terms of how he wanted every note played; he would hum the inflections—‘bend a little bit here’—everything had to just be so.”

“Elvin’s thing was the other end of the discipline spectrum, just completely loose. And at that point I had never worked for a leader that commanded so much intensity from you, song after song, night after night. He would play one song that might last 40 minutes to an hour. He’s the only bandleader I’ve ever worked with who...”

Payton’s vision has steadily evolved through the years into something uniquely his own. He asserts, “Basically my concept for making an album these days comes from my compositional process since 2002, which is when I say I stopped formally writing songs and let songs write themselves. It was this idea that when I have an inspiration, or when I hear a melody, or when I hear a groove, or I hear a baseline or set of chords, I’ll go to a recorder and sing that idea, or play that idea, or speak that idea into the recorder. As you can imagine that over the past almost 18 years I have quite a Rolodex file of songs and ideas. So when I go to do an album I go to my reservoir and pick which ideas that I feel fit the project.”

The concept has also inspired his live performances, as can be heard on his Relaxin’ With Nick (Smoke Sessions) album, recorded during an engagement at Smoke with bassist Peter Washington and drummer Kenny Washington. He says, “We explore a lot of different grooves on the record. I’m particularly proud of the fact of me being able to get Kenny Washington compliant with me playing Rhodes and electronic instruments, which is not something that he’s done a hell of a lot of, if at all. I might be the first person with who’s played over samples and loops and various things like that.”

Payton’s methodology is perhaps most evident on his Afro-Caribbean Mixtape (Paytone) album. “I called it that because it was a mixtape in the sense of the old days of the mixtape where we would put some of our favorite ideas or songs and create this musical collage. So I went through my phone and picked the beats or the phrases for tunes or motif ideas that I felt would work best. But I also always had the idea that I wanted to weave into that collage Black voices of intellectuals. People like my good friend Dr. Greg Carr. Dizzy Gillespie is heard on the album, Miles Davis and Max Roach, who’s been a big inspiration to me in terms of BAM... With these voices I was able to create musical works that spoke to the tenor of the philosophical and social ideas of Black Liberation that I had previously been espousing only in my literary work.”

Payton’s political writing may have engendered more than a bit of controversy, but current events might be said to have vindicated his views. He declares, “We’re at a crossroads. We have a chance and a chance I believe to really make some fundamental and foundational changes, not only in this country, but also in the world. What we do in this moment, in these next couple of months, these next few years, is going to be the determining factor on the next 50 years. So I think that it’s really incumbent upon us and what we bring forth. The choice is up to us.”

For more information, visit nicholaspayton.com

Recommended Listening:
• Nicholas Payton/Wessell Anderson—New Orleans Collective (Paddle Wheel-Evidence, 1992)
• Nicholas Payton—Gambo Nouveau (Verve, 1995)
• Christian McBride/Nicholas Payton/Mark Whitfield—Fingerpainting (The Music of Herbie Hancock) (Verve, 1997)
• SFJAZZ Collective—Live 2005 (2nd Annual Concert Tour) (SFJAZZ, 2005)
• Nicholas Payton—Afro-Caribbean Mixtape (Paytone, 2016)
• Nicholas Payton—Relassin’ With Nick (Smoke Sessions, 2019)
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Guitarist Sonny Greenwich is among the pantheon of jazz players known and respected, almost revered, by fellow artists and serious listeners, but barely known to a larger audience. Now 84, Greenwich, it is true, never sought the spotlight and, except for brief periods, plied his trade in his native Canada. Most of his recorded output has been for small independent Canadian labels with little distribution outside of that country, including his own Kleo Records.

One major exception has brought the guitarist’s unique style to jazz fans worldwide: the new Mosaic boxed set of saxophonist Hank Mobley’s Blue Note 1963-70 recordings contains several pieces with Greenwich on one session, Third Season from 1967. “I was in town working with John Handy at the time and Horace Silver and Lee Morgan both recommended me to Hank Mobley for this recording,” Greenwich recalls about how he happened to be on the date.

The notes from the set add: “The seventh voice on most tracks is Canadian guitar legend Sonny Greenwich, in his only visit to Rudy Van Gelder’s or any other US recording studio. Greenwich...adds a venturesome concept that leaves this listener wishing he had found the opportunity to bond with other Blue Note artists such as Larry Young and Grant Green.

Also released this year is an in-depth 322-page biography of Greenwich by respected Canadian journalist Mark Miller: Stars and Strings, sure to be the go-to source for everything Greenwich. Miller has written several long-form pieces over the years on go-to source for everything Greenwich. Miller has written several long-form pieces over the years on
greenwich and, incidentally, shines a light on the history of Blacks in southern Ontario.

Born in Hamilton, Ontario in 1936 and raised in Toronto, Greenwich, like many other Black musicians, came up playing in R&B bands in the late ‘50s. By 1965 he was on the North American jazz circuit, accepted and respected by fellow artists on both sides of the border. He played in New York at the Village Gate with saxophonist Charles Lloyd in 1963 and for several months on both coasts in 1966-67 with Handy, culminating in a Columbia recording, Spirituals to Swing. He led his own groups in New York as well and performed at the Half Note, Village Vanguard and other clubs, in the same period as the Blue Note artists.

After working with Miles Davis in Toronto around 1969, Greenwich came close to joining him, he confirms.

Greenwich’s talent was slowly recognized by critics and musicians. Fellow guitarist Barney Kessel wrote in The History of the Guitar in Jazz, “There is a deep sincerity in Sonny’s music...and I consider him a rare kind of talent.” In 1971, Mike Bloomfield in Guitar Player magazine said, “...dig this Sonny cat. He’s the Coltrane of guitar players.”

Greenwich claims more of a spiritual connection to Black jazz greats, saying “I was influenced by Paul Klee’s art, by Cubism. I looked at the guitar frets as cubes. Since with me. I was influenced by Paul Klee’s art, by
Vacation—and being mysterious is central to his persona: “I have a spiritual, metaphysical connection to my music, which I try to tell people about. That’s the basis of my playing, of my music. I was interested in painting and in philosophy before I started playing. Then I turned out to be a musician and those things stayed with me. I was influenced by Paul Klee’s art, by Cubism. I looked at the guitar frets as cubes. Since
Hardbop era, Brown did not record mainly for the legendary Blue Note and Prestige. By the summer of 1954 he had joined drummer Max Roach to co-lead what was arguably hardbop’s greatest band: the Clifford Brown-Max Roach Quintet. The band featured the piano and spectacular arranging talents of Richie Powell (Bud’s younger brother), tenor saxophone of Harold Land (replaced by Sonny Rollins in 1955) and bassist George Morrow.

The Brown-Roach Quintet signed with EmArcy, the jazz label of Mercury Records, where producer Bob Shad had the money, clout and backing of a major label and the freedom to record its popular stars in jazz settings. So we have Shad and EmArcy to thank for Brown’s memorable appearances on albums by singers Sarah Vaughan, Dinah Washington and Helen Merrill, as well as Clifford Brown With Strings, recordings that we would never have had from the small New York independents like Blue Note and Prestige.

“By 1955...Brown had become the most applauded young trumpeter in jazz,” writes Richard Gribble in The New Yorker. “He had color and fire and great forward motion. His solos in outline resembled [Fats] Navarro’s, but they were delivered with greater intensity...Brown raced and swam around his horn, as if he had intimations of his limited time and had to get as much said as possible.”

However, unlike many leading lights of the hardbop era, Brown did not record mainly for the legendary independents Blue Note and Prestige. By the summer of 1954 he had joined drummer Max Roach to co-lead what was arguably hardbop’s greatest band: the Clifford Brown-Max Roach Quintet. The band featured the piano and spectacular arranging talents of Richie Powell (Bud’s younger brother), tenor saxophone of Harold Land (replaced by Sonny Rollins in 1955) and bassist George Morrow.

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(continued on page 13)
Trouble in the East
By Michael Cobb

Founded in late 2015, Trouble in the East Records is a musician-run label based in Berlin, Germany. The name is in jest to their former East Berlin origins and in earnest to the composition “Trouble in the East” by Ornette Coleman from his 1969 album Crisis. The concept was born out of a desire for independence as well as creating a platform to share with like-minded colleagues and friends.

When asked what is special about the label, guitarist Alberto Cavenati explains, “We did not have a detailed operational plan when we started five years ago, but we knew that we did not want to limit ourselves and target a specific style. Instead of looking for anything in particular, we wait for something surprising and fresh. We work a lot with like-minded friends and colleagues, so in our catalogue you will find a lot of Berlin improvisers and composers all coming from jazz, free jazz, or improvisational music. But we want to keep it open and maintain a balance between identity and diversity.”

There are only three people running operations: trombone player Gerhard Gschlößl, drummer Sunk Pöschl and Cavenati, who also play together as a trio. Gschlößl and Cavenati had been discussing starting a label and decided to go for it when they put out their first record as a trio, which became the first release on the label. Their initial intention was to be able to publish work quickly and independently with complete control of every aspect related to the manufacture of releases.

As far as how being a musician-run label affects operations, Cavenati says, “Musician-run labels are becoming the standard. We don’t have any business goals and we don’t make any money with the label. You can think of it more like a platform.”

“We don’t have obligations, we don’t have to release a certain number of records and we do what we like. The downside is that you have to learn a lot of things and it’s a lot of work, from the website to taking care of the promotional side, shipping the items and so on and so forth, all things we did not have prior experience with. We are still learning and slowly getting better and more confident.”

Known for having a wide spectrum of styles where improvisation is a main feature, the jazz scene in East Berlin is a place where, “you are going to find musicians who are comfortable crossing between more radical ‘free’ improvisation settings and situations where composition of some sort plays a role. On the other hand, others adhere strictly to a distinctive aesthetic. Sometimes they mix a little bit, sometimes they don’t so much,” Cavenati says.

“Getting back to the label, we tend to like overlapping styles, provided that it results in an individual perspective on music by the artist. In general, there is still a lot of music in Berlin, from Echtzeitmusik to postbop and everything in between, and there is good communication between generations, which I think is really important. The community is getting bigger and bigger with a lot of musicians moving here from all over the world.”

Regarding how Coleman and free jazz influence the label, Cavenati says, “Gerhard wanted the label name to refer to something specifically musical or to some of the legends of improvised music and our heroes. It didn’t have to be Ornette, but since he had passed just a few days before we were discussing the name, we wanted to pay homage to him. We found that ‘Trouble in the East’ served the purpose being descriptive of our experience, since we live in the former East Berlin, while also being sort of an inside joke as well as a declaration of love and an homage. Ornette has been a major influence for generations of musicians; he is one of the giants.”

“As to how Germans approach jazz, Cavenati states, “I am not German, I am Italian, and if you asked me if there is a particular Italian way to play jazz I would say no...but in Germany, I think that there are some incredibly original musicians who express their own sensibility as a result of the environment they grew up in and in many cases distanced themselves from the American jazz continuum. Improvised music has always been first and foremost social music [that was Miles Davis’ definition of jazz] so it must be influenced by the social environment where it is conceived. In this sense, all music is local and if the community of musicians is big enough and active enough that it results in people influencing each other, I think we can talk of a Berlin sound.”

In regards to how the pandemic has changed things, Cavenati says, “The pandemic changed and is still changing a lot of things in a very dramatic way. The music community was hit like everybody else and the dramatic consequences have been thoroughly examined and discussed.” He continues, “One positive

(Continued on Page 13)
Trumpeter Eddie Gale, who had mid ’60s credits under Sun Ra, Larry Young and Cecil Taylor but was better known for his own albums, died Jul. 10th at 78.

Gale was born Aug. 15th, 1941 and raised in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn. While he studied with Kenny Dorham, during a 2003 interview for this gazette by Laurence Donohue-Greene, Gale additionally credited as influences Clifford Brown (“one of the strongest lyrical trumpeters”), Miles Davis (“Miles was sharp and set the trend”), Dizzy Gillespie (“strength to stay upstairs”), Webster Young (“with him and Miles together, you didn’t know who was who”) and Clark Terry.

Early jobs were quite broad and equally informative: membership in the Sun Ra Arkestra (appearing on the 1962 El Saturn album Secrets Of The Sun) and work with Cecil Taylor (Unit Structures, Blue Note, 1966) and Larry Young (Of Love and Peace, Blue Note, 1966). Presumably the latter two credits got him noticed at the label because a couple of years later Gale made his leader debut and follow-up for the imprint, Ghetto Music (a quintet plus vocal choir set) and Black Rhythm Happening (with fellow Taylor album Jimmy Lyons on alto saxophone and Elvin Jones on drums, respectively).

After Blue Note was bought and no more records were forthcoming, Gale moved west, first as an Artist-in-Residence at Stanford University and then permanently in San Jose. A rare album from that early period was Eddie Gale And The California Movement’s “To Be A Slave” (“African Sunshine”), a 45 rpm 7” released by Gross Records. Shortly thereafter, Gale rejoined the Sun Ra Arkestra, heard on the albums Languidity (Philly Jazz, 1978), On Jupiter (El Saturn, 1979) and The Other Side Of The Sun (Sweet Earth, 1978-9). Speaking of Sun Ra to Donohoue-Greene, Gale said, “We had a father-son relationship. I used to be very out and traveling…My goal is to play and reach people.”

Almost two decades after his Blue Note dates, Gale started working regularly as a leader once more. He released albums on his own Roof Top Records, a quintet date (featuring pianist Larry Willis) on Mapleshade, sessions for Life Force, Edgetone, Crystal Bird and Top Music International, most notably a 1977 live recording from New York City backed by the Billy Taylor Trio. Hirotta died Jul. 19th at 56.

Cleveland Eaton (Aug. 31st, 1939 – Jul. 5th, 2020) The bassist’s own handful of albums veered more toward soul-jazz and jazz-funk, an outgrowth of his tenure in pianist Ramsey Lewis’ groups from 1964-74, and he also recorded under Bunky Green, Sonny Cox, John Klemmer, Gene Ammons, Sonny Stitt, Teddy Carson, Count Basie and many more. Eaton died Jul. 5th at 80.

Paul Faulise (Apr. 25th, 1932 – Jul. 5th, 2020) The trombonist was active from the ’60s into the new millennium with hundreds of credits in big band recordings by Dizzy Gillespie, Cannonball Adderley, Oliver Nelson, Charles Mingus, Tony Bennett, Milt Jackson, Urbie Green, Quincy Jones, J.J. Johnson, Maynard Ferguson, Paul Desmond, Jimmy McGriff, Johnny Griffin, Don Sebesky, Tony Motolla, Mike Gibbs, Hank Crawford, Eddie Gale, Joe Farrell, Gato Barbieri, Stanley Turrentine, Bob James, John Pizzarelli and many others. Faulise died Jul. 5th at 88.

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Cor Fuhler (Jul. 3rd, 1964 – Jul. 19th, 2020) The Dutch multi-instrumentalist improviser and sound artist collaborated with Palinkcs, Maarten van Alphen, Max Altman, Jack Deiéval, then returned to the US at the end of the ’90s, making albums with Gerry Mulligan, Zoot Sims and Buddy Bregman. In 1957 she joined up with Dave Lambert and Jon Hendricks to form Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, active until 1962 (other singers took Ross’ spot until 1964) and releasing albums on ABC-Paramount, Roulette (a collaboration with Count Basie) and Columbia. On her own she released albums for Transatlantic, Ember, SABA, Fontana, Savoy, Prestige, Decca, DRC, Consolidated Artists Productions and other labels into the new millennium. Ross died Jul. 21st at 89. [See In Memoriam spread on pgs. 14-15.]


Donald E. McCaslin (Dec. 13th, 1926 – Jul. 16th, 2020) The pianist and vibraphonist was a member of a 70's band that was a stalwart of the Santa Cruz jazz scene (and whose most famous alumnus is Russell Ferrante), and much later The Incredible Jazz Geezers and was a mentor to many local musicians, especially his accomplished saxophonist son Donny. McCaslin died Jul. 16th at 93.

Dave Mackay (Mar. 24th, 1932 – Jul. 30th, 2020) The pianist had releases on Impulse!, Studio 7 and Discovery between the late ’60s-early ’90s and sideman credits under Chet Baker, Kai Winding, Don Ellis, Emil Richards, Larry Carlton and others to go along with myriad pop and rock jobs. Porcaro died Jul. 6th at 90.

Joe Porcaro (Apr. 29th, 1930 – Jul. 6th, 2020) The drummer was head of a musical family (keyboard player Steve, late bassist Mike and late drummer Jeff, all members of Toto, on whose hit “Africa” the older Porcaro played marimba and percussion) and had numerous credits starting in the late ’50s with Tommy Dorsey, Bobby Hackett, Mike Maitre, Emil Richards, Don Ellis, Dave Mackay, Boots Randolph, Lalo Schifrin, Gerry Mulligan, Louise Bellson, John Klemmer, Gap Mangione, Stan Getz, Milt Jackson, Pete Christlieb, Larry Carlton and others to go along with myriad pop and rock jobs. Porcaro died Jul. 6th at 90.

Annie Ross (Jul. 25th, 1930 – Jul. 31st, 2020) The vocalist (née Annabelle Short Lynch) was a child star in ’40s Hollywood (continuing to act in film and TV from the mid ’50s-mid ’60s in vehicles as disparate as Send in the Girls, Superman III, Thro' Mammas From The Train, Basket Case II and III and Short Cuts), returned to Europe (she was born in the UK) at 20 where she took up singing professionally, recording with Tony Bremble and Jack Deiéval, then returned to the US at the end of the ’90s, making albums with Gerry Mulligan, Zoot Sims and Buddy Bregman. In 1957 she joined up with Dave Lambert and Jon Hendricks to form Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, active until 1962 (other singers took Ross’ spot until 1964) and releasing albums on ABC-Paramount, Roulette (a collaboration with Count Basie) and Columbia. On her own she released albums for Transatlantic, Ember, SABA, Fontana, Savoy, Prestige, Decca, DRC, Consolidated Artists Productions and other labels into the new millennium. Ross died Jul. 21st at 89. [See In Memoriam spread on pgs. 14-15.]

HeLEN JONES WOODS (1923 – Jul. 25th, 2020) The trombonist was an original member of the groundbreaking International Sweethearts of Rhythm, founded and led by her adopted father Dr. Laurence C. Jones, an integrated female band, which worked around the country in the 40s, often coming up against the racism endemic to the period (she can be heard on an eponymous compilation of recordings from 1945-46 released by Rosetta in 1984), but who quit music shortly afterward the group disbanded. Woods died Jul. 25th at 96 of complications from COVID-19. ❧
I didn’t read music. I put together a way of playing based on what I saw on the frets of the guitar. I tried to form a new way of playing the guitar; I chose to do it by creating all these diagrams and base my music on that. It is not that I have based my music on what Coltrane was doing. He had his own way. I have listened to Coltrane. But my influence comes from Paul Klee. I just put a clip of a song I wrote, ‘Epiphany’, on YouTube, from these same diagrams...that’s what I’m doing. I sit down at the piano, I might play a chord, seeing the diagram on the chord that I play and I can build a composition from that. I see the universe in what I am playing in the composition of the universe, in terms of nature, vibrations, which are the basis of everything, the way they will set themselves up in a form... When I played with Sun Ra in Montréal, I fit right in because of my concept. I am really not avant garde, though. I was just doing a different kind of thing than the normal thing... I can free myself from the guitar. I felt that way about Bird too. He could separate himself from the saxophone and play himself. That is the first thing I saw, that you could not just play the guitar to express yourself musically. Use it as your expression. The mysterious part of me is not being able to explain it.”

For more information, visit sonnygreenwich.com

Recommended Listening:
• Hank Mobley — Third Season (Blue Note, 1967)
• Sonny Greenwich/Don Thompson — Love Song For A Virgo Lady/The Old Man and The Child (Sackville, 1969-70)
• Sonny Greenwich — Evol-ution, Love’s Reverse (PM, 1978)

According to Roach, Brown always credited Navarro as an influence in interviews. Like Navarro, Brown articulated individual notes by tonguing rather than slurring. “It’s really hard to play the trumpet and tongue that much,” says Wynton Marsalis. “That was the way he phrased. If you play a Charlie Parker solo on the trumpet, it sounds like Clifford Brown. He had them fingers too.” Brown was also a complete trumpeter, as formidable on ballads as on uptempo bebop. Golson, who played with him in the Quincy Jones Big Band, said of his ballad style: “He could change from a meek lamb, musically, into a fierce tiger. He could play the bottom, the top, loud, soft; he was playing the whole instrument.”

Trumpeter Freddie Hendrix, who is producing a virtual Festival of New Trumpet Music (FONT) this month to honor Brown’s 90th anniversary, summed up his legacy: “He was a gentle spirit, immersed and committed to the pursuit of excellence. Every solo he plays is a masterpiece and a world of knowledge to analyze and learn from. Everything that he represented as a human being is the example that we all must remember to follow.”

A tribute to Brown led by Freddie Hendrix and with Dave Douglas will take place online on Sep. 10th as part of the Festival on New Trumpet Music. For more information, visit fontmusic.org/festival2020.

Recommended Listening:
• Clifford Brown — Memorial Album [New Faces – New Sounds / New Star On The Horizon] (Blue Note, 1953)
• Art Blakey Quintet — A Night At Birdland, Vol. 1-3 (Blue Note, 1954)
• Max Roach/Clifford Brown — Brown and Roach Incorporated (EmArcy, 1954)
• Clifford Brown/Max Roach Quintet — Clifford Brown and Max Roach (EmArcy, 1954-55)
• Clifford Brown — Clifford Brown with Strings (EmArcy, 1955)
• Sonny Rollins — Plus 4 (Prestige, 1956)

thing that I witnessed has been the support of customers and music lovers who helped musicians and some venues through fundraising. Also, virtual and live stream concerts helped. It is a strange feeling though. Right now in Berlin small concerts and short sets are allowed with a restricted number of people. We hope not to fall back again and to get past this situation.”

As to the future of live music in Berlin, Cavenati thinks it’s unpredictable. “We need live music for certain. In the last few years there has been an expansion of festivals and venues, but it is hard to say if it will keep on growing or will get to a point of saturation. Should this be the case, I hope musicians will find a way outside of the usual institutions.”

For more information, visit troubleintheeast-records.com
Annie Ross was a wonderful lady and a fantastic musician. She is up in Heaven singing with Jon Hendricks and Dave Lambert, I’m sure. Her wonderful singing will be sorely missed by me and a million others. RIP dear Annie.

— SHEILA JORDAN, VOCALS

Annie Ross was an original in jazz. The sound and quality of her voice and ability to smoothly channel through horn lines with lyrics made her the best choice for Lambert, Hendricks & Ross. As a vocal jazz teacher and performer, every student I worked with learned Annie’s classic lyrics on “Twisted” written to Wardell Gray’s horn solo. Her wit and sense of humor oozed with personality in “Farmer’s Market”, an advanced vocalise with her clever lyrics—she made every twist and turn effortlessly. Hearing Annie at the Metropolitan Room, a couple of years ago was a lesson in life and phrasing. She put herself wholly into everything she sang. She’ll be sorely missed but every jazz singer should check out all of her book.

— ROSEANNA VITRO, VITRO

I was very fortunate to work with Annie for something like 25 years and, over time, we got to know and understand each other on a deep level. When I met her she had already lived 1,000 lives and I think she lived 1,000 more after that. Annie was incredibly clever and quick witted; a top-flight musician and improviser who could teach you both bad habits and good ones. Annie was a master class. One day Annie called me and said, “I’d love to come over to play.” I said, “I have something for you” whereupon she handed me a scratchy cassette of Johnny Mercer singing “Let’s Fly”, a song for which Annie had written lyrics (melody by David Ball) for a contest they won in LA way back in the day, 14 Mews and The Pied Pipers would record it. I transcribed it and eventually composed a vocalise-style melody and lyric for the second chorus, hats off to Annie. I recorded it with my vocal group, The Royal Bopsters, on one of our albums and it’s on which Annie joined us for “Music Is Forever”, her lyric, music by Russ Freeman. That recording also features more beloved bop royalty: Sheila Jordan, Mark Murphy, Jon Hendricks and Bob Dorough. I think Annie was a wizard at three in “Twisted”, she wasn’t kidding. Music Is Forever, Annie, and so are you!

— AMY LONDON, VOCALS

I had the privilege to accompany Annie Ross when her longtime pianist, the great Tardo Greco, was out of town. This was during the years when she had a regular gig at the Metropolitan Room in Manhattan. When I was called to sub, I would go to her apartment to help her warm up. She would sing a few tunes then we’d get in a cab and head downtown. I was thrilled to have the time to work with her and a music legend. In those moments I learned that Nina Simone had once asked her to share an apartment (Annie declined), and that Count Basie was among her favorite composers.

When Annie arrived at the club and it came time to perform, she was ready to give everything she had to music. The size of the audience didn’t matter. Her mood or health that day didn’t matter. She was there to tell her story and to bring her truth to the songs that she sang. She was 100% in the moment without relying on a huge vocal range, technical virtuosity or slick arrangements. She was spontaneous and absolutely honest. As a pianist it could be terrifying to follow her because she was musically unpredictable. But that’s also why it was such a joy to play with her. She took the band and the audience on an incredible ride.

And whether she was singing “You’re Nearer”, “I’ll Be Seeing You” or her original “The Boy From Ipanema”, every syllable she uttered swung with a depth and passion that’s hard to find anymore.

Annie’s appeal was universal. She was loved and admired by singers and instrumentalists, artists, fans, hip people, young people just learning about the Great American Songbook and old people for whom those songs are cherished possessions. Annie Ross was a blessing for American music.

Thank you Annie. Thank you for blowing my mind when I first discovered your work—and range!—with Lambert, Hendricks & Ross. Thank you for knocking me out with your phrasing and feel on your solo recordings; my favorites are Sings a Song and Best of the Rest. Thank you for continuing to perform in New York City, each show a masterclass for vocalists and instrumentalists alike. Fairly recently, a friend told me that my singing reminded them of Annie Ross. I feel that I’ve ever received. Thank you, Annie, for sharing your voice with us and inspiring so many of us.

— AMY CERVINI, VOCALS

Hal Willner had put together the band to support Annie Ross in Robert Altman’s production of Short Cuts. I was with her both in the soundtrack recording and on the film and went for about a week and a half in Los Angeles at the studio that Altman was using there, which was quite an experience. Annie wasn’t really 100% down with all of the esoteric song selections that Hal had come up with, but she sang them all incredibly beautifully.

And after the film was wrapped, they were trying to promote the film at some of the film festivals, they wanted Annie to take out a band and play gigs. I was in that band as well. But before we went overseas she wanted to rehearse a bit in New York. So, she just gave us an address where to meet her and we showed up and there was this nice small apartment on the Upper West Side. We went upstairs and while waiting and sitting on the couch I noticed these pillows. All of the pillows had titles of some of my favorite songs. Turns out the lady of the house was the wife of Sam Coslow, the famous songwriter of “My Old Flame” and a lion’s share of some of the greatest songs ever written. Annie knew everybody, all the survivors of the Golden Era of entertainment. And so working with her was not only a musical experience of working with one of the legends of jazz voice, but it also was kind of a “scene”.

We got through the rehearsal and we were over at one of these posh hotels there. But the business was kind of slow. It was an off night. We’re playing and looking out at this big room, and there were two people in the entire audience for the second set who looked like they were enjoying their own personal beverages.

At the end of the show, these two gentleman came backstage and it turns out that one was Larry Adler, the harmonica virtuoso, and the other was Van Morrison. They were both going on and on about how much they loved the show, but there was something that Van Morrison said, which really stuck with me. He said, “When you sing ‘A Foggy Day’, it’s a fucking foggy day?”, or maybe it was “A foggy fucking day”?! The long and short of it was that he had a lesson that night about singing a song from the Great American Songbook and how to sell it and make it believable. The thing that stuck in my head is something that Annie did as good as any of them.

I learned a lot on that gig and the various and sundry things I did with her. A real show person all the way: a musician’s musician. Yeah, it was quite a journey we went on together. Of course I send my condolences to all those who were close to her, and the music world. We lost a really important figure when Annie passed away.

— MICHAEL KANAN, PIANO

— GREG COHEN, BASS
Annie Ross brought an inimitable voice, perspective and spirit when she crossed the “pond” from the UK to the US. Her contributions to jazz through her work with Lambert, Hendricks & Ross will forever be remembered. With her passing, our community has lost another sister-in-music. We join her family and friends in both mourning and celebrating her incredible talent and life.

— DEE DEE BRIDGEWATER, VOCALS

To me Annie Ross was not a singer, she was a galaxy with no end that the rest of us just circled around hoping for a moment she would give us just one more chorus. This woman of grit and glamour was everything. She had me from her first double high C hits to her growling lower register when she sang (live) in Robert Altman’s film Short Cuts. From her highs to her lows then to her highs again, Annie inspired a generation of women jazz singers like no other, combining her high-pitched snaps of a single pitch-perfect note that brought chills up the spine to just plain great swinging riffs of Count Basie. She had such a nonchalance about her as well; in her tight taffeta evening gowns to her sassy pearls on the Sing A Song of Basie cover. She was fearless as she glided through Lambert, Hendricks & Ross repertoire, holding her own and sailing right past Dave and Jon at times, but always there supporting her beloved singing partners. Annie Ross gave me permission to hit a high note any way that the song called for. She will always be at the top of my list. Whether I sing “Doodlin’” or “Farmer’s Market”, “Centerpiece”, “Come on Home” or “Charleston Alley”, I will always bow to the first lady of the high C.

— CHERYL BENTYNE, VOCALS

The news of the passing of the great Annie Ross came at a delicate moment, in the midst of a pandemic where we lost many other Masters. I have always adored Annie, since I first discovered her voice when my Dad played one of his vinyls for me. The cover attracted me immediately: a gorgeous lady sitting on a piano, her legs crossed, her eyes closed while her arms were raised as if she was swaying to the rhythm while Dave Lambert and Jon Hendricks stood at her sides equally enraptured, the one on the right holding a picture of Count Basie. It was such an exciting image, exuding humour and that hard-to-describe factor called hipness, a mixture of elegance and irony with a daring touch. Sing a Song of Basie by Lambert, Hendricks & Ross is one of the seminal vocal albums of all times. I was hooked from the first listen.

In today’s popular music, we have gotten accustomed to a certain disconnect between an artist’s image and the essence of his/her musical message, image often playing a much bigger role to the detriment of musical content or artistic authenticity. Annie Ross’ artistry stands at the exact opposite: she sang and lived every song with her body and her soul and you could not only hear the message in her voice, you could see it in every gesture and in every glance, in the way she stood and walked and dressed. Just like the greatest among vocal Masters, she was a true story teller and a superb actress. I witnessed her magic at the Metropolitan Room in NYC where I went many times to hear her sing. She always delivered, always communicated what was at the heart of the song, always honest, always true to herself and to the music. Rest In Peace Annie, forever the hip and gorgeous lady with the golden voice.

— ROBERTA GAMBARINI, VOCALS
Montreal-born trumpeter Rachel Therrien has led a variety of groups, some acoustic and others with electric instruments. *Vena* is a quartet date with Daniel Gassin (piano and organ), Dario Guibert (bass) and Mareike Wiening (drums), expanded by tenor saxophonist Irving Acao on two selections: “Bilka’s Story” (offering Freddie Hubbard-like exuberance) and melancholy ballad “This Isn’t Love”. *Vena* favors an inside/outside approach, with postbop dominating the 55 minutes but contrasted by “Synchronicity”, probing “Bleu Torque” and brief “Women". Therrien clearly admires Miles Davis’ use of space probing “Bleu Tortue” and brief “Women". Her piano playing is boppish without being derivative as she shows on her “A Tip Of The Hat” (a near-instrumental) and a cooking version of Dorough’s “Nothing Like You”. Pelt’s spectacular trumpet solo on Cohn’s “Cross Me Off Your List” and Person’s two appearances (soulful on “The Way We Were” and swinging during Henry Mancini-Johnny Mercer’s “The Days Of Wine And Roses”) are added bonuses.

Close attention was paid to variations in moods and tempos throughout the project and the result is a well-rounded set.

For more information, visit jazzdepot.com. DeRose will present a Master Class on Sep. 19th at jazzvoice.com/bookings-checkout/dena-derose-online-masterclass.

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**Dena DeRose**

**Ode To The Road**

Dena DeRose (HighNote) by Scott Yanow

Dena DeRose is a veteran pianist-singer who has long carved out her own musical identity within the modern mainstream of jazz. On *Ode To The Road*, she is joined by her longtime trio of bassist Martin Wind and drummer Matt Wilson and, on two songs apiece, singer Sheila Jordan, tenor saxophonist Houston Person and trumpet player Jeremy Pelt.

She begins her 11th album as a leader with the obscure Alan Broadbent-Mark Murphy title song and also performs another Broadbent-Murphy piece, the tender ballad “Don’t Ask Why”, plus two Bob Dorough gems, a pair of originals, one tune each by Al Cohn and Roger Kellaway and three standards.

DeRose’s voice has grown warmer through the years and she sounds particularly fetching on the ballads (“Don’t Ask Why”, Alan Bergman-Marilyn Bergman-Marvin Hamlisch’s “The Way We Were” and Alan Bergman-Marilyn Bergman-Roger Kellaway’s “I Have The Feeling I’ve Been Here Before”) while also joyfully trading scat passages with the ageless Jordan on a combination of Walter Jarrum-Gus Kahn-Bronislaw Kaper’s “All God’s Chillun Got Rhythm” and Miles Davis’ “Little Willie Leaps”. Her piano playing is boppish without being derivative as she shows on her “A Tip Of The Hat” (a near-instrumental) and a cooking version of Dorough’s “Nothing Like You”. Pelt’s spectacular trumpet solo on Cohn’s “Cross Me Off Your List” and Person’s two appearances (soulful on “The Way We Were” and swinging during Henry Mancini-Johnny Mercer’s “The Days Of Wine And Roses”) are added bonuses.

Close attention was paid to variations in moods and tempos throughout the project and the result is a well-rounded set.

For more information, visit jazzdepot.com. DeRose will present a Master Class on Sep. 19th at jazzvoice.com/bookings-checkout/dena-derose-online-masterclass.
Incorporating “Drop Me Off In Harlem” as well as on indelibly remembered in a “Take the A Train” highlights. Duke Ellington, another Blake hero, is (“Pinky”, “Dr. Mabuse”) and tributes to musical traditional Catalan song, themes from film noir Greece to study with in the late ’60s. There’s also a composer Mikis Theodorakis, whom Blake went to repertoire is a trip down memory lane for Blake, Improvisations music, as well as what we now call World Music.

And while Monk is one of his lodestars, Blake’s embraces a less-is-more aesthetic, as well as an oblique sense of time. He has myriad ways of landing on a note or chord, often in sequences where each is as distinctive as if having been played by a different hand. And while Monk is one of his lodestars, Blake’s influences encompass everything from Mahalia Jackson and Ray Charles to film noir and modern classical music, as well as what we now call World Music.

Gray Moon is one of the most idiosyncratic in jazz. High-speed virtuosity and razzle-dazzle flair are not part of his vocabulary. Like his friend Monk, Blake embraces a less-is-more aesthetic, as well as an oblique sense of time. He has myriad ways of landing on a note or chord, often in sequences where each is as distinctive as if having been played by a different hand. And while Monk is one of his lodestars, Blake’s influences encompass everything from Mahalia Jackson and Ray Charles to film noir and modern classical music, as well as what we now call World Music.

Gray Moon is one of the few piano duo albums Blake has recorded. Much more Blake-centered than Improvisations with Jaki Byard (Soul Note, 1981), the duets here with Frank Carleberg led by Blake are often so sparse as to sound more like solo piano. Much of the repertoire is a trip down memory lane for Blake, beginning with “Vradiazi”, a tune by the Greek composer Mikis Theodorakis, whom Blake went to Greece to study with in the late ’60s. There’s also a traditional Catalan song, themes from film noir (“Pinky”, “Dr. Mabuse”) and tributes to musical mentors Gunther Schuller and George Russell. Blake’s own compositions “Memphis”, conjuring up the day Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, and “The Short Life of Barbara Monk”, are dramatic highlights. Duke Ellington, another Blake hero, is indelibly remembered in a “Take the A Train” incorporating “Drop Me Off In Harlem” as well as on a “Mood Indigo” that captures the mystery of Duke’s orchestral voicings in two spare piano parts.

Blake’s only solo on Gray Moon is “No More”, a song by Toots Camarata recorded by Billie Holiday. When Soft Rain Falls is Blake and Christine Correa’s tribute to Holiday, encompassing the entire 13-song repertoire of Holiday’s Lady In Satin (Columbia) album, as well as a poem by Frank O’Hara and the Herbie Nichols-Holiday tune “Lady Sings the Blues”. Correa is credited on this duo recording of what was an orchestral Holiday project as “voice”, as an accurate description of her vocals goes way beyond singing. Like Blake with notes, she can express words in myriad ways. She can be declamatory, raucous or demure. The parlando of Mahalia Jackson blends with the anguished grate of late Holiday. On “But Beautiful” her voice ranges from a creaking ache to coyly sweet. Throughout, she and Blake reframe the dark depths of Holiday’s emotional final days.

Chicago-based reed player Ken Vandermark, who turns 56 this month, has engaged in a wide array of sound exploration with compatible collaborators for some years now. He has now added three powerful Consequent Duos to his considerable catalog.

On Series 2B, Vandermark’s pairing with guitarist Joe Morris, the listener quickly becomes transported. Both engage in the sort of free jazz once heard regularly in Downtown lofts and, in a period of nostalgia, it’s a welcome thing. Nimble, blurry, fluid liquid drops in a wealth of chords and double-stops even as it crafts lengthy, careening lines at presto tempo, which never suffer a loss of clarity. Vandermark on tenors remains in kind, moving full throttle through the lengthy opener, named for the instrument he is playing. Other selections, “Baritone Saxophone” and “B-flat Clarinet” among them, each shine in a manner well beyond expectations of such basic titles. The former features a similar Loft-era Freeplay, albeit with both focusing on the 20th Century music aspect of that genre (its fascinating, isn’t it, when free jazz improvisers seem purposely to avoid flat 5s, flat 13s and the like, investing their freedom in non-jazz forms). The latter piece opens with a lengthy Morris statement that traverses that 20th Century language, but here fully immersed in the Loft jazz tradition. Clarinet is a warm, engaging instrument in this ballad named for it. Even as both instruments improvise rhythmic subdivisions, the inner pulse remains consistent and swinging. This cut is the highlight of the album.

Iku Mori first came to national attention in 1978 with Arto Lindsay’s trio DNA, exploding over the iconic No New York album with tribal-based rhythms underpinning the entire no wave concept. Over the years, she switched from percussion to electronics, commanding a strong hold on new music, dance and theater performance. For Series 2C, she lays out streams of electronic sounds that often appear utterly organic, deftly combining a Mingus-like sense of timing and melody that never reaches its apex. Conversely, the digitalpercussive sounds fill in around saxophones and clarinets, the line between digital and analog becomes artfully blurred. The pair move through varying dynamics and while the full-throated sax is present, he does so with the resonant force and emotional output. Very quickly, the pair fill the soundscapes, with multiphonics and electronic effects against marked drumming. These works are far from just blowing sessions, what with both musicians engaging in improvisations built on compositional shapes when not reflecting classic New Thing, trading overlapping passages, leaps and gusher crescendos. The pair are also quite strong, both technically and emotionally, and their writing has opened the door to the kind of expansive, complex soundscapes that have characterized the past five decades of avant-garde jazz. Finally, there is the fact that both, unlike most avant-garde bands, have the ability to perform with a degree of precision and control that is often sorely lacking in the genre. Overall, it’s a strongly engaged session, a window in time to a distinctive trio that combines elegiac depth and close-knit immediacy.

For more information, visit audiorapids.com

The Spell: The Vincent Chantory Trio Live, 1987
Vincent Chantory/Wilber Morris/Warren Smith (NoBusiness)

Vincent Chantory is a distinguished member of the small fraternity of French horn players in jazz, heir to pioneers like Julius Watkins and Willie Ruff. A student of the former, Chantory has been active since the mid ’70s, contributing to the major large ensembles and brass choirs of the era, including those of Sun Ra, Carla Bley, Charlie Haden, David Murray, Mulha Richard Abrams, Lester Bowie and Dave Douglas. He has also released three CDs as a leader since 1993. This vinyl release, recorded at the Kraine Art Gallery in New York, predates his studio dates as a leader by six years and presents Chantory with superb support from the late bassist Wilber Morris and percussionist Warren Smith, the latter providing further melodic input with a mallet instrument, likely xylophone.

Why French horn? It takes only a few bars of Morris’ blues-drenched “Chazz” to provide an answer. Chantory has the sound of a warmer, lighter trombone, enhanced by the instant precision of keys, along with the horn’s ingrained capacity for split tones and centuries-old techniques of hand-damping to develop subtle, expressive inflections. “Chazz” feels as old as the oldest blues and gospel, with Morris and Smith, ideal foundational players, providing bass pedal tones and drums that are propulsive at near-direg tempo. When Morris comes to the fore, he does so with the resonant force and precision of Charles Mingus (a David Murray recording of the composition is explicitly dedicated).

That slightly subdued feel continues with Chantory’s own title track, his magisterial lyricism enhanced by elastic bass arco glissandi and bright xylophone, but the mood shifts for Smith’s “Free Form #10” to a more energized approach, though oddly with a Mingus-like vamp in the works. The final track, Morris’ “Afro-Amerin”, contrasts with “Chazz”: a complex piece with textures ranging from hyper extended tenor saxophone to sometimes burbling, dramatic runs from French horn.

For more information, visit nobusinessrecords.com

The New York City Jazz Record | September 2020 17
This is a stylistic and genre trio date, led by bassist Martin Wind and featuring the now 90-year-old Netherlander Ack Van Rooyen (he was a mere 89 when the music was recorded) who plays flugelhorn on most, but not all, the tracks. The elder statesman, with credits under Kenny Clarke, Friedrich Gulda and Erhard Weber, among others, has maintained an impressively durable lip and he plays his big horn with a warm, grained, centered sound, the intonation always right there.

Sound is the immediate impression and the last impression—no white noise here. To introduce the opening track, Kenny Wheeler’s “Canter”, Wind plays arco in the upper register and the sound is strong and full. It’s not just his playing; he credits his amp, pickups and microphone and the album boasts some of the nicest bass sound put on disc, real reference quality.

Belgian guitarist Philip Catherine has always been known for his classic ringing, liquid sound and his pointed articulation; he gets a lot of expressive mileage out of some judicious plectrum aggression on his bluesy solo through the Jimmy Van Heusen-Johnny Burke standard “But Beautiful”. The two string players duet on that one and handle the bulk of the duties. They sound so good together, really playing for each other, this almost seems a duet record.

But the beauty of Van Rooyen’s voice is essential. “Canter” is a wise choice as he has a lot of the suave, graceful phrasing that was Wheeler’s style, the little inflections at the end of notes that are full of meaning (Wheeler and Van Rooyen played alongside one another in the United Jazz+Rock Ensemble and Peter Herbolzheimer Rhythm Combination & Brass). Compared to Wind and Catherine, he can be rhythmically insecure. Still the sound is there and is integral to this lovely album. His expansive playing on his own “Autumn Bugle” is marvelously eloquent.

For more information, visit laika-records.com. A livestream release for this CD is on Sep. 19th at facebook.com/MartinWindBliss.

**Solar Winds**

Raoul Björkenheim (Long Song)          Plays Coltrane

Awatar (Fundacja Sluchaj)               Transe’s Delight

Poncho Sanchez (Concord Picante)        by Jim Motavalli

*If John Coltrane (Sep. 23rd, 1926 - Jul. 17th, 1967) had not died so early, what would he be doing now? The last recording we have is from April of 1967, a concert at the Olatunji Center of African Culture in New York. It gave no clear sense of a new direction: he played a 34-minute version of “My Favorite Things”. So here are three tributes, each quite different: Coltrane with a Latin beat, further out and on guitar.

Let’s start with Raoul Björkenheim’s Solar Winds, the best of the three and probably the furthest away from Coltrane’s actual music. Aside from working with Kenny Burrell here and there, he wasn’t much for guitar players. The funny thing is that although Coltrane wasn’t much influenced by rock (and this album definitely comes out of that tradition) Solar Winds nonetheless captures the spirit of Coltrane’s later music. The antecedent is Love Devotion Surrender, the 1973 collaboration between Carlos Santana and John McLaughlin. It included two Coltrane compositions and was intended as a tribute to the master. Björkenheim’s project is very much a love and spiritual jazz vein, intense and reaching for a higher consciousness. Solar Winds was recorded in Milan and features the leader’s electric guitar along with the violin of Emanuele Parrini. Silvia Bolognesi is on bass and the engineer is György Palóczi on Frec tenor saxophone. All the music is Coltrane’s, except Björkenheim’s title song and “Volition”. It’s a deeply felt, propulsive work by a master guitarist you may not have on your list. A great place to start is “Peace on Earth”, a master class in contemplating the infinite, with reference to the spiritual jazz that flourished while Richard Nixon was in office. Parrini’s work is reminiscent of former Pharoah Sanders collaborator Michael White.

Awatar is a Polish trio, featuring Tomasz Gadecki on tenor and baritone. Plays Coltrane follows along fresh-shoe phrasing. Adds bangs and rattles to certain strings for percussive effect; “Montañas” contains buzzes, another in the United Jazz+Rock Ensemble and Peter Herbolzheimer Rhythm Combination & Brass).

This is a stylish and genial trio date, led by bassist Martin Wind and featuring the now 90-year-old Netherlander Ack Van Rooyen (he was a mere 89 when the music was recorded) who plays flugelhorn on most, but not all, the tracks. The elder statesman, with credits under Kenny Clarke, Friedrich Gulda and Erhard Weber, among others, has maintained an impressively durable lip and he plays his big horn with a warm, grained, centered sound, the intonation always right there.

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Simply put, Matt Wilson’s *Hug!* is a most welcome embrace. With a love for musical family at the fore and a signature blend of ebullience and heart radiating from his kit, the celebrated drummer uses his 14th leader date to remind us that art has the power to enfold.

Social immediacy, not distancing, fires the flames of this long-standing quartet and emotions run high—and in multiple directions—at the party’s start. Gene Ammons’ “The One Before This” nods to camaraderie and carousing, Abdullah Ibrahim’s “Jabulani” offers a sunny stand on South African land and Charlie Haden’s “In the Moment” delivers incredible velocity and magnetism. Cornet player Kirk Knuffke weaves an inside-outside path, which seduces and surprises during that opening stretch. Saxophonist Jeff Lederer’s brazen blowing is matched and balanced by his tuneful inside-outside path, which seduces and surprises. Bassist Chris Lightcap adds depth to the music as both soloist and rhythmic pillar. Together, along with their fearless leader, these men wrap their arms tight around every song they encounter.

Wilson, who turns 56 this month, has never been one to discriminate when it comes to repertoire. Wearing eclecticism like a badge of honor, he illustrates how accessible melodies, sharp angles, good humor and genuine emotion can form a cohesive whole. Sincerity reigns supreme on a trip through Roger Miller’s “King of the Road” featuring Lederer on clarinet. The balladic “Every Day With You” highlights the drummer-composer’s gifts as melodyist. “Space Force March/Interplanetary Music”, which samples Donald Trump’s speech announcing the formation of the titular body and launches into a classic from Sun Ra, speaks to Wilson’s zany spirit with its gleeful madness. And an appreciation for Ornette Coleman’s language comes through strong and clear on “Sunny & Share”, a wild ride that reframes images of “The Beat Goes On” and “I Got You Babe”. All of these performaces, along with others like the uplifting, strings-enhanced title track, speak to the artistry of a man with endless enthusiasm. Matt Wilson has a serious lust for life.

For more information, visit palmetto-records.com

Seven Deserts is such a work, a seven-part piece that’s 65-minutes long, derives from a 50-page score and includes an improvising conductor (long-time associate Stephen Dembski) primarily responsible for pulse and density, and a 20-piece orchestra. The latter is as central to the achievement as Fields’ thoughtful management of form, texture and individual input.

The musicians include members of Cologne-based new music ensembles devoted to diverse areas of contemporary practice, with sections of strings, flutes, percussion and brass and a host of individuals distinguished in improvised music, among them bassists Pascal Niggenkemper and Christian Weber, electric guitarists Dave Ball and Fields himself and individual reed players Frank Gratkowski and saxophonists Ingrid Laubrock and Matthias Schubert. *Seven Deserts* is a work that continuously alternates and combines distinctive solo voices with a contrapuntal interplay at once distinguished by its wedding of complexity and clarity. No matter how many parts are going on, there’s a sense of individual lines, from the flute that inaugurates the initial segment to the dense, rapid lines of “Desert 6”. Every musician has a highly developed sense of timbre, whether the smooth, even tone of Helen Bledsoe’s flute, varied vocalic chirp and wail of Laubrock’s soprano or Udo Moll’s blursh, burned trumpet. The ensembles can develop strange, wandering polyphony with eliding pitches or form tight-knit coils, roam further afield or suddenly halt.

The album has been assembled from studio and live performances of the work for the optimum version possible, but the sonic quality is seamless.

As well as invoking a tradition that includes Anthony Braxton, Barry Guy, Roscoe Mitchell and George Lewis, *Seven Deserts* joins a collection of recent works—Christopher Fox’s *Topology*,  Laubrock’s *Contemporary Chaos Practices*, Nate Wooley’s ongoing *Seven Storey Mountain*—in blurring boundaries between and expanding the possible syntheses of large-scale composition and improvisation, increasingly presented as complementary rather than contrary processes.

For more information, visit newworldrecords.org

This album was recorded 24 days before Larry Willis died on Sep. 29th, 2019. Sometimes the musicians easiest to love are second echelon players. The great masters are too far removed for love. Art Tatum and Oscar Peterson and Keith Jarrett, on their own mountaintop, provoke awe. Willis was loved because his gifts were human in scale. He did not possess out-of-this world chops and was not an innovator. But he always played piano with total commitment and heart, as if he were making his last record.

His discography is enormous, especially as a sideman, because he was an intuitive accompanist. His body of work as a leader is also substantial. (Two quick recommendations: *A Tribute to Charlie“ (AudioQuest, 1933) and *Solo Spirit* [Mapleshade, 1992].)

The format for half of I Fall In Love Too Easily is the one in which Willis did most of his life’s work: a high-caliber small ensemble playing take-no-prisoners hardbop. The trumpeter, Jeremy Pelt, was relatively new to Willis, but also saxophonist Joe Ford and drummer Victor Lewis had been collaborators for decades. Together, they smoke Kirk Lightsey’s “Habiba” and Jack DeJohnette’s “Climax”. Pelt tends to stay creatively on course and Ford tends to digress creatively.

The band numbers are jolts of adrenalin, but the piano pieces are summations. It feels inevitable that the final performance on Willis’ final recording, the Jule Styne-Sammy Cahn title track, is a solo piano ballad. On ballads, he held his natural aggression and had touch check, just barely. Willis, a bear of a man, was a shameless romantic. He starts with a rapt prologue, marking it out thoughtfully and patiently. He comes upon the melody as if by chance, then keeps returning to it, insisting upon it, variation upon heartfelt variation.

It is touching to learn that Willis’ last album was recorded in the Van Gelder studio in Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, where he made his very first one, with Jackie McLean, in 1965.

For more information, visit jazzdepot.com

Play Sonny Rollins
Vinnie Sperrazza/jacob sacks/Masa Kamaguchi (Fresh Sound-New Talent)
by Tom Greenland

Pianist Jacob Sacks, bassist Masa Kamaguchi and drummer Vinnie Sperrazza have recorded seven albums of jazz standards for Fresh Sound-New Talent, all but one focused on a single composer. Unlike Ella Fitzgerald’s songbook series, which closely conformed to the composer’s intentions, Sacks/Kamaguchi/ Sperrazza take (and make the most of) great liberties with the original pieces, using them as springboards for even higher leaps of imagination. *Play Sonny Rollins* culs choice tunes from the oeuvre of the tenor saxophonist (who turns 90 this month) and, as the title suggests, provides a forum for the trio to play with them, sandbox style, fun in the forefront.

What elevates this from yet another piano trio recording of standards is a relaxed but rigorous execution of a promiscuous diffusion of ideas and involutions bound together by common threads. Sacks and Sperrazza take cues from Rollins and drummer Max Roach, each lauded for his ability to generate holistic, sometimes lengthy improvisations unified by a short motif. On “Freedom Suite Pt 4”, “Strode Rode”,”Oleo” (a drum feature), “Airgoin” and “Way Out West” germinal motifs are developed systematically yet freely. Sacks’ rhythmic phrasing is extremely limber, laying back behind the beat while swinging, then suddenly accelerating in brisk flourishes that leave the bar lines behind, as if someone had hit the fast forward button on a tape player. “Pent-up House” and “St. Thomas”, particularly the coda, show his ability to play over and through the pulse simultaneously while his runs on “Saxophone Colossus” suggest a laid-back version of Art Tatum. His solos often minimize left-hand harmonies for single-note statements, creating a thinner overall texture amplifying the bass and drum contributions, exemplified on “Freedom Suite Pt 4”.

Together, they smoke Kirk Lightsey’s “Habiba” and Jack DeJohnette’s “Climax”. Pelt tends to stay creatively on course and Ford tends to digress creatively.

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For more information, visit jazzdepot.com
This World brings together a new quartet of seasoned players. Recorded after a string of shows given in 2019 by Mike Nock (New Zealand, piano, who turns 80 this month), Hamish Stuart (Scotland, drums), Julien Wilson (Australia, tenor saxophone and effects) and Jonathan Zwartz (New Zealand, double bass)—all four of whom are based in Australia—the album glistens with music written especially for this studio session around a core of unmistakable experience. Said experience translates not into mountain-top pontificating for the fortunate few but rather into a grounded message that all can understand. The album’s title, like the Zwartz tune after which it is named, is therefore more than an anthem; it’s a mission statement from a group of musicians content in forgoing the flaut in favor of the flavor.

Other examples of the bassist’s writing are “And in the Night Comes Rain” and “Home”. Where the latter comes across as being less about being home than about returning to it after a long time away, the former is a highlight of the set for its collective pause in anticipation of a storm. Instead of thunder, we get the gentle kiss of autumn as prelude to a soulful dance that goes from solid to liquid and back again.

These scenes highlight the evocative abilities of Wilson, who adds two parts blues (“Riverside”) and one part groove (“We Shall Rise Again”) to the compositional brew. As performer, the saxophonist renders a painterly wisdom that is fully integrated into its surroundings and is enhanced ever so subtly by an application of electronic effects. Whether lending sparkle and shine to “Any Heart” (a cinematic montage by Stuart in which the drummer’s vacillation between tapping his instrument’s body in between passages of stark, austere bowing and Yamazaki is all over his kit like a rattling avalanche of pebbles and gravel. Later, Mori switches to bass clarinet and things get even quieter, nudging the threshold of audibility at times. That’s followed by a 13-minute drum solo, which bridges the performance’s two halves. It has elements of John Bonham on Led Zeppelin’s “Moby Dick” but, with its particularly sharp cymbal crashes, also brings to mind the music accompanying classic Japanese Noh theater.

The “Mass Projection” disc begins slowly but ominously. Takayanagi has switched to an electric guitar, which drones like a thundercloud building ominously. As things begin, Takayanagi is playing what masquerades as Honey in My Hands by Freida Jones

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THE NEW YORK CITY JAZZ RECORD

20 SEPTEMBER 2020
Guitarist Michael Musillami and bassist Rich Syracuse have previously released two different takes on their shared muses. The first was an intimate improvisatory treatment of saxophonist Wayne Shorter (Of The Night, Playscape, 2016) and second an animated conversation around bassist Charles Mingus (Bird Calls, Playscape, 2017). Their latest is Dig, an examination of pianist Bill Evans, who died 40 years ago this month.

Musillami is a wonderfully angular guitarist who in his previous work often conjured up Thelonious Monk more than Evans while Syracuse’s stylistic elegance is custom-made for their chosen subject. As such, the tension, dynamics and the way the duo make these songs their own are the brilliance of this program. They do this by fundamentally signifying each tune and then discussing the music from their own perspectives.

Many of Evans’ best known songs such as “Waltz For Debby” and “Peace Piece” are absent and although this release plays on the seminal title Everybody Digs Bill Evans (Riverside, 1958), it oddly doesn’t include any music from it. The amazing thing though is that this doesn’t matter. Even on the better known pieces, such as a gorgeous rendition of “Blue in Green” and intriguingly restructured “Nardis”, the interaction of Musillami’s tone with Syracuse’s timbre in this atmosphere of creative conversational improvisation is captivating. Their technique is riskier than simple new takes on old standards and in the process they provide a much more intriguing experience.

An inventive “Twelve Tone Tune” retains Evans’ beautifully imaginative and lyrical approach but is improvisationally taken for an avant stroll while the duo show off their individual chops on Earl Zindar’s “How My Heart Sings”. Syracuse captures the essence of Evans on closer “Bill’s Hit Tune” with sensitive arco playing as the duo completes an excellent job of grasping the chill that is associated with Evans’ greatness while bringing their own intimate dialogue to the fore.

Tales Of Wonder: A Jazz Celebration Of Stevie Various Artists (Posi-Tone)

There are few musicians in this world with the impact of Stevie Wonder. Signed to the Motown/Tamla label when he was only 11 years old, Wonder has sold over one hundred million records in his 70 years. It’s one thing to sell millions of records, but creating art that will stand the test of time is equally difficult and Wonder has done both throughout his career. His music has always appealed to jazz musicians and this collection on the Posi-Tone label offers myriad reasons why.

“Send One Your Love” starts it all off by the group Works For Me, featuring the warm guitar of Tony Davis and saxophonist Alexia Tarantino, luxuriating over the pocket laid down by the rhythm section of Catil O’Doherty (piano), Adi Meyerson (bass) and Joe Strasser (drums). Pianist Jon Davis takes “My Cherie Amour” out for a spin, offering a straightahead version leaning heavily on the moaning bass of Ugona Okepgwo and feather-duster traps of Jochen Blümel. Davis takes this time, crafting a compelling essay that swings with ease.

“Superwoman” (originally from Music of My Mind) is one of Wonder’s most endearing themes. Pianist Theo Hill’s Rhodes is cool, but his quavering syrup patches tend to induce motion sickness in this listener. Rashawn Carter is solid on the electric bass but Mark Whitfield, Jr.’s drums steal the show. The Posi-Tone collective Idle Hands gives you “You And I” a light, samba groove, showcasing the lilte guitar of Will Bernard and vibraphone of Behn Gillece. Also on board are Sam Dillon (tenor), Art Hirahara (piano), Boris Kozlov (bass) and Donald Edwards (drums).

A highlight comes with organ player Jared Gold’s trio with guitarist Dave Stryker and drummer Mark Ferber, who infuse “You Haven’t Done Nothin’” with languid guitarbucket, wah-wah pedal funk that gets downright dangerous. Soprano saxophonist Diego Rivera leads a band with Helen Sung (piano), Kozlov and Edwards through a pretty, modal version of “The Secret Life of Plants” and trumpeter Farnell Newton helms a group with Brian Charette on organ and Rudy Royston on drums for “All In Love Is Fair”.

But the zenith moment comes last with the duo of Gillece and Kozlov for a staggering, intimate rendition of “Visions”, which features the best resonant qualities of each instrument. Great stuff, indeed.

Let’s Cool One

Jersey City has boasted a considerable list of music with guitarist Dave Stryker and drummer Mark Ferber. From the opening notes on alto saxophone.

“Tales Of Wonder” is a jazz celebration of Stevie Wonder. Various artists from the Posi-Tone label contribute to this collection, offering a diverse range of interpretations of the renowned musician’s music. Here are some highlights:

- **Send One Your Love**
  - Description: Starts it all off by the group Works For Me, featuring the warm guitar of Tony Davis and saxophonist Alexia Tarantino, luxuriating over the pocket laid down by the rhythm section of Catil O’Doherty (piano), Adi Meyerson (bass) and Joe Strasser (drums).

- **My Cherie Amour**
  - Description: Offers a straightahead version leaning heavily on the moaning bass of Ugona Okepgwo and feather-duster traps of Jochen Blümel. Davis takes this time, crafting a compelling essay that swings with ease.

- **Superwoman**
  - Description: One of Wonder’s most endearing themes. Pianist Theo Hill’s Rhodes is cool, but his quavering syrup patches tend to induce motion sickness in this listener. Rashawn Carter is solid on the electric bass but Mark Whitfield, Jr.’s drums steal the show.

- **You And I**
  - Description: Offers a light, samba groove, showcasing the lilte guitar of Will Bernard and vibraphone of Behn Gillece. Also on board are Sam Dillon (tenor), Art Hirahara (piano), Boris Kozlov (bass) and Donald Edwards (drums).

- **All In Love Is Fair**
  - Description: A highlight comes with organ player Jared Gold’s trio with guitarist Dave Stryker and drummer Mark Ferber, who infuse “You Haven’t Done Nothin’” with languid guitarbucket, wah-wah pedal funk that gets downright dangerous.

Overall, this collection offers a captivating journey through the music of Stevie Wonder, compiled by a diverse array of musicians who bring their unique perspectives to each track. For more information, visit playscape-recordings.com.
appealing, albeit not always memorable, melodies thus constitute what Smith defines as “one-page songs”, allowing the soloists to take them in various directions. Thus this installation has a certain amount of freedom. The main dynamic is the effects-distorted alto and free improvisation and written avant garde music.”

Things start off with Smith and Stevens (on acoustic) in duo on the heartfelt tribute to Hargrove. Collective “Lotto” begins with a three-note pattern leading to a simple melody and tight dialogue between Smith and Stevens. Smith’s “Clem” is the perfect example of the group’s approach: a two-note pedal by piano is picked up by bass and tenor while the piano swirls around it. The bittersweet melody follows but the pedal is never abandoned and Thomas builds his solo around it. Oh then takes it away with a very brief musical solo before Smith solos then reverts to the main theme and the two-note pedal. Throughout Smith’s brushwork is simply superb. And all this in just over five minutes. Smith’s “Van Der Linden”, inspired by video games, has more of a hard edge and a dramatic progression thanks to Stevens, but it has fundamentally a similar structure. Smith’s “Little Lamplight” is a brief interlude showcasing Thomas and, to close, Stevens’ “Opera” builds on a tight pattern carried by the rhythm section while a gentle melody is developed by the leaders. A very successful second recording that bodes well for a third.

For more information, visit whirlwindrecordings.com

**Brain Drain**

Gorilla Mask (Clean Feed)

by Kyle Oleksiuk

**What is jazz-rock?** Rock with jazz influences, or vice versa? Is it the same as rock-jazz? Answers depend on who you ask and what mood they’re in. What is rock-jazz today might be jazz-rock tomorrow and what is both today is neither on Sundays. A label that was supposed to help an album find its audience becomes a useless pointer to an unclear in-between zone. All that is solid melts into air. You’ll just have to listen to figure out whether it’s your kind of thing and that’s the very special quality of multi-genre music—it swallows our collective Spotify-enabled mania for taxonomizing music. Even if they’re not any good, multi-genre albums always provide a jolt of un-classified recognizability.

Not that Brain Drain by Gorilla Mask is no good. It’s quality jazz-rock, or as the liner notes more minutely describe it, “a mishmash of punk, metal, jazz, free improvisation and written avant garde music.” The main dynamic is the effects-distorted alto and baritone saxophones of Peter Van Huffel (who turns 42 this month), which sound like Albert Ayler scoring The Twilight Zone, against Roland Fidezius’ electric bass.

Like all albums within riffing distance of heavy metal, the track titles are pure poetry: “Forgive me, Mother”, “AVALANCHE!!!”, “Caught in a Helicopter Blade”. What could it mean? How can you get inside a helicopter blade? Who cares! It’s fun. And that’s the best thing about Brain Drain—the combination not just of the technical aspects of metal and jazz but also of their attitudes. This is “jazz” with the silliness and spookiness of heavy metal. The shock of this particular way of combining styles, rather than the combination itself, is what makes the album enjoyable. So don’t you dare try to label Brain Drain and lump it together with all the other jazz-rock albums, or you will be forever haunted by the telltale moan of the jazz-rock saxophone.

For more information, visit cleaneed-records.com

**In Common 2**

Walter Smith III/Matthew Stevens (Whirlwind)

by Marco Cangiano

This is the second recording of a quintet co-led by tenor saxophonist Walter Smith III (who turns 40 this month) and guitarist Matt Stevens. The other members have changed since the previous release (hilariously photoshopped into the original cover) but, regardless, there is continuity and natural evolution. Concision and simplicity pervades the ten tunes—all originals except for the late Roy Hargrove’s “Roy Allen”. Most rely on simple and insistent rhythmic patterns, as in the case of Stevens’ “Cowboy”, which, while giving structure, also provide for great freedom. The

**For more information, visit cleanfeed-records.com**
Jazz and spoken word have a long and natural relationship: bebop and Beatniks; revolutionaries of the '60s; the free verse '70s funk to hip-hop DJs sampling beats and eventually building bridges to the people who played on those old sides. Sadly, success isn't always guaranteed. Too often, one side just copped a vibe, leading to unbalanced equilibrium and short shelf-life. Witness, for example, the well-meaning and at-the-time exciting meetings on the 1994 AIDS benefit album Stolen Moments: Red, Hot + Cool. Pairing Lester Bowie with Digable Planets seemed like a game-changer at the time; today it just sounds like game over.

The problem has been in failing to integrate forms: breakbeats get frozen in looped precision, raps are delivered without free flow. But lately, some outfits like Heroes Are Gang Leaders (HGL) and Standing On the Corner—or Ambrose Akinmusire’s work with rapper Kokayi and Nicole Mitchell’s group with poet and singer Avery Young, for that matter—have made true and exciting, hybrids of forms.

Rapper Raw Poetic sets the agenda at the outset of Ocean Bridges, recalling in an unscripted talk titled “Valuable Lesson” an old bandmate telling him to “shut up and listen” and his learning to leave space for “every part of the music”. Poetic and DJ/producer Damu the Fudgemunk stick to that formula through their album of casual jams, leaving space for the small band that includes Poetic’s uncle, the powerhouse Archie Shepp. Poetic has sent the master saxophonist more than a dozen tapes before Shepp responded to a formula within which he thought he could fit. With a quintet including HGL bassist Luke Stewart, Poetic and Fudgemunk booked studio time and brought Shepp in from France for an improvised session with no second takes.

Wurlitzer, vibraphone and processed beats dictate the easy grooves and the mix with Shepp is organic. His presence is strong throughout, not as a featured artist, despite the fact that Sun of Goldfinger can break out the big guns when it feels so inclined, there’s a distinctly meditative heart beating at the center of it all. One hears this especially in the final and title track, where a train crossing signal-like guitar stretches over head-nodding drums before alto kicks in the door bearing gifts of awakening. The sheer depth of coherence that ensues is a pleasure to behold in our wounded selves.

The opening minutes of Jazz on a Summer’s Day, Bert Stern’s stellar 1959 documentary about the previous year’s Newport Jazz Festival, move at the kind of leisurely pace often associated with an afternoon in the seaside sun. As Thelonious Monk plays, early arriving audience members nod along to the bendy notes and slouch against the backs of folding wooden chairs. Stern interposes this and other initial scenes with shots of sailboats zipping across the Atlantic. Nobody, it seems, is in much of a hurry.

The film, now in a superb restored version, grows even more compelling after the sun goes down. Nighttime sets by, among others, Gerry Mulligan, Dinah Washington and Chuck Berry, are all compelling, but three other performers emerge as the stars of the exhilarating second half. Charismatic Big Maybelle, attired in a tiara and white gloves, sings a blistering rendition of “I Ain’t Mad at You”; ecstatic concerto goers respond by dancing, solo and in couples (because of technical challenges, some of the audience scenes were shot off-site and edited in alongside the Newport footage). Later, Louis Armstrong, after some jocular comments about his busy international touring schedule, gallops through a trio of crowd-pleasers. In a film that limits some performers to a minute and change, he gets more than ten. Finally, Mahalia Jackson closes the show with three timeless spirituals. Her riveting performance of “The Lord’s Prayer” gives the film the conclusion it deserves. A portrait of a moment in time, the film—for which producer George Avakian also deserves immense credit—is mercifully free of the talking heads that clog so many contemporary documentaries. Aside from the musicians and an unobtrusive emcee, just about the only voice we hear comes from a local radio show, whose host offers a bit of boosterism about smooth sounds and great weather. Stern often films the musicians in profile, but his best shots come from a camera set up at the foot of the stage. This is a reverent vantage point. These shots typically last for just a few seconds, but they’ll linger in the viewer’s mind for much longer.

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Sonny’s Crit
Sonny Clark (Blue Note) September 1st, 1957

Three years earlier, Italian drummer and trumpeter Dino Gogojović and Swiss pianist George Gruntz were all part of the Newport International Youth Band. The threesome reconvene, apparently, on one day’s notice, in his base of Milan with two more Europeans, French tenor/soprano saxophonist Barney Wilen and German bassist Karl Theodor Gelnzer, for a program of American jazz standards, plus a couple of originals by the band members. It is unclear why this is called Vol. 2.

Lionel Hampton Presents
Kai Winding’s Work in Jazz
September 1st, 1957

This album was the first entry in Lionel Hampton’s Who Is in Jazz series, 29 albums made between 1977-85. Danish trumpeter Kai Winding had waxed numerous records as a leader prior to and during a 60s tenure with Verve and in partnership with fellow trumpeter J.J. Johnson, his output slowed in the 70s-80s (he died in 1983 at 60). This album, recorded in L.A., is a quartet date with Frank Strazzieri (piano), Ken Brandon (bass) and Fred Hawke (drums) of standards and a tune each by Winding and Strazzieri.

German pianist Uli Lenz’ career has featured not only his work in a jazz context, but also a series of collaborations, such as this, his second and final release for Enja, a concert recording from New York’s now-defunct Sweet Basil. With him are two elder statesmen in bassist Cecil McBee and drummer Joe Chambers, rhythm section for Wayne Shorter, Andrew Hill, Woody Shaw, John Stubblefield and Freddie Hubbard. Three Lenz originals are bookended by two very different jazz standards: Eddie Harris’ “Freedom Jazz Dance” and Victor Young’s “My Foolish Heart”.

**ON THIS DAY** by Andrey Henkin