YOUR FREE GUIDE TO THE NYC JAZZ SCENE

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THE NEW YORK JAZZ RECORD

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WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH ISSUE

MELISSA ALDANA
VISIONS

SUSAN ALCORN
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MARILYN MAZUR
DOROTHY DONEGAN

NYCJAZZRECORD.COM
On Mar. 12th, 1987, Congress officially designated March as “Women’s History Month”. Since that time, 124 women in 84 countries have been Heads of State but, ironically, not in the U.S. But, in 2021, we celebrate this Women’s History Month having come the closest with recently elected Vice President Kamala Harris. Of course, American history is often two steps back for every step forward so this may not signal a substantive, longterm change. Still, any progress these days feels monumental.

Jazz has been somewhat ahead of the curve, with substantial, longterm contributions from women throughout its history and continuing even more verdantly in the present day. We dedicate this March 2021 issue to a wide range of female practitioners: tenor saxophonist Melissa Aldana (On The Cover), who was the first woman to win the Thelonious Monk competition; pedal steel guitarist Susan Alcorn (Interview); vibraphonist Patricia Brennan (Artist Feature); percussionist Marilyn Mazur (Encore); and pianist Dorothy Donegan (Lest We Forget); plus a special section of CD Reviews (pgs. 12-20), focusing on an international and multigenerational cast of women in jazz.

There is an old couplet: “Man may work from sun to sun / But woman’s work is never done.” At the time of its writing this referred to menial housework. Now it can be appropriated to mean that there is much to be done and many milestones to reach with plenty of obstacles still littering the path. While Congress was well-intentioned, every month should celebrate the contributions of women in all fields.
Imagine Chile-born tenor saxophonist Melissa Aldana as a racecar driver, hitting her stride on the Mulssanne Straight at the 24 hours of Le Mans, ahead of all the competition, when all of a sudden the red flag comes out. The race is stopped! Something similar to that happened to Aldana when COVID restrictions were imposed.

The Berklee graduate and Thelonious Monk International Jazz Saxophone Competition winner (in 2013, when she was 24) was teaching (at the New School), recording (five albums so far) and touring prolifically until last spring. “The year 2020 was hard,” she said, with a divorce part of the mix. But Aldana, who is both very disciplined and inherently optimistic, chooses to see things in a more upbeat light.

“From a personal perspective, it was the most beautiful year,” Aldana said. “I had time to get to know myself better. I did a lot of soul searching, got closer to my friends, worked through some drama with my family. I have to say that a lot of positive things happened that wouldn’t have otherwise, because I was always busy with something else.”

Aldana, who lives in Flatbush, Brooklyn, also has been able to spend a lot of time with her working band who, with the exception of guitarist Lage Lund in Norway, all live locally. That’s harder now, too, but the group is a COVID bubble of sorts. Lots of in-person time is necessary, because for the most part Aldana writes her own through-composed music and it’s not only gorgeous, but also highly complex, not meant for sight-reading on the bandstand.

The group includes fellow Chilean Pablo Menares on bass and Kush Abadey on drums. For Aldana’s most recent album Visions, released on Motéma Music in 2019, she added pianist Sam Harris and vibraphonist Joel Ross (Tommy Crane on drums). The latter’s presence has drawn comparisons with Eric Dolphy’s Out to Lunch, featuring Bobby Hutcherson. The music (inspired by Mexican artist Frida Kahlo) is similarly spiky, hovering in that enchanted space between bebop and the avant garde, but Aldana sounds nothing like Dolphy. She’s got a big, broad tone, with maybe Joe Henderson a better comparison.

Nobody gets on that plane effortlessly and for Aldana it’s been a lifetime of study. It helps that dad and grandad were saxophone players. Dad Marcos was himself a Monk semi-finalist in 1991. But that doesn’t mean that jazz was around when she was growing up. Much of what the young musician learned was from records and being the diligent student she is, transcribing solos was a big part of her education. Aldana began playing when she was all of six, under the careful tutelage of her dad. She began on alto via a lobby call at 7 a.m., she’d be up at 5:30 working on her sound, her tone and constantly writing. She has an extremely curious mind and she’s relentless and unstoppable in pursuit of more knowledge. If we have a lobby call at 7 a.m., she’d be up at 5:30 working on her music.”

Salvant said that Aldana “loves to get her ass kicked”. She puts herself in tricky situations with musicians who challenge her. And the more she learns, the more sophisticated her music gets. “It’s the little turns and surprises in her music that make it unique, spiritual and entertaining,” Salvant said. She last worked with Aldana on a jazz cruise about a year ago. “Sitting in an airport; that’s the last time I saw her,” she said. Aldana makes a guest appearance on Salvant’s The Window album, a duet with pianist Sullivan Fortner, released in 2018. “It wasn’t a planned thing,” Salvant said. “She sat in on a couple of tracks recorded on a crazy night at the Village Vanguard. That’s her on ‘The Peacocks’, a piece we both had in our repertoires. ‘The Peacocks’, written by Jimmy Rowles, starts off very quietly, and that’s the way Aldana enters, playing breathly in a way that recalls Stan Getz—or maybe Archie Shepp in a more meditative mood. There’s an amazing moment where Salvant is singing and Aldana is tracking her so closely she’s almost vocalizing the lyrics through her horn. The saxophonist concludes the piece with a note so low you’d swear she was playing a baritone instead of a tenor.

Aldana knows the way to Carnegie Hall—practice and you’ll get there. One of her favorite quotes is from the late tenor player Jimmy Heath, who said, “Her tone is as beautiful as her personality... I am sure you will agree.”

Why Frida Kahlo? Aldana says the Mexican painter “was just herself, very honest. I respect that.” Being herself is critical for Aldana. She recently left Artemis because she wants to explore her own music further. And she is about to sign to a new label, so there’s some extraordinary music ahead.

For more information, visit melissaaldana.net. Aldana livestreams at barbeyux.com Mar. 3rd and smajejazz.com Mar. 12th-13th.

Recommended Listening:
- Melissa Aldana—Free Fall (Inner Circle Music, 2010)
- Melissa Aldana—Second Cycle (Inner Circle Music, 2012)
- Melissa Aldana—Melissa Aldana & Crash Trio (Concord, 2013)
- Melissa Aldana—Visions (Motéma Music, 2018)
- Artemis—Eponymous (Blue Note, 2019)

THE NEW YORK CITY JAZZ RECORD | MARCH 2021
Under the aegis of the Queens Jazz OverGround, a local artists’ collective founded on similar principles to those of its southern neighbors the Brooklyn Jazz Underground, Korean-American pianist Eugenia Cho kicked off the second of three events of the organization’s Winter Jazzfest with a short but rousing set at Culture Lab LIC in Hunters Point (Feb. 17th). The live-streamed concert captured some of the ambiance of a club performance through the presence of a small but lively (beer was served) crowd and studio audience. Traveling cameras and a glittery lighting scheme added to the pageantry, but the robust set, buoyed by Cho’s go-to rhythm team of bassist Danny Weller and drummer Alex Wyatt, generated its own excitement. The original repertoire revealed her painterly approach to composition, favoring soft textures over hard edges, broad strokes over sharp lines. Like Bill Evans, she encourages vigorous participation by her compadres, allowing Weller in particular ample room to stretch his creative legs. The opening numbers, “Vendant Dream” and “Breathless”, served as warmups for the hard-hitting “Koquiri” (Korean for elephant). “Odd Birds” led from a pensive solo piano rumination to a vamping theme, followed by a free-blowing middle section before the final vamp. The last piece, “Sunday Fatigue”, contained interesting rhythmic shifts and some of the strongest solos and closest interaction of the set, leaving the crowd pleasantly dissatisfied that there was no time for an encore. —Tom Greenland

“`I love a piano, wrote Irving Berlin, “a grand piano, it simply carries me away.” Roger that sentiment; the live-streamed Eight x 88 (Feb. 4th) was a deep dive into the thrills of piano love. Filmed at Steinway Hall and benefitting the Jazz Foundation of America, Kris Davis, Aaron Diehl, Orrin Evans, Sullivan Fortner, Aaron Goldberg, Kevin Hays, Fred Hersch and Christian Sands played a dazzling assortment of pieces from hymns to bebop. The program was conceived by Goldberg and Hays and furthered by Hersch, offering a terrific embarrassment of piano riches in its 90 minutes. Goldberg led off with a jaunty Haitian folk song, “YoYo”, painting a vivid musical picture of the eponymous marketplace seller. In contrast was an immersion into the contemplative with Diehl’s masterful rendition of Duke Ellington’s “Reflections in D”. He was matched in a meditative mood by Evans’ own “Clean House”, which flowed seamlessly from Pollitt-Pierpoint’s 1864 hymn “For the Beauty of the Earth”. Hersch also reached into the way-back, playing a huge hit from 1918, Turner Layton’s “After You’ve Gone”, proving that a standard is just that and the arrangement is everything. Davis’ original, “Pandemic Mood” was a derivative miss, but she excelled in technique in a duo with Hersch’s Monk’s “Misterioso”. Also making much of Monk were Hays and Sands with “Bye-Ya”. Eight x 88 ended on a joyful note, Diehl and Evans out on a lighthearted, swinging “I Want to Be Happy” (Vincent Youmans). —Marilyn Lester

One positive way to view the extended quarantine is that it gives musicians plenty of time to woodshed. Remember how Sonny Rollins sounded after two years practicing alone on the Williamsburg Bridge? Guitarist Gilad Hekselman showed a similar flowering of his compositional and improvisatory skills when he led a quartet with keyboard player Aaron Parks, bassist Burniss Travis and drummer Marcus Gilmore at The Jazz Gallery (Feb. 4th). He must have been putting his downtime to good use because he had a slew of new tunes and chops honed to a diamond edge. Combine that with the fact that his group was jonesing to play ‘live’ and you’ve got two sterling sets of jazz, the second even more resplendent than the first. On his tunes “Rebirth” and “Long Way from Home” (which opened both sets), “Urban Myth” and “Scoville” one could discern influences of Pat Metheny and John Scofield, but Hekselman’s unique facility with chord melodies came into its own pieces like the moody “Na Vanad” (which also featured fine work by Parks), “Magic Chord” and “Cycles”, during which his long fingers stretched deftly (and also the voicings of Parks. Plante, steeled like a climber scaling a sheer rock face, moving from stable three-point holds into exciting “dyons”. His final solo, on the second set version of “Magic Chord”, was his most inspired. For those of us watching at home, the Gallery experimented with a few new camera angles, one pointed just over Gilmore’s left shoulder, creating the sense that we were sitting in with the band. (TG)

Guitarist/vocalist Glenn Crytzer has for many pandemic months been live-streaming his quartet, featuring American Songbook standards by the year. This latest (Feb. 21st) covered 1934, well suited to Crytzer’s signature style of hot-jazz-influenced swing. For aficionados of the genre, Crytzer produces a very satisfying sound, with a collection of tunes anchored in melody. They were not only written for vocalists and for dancing, but also came from Broadway and film. And because of recording constraints of the day, the numbers are relatively brief, allowing Crytzer to pack a bunch of goodies into one short hour. Highlights were some lesser-known numbers, such as “Midnight, the Stars and You” (Harry M. Woods-Jimmy Campbell-Reg Connelly) with its silky slow fox-trot rhythm, repeated in “Two Cigarettes in the Dark” (Lew Pollack) and an obscure Harry Warren tune, the swinging “As Long as I Live”. Trumpeter Mike Davis and clarinetist Ricky Alexander claimed a bright spot with call-and-response and splendid harmonies on Richard Rodgers’ “Blue Moon”. As per the standard of the era, bassist Andrew Hall provided pre-Jimmie Blanton, steady one-two timekeeping. Crytzer’s solos often took him into the gypsy-jazz realm, most evident on “Stompin’ at the Savoy” (Edgar Sampson), arranged to the 1934 Chick Webb version, rather than Benny Goodman’s 1936 iteration. His virtuosity was on display with playout number “What a Little Moonlight Can Do” (Harry M. Woods) at a super-charged tempo. (ML)

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**NEW YORK @ NIGHT**

**STEPHANIE NILLES**

*I Plead Allegiance to the Flag: The White Flag*

SSC 1606

AVAILABLE 3/05/21

—“Stephanie Nilles is possibly the most compelling jazz piano/lounge punk singer since Tom Waits started chain smoking and singing about sailors.” AudioSuede

Stephani Nilles knows that the fight against racism is a universal cause and that the power of Mingus’s work artistically assists that cause, thus the creation of her moving new recording.

**DAN BLAKE**

*Da Fé*

SSC 1616

AVAILABLE 2/12/21

—Saxophonist/Composer Dan Blake finds hope for a better future through compassionate action on his inspiring new album.

—Da Fé is an outgrowth of Blake’s activism.

**MICHAEL WOLFF**

*Live at Vitello’s*

SSC 1615

AVAILABLE 3/19/21

MICHAEL WOLFF piano, fender Rhodes

MARK ISHAM trumpet & flugelhorn

MIKE CLARK bass

**MICHAEL THOMAS**

*Natural Habitat*

SSC 1611

AVAILABLE 2/26/21

—Michael Thomas is a Grammy-winning saxophonist, composer, and arranger

—The New York Times: Michael writes “energetic, tuneful music for both combos and large ensembles”

MICHAEI THOMAS alto sax, bass clarinet

JULIAN SHORE piano, keyboards

HANS GLAWSCHUG bas

JONATHAN BLAKE drums

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www.sunnysiderecords.com
Streaming live before a limited-capacity audience at Smalls (Feb. 6th), the latest edition of the band Palladium, featuring tenor saxophonist Nicole Glover and vibraphonist Sasha Berliner with pianist Sean Mason, bassist Russell Hall and drummer Victor Lewis, continued its mission to explore the music of Wayne Shorter. Two sets interpreted the many compositions of the legendary tenor/soprano saxophonist, ranging from his early days with Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers on through his years with Miles Davis to Weather Report and his other interregnum groups. The quintet eased into its second set with an arrangement of “El Gauche”, Lewis tapping his snare rim to set the uplipping tempo of the rhythm section’s original prelude to the piece, which preceded Glover stretching out over a bossa nova rhythm in a dark sinewy tone. Betty Carter took her turn next, regular Thursday night with a bright sound, and then Mason, digging in deep with Hall and Lewis, guiding the band to a soaring finish. Glover introduced an atmospheric rendition of “Pandora Awakened” and vibraphonist Sasha Berliner with pianist Sean Mason. For more information, visit montereyjazzfestival.org/evolution-of-a-groove.

Lee Konitz, a founder of jazz “cool school”, was an icon. The saxophonist’s COVID-related death in April, the height of lockdown, didn’t allow for honors to be properly set, thus Soapbox Gallery’s live-streamed Tribute to Lee Konitz (Feb. 3rd) carried a certain significance. Pianist Sebastien Ammann, saxophonist Lena Bloch, bassist Cameron Brown and drummer Michael Sarin, all connected to Konitz, presented both his compositions and those in his wake. “He touched us with his music and his legacy lives on,” Ammann stated. “So, we pay tribute to Lee and his art.” Opener “Subconscious-Lee”, a classic of the genre, bop-fueled, medium tempo, featured each quartet member, though none seemed to enjoy the moment more than Brown, glowing as he played, leaning over his instrument as the pulsations locked solidly with Sarin’s ride cymbal. Bloch’s tenor in its mid-to-high register tempered the big horn over the terrain of Konitz’ fleet alto with no loss of tone. On several selections while doubling on soprano, Bloch traveled only further out west. Her improvisations wrapped about Ammann’s often Tristano-esque piano, fueling his aerial counterpoint patterns as Sarin’s sticks danced with a touch so light as almost to float over drums and cymbals. And the tireless Brown, as always, stood as the heartbeat, a ceaseless drive that sang of both coasts simultaneously. Bouncing off this soundboard, however, each and every low moan runs cool. The concert would have made Konitz proud. –John Pietaro

WHAT’S NEWS

In another loss to the pandemic, it is being reported that Washington, DC’s Blues Alley, open since 1965, may be ceasing operations.

On Mar. 26th, the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra will present the virtual concert “Voice of Freedom”, featuring the music of Betty Carter, Billie Holiday, Abbey Lincoln and Nina Simone with guests Melanie Charles, Shanel Johns, and Ashley Pezzotti. For more information, visit jazzatlincolncenter.org/squarespacespace/virtual-season.

United States Artists has announced its 2021 class of Fellows, each receiving $50,000 in unrestricted funds. This year’s Music Fellows are Martha Gonzalez, Edward “Kid” Jordan, Tomeka Reid, Wadada Leo Smith and Mazzy Swift. For more information, visit unitedstatesartists.org.

The Alternative Guitar Summit will take place online Mar. 20th at 8 pm (Honoring Pat Martino with Adam Rogers/Peter Bernstein, Dave Stryker/Paul Bollenback, Rez Abbassi/Jeff Miles, Oz Noy/Steve Sh碑, Shenel Bailey, Ed Cherry and Joel Harrison and Kurt Rosenwinkel solo) and Mar. 21st at 2 pm (solo performances by Nguyen L¢, Nels Cline, Michael Greco, James, Wolfgang Muthspiel, Mark Johnson, Michael Kaiser and Anthony Piro). Additionally, the AGS online camp takes place Mar. 6th-7th with Bill Frisell, Mike Stern, Adam Levy, Ben Monder, Chris, Rogers, Bailey and more. For more information, visit alternativeguitarsummit.com.concerts.
Throughout a career spanning more than four decades, Susan Alcorn has anticipated expectations of what the pedal steel guitar can do. After getting into slide guitar by inspiration of Robert Johnson, Son House, Blind Willie McTell and others, she encountered the pedal steel in 1975 and never looked back. She cut her teeth in Houston, TX, where she schooled herself both on stage and through formal instruction in jazz improvisation. Over time, she felt a longing to do something more than was stereotypically expected of the instrument. This set her on a path of deep self-examination and rethinking of musical paradigms, eventually leading to solo performances in which boundaries were a thing of the past. Equally informed by classical, jazz, country, South American protest songs and folk music, Alcorn feeds on the nutrients of the creative spirit to cultivate her own across a wilyfied misunderstood fretboard. Through it all, her sense of heartfelt appreciation comes through. Whether playing by her lonesome on 2015’s Soledad or, most recently, with a quintet on 2020’s Pedernal, her spirit is uniquely alive in every note. Her upcoming album, Bird Meets Wire, which finds her in company of saxophonist Ingrid Laubrock and cellist Leila Bordreuil, is scheduled to be released in May.

The New York City Jazz Record: The pedal steel guitar is rarely associated with jazz. Does the instrument have any sort of improvisational history?

Susan Alcorn: Not a long history. There’s improvisation in country music, of course, but it’s usually very short—maybe 16 bars at most. I tend to improvise a lot when I’m practicing and get ideas from that. But the country steel players, especially the Nashville ones, come up with a repertoire of intelligent licks, which they then string together when playing solos. The problem with that is you tend to run out of licks, as opposed to playing bebop, where you have to invent and tell a story—you don’t know where it’s going next. On the other end, [master pedal steel guitarist] Buddy Emmons put out an album [in 1963] called Steel Guitar Jazz. But as far as free jazz is concerned, there’s very little history with the instrument.

TNYCJR: Is the pedal steel typecast?

SA: A lot of people automatically think of country music when they hear the pedal steel. Some reviewers of pedal steel music still like to talk about it as having an “Americana” sound, so yes, it’s certainly been typecast.

TNYCJR: Stereotypes aside, how do you define your approach to the instrument?

SA: What I try to do is find the aspects of the instrument that will go farther abroad and, at the same time, maybe a little bit deeper. Over the years, I’ve developed techniques to evoke a Ligeti choral work or the microtonalism of Xenakis.

TNYCJR: On that latter note, there’s clearly a classical thread running throughout your work, not least of all in your 2007 album And I Await the Resurrection of the Pedal Steel Guitar, which grew out of your love for Olivier Messiaen’s Et exspecto resurrectionem mortuorum. In that respect, where do the techniques of Ligeti and Xenakis fit into free jazz?

SA: There’s a tendency to throw around the term “free jazz”, but what does that mean? It’s a label that can be construed in several ways and misconstrued in even more. If you look at the Art Ensemble of Chicago and Sun Ra, for example, you’ll find more of an openness to 20th Century classical music than among bebop musicians. Classical structures and harmonies have been with me for as long as I can remember. My mom sang in a choir with the Cleveland Symphony Orchestra under George Szell. She also played piano—church tunes, mostly—and sang. I would sit under the piano and listen. My father was known for mimicking big band singers, which was a thing back then. People would put on a record and basically mimic the entire performance. I never got to see any of that, but I hear he could be quite the life of the party. My parents had a lot of classical and jazz records when I was growing up. One day it might be Mussorgsky or Ravel and the next it might be Duke Ellington, Count Basie or Ella Fitzgerald. I think I’ve always had an ear for something different. While all my friends were listening to The Beatles, I liked The Dave Clark Five. I was also into the music of Edgard Varèse in junior high school.

TNYCJR: When and where did you experience your eureka moment with the pedal steel?

SA: Before pedal steel, I used to play blues slide guitar. I really got into the blues in middle school and it stuck. Seeing Muddy Waters was what made me want to do slide. It was the notes between the notes, all at the same time, that grabbed me. With a regular guitar, you put your finger on the fret and that’s it, but there’s so much power in even the slightest movement of the slide. And then one night, when I’d just turned 21, I was at a bar in DeKalb, Illinois, listening to a country rock band with a pedal steel player. From where I was in the back, I could see the instrument just barely; it looked like the bar was floating. I decided that’s what I wanted to do. I bought a pedal steel guitar two days later and went looking for a teacher. I had played a bunch of instruments before that, but from then on I concentrated pretty much exclusively on the pedal steel guitar.

TNYCJR: Was instruction easy to come by?

SA: At the time, I couldn’t find anyone who was willing to teach me. These were men in their 30s-40s, which seemed really old to me at the time, and none of them wanted to share their bag of tricks.

TNYCJR: Was this due to any stigma against women?

SA: You don’t always know if people are acting a certain way due to sexism, but at times you wonder. With country music, I think if you can play well, you’re an asset to the band and it helps if you’re considered eye candy. You could be in the most conservative, racist and sexist band imaginable, but they’ll respect you as a musician, though you’re not privy to their ‘boys club’ world. But there have been a few times when people made it more obvious. One time I was sharing the stage with a highly-regarded local steel player. I was no virtuoso but I knew my way around the instrument. He would kind of butt in whenever I’d take a solo. So, when he took a solo, I started playing harmony with...
Before everything ground to a halt as the pandemic hit, the presence of vibraphonist Patricia Brennan on the bandstand was a sure indicator of both adventure and quality. She graced outfts as diverse as John Hollenbeck’s Large Ensemble, the Anna Webber/Angela Morris Big Band and Michael Formanek’s Ensemble Kolossus as well as at the more intense end of the spectrum with Matt Mitchell’s Phalanx Ambassadors and Tomas Fujiwara’s Seven Poets Trio. But she’s not been idle since, juggling a busy but fulfilling teaching schedule at NYU, The New School and Brooklyn Academy of Music with the release of her leadership debut album Maqishti.

Brennan was born in the melting pot of Port of Veracruz, Mexico in August 1984. Music was ever present during her childhood, thanks to the Latin percussion of her father and a grandmother who was a concert pianist. She studied classical percussion and piano from an early age, eventually moving to the prestigious Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia for her undergrad, by which time the vibraphone and marimba were her prime instruments.

Brennan explains the allure: “One of the traditional instruments back home is Mexican marimba. That was one of the earliest memories and I even had a little instrument when I was very little. As a percussionist I was just drawn to it as it had that harmonic and melodic element and as I was a pianist it was a good way to combine all the instruments. I was even able to play some of the piano repertoire on marimba at the time and also keep that physical and raw feel that you have with drums and percussion. But then later on during college when I had to start playing in chamber music situations, I was playing more vibraphone. One of the things that attracted me the most to that instrument was the ability to sustain the sound and the tone quality of the instrument. There’s just nothing like it.”

Although to this point her repertoire was largely contemporary, composers like Iannis Xenakis or John Cage, she took a sharp left turn by deciding to do her undergrad, by which time the vibraphone and drums and percussion. But then later on during college where I had to start playing in chamber music situations, I was playing more vibraphone. One of the things that attracted me the most to that instrument was the ability to sustain the sound and the tone quality of the instrument. There’s just nothing like it.”

For more information, visit patriciabrennanvibes.com

Recommended Listening:
- Michael Formanek Ensemble Kolossus – The Distance (ECM, 2014)
- John Hollenbeck Large Ensemble – All Can Work (New Amsterdam, 2017)
- Tomas Fujiwara – 7 Poets Trio (RogueArt, 2018)
- Matt Mitchell – Phalanx Ambassadors (Pi, 2018)
- Anna Webber / Angela Morris Big Band – Both Are True (Greenleaf Music, 2018)
- Patricia Brennan – Maqishti (Valley of Search, 2018)
Marilyn Mazur is a unique artist: percussionist, composer, vocalist, dancer and multi-instrumentalist who has pioneered her own path. In a fantastic career spanning almost 50 years, over 200 album credits and numerous awards, she has worked with a variety of artists, including Miles Davis, Wayne Shorter, Gil Evans, John Tchicai, Jeanne Lee, Irène Schweizer, Lindsay Cooper, Jan Garbarek, Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen, Eberhard Weber, Dino Saluzzi and Pierre Dørge's New Jungle Orchestra, among many others.

Born in New York City, Mazur and her family relocated to Copenhagen when she was six. In Denmark she started violin lessons at seven. She didn’t take to that instrument but began dreaming and made a connection between music and magic. “I established my ‘secret world’, where my fantasy dance teacher [Mrs. Mysticum] would teach me the steps of Le Sacre du Printemps, my absolute favorite music, which has been rooted deeply inside me my entire life. I would draw the curtains in our living room, so I was alone on our red carpet, put the record on and dance.”

At nine she began piano and ballet lessons, which she maintained her secret world where both dance and music were magic and creative ways of living. As a teenager, she was inspired by records. She enjoyed Cream and Frank Zappa, but when a friend sat her in a dark room with headphones to listen to Bitches Brew it made a huge impression. It was also as a teenager that she started experiencing more live music. “I started to listen to live music and would always dance, rather wildly, at live concerts with my favorite groups: [Alex] Riel/,[Palle] Mikkelborg, V8, led by two Danish jazz icons, who I later got to work with extensively, and Kenneth Knudsen’s Coronarias Dans.”

Around 16 she left school and joined The Creative Dance Theatre and toured with them for about three years. Sometimes they worked live with musicians such as Dollar Brand, Karl Berger and the Swiss group OM. Her piano teacher wanted her to attend the Royal Music Conservatory to receive an advanced musical education. At that time, in Denmark and the States alike, music studies were strictly classical and Mazur had no aspirations of becoming a classical pianist, so she pursued the music education track and began to focus on percussion, among other things.

“...in the beginning she collaborated with free jazz musicians, avoiding the established route into jazz. “As a drummer I found it cool to communicate easily by ear and feeling, so I didn’t worry much about tradition and [i.e.] bebop. This doesn’t necessarily mean that I am breaking rules—which I am not applying in the beginning 1985, the second Miles band I was in [1988] was more social, but, wow, what an experience with Miles’ leading power and inspiration—to tour the whole world under those grand circumstances and have the chance to give whatever possible to Miles’ music!”

That experience was followed by touring and recordings with the Gil Evans/Laurent Cugny Big Band Lumiere in 1986 and a world tour with Shorter in 1987 and then back with Davis in 1988. In 1989 Mazur formed her own dream band, Future Song, and from 1991 to 2005 she had a fruitful collaboration with Norwegian saxophonist Jan Garbarek.

After all of these amazing experiences, she fondly remembered the Primi Band like family. So, when the Copenhagen Jazz Festival asked her to revive the group in 2015, she was thrilled. Putting the original group back together was not possible at this point, but a sort of new version was assembled called Shamania.

Dorothy Donegan was never easy to categorize. During her long career, the native Chicagoan pianist performed everything from boogie woogie, swing, blues, bop and stride to European classical music. But whatever she played, Donegan was a virtuoso.

Born on Apr. 6th, 1922, Donegan was six when she began studying piano. Her early influences included Art Tatum, Earl “Fatha” Hines, Fats Waller, Count Basie and Duke Ellington as well as classical piano and at 12 she performed with the Chicago Symphony. Donegan, who was first recorded in 1942, later absorbed the influence of Bud Powell, Oscar Peterson and other bop pianists. Although she didn’t record as often as her admirers would have liked— and no studio albums at all from 1964-74, Donegan built an impressive catalog, which included dates for mostly independent labels.

In her discography were many live albums. She was famous for her shows, which went as far as they were unpredictable. Because she was so spontaneous, Donegan could be difficult for bassists and drummers to keep up with. Danish bassist Mads Vinding, who played with Donegan during the ‘80s, recalls, “Dorothy could play different melodies in either hand at the same time. We had no setlists and she never gave a clue as to which melody she was playing. Sometimes, she changed melody or key in the middle of a solo. Quite difficult to follow sometimes, but it was a good exercise for the ears.” Another bassist, Jon Burr, played in Donegan’s trio extensively during the ‘90s and remembers her as someone who wanted to make sure that the audience had a good time. "Dorothy was unique," he explains. "I heard it said about her that Dorothy maybe wasn’t the greatest jazz pianist, but she was certainly the greatest pianist in jazz. She was recognized as such by other pianists and she was an entertainer; that was the focus of her show. Dorothy had a comedic aspect to her showmanship. She would walk out on stage wearing flats, carrying high heels. Then she would sit down on the piano bench and the first thing she would do is change the shoes. And she would do stuff like play the piano with her foot... It was said that nobody wanted of becoming a classical pianist, so she pursued the music education track and began to focus on percussion, among other things.

“...in the beginning she collaborated with free jazz musicians, avoiding the established route into jazz. “As a drummer I found it cool to communicate easily by ear and feeling, so I didn’t worry much about tradition and [i.e.] bebop. This doesn’t necessarily mean that I am breaking rules—which I am not applying in the beginning 1985, the second Miles band I was in [1988] was more social, but, wow, what an experience with Miles’ leading power and inspiration—to tour the whole world under those grand circumstances and have the chance to give whatever possible to Miles’ music!”

That experience was followed by touring and recordings with the Gil Evans/Laurent Cugny Big Band Lumiere in 1986 and a world tour with Shorter in 1987 and then back with Davis in 1988. In 1989 Mazur formed her own dream band, Future Song, and from 1991 to 2005 she had a fruitful collaboration with Norwegian saxophonist Jan Garbarek.

After all of these amazing experiences, she fondly remembered the Primi Band like family. So, when the Copenhagen Jazz Festival asked her to revive the group in 2015, she was thrilled. Putting the original group back together was not possible at this point, but a sort of new version was assembled called Shamania.
Categorizing the unclassifiable is a fool’s errand, to be sure, one upon which the channels of music production and distribution—marketers and distributors to broadcasters and journalists to merchants and consumers—largely rely. It’s a model that rarely reflects consumer preference and which forces the avoidance of genre to be considered a niche.

There are, of course, enterprises resisting the confines of race, region and definition of style. Carrier is one such endeavor. Launched in New York City in 2009 by composer/performers Sam Pluta and Jeff Snyder, the label has grown to have partners in four cities and a catalogue attracting the attention of such uncategorizable artists as Fred Frith and George Lewis.

“The goal of the label was to make a place for all these different musical worlds we find ourselves in that seem to be separate,” said Pluta, speaking from Paris where his wife, composer Sky Macklay, has a fellowship. (He is fulfilling his obligations at the University of Chicago, where he is an assistant professor in the Department of Music, online.) The label, he explained, began as a way to put out music by Snyder, himself and their friends, setting an eclectic agenda from the outset. The first two releases were by the composer/performer collective Wet Ink Ensemble and a sort of electro-chamber drone project called Glissando Bin Laden. Pluta is a member of both groups. Label management has since expanded with the addition of composers Katie Young in Atlanta and David Brynjar Fransson in Los Angeles, with each bringing projects to the table to be voted on and then seen through production by one of the four. “We each have really different tastes, so hopefully there’s a breadth of different musical ideas,” Pluta said.

Some recent releases leaning toward the improvisor sector of the Carrier umbrella were brought in by Pluta: Pluta and George Lewis, who works with “recuperated junk”; Rainbow Family, an archival recording by George Lewis with Derek Bailey, Douglas Ewart, Steve Lacy and Joëlle Léandre; and The Cat Of Sadness, a soprano saxophone trio by Dan Blake, Jon Irabagon and Ingrid Laubrock.

Rainbow Family came about after Lewis emailed Pluta saying he’d come across a 1984 Betamax recording of some early electro-acoustic experiments recorded at Institut de Recherche et de Coordination Acoustique/Musique in Paris. “George is very well known for the Voyager project but I didn’t even know about this Rainbow Family project,” Pluta said of his former instructor at Columbia University. “What he was doing in 1983-84 with electronic instruments and improvisation is what I try to do in my work. To be able to put out this heavyweight, major document in the field was really important.” Releasing Rainbow Family and Ted Moore’s bruit, a set of contemporary acoustic/electronic improvisations, outlined a four-decade continuum of what the label sets out to document. “This is so central to the core of what we do,” Pluta said. “For us to be able to release this and then the Ted Moore album and to show those things next to each other and lay out a tradition, that is important.”

For more information, visit carrierrecords.com
Howard Johnson, brass and reed player known mostly for playing tuba, baritone saxophone and bass clarinet but also clarinet, flugelhorn, cornet and pennywhistle on hundreds of records since the mid ’60s, died Jan. 11th at 79 after a long period of poor health.

Johnson was born Aug. 7th, 1941 in Montgomery, Alabama and raised in Ohio. He was self-taught on baritone and joined his middle school band, where he would also pick up the tuba, getting, as he told our own John Pietaro in a 2019 interview, “all of the fingers down just by watching the tuba players.” After a stint in the Navy he moved to Chicago and then New York. Soon after he came into the circle of bassist Charles Mingus. As he related to Pietaro, “I wandered into The Five Spot and someone pointed out to Mingus that there was a tuba player in the house... He called the band a Jazz Workshop so he could do anything, including audition tuba players onstage.” Though he had already recorded with Bill Dixon, his time with Mingus’ large ensembles of 1964-66 got him noticed.

From there he would never stop working, appearing on albums by Hank Crawford, Gerald Wilson, Archie Shepp, Hank Mobley, Big Black, Freddie Hubbard, Gary Burton, McCoy Tyner, Leon Thomas, Rahsaan Roland Kirk, Jimmy Owens, Charlie Haden, Charles Tolliver, Thad Jones/Mel Lewis, Alan Silva (releasing a handful of records on the French Center Of The World label) after earlier credits under Booker Ervin, Marzette Watts, Noah Howard, Alan Silva, Archie Shepp and Hans Dufu, staying in Europe and waxing his own dates for Sun, Free Lance, Vogue, Black Lion, Disques Ades, Miss You Jazz, Bleu Regard, CIMP and Boxholder alongside collaborations with Sunny Murray, Steve Lacy, Talib Kibwe, Eve Packer, Avram Fefer, Kali Z. Fasteau, Jacques Couri and others. Few died Jan. 6th at 85.

MALCOLM GRIFFITHS (Sep. 29th, 1941 - Jan. 19th, 2021) The British trombonist was a crucial figure in his country’s early avant garde scenes, getting his start—as many did—in Mike Westbrook’s free jazz period and might work with John Surman, Alan Skidmore, Peter Brötzmann, Chris McGregor, Michael Gibbs, Norma Winstone, Kenny Wheeler, Paul Rutherford, Hugh Hopper, Graham Collier, Stan Tracey, John Warren, Ray Russell, Harry Miller, Tony Coe, Gil Evans, Louis Moholo, Paul Dunmall, Keith Tippett and more. Griffiths died Jan. 19th at 79.


JEREMY LUBBOCK (Jun. 4th, 1931 - Jan. 29th, 2021) The British pianist’s albums were noted for his virtuosity, and as a sideman with Herb Alpert, Al Jarreau and Michael Bublé and had songs recorded by The Manhattan Transfer, Lee Ritenour, Ramsey Lewis/Nancy Wilson, Ernie Watts, Diane Schuur, Pat Metheny, Helen Merrill, Milt Jackson, Nina Simone, Quincy Jones and others. Lubbock died Jan. 29th at 89.

JUNIOR MANCE (Oct. 10th, 1928 - Jan. 17th, 2021) The pianist’s credits stretch all the way back to the mid ’40s, composers who Who’s Who of jazz in Leo Parker, Gene Ammons, Sonny Stitt, Lester Young, Dinah Washington, Joe Gordon, Cannonball and Nat Adderley, Wilbur Ware, Art Blakey, James Moody, Johnny Griffin, Dizzy Gillespie, Benny Green, Clark Terry, Eddie Jefferson, Etta Jones, Ben Webster, Howard McGhee, Jimmy Scott, Dexter Gordon and more, later credits being with Ken Peplowski, Frank Vignola, Al Grey, Takashi Ohi, Tony Falanga, José James and Richard Davis, all this plus dozens of leader dates since the mid ’50s on Verve, Jazzland, Karusell, Riverside, Capitol, Atlantic, Milestone, East Wind, Sadville, Nilha, Bee Hive, All Art, Lob, Chiascuro, Enja, Trio, M&K Jazz and, in the new millennium, his own Jun Glo. Mance died Jan. 17th at 92.

GINO MORATTI (Jan. 15th, 1937 - Jan. 18th, 2021) The longtime private investigator and amateur musician channeled his passion as the latter towards his role as Artistic Director of Jazz at Kitano from 2006-20, making it one of New York’s finest jazz rooms and a home for such pianists as Don Friedman and Frank Kimbrough. Moratti died Jan. 18th at 84.

SAMMY NESTICO (Feb. 6th, 1924 - Jan. 17th, 2021) The legendary composer/arranger released over a dozen albums since the ’80s, many in the new millennium in collaboration with Germany’s SWR Big Band, in a career going back to the mid ’50s and work for Charlie Barnet, Glenn Miller and, most notably, Count Basie, many of his charts performed and recorded by big bands from all over the world, ranging from high school and college to military, plus movie music credits for Million Dollar Infidel, The Color Purple and Little Children. Nestico died Jan. 17th at 96.


JOHN RUSSELL (Dec. 19th, 1954 - Jan. 18th, 2021) The British guitarist was part of his country’s second generation of free improvisers, recording since the mid ’70s for Incus, Caw, Acta, Emanem, FMP, Nur/Nicht/Nur, Another Timbre, psi, dEN, Extralatte, Bociian, Va Fongool, Weekerhoff, FMR and other labels in collaboration with Toshinori Kondo, Maggie Nichols, Steve Beresford, John Butcher, Paul Lovens, Radu Malfatti, Roger Turner, Evan Parker, Maarten Altena, Sabu Tooyumzi, Michel Doneda, Mats Gustafsson, Raymond Strid, Eddie Prévost, Thurston Moore and others. Russell died Jan. 18th at 66.

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**ALBUM REVIEWS**

**Bassist Shayna Dulberger has covered a lot of territory, not only jazz with her own groups, which have featured saxophonists Darius Jones and Yoni Kretzmer, but also noise and electronics with Hot Date with guitarist Chris Massey. Her rich, sure-footed sound and adventurousness has also led to frequent sideman stints, notably William Parker’s *Sunrise In The Tone World* (AUM Fidelity), recorded at the 2008 Vision Festival. Dulberger is one point of the equilateral triangle Dromedaries alongside saxophonist Keir Neuringer and drummer Julius Maris. The followup to an eponymous debut in 2015 continues the egalitarian ethos with four slices of spontaneity captured at Seizures Palace in 2018. Dulberger cycles through repeated patterns, which mutate to create a sturdy sense of movement and non-metric swing. While often the least obtrusive member, she is maybe the most important in keeping things aloft. Neuringer, whose profile has risen thanks to his role in Irreversible Entanglements and his work with his band, is the one to whom Dulberger looks for balance and contrast. Masri’s addition is like a modern radio... Of days and patriarchal-induced confusion and decimation erected and produced during Kidambi and Bertucci’s personal isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It can be assumed that the stark collaborative readjustment was a deeply embedded source of inspiration as the tracks are heavily coated with sounds of empowered desperation, resulting in a kind of freedom that can only be earned through perseverance and ingenuity during this time of global loss.

The album opens with “Siren Call,” reimagining the powers of the mythological water beings who entranced unassuming sailors with their eerie feminine singing, causing them to shipwreck on the three islands of Sirenum scopuli. Kidambi’s voice is layered and looped by Bertucci into transcendentals of beauty and chaos. “False Profits” is a darkly fanciful sonic collection of breathy vocals and speaking voices mixed and rearranged into a swirling, fast-paced and high-pitched piece of sound art purposely created to overwhelm and disorient the listener. “Alter of Time”, “Must I Burn?” and the title track continue to drive the listener through a journey of death, pain and rebirth as the duo creatively orients songs into stealthily, yet powerful expressions of freedom that can only be earned through perseverance and ingenuity during this time of global loss.

The surreal, apocalyptic musical offering *End of Softness* is the second collaboration between vocalist Amirtha Kidambi and sound artist Lea Bertucci. The album is comprised of carefully woven musical shards from their debut album *Phase Eclipse* and a live performance the duo reworked and resttexturized in order to create this new collection of darkly-themed songs. The surreal, apocalyptic musical offering *End of Softness* is the second collaboration between vocalist Amirtha Kidambi and sound artist Lea Bertucci. The album is comprised of carefully woven musical shards from their debut album *Phase Eclipse* and a live performance the duo reworked and restexturized in order to create this new collection of darkly-themed songs. The surreal, apocalyptic musical offering *End of Softness* is the second collaboration between vocalist Amirtha Kidambi and sound artist Lea Bertucci. The album is comprised of carefully woven musical shards from their debut album *Phase Eclipse* and a live performance the duo reworked and restexturized in order to create this new collection of darkly-themed songs. The surreal, apocalyptic musical offering *End of Softness* is the second collaboration between vocalist Amirtha Kidambi and sound artist Lea Bertucci. The album is comprised of carefully woven musical shards from their debut album *Phase Eclipse* and a live performance the duo reworked and restexturized in order to create this new collection of darkly-themed songs.

For more information, visit judisilvano.com/recordings/unity. Silvano has recorded a lot more albums since then, making her mark with a wide range of projects and collaborators. This CD makes maximum use of her avant garde talents and Arnold is a consistently intuitive collaborator for the veteran singer.

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I’m Forever Blowing Bubbles
Hailey Brinnel (Outside In Music)
by Elliott Simon
The title track on this debut from vocalist/trombonist Hailey Brinnel was written over a century ago by John Kellette. It fits Brinnel’s youthful expressive vocals perfectly due to its naïveté, which fronts for a mix of heartache and amusement. Her arrangements of this and seven other songs from her grandfather’s generation are largely spot-on and work to feature her vocal chops and trombone prowess. Brinnel’s voice sparkles during the changes and she deftly moves through pensive waltz, swing, Dixieland and back again. Pianist Silas Irvine, bassist Joe Plowman and drummer Dan Monaghan are a fine rhythm section dexterously navigating these vagaries. Brinnel is one of many women associated with drummer Sherrie Maricle, with half of these compositions recorded at Drummers, Maricle’s Philadelphia based in-home studio/concert space.
The program opens with a stellar version of Milton Delugg-Wilkie Stein’s “Orange Colored Sky”, which includes lovely arco work from Plowman, who is very much at home in these environs and integral to the session. Cole Porter’s usually sedate “Easy to Love” swings harder than it ever has with a clipped trumpet solo from Andrew Carson that does battle with Brinnel’s potent scat.
Brinnel’s trombone/vocal combination is at its best in the bigger band contexts and when clarinetist Sam Bishoff joins with Carson on a couple of cuts things really swing. However, a duet with guitarist Dariel Peniazeck on J. Fred Coots-Haven Gillespie’s “You Go to My Head” and with Plowman on Rube Bloom-Harry Ruby’s “Give Me the Simple Life” showcase a sultry innocence. Busby Meyer’s “What’s the Use of Getting Sober” and Hoagy Carmichael’s “Stardust” do not fare as well vocally but on the whole Brinnel can blow the hell out of her trombone and I’m Forever Blowing Bubbles is a wonderful blend of leadership and Swing Era sensuality.

Artlessly Falling
Mary Halvorson’s Code Girl (Firehouse 12)
by Marc Medwin
“You arrive with daggered hands,” begins and ends “Walls and Roses”, but, as with the music sliding in and out of focused contemplation on Code Girl’s second album, are they really the same in the end? Lorraine Hansberry once spoke of the universal need to be understood in its details, a lesson guitarist Mary Halvorson has learned well. In this revamped version of Code Girl, she has found the perfect vehicle for a vision shuttled between minutia and grandiosity, a vision shuttled between minutia and grandiosity, by German trumpeters Birgit Ulrich and Franz Hautzinger, was a statement in and of itself, no mean compositional feat for artists whose multivariant careers have been rife with them. It was very good, but this one is a triumph due in no small part to the addition of saxophonist and vocalist María Grand and trumpeter Adam O’Farrill. This album has now taken on the intimacy, precision and unassuming grandeur of a chamber music ensemble, but one skilled in negotiating the spaces, somewhere between sublety and sucker punch, that have always opened up in Halvorson’s genre-bending positions.
For the latter—and its title gives the heads-up—“Walls and Roses” alternately blasts and cajoles its distorted and crystalline way through the repetitions modified by perception and context, those destroyers of all cyclical and categorical tidiness. A similar but smaller series of disconnects opens the title track, whose deliciously accessible guitar harmonies jitter in dizzying blanket formations, dissolving the saltiness of old patterns, as Halvorson’s lyrics suggest in Kidambi’s gorgeous delivery. A middle ground is furnished in usually jazzy-ish, each Halvorson's ubiquitous pedal warpings never quite derail the liquid harmonies bolstering the exquisite horn interplay and succulent sustain, all melding perfectly with Robert Wyatt’s beguiling intonations.
Unexpectedly, the thankfully irrepressible Wyatt lends his magical vocal arts to three of the album’s tracks. What a joy it is to hear him in contexts so expertly shaped for him by someone who knows so intimately the nature of his instrument! The expertly timed overdubs, on dramatic lines of the wistful, “Lemon Trees” just to cite one example, evoke his solo work while placing a new frame around that instantly recognizable vocabulary. His vocal transparency, underpinned by the deepest humanity, remains the hallmark of his art. Is it Kidambi or Grand, a kind of vocal soulmate for Wyatt’s ethereality, singing the stunningly understated background as Halvorson, Formanek and Fujiwara anchor each chordal plateau to O’Farrill’s filigree? Even that brief pastorality is rendered moot as the track builds, slowly but burst of energy, as if small squalls were blowing through, a grand tempest arriving near the end, one final cloudburst before irenic frog croaks and bird songs return, the pond at peace.
Future (Japanese for “two people”) is pianist Satoko Fujii, well known for her prolific output and international collaborations, and vibraphonist Taiko Saito (also Japanese, but based in Germany), who, though a generation younger, shares many of Fujii’s aesthetic sensibilities. Their 15-year friendship finally blossomed into Beyond, recorded in Japan after the third gig of their first tour. As such it has a quality of fresh discovery—people figuring out how to play together. Although Fujii can be extremely assertive, here even in her most ecstatic moments—as when she crowds the bass register with dense twining lines and chords—she never overpowers Saito, whose light shimmering tones in the upper register maintain a strong presence. The pieces, which include pointillistic melodies (“the Mo Ato”, “Mobius Strip”), short motifs with improvised elaboration, through-composed pieces and textural sketches, a nice balance of freedom and control. Kleine Trompetenmusik, by German trumpeters Birgit Ulrich and Franz Hautzinger, was recorded in the former’s flat in May 2018, but sounds as if could have been made this winter by two people cooped up inside by COVID-19 quarantine. Foregoing traditional trumpet tones, the pair instead explores various extended techniques producing all manner of pops, knocks, clicks, creaks, rattles, buzzes, rubs, slaps, growls and a host of aspirated attacks aping boiling teakettles, pressure cookers, hissing radiators and droning motors. One technique (heard on “Griesel”) sounds just like the saliva suction tube that dentists use. The five tracks are of a piece, each an interlocking conversation in which one states an idea in the form of an unusual tone or timbre, maintaining it as the other (mixed in the opposite channel) offers the first idea, with a second idea that surely demonstrates a similar trajectory for the composer. Her music was always very good, but now it’s great and she has become a forceful poetic and musical voice with which to be reckoned.
Vocalist Roseanna Vitro is looking both ways as she joined the septuagenarian club on Feb. 28th. Eyeing the future, she’s readying two new albums—a guest-enhanced celebration of Charlie Parker’s music and a meeting with pianist/longtime collaborator Kenny Werner. And digging into the past, she’s working with her husband—producer/engineer Paul Wickliffe—to digitize and rerelease early recordings. As logic would dictate, that project begins with Vitro’s dazzling debut. Originally released on vinyl in 1984, the album is now available on CD and streaming platforms for the first time. And, boy, is it long overdue. Enlisting pianist Kenny Barron’s trio with bassist Buster Williams and drummer Ben Riley for primary support, tapping Fred Hersch to write arrangements, spicing up a pair of tracks with percussionist Duduka Da Fonseca and calling on some bandmates from her Houston days—pianist Bliss Rodriguez, saxophonist Arnett Cobb and guitarist (and then-future bassist) Scott Hardy—Vitro positioned herself for victory before she ever uttered a note. But the singing—the real draw, of course—is sensational, carrying the program to tremendous heights. With a signature blend of power and poise, serious flexibility and range and pitch-perfect clarity, Vitro grabs the ears from the get-go.

After opening in samba territory with “No More Blues”, Vitro quickly shifts gears again and again. There’s a coolly swinging 5/4 take on “You Go to My Head”, the slow-and-bluesy “Centerpiece” (Rodriguez and Cobb soulful and true), an appropriately chipper “Love You Madly” and the balladic beauty of “A Time for Love”. And that’s just for starters. Vitro rides the beautiful flow of a bossa nova foundation during “This Happy Madness”, delivers a hip “It Could Happen to You” (that gives Cobb and Riley a chance to trade), stylishly struts down “Easy Street” and drops into a few other welcoming jazz haunts. Sounding fresh and smart decades after its release, there’s no dust to be found on Listen Here.

For more information, visit roseannavitrojazz.squarespace.com

Few singers have a history rich with mystery and legendhood as Patty Waters, who turns 75 this month. After being relatively quiet for much of the ’70s-80s, Waters returned to performing and recording in the ’90s. Her voice is slightly deeper and a touch raspier and she is more of a conventional singer, but still treats words and syllables in the manner in which an instrumentalist interprets sighs, coos and shrieks. Pianist Burton Greene was her accompanist in the ’60s and returns on this April 2018 recording with bassist Mario Pavone and drummer Barry Altschul. What separates this from her classic ’60s sets is that her approach is somewhat more straightforward. Waters treats oft-heard standards with respectful warmth yet recasts them as only she can.

“Hush Little Baby” is stripped down to Waters taking the chorus and repeating it, fracturing it and breathlessly chanting it over the trio’s thorny improvisations. Via Waters the word “hush” becomes a fantasia, a slice of wishful thinking, an anguished plea, an insistent ritualistic chant, until it dissolves in the ether. Country classic “I’m So Lonesome I Could Cry” is transmuted into a near-gothic lament—almost every syllable rings as if from a cathedral. On “Nature Boy”, the phrase “just to love” evolves into a mantra, the repeated word “love” embodying both aching yearning and affirmation—what was once a song becomes ritual. Thelonious Monk’s “Off Minor” gets a rollicking, brittle and completely instrumental rendition wherein Altschul gets to shine in a crackling, roiling solo spot—a joy to behold, as he is otherwise restrained and sublimely supportive. “Lonely Woman” is a number where the whole ensemble goes into explorational mode while avoiding meandering self-indulgence—there’s a hushed urgency, adding to the drama.

With both humble delight and an occasionally harrowing mindset Waters truly reinvents these familiar tunes with subdued passion.

For more information, visit cleanfeed-records.com

By Dan Bilawsky

Listen Here
Roseanna Vitro (Skyline)

By Mark Keresman

An Evening in Houston
Patty Waters (Clean Feed)

Women’s History Month
Beyond her obvious skills—sophisticated pianist, composer, writer and painter—Yelena Eckemoff’s greatest strength may be an ability to draw on life’s surroundings to guide and enrich the aural experience. This prolific artist’s work is constantly nurtured by environment—and ours, collectively—and she’s always uncovering narratives hidden within. One need only look at Eckemoff’s discography to glean that information. She captured the temperature of a persistent winter in a trio with bassist Mads Vinding and drummer Peter Erskine on 2010’s Cold Sun; harnessed the light in emotion with help from tenor saxophonist Mark Turner, vibraphonist Joe Locke, bassist George Mraz and drummer Billy Hart during 2010 and 2020, but it clearly makes the point. So too does this evocative and absorbing double-album. Reuniting with vibraphonist Panu Savolainen, bassist Antti Lötjönen and drummer Olavi Louhivuori, who assisted the pianist in making musical sense of scents on 2017’s Blooming Tall Phlox, and adding two more notable Finns—saxophonist Jukka Perko and guitarist/multi-instrumentalist Jarmo Saari—Eckemoff sets off to tell the tale of a wildflower’s life and times. The perennial, given the fitting name Columbine, starts out as a seed seeking full life. Eckemoff and company conjure the warm glow of its growth in moving from mellow and curious environs to brighter atmospheres on the “In the Ground” opener. At the other extremity, the minimalist forays over with barely restrained, scorching heat, as on the opening “no friends but the mountains”, which plunges the mind into darker interiors, as if gazing into a black mirror searching for flickers of self. Then, after more incendiary aural collisions, ekhinda closes by suturing its polar points with “one leaf left”. The song unfolds like a Noh play’s prolonged scream before erupting into a sudden, final shockwave.

Mollestad accomplishes so much with her guitar that it may be easy to underestimate the contributions of her bandmates. This would be a mistake. The sound depends equally on the clear, searching flights of Susana Santos Silva’s saxophone, the textural layering provided by Marte Eberson and Erland Slettevoll on Rhodes, moog and electric piano, which alternately add a tapestry of competing discord and reinforce textural depth, especially during tunes’ densest frisson. Finally, ekhinda’s bustling intensity and rich dynamics are propelled by percussionist Ole Mufjell and drummer Torstein Lofthus’s thundering beats and daedal rhythms.

_ekhinda_ may appeal most to musical omnivores, but anyone willing to plunge into its depths will undoubtedly discover music both potent and inimitable.

For more information, visit ridesymbol.com

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**Early Blue: 1958-1968 (Treasures of Dutch Jazz)**

**Ann Burton (Nederlands Jazz Archief)**

The Netherlands’ Ann Burton (née Johanna Rafalowicz 1933-89) survived a difficult childhood (which included a few years hiding from the Nazis) before she began to work towards becoming a jazz singer. So grateful was she when the Americans liberated her country she spent her career exclusively singing in English, never displaying an accent. In 2020, the Nederlands Jazz Archief acquired her archives, including unreleased acetates. Along with some other holdings, they serve as the foundation of _Early Blue_. Other than four songs from 1965 previously released as an EP by Dutch Decca, the performances have mostly never been out before or were released on tiny European labels. Burton just made one LP (1967’s _Blue Burton_ for the Dutch Arton label) during the period of time covered by this release. _Early Blue_ gives listeners an opportunity to hear Burton before she became well known and regularly called her country’s top jazz singer.

A very subtle vocalist who dug deep into lyrics, Burton had a quiet and fetching voice with her improvising being fairly minimal. She often simply stated the melody but made the songs her own through sincerity and relaxed phrasing. She loved the recordings of Billie Holiday and, although her tone is very different, sometimes she hints at Lady Day on the ballads as on this version of “I’ve Got A Right To Sing The Blues”.

_Early Blue_ contains 24 concise selections (only four are slightly longer than four minutes), Burton accompanied by a variety of different groups, ranging from trios to a string quartet, the Metropole Orchestra and (for three songs) a trad septet (the Down Home Jazz Band). No matter what the setting or the year, Burton consistently uplifts the material during these mostly well-recorded performances. Highlights include “Kansas City”, a swinging “Exactly Like You”, “They Didn’t Believe Me”, “Let There Be Love” and a version of “I Could Have Told You” that is one of the beautiful recordings ever. Burton, who only recorded one album in America (1979’s _New York State Of Mind_), never became famous in the U.S. but, on evidence of this excellent release, deserves to be remembered.

For more information, visit jazzarchief.nl
Dottie Dodgion was a professional jazz singer as a teen, but she would make her name plying a different set of skills. In a career that began in the ‘40s and continued for seven-plus decades, the 91-year-old author of this often-engaging memoir drummed with legendary musicians and played storied venues, distinguishing herself in a male-centric milieu. “The guys were not going to give it up—the drummer was the balls of the band—and I really had to prove it,” she writes. Dodgion and co-author Wayne Entice acknowledge that she has long “languished in obscurity” and they understand that some readers might be more familiar with Jerry Dodgion, an accomplished saxophonist she married in the ‘50s (they later separated). The Lady Swings is “an eleven-hour rescue” mission meant to bolster her status as a pioneer who paved a route for other women drummers.

Her youth in California was shaped by music and by several deeply painful incidents. When she was five, Dodgion says, her father, a jazz drummer who had split with her mother, “kidnapped” her and took her along as he played West Coast “roadhouses and strip joints”; one night, an intruder broke into her father’s room and locked her in a closet. Her first stepfather raped her; her second died in World War II. At 16, she was the singer in a touring band led by Bay Area jazz guitarist Nick Esposito. Her father didn’t teach her to drum, but she was nonetheless drawn to the instrument. Though she worked numerous “humdrum gigs”, Dodgion briefly served as the drummer in bands led by Benny Goodman and Dave Brubeck. She took the stage at the Village Vanguard and the Half Note. And when she toured Europe with Melba Liston’s band, celebrated jazz writer Leonard Feather praised her in print. A Manhattanite in the ‘60s, she was always ready to work: “If a drummer took sick, was late, had habits, or lived in New Jersey and couldn’t get across the bridge, I was there.”

As of the winter of 2020-21, Dodgion was still playing shows at a California hotel. Dodgion is good on craft. Her description of learning how to keep “a standard swing rhythm”—she’d silently repeat “apple pie”, then “duplicate that sound on the stand-up tom”—is vivid and memorable. But if her recollections of overcoming sexist agents and musicians are inspiring, this book, like many memoirs, contains questionable quotations and scenes that read like embellished depictions of reality. Dodgion quotes from conversations she neither witnessed nor took part in and virtually everyone she encounters simply adores her. This is an interesting book about an eventful life in music, but you wouldn’t necessarily call it an authoritative version of events.

For more information, visit press.uillinois.edu
I am an artist on the new album by Sinan Alimanović International Band – “Lejla” (2020). Since the album was named after my father’s composition, dedicated to me, I have an urge to say a few words about the project and to modestly convey our shared experience about the very process of making this album. My inspiration came from reading the album notes for the legendary album “Kind of Blue” – Miles Davis, that were also written by the great pianist on the record Bill Evans.

One of the finest spaces of facts of consciousness in human experience is the space of music. In a creative process based on both the Black American Music, as well as the European musical heritage, the art of improvisation is unavoidable as it happens in real time. The album “Lejla” combines, in duration, different cultural backgrounds that merge into one, unique flow. Thus the Bosnian traditional song “sendalinka” (Track 1: “Sejdefa”), in musical preparation by Sinan Alimanović, performed as a trio starts to breathe as the rhythm changes form, while my minor blues “In Search for Freedom” (Track 2) arose from the experience ingrained in sendah (the word sendah derives from the Arabic word sauda, meaning black bile). In duration, in the Bergsonian sense, even intuitively, we can recognize a common field between spatially distant but essentially and even etymologically related concepts and practices grounded in human experience. By listening, but also by deciding to follow the experience of the term blues, we will feel that sendah becomes kind of blues, and that blue paints kind of melancholy. Only life and art are so naturally able to imprint traces in each other, to paint the outlines of the rich web in which the textures of experience are woven, no matter where we collect them. And music is, of all the arts, the most immediate in conveying these significant, humanistic messages, or rather, music is the most direct in articulating an authentic, sensory experience derived from that new wholeness. Music has the power to open, most naturally, the portal to that universal, timeless zone, on which Marcel Proust wrote that is “torn away of time”, and that zone is again in the very core and nature of the human understanding of time, in duration itself.

In the third composition, the band leader turns the course of this musical sailing towards the tradition of American Improvising Music and his own understanding of the composition “Body and Soul” (Track 3), shown in piano trio format. Already, at the next Sinan Alimanović’s straight-ahead composition “Sarajevo Remake” (Track 4), he pays tribute to the rich musical heritage left by the grand masters from the past, while simultaneously impressing his own author’s stamp and understanding of the sound of contemporary art music. In the next two compositions, the course again is oriented on lyrical conversations between piano, double bass and drums. A soulful, vital ballad “Falling” (Track 5) by Harvie S. allows us to sneak into the abundance of music that this author carries within himself, and which he elegantly shows through his solo on double bass. In “My Funny Valentine” (Track 6), as in “Body and Soul”, the trio again preserves the essential musicality of the composition while simultaneously reharmonizing it in a contemporary context.

Music does not require the knowledge of languages other than music, and comprehension is achieved in frequencies, resonances and vibrations, in moving towards a common goal. This universal fluidity that Kandinsky aspired to through the sounding of colors, or Arthur Rimbaud through giving the colors to vowels, we also found by transforming two, geographically, distant worlds and merging them into one joint confluence, in real time. Now, that movement is coming towards you, dear audience.

The acquaintance between Sinan, Harvie and myself embraced Victor, Jed and Adam in one duration that gives the message of the new wholeness, which is always reflected in the other – the strings on Harvie S’s double bass resonates in relation to Sinan Alimanović’s touch on the restored Steinway & Sons piano, while Victor Lewis breathes the pulse of life into the body of this musical story, which is certainly more significant while listening to it, than reading about it. In the audio material and also through Jed Levy’s sound, you will recognize that special color, shade which is reflected in work of great masters like John Coltrane and Joe Henderson.

That June night, after the recording of the album was over, before going to bed, I listened to the recording “Miles Smiles” by the Miles Davis Quintet. It is a completely natural sequence of circumstances that this recording is released on Miles High Records.

BY LEJLA ALIMANOVIĆ

Sinan Alimanović International Band

Sinan Alimanović international band features Victor Lewis on drums, Harvie S. on double bass, producer, tenor saxophonist Adam Klemm, vocalist Lejla Alimanović, and Sinan Alimanović on piano, bass, and lead vocals. A unique and creative team of musicians, the band has released its third album, “Lejla”, which showcases their unique blend of American and Bosnian music.

Available on CD, download, streaming:
Spotify / Deezer / Apple Music / YouTube

www.mileshighrecords.com | www.amazon.com
Facebook: www.facebook.com/sinanimanovic
These duets between longtime collaborators Jane Ira Bloom (soprano saxophone) and Mark Helias (bass) were recorded via the exchange of files in COVID-limited New York during 2020. They capture some of that period’s isolation but sound hopeful too. If the overall tone is melancholy, maybe that’s just what this particular combination of soprano and bass is going to yield. Bloom definitely has her own sound on the instrument. Helias is all empathy.

These two met back in the ’70s in New Haven, which had a lively jazz scene at the time. The manifesto for this recording: “We didn’t have to write anything. We didn’t even need to have anything. We didn’t even have to talk.” But they talk plenty on their instruments and spontaneously create some indelible music. The title piece, for instance, is wistful and keeps sounding like it’s about to segue into a standard.

Helias has his bow out for “Star Talk” and Bloom plays short phrases in the horn’s upper reaches. It’s Earthrise on the Mars, or maybe whales calling to each other across a lonely ocean. “First Canvas” is more open, but at 1:03 it’s over before it begins. “Magic Carpet” features playful soprano dancing over deep bass rumble, but also contains several meditative passages that build on closely heard responses.

Helias sets the tone for “Traveling Deep” with a bass rumble, but also contains several meditative passages that build on closely heard responses.

“Far Satellites” brings out Helias’ bow again. It attains almost a call-and-response feel, but with sparse tones from a slow night at the space station bar and grille. “Pros and Cons” has some of Bloom’s prettiest playing, contrasting with the more unsettled reality of “Drift”; Helias plays some amazing stuff halfway through the latter, an agitation waltz.

A lot of territory covered, without the players having to leave their socially distanced home bases. More than 40 years of intense collaboration in myriad settings obviates the need for up-close studio intimacy.

For more information, visit markhelias.bandcamp.com

Saxophonist Anna Webber makes spiky, challenging art music that owes as much to modern composition as to the jazz tradition and probably more. On her 2016 album Binary (recorded with a bassless trio of pianist Matt Mitchell and drummer John Hollenbeck), she took passages from compositions for percussion by composers like Milton Babbitt, John Cage, Morton Feldman, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Edgard Varèse and Iannis Xenakis and expanded them into pieces for a chamber jazz ensemble. On Both Are True, the 2020 debut of a big band she co-leads with fellow saxophonist Angela Morris, the 19-member ensemble played music that was cinematic (bringing to mind Lalo Schifrin, J.G. Thirlwell and even Ennio Morricone’s weirder scores) but also highly adventurous and which used the studio as a tool to terrific effect. Webber is someone who thinks before she plays and designs obstacle courses for her bandmates to navigate.

This album is pretty much the opposite of all that. It’s a live recording featuring Webber, pianist Marc Hannaford, bassist Adam Hopkins and drummer Mark Ferber. Hannaford and Hopkins are part of the Morris-Webber Big Band; Ferber is making his first appearance in her catalogue. It’s a single 35-minute piece, recorded live in Queens in December 2019 on a portable Zoom recorder and later polished in a studio by engineer Nathaniel Morgan, who really deserves credit as a fifth member of the group.

The music is an adaptation of “Reflections 3”, which was split into three chunks on Binary. On that album, it was little more than a juggled, stuttering melody line, played a few times as interludes between longer compositions. Here, that same melody is disassembled and refracted with a kind of disciplined relentlessness; when Webber is extrapolating phrases, long breath after long breath, seemingly without pause, it’s easy to think of Roscoe Mitchell’s adventures in repetition and intensity. Hannaford, Hopkins and Ferber lock in behind her, creating a pounding rhythm that oh-so-gradually shifts into fluid swing. Through it all, Webber moves implacably forward, never looking back, making what could have been a forbiddingly intense performance into something raucously alive.

For more information, visit outofyourheadrecords.com

As is my general practice, I listened to this recording several times before reading any explanatory materials. I’m a fan of both pianist Alexander Hawkins and cellist Tomeka Reid and was excited to hear them together. In keeping with the trite-and-true maxim, I wanted to let the music speak for itself. Here’s a note I made while re-listening, before reading the liner notes:

“Cecil Taylor-esque”. It’s a loving tribute to the departed master, but is reductive enough to be nearly meaningless. Not entirely so, but very nearly. What it’s meant to suggest is a performance (specifically on piano, but it needn’t be so) in which ideas fly by too fast to fully grasp. It isn’t just tempo; it’s in the intelligence of the playing.

I feel the need to preface that note because in his liner notes the pianist and Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Anthony Davis likens one of the album’s eight improvised pieces to Taylor’s early recordings. So, easy or not, the comparison, it seems, is apt and Davis and I are both right. But not as right as Hawkins and Reid, who are responsible for this exceptional jazz voice.
In 1925 Lil Hardin Armstrong guided husband Louis stage-front and led his Hot Five from the shadows. Since then, women have taken the lead many times over, but the journey was in spite of a male-dominated industry.

Some 60+ years later this reviewer, rushing toward the downtown express at Union Square, became enraptured by the sound of four saxophonists playing magically interwoven lines. The train was missed but it was worth it. “We’re the Billy Tipton Memorial Saxophone Quartet,” Amy Denio announced to the whooping crowd. Tipton, who died in 1989, was a transgender male identifying musician and bandleader of the ‘30s-’70s whose closeted life inspired Denio and baritone saxophonist Babs Helle (now John Otto). The two founded the band in Seattle in 1988, though many others have come through the ranks, particularly after Denio and Jessica Lurie. The current iteration is completed by Sue Orfield (tenor), Tina Richerson (baritone) and drummer Robert Kainar. If the band in its infancy was griping, today it’s simply outstanding.

**Wabi Sabi** was inspired by the Japanese aesthetic principle of transience and imperfection and, ironically, produced an album that’s pretty damned perfect. On Richerson’s opener “December Dance”, the listener experiences tractor-beam transport to the Latin Quarter of long ago. Thriving on Kainar’s stormy presence, shifting mambo beneath pasodobles of a sort, the horns’ moves are unstoppable. This energy only strengthens through Denio’s fascinatedly arranged “I Gran Orinador”, flooded with solos. The title cut by Orfield maintains the dancefloor action before moving into a slower theme with soaring vocalized melody out front. Denio’s uniquely mournful voice shines in her “Root Dance” both before and during the start of a beautifully Balkan-inspired 7/8. The piece effortlessly melds this tradition with New Orleans, casting joyful lament. The second half of the album, then, stretches the concept further, a global embrace of culture championed through improvisation. Listen for Brazilian- and West African-inspired sounds, Eastern European modes, even jazz rock. The closer, Orfield’s “Working Song”, is anthemic, grown from a soft pentatonic strain, a call to order, perhaps to arms, as the saxophone choir insistently, symbolically sings and shouts over a steady beat.

**I Love To See You Smile** from pianist Jackie Warren, bassist Amy Shook and drummer Sherrie Maricle, is a set of (mostly) standards sitting firmly in the 40s-50s piano jazz tradition, though in this case, drummer-led. 3D, short for three divis, shines throughout, each with moments but always focusing on the whole. Their version of “Besame Mucho”, with layers of rhythm cascading from the drumkit and featuring crisp, swinging breaks, brings new life to an old gem. Danceability, not so much as a goal but rather a byproduct of the often turbulent and improvisational nature of it all. The title cut, one of nine Hilton originals, is the opener: an airy, crooning ballad, midtempo and has a cheery, sunshine-y feel. Cole Porter’s “I’ve Got You Under My Skin”, the set’s sole standard, is played for muted shadows; it’s still upbeat, but in a slightly guarded manner. Rich, gently rolling chords in the ornate introduction, framed by bass and drums, are faintly dramatic, adding a bit of turbulence. “Karma Chaos” is a nice midtempo cooker, Curtis and Royston laying down a choppy magnetic rhythmic figure with Hilton jauntily essaying away over-top. One of the daintiest aspects of Hilton’s playing is her tidy and controlled, slightly witty sense of restraint. The closer, “Today I Looked At Love”, features lusciously lovely rhapsodic piano and crisp, considerably probing drumming.

**More Than Another Day** is a batch of easygoing jazz of considerable substance. It doesn’t cut corners nor is it high-handedly “artistic”. Hilton is an inheritor successor to the mantle of Erroll Garner; classy, intelligent and accessible without bowing to commercial-type compromise.

__For more information, visit lisahiltonmusic.com__
Adventurous ensemble writing, as well as surprising variety, can be found on these three albums, featuring differently sized and configured ensembles, all incidentally led by women. Jihye Lee’s Orchestra is configured in the classic big band mold—brass, reeds and rhythm—but she eschews the usual swing tropes, suggesting comparisons to Maria Schneider or Darcy James Argue (who produced Daring Mind). The Composers’ Orchestra Berlin [COB] mixes three reeds, two trumpets and a tuba, with a four or five-piece string section, plus piano, guitar, bass and drums. Bassist Gina Schwarcz’ “cracked an egg” is a monet with trumpet/flugelhorn, trombone, soprano saxophone/bass clarinet, violin, cello, piano, guitar and drums.

Daring Mind is a consistently fascinating aural adventure. Lee creates distinct sonic landscapes in her arrangements, often building, as on “Suji”, all in major chords, from a small kernel from one instrument that builds across and up sectionally to a climactic unfurling of solos (piano, clarinet). Lee often employs rhythms not normally associated with big band jazz, from martial 2/4 and 4/4 to floating, semi-rubato waves. Her take on a flagwaver, “I Dare You”, is all of whirling reeds and cussing riffs, Quinsin Nachhoff’s tenor wailing over jangly riffs before spirited massed ensemble shouts take it out. A metronome-like time centers “Relevent Mind”, features great trumpeter Sean Jones, who also appears on the power ballad “Struggle Gives You Strength”. “Dissatisfied Mind” mixes instruments in a cubistic dissonance, individual voices emerging and submerging into the swirling ensemble before a baritone coda. The closer, “GB”, builds from trumpet and piano up to a big brassy, cinematic climax (Lee hopes to write music for films in the future).

Conducted by C.O.B. founder Hazel Leach, Vanishing Points features the compositions of bassist Dirk Strakhofer, whose reeds run all the way from ’60s horror TV shows and hurricanes to paintings, J.S. Bach and Egyptian music. The latter gives us the CD’s second best tracks: “Tahar Square” begins with a round from the strings, answered by tuba-led horns morphing into a bright, bouncy theme before cleverly mixing strings, trumpet and saxophone in a Middle-Eastern version of New Orleans polyphony, while “Dos Danzas”, inspired by the Egyptian music of Mohamed Abdelwahab”, features guitar over rhythms led by the Egyptian dharbouka drum, violin, trumpet and cello soloing over the contagious rhythms. Strakhofer’s command of strings is impressive throughout, as he blends them with horns fluently as on his Bach tribute, “Passacaglia”, and his blend of strings and trumpets on “Belphegor”, his reminiscence of a 60s TV show. He also incorporates electric piano and guitar into a heady sonic mix of “Four Steps Into The Dark”.

Pannonica consists of two CDs, the first, with 11 tracks, an hour long; the second, with 12 tracks, about half that. Three short tracks on Disc One are bass solos; six short tracks on Disc Two are ensemble mashups. Schwarz’ compositions on Disc One range from inside to outside, in and out of tempo, foot-tapping to anarhich. The full ensemble, with strings, is employed for various effects on most of the long tracks, the best, “Lily of the Nile”, building momentum through enticing solos and solid ensembles. Disc Two doesn’t make much use of the strings and tracks rarely coalesce beyond dissonance and unfulfilled aspirations. Exceptions are the Middle-Eastern theme of “Baharat” and “Road Trip A22”, with a Philipp Nykrin piano solo right out of Cecil Taylor or Don Pullen.

On Exotinger, Sarah Bernstein delves into the fathoms of mystical terrain she’s carved out for some years, albeit this time with a whole new cast of instruments and voices/ generated effects. Bernstein’s strengths as instrumentalist and composer have been matched in recent performances and recordings by her mastery of digital sound. cavernous echo, like multi-speeds, orchestral hits and caustic percussives triggered live accompany her prodigious playing, high-lonesome vocalizations and spoken word. The overall effect is riveting, tapping into the territory of Laurie Anderson but with a naked embrace of not only post-punk aesthetics but also its inherent nihilism. To call this music “hardcore” would be unfair, yet Exotinger could be the underground soundtrack bridging no wave and steampunk. In this sense, the electronic sonorities of “Ghost Become Crowds”, its layers of oppressive sound beneath relatively pure vocalization, acts as a latter-day Lydia Lunch. However, on “The Plot” the poetry is set plainly against effects of “music, sound and language”, at points is reminiscent of Adrian Belew/King Crimson’s “Elephant Talk”: “word/ sounded language/stated listening/of dancers/ subliminal language/ chaos of carelessness….”

Exotinger
Sarah Bernstein (577 Records) Solo Songs For Instruments Ig Henneman (Wig)
MYASMO
Mia Zabelka (Setola di Maia)

For more information, visit mutema.com, jazzhausmusik.de and crackedaneegg.com

MYASMO by Austrian violinist Mia Zabelka achieves a uniquely old-world quality as each of the four works, recorded across much of northern Europe in 2018 and 2019, are respectively titled “London”, “Le Havre” [France], “Vienna” and “Tansberg” [Norway]. Though a major voice in European improvisation and new music, Zabelka holds a special place in the NYC experimental music scene touting collaborations with Pauline Oliveros, Alvin Curran and Lydia Lunch and important dates at The Kitchen and New Music America, among many more. As per usual, Zabelka is working in a purely improvised setting. MYASMO opens with dramatic bowing drawing on the instrument’s most vocal tendencies: angling the bow during strokes, rapid percussive rebounding attacks and pizzicato accents bring out a mournfulness unachievable without such expansive techniques or such a powerful improviser. While solo recordings are far from uncommon within the avant garde, Zabelka’s performances carry gripping melody that taunts and lures in the ear; “London” is an excellent example of this. The quickly moving passages, particularly when blended with her whispery, staccato vocalizations, conjure visuals that can be described as vividly ghostly, yet stunningly beautiful. Perhaps the piece is really for wayward souls of the infamous Tower of London? “Le Havre” makes use of extended techniques and percussive vocalizations as a central aspect, the latter recalling Yoko Ono, and the piece offers a more defined anger, almost a madness. Dizzying presto strokes that are all-encompassing contrast greatly to full-bodied long tones, which build a theme before erupting into harmonic-laced shrieks. “Vienna” begins as an extension of the first, somewhat unifying the set with a more central riff before angling the bow again. Though “Tansberg” is the only piece that does not incorporate improvisation, the suite still leaves us with an indelible impression of a great artist of the experimental scene.
Delving the pandemic, the Blue Note label has been on a roll. One sure sign: it beat out ECM in the latest JazzTimes Critics Poll. Blue Note albums by people like Ambrose Akinmusire, Gerald Clayton, Immanuel Wilkins and Joel Ross were all over the “Best Of” lists for 2020. Here are two more high-level releases from Blue Note, one great (Valentine), one very good (Rainbow Sign). Both feature the preeminent guitarist of our time, Bill Frisell, the first in his optimal format, the trio, the second in an all-star band. Ron Miles’ other sidemen are no less than Jason Moran, Thomas Morgan (who also appeared on the new summit) and Brian Blade.

Frisell has played with bassist Morgan and drummer Rudy Royston for years, but they had never recorded as a trio. Frisell intends Valentine as “evidence” of this ensemble’s “magic”, which he defines as “everybody trusting each other...you feel safe enough to try anything.” In presenting his evidence, Frisell draws upon his preferred musical genres. There are standards like Billy Strayhorn’s “A Flower Is a Lovesome Thing”. It takes 30 seconds to coalesce from floating guitar figures, but once Frisell has found the song he never truly leaves it, even as he sometimes breaks it off mid-phrase and appends new melodies. There are originals, some new (“Electricity”), a wicked little set of hooks some old (“Winter Always Turns to Spring”). Frisell has never been sufficiently acknowledged as a composer. He writes tunes so fine they can be played alongside Strayhorn. A representative Frisell album must contain some Americans. “Wagon Wheels” resonates as shared history. There are staples of popular culture like “What the World Needs Now Is Love” that Frisell utterly transfigures in his stinging, glistening, ringing guitar language. There is a traditional, “We Shall Overcome”. It is unusual for a major leader to work in other genres, but when the guitarist takes a more active role, his contributions to jazz, but it’s a useful metaphor for looking at how guitarist Ben Monder fits into different groups and musical situations. Because fit in does he—a musician’s job, the guitarist, he often sits in the ambiguous position of being both complementary and the best part of the overall proceedings.

That’s the general case with these three albums. On one, Julia Karosi’s Without Dimensions, his presence makes up a fraction of the music, but he looms large over the whole, to the relative detriment of the leader. On the two albums credited to groups of musicians, he’s often the strongest and most interesting voice and though everyone is trying to play together, the success of the music hangs on how well the other musicians integrate with Monder. The oddity of each situation is that Monder for the most part is playing modestly, following the concepts and values of others.

Without Dimensions sits a bit apart from the other two albums. Karosi is a vocalist, to begin with, and it’s a vocal album though one with little in the way of text. The other feature is that the music is centered around Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály, with more than half the background on many tracks one of the best things about the album. He’s the most interesting element and in this context brings some slight, but meaningful, disappointment with the record. The melodic and rhythmic contours of Bartók seem to be the only things the leader hears in his music, there’s no exploration of colors (Bartók was an outstanding orchestrator) and nothing that touches on the sexuality and violence that is important in his music, this even with quoting from the Prologue to Bluebeard’s Castle. Not a bad record, but a profound disappointment.

Drummer Tom Rainey is the other common link to these three albums. It’s no slouches, but this feels very much like sandlot ballplayers and Mike Trout. The Live at the 55 Bar trio has the same shape of a quiet, yet dramatic opening, rising in an arc as the musicians improvise. Monder’s playing is mostly about timbre, a multidimensional sound-world into which saxophonist Tony Malaby and Rainey fit. There is time spent in each part as the musicians suggest ideas and circle around each other, then a point where everything gels and the music is magnificent, slabs of involving, expressive sound. It can take some time to get there, though “Part II” is 29 minutes and it’s only around the last seven where everything comes together. Throughout the album, it sounds like Monder is content to create possibilities for Malaby and Rainey, neither of whom sound quite connected to each other, but when the guitarist takes a more active role, everyone catches fire. If only he was less modest!


**RECOMMENDED ALBUMS**

- Ab Baars, George Dumitriu, Ig Henneman, Paul Sola Masafret—Aforismen Aforisme (Not Two)
- Yelena Eckemoff—Braving the Wilderness (L&H Prod.)
- Futari—Beyond (Libra)
- Elisabeth Harms/Paul Nilssen-Love—Tangram (Catalytic Sound)
- Claron McFadden, Kristina Fuchs, Oguz BuyükBerber, Tobias Klein—37ER (Trytone)
- Carrie Nilles—I pledge allegiance to the flag... (Sunnyside)
- Tomeka Reid/Fred Morris—Combinations (RogueArt)
- Verónica Swift—The Bitter Earth (Dore Avenue)
- Aki Takase/Christian Weber/Michael Grieser—Augé (Intakt)
- Yuma Uesaka/Cat Toren/Colin Hinton—Octet (577 Records)

**REVIEWED ALBUMS**

- Hasaan Ibn Ali—Metaphysics: The Lost Atlantic Album (Omnivore)
- Don Cherry—The Summer House Sessions (Blank Forms)
- Jeremiah Cymerman/Charlie Looker—A Horizon Made of Canvas (Astral Spirits)
- Futari—Beyond (Libra)
- Alexander Hawkins—Togetherness Music (To Sleep With Musicians Featuring Evan Parker + Riot Ensemble) (Intakt)
- Julius Hemphill—The Boye Multi-National Crusade For Harmony (mbri Production Company)
- Kari Ikonen—Impressions, Improvisations and Compositions (Ozella)
- Calvin Keys—Stirring Up (Black Jazz-Real Gone)
- Zena Parins/Perete Rasnussen/Ryan Sawyer—Glass Triangle (Intakt)
- Yuma Uesaka/Marilyn Crispell—Streams (Not Two)

Andrey Henkin, Editorial Director
This is Bobby Wiens’ debut CD, a few bio notes are warranted. Born and raised in Calgary, Canada, the drummer received a Bachelors degree in Jazz Studies at Vancouver’s Capilano University. He eventually completed a Masters of Music degree from the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley, where he currently resides and recorded this CD last July with all hands on deck. A brilliant debut.

For more information visit cellarlive.com. This project live-streams Mar. 6th at museperformancespace.com.

Most of guitarist Dave Stryker’s dates as a leader or co-leader have been in small groups, so the invitation to record with the North German state-funded WDR Big Band was a rare opportunity too good to miss. His friend Bob Mintzer wrote the orchestrations and most of the arrangements and Stryker sounds very inspired.

The soul-infused opener, Marvin Gaye’s “Trouble Man”, in a chart penned by Stryker with his regular percussionist Mayra Casalés. Leon Russell’s “Superstar” is best known from The Carpenters’ 1971 gold record, though it has been recorded by other vocalists. Stryker strips it down to basics, with his guitar replacing the vocal, as Gold and Hunter (the latter on brushes) provide a perfect backdrop in this miniature.

Both CDs are valuable additions to the already sizable Stryker discography and reinforce his status as one of the top guitarists of his generation.

For more information, visit datestrekr.com. Stryker live-streams Mar. 20th at alternativeguitarsummit.com.
Long involved in various forms of improvised music, California-based guitarist Henry Kaiser has ranged from rock-informed music to Yo Milets!, his long-standing exploration of Miles Davis’ electric years. He has also created soundtracks, through it all emerging as one of the guitar’s most specific virtuosos, a master of altered sounds and dimensions uncanny in their complexity and freedom from the instrument’s traditions.

A special dimension of Kaiser’s career is his relationship to cold water. A scientific diver in the American Antarctic program, he has both experienced that world and created film soundtracks in the Antarctic environment. In The Arctic Dreamtime is a series of improvisation duets with Norwegian guitarist Ivar Grydeland, a new soundtrack for explorer Roald Amundsen’s classic documentary Ellsworthsflyveekspedition 1925, charting his attempt to reach the North Pole. The guitarist’s mastery of reverberation is hardly a technical exercise: echo and delay transform sounds and dimensions uncanny in their complexity and freedom from the instrument’s traditions.

In The Arctic Dreamtime Ivar Grydeland/Henry Kaiser (Rune Grammofon)
The Secret Handshake With Danger, Vol. One
Olle Brice, Binker Golding, Henry Kaiser, N.O. Moore, Eddie Prévost (577 Records)
A Love Supreme Electric (A Salvo Inspired by John Coltrane)
Vinny Golia, John Hanrahan, Henry Kaiser, Wayne Peet, Mike Watt (Cuneiform)

ESP-DISK’ MARCH RELEASES

“Joe McPhee’s magical take on avant-garde sax remains one of the wonders of the scene. He still has one of the most beautiful tones on the planet, even when he’s reaching for jazz’s outer limits.” – Time Out New York

VINYL REISSUES

Ronnie Boykins: The Will Come, Is Now
Henry Grimes: The Call

ESP-DISK.bandcamp.com

For more information, visit runegrammofon.com, 577records.com and cuneiformrecords.com. Kaiser lives in his native Denmark, and streams Mar. 21st at alternativeguitarsummit.com.

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Guitarist Nels Cline is one of the few who can push the envelope yet remain accessible to a large audience. For the last 20 years, one of Cline’s most arresting ensembles has been The Nels Cline Singers, a trio with Trevor Dunn (bass) and Scott Amendola (drums), who began making records with Instrumentals (Cryptogramophone, 2002). Cline has doubled the group, adding Skerik (saxophone), Cyro Baptista (percussion) and Brian Marsella (keyboards) for this latest document. Share the Wealth functions as a potent love letter to the jazz-fusion era of the 70s, especially Herbie Hancock, Weather Report and Miles Davis.

The disc opens with “Segunda”, the love cover (written by Gal Costa.) Droning guitar sets up a hypnotic vamp for saxophone to shriek in the manner of mid-60s Pharoah Sanders or early Gato Barbieri. On “Beam/Spiral”, the band makes effective use of space and the additional instrumentation. Especially striking is the rubato ballad “Nightstand”, which features Skerik and Cline having a conversation recalling the Joe Zawinul/Wayne Shorter duet on “Blackthorn Rose” from the Weather Report album Mysterious Traveler.

Of course, it wouldn’t be a real Cline album without some wicked, over-the-top distortion, delivered up on “Princess Phone”, a jam straight out of Davis’ Big Fun. This one serves as an effective calling card for Marsella’s Fender Rhodes and the leader’s fuzz-tone, wah-wah explorations. Dunn gets the spotlight on “The Pleather Patrol”, laying down a super funky Bootsy Collins vamp over the slamming beat of Amendola. Cline and Marsella unveil an enticing duet between Dobro and toy piano on “Ashcan Treasure”, one of the most concise moments on the album.

There are two epic jams that characterize the expanded lineup. The first, “Stump the Panel”, is a prolific free-jazz-rock groove that encourages balls-out contributions from the entire band. One can easily hear strains of Davis’ Live Evil or Hancock’s Crossing, with perhaps a dash of Sun Ra tossed in for good measure. The other epic jam, “A Place On The Moon”, veers off into a Weather Report-inspired exploration that wouldn’t sound out of place on I Sing the Body Electric or other monumental records of that era.

For more information, visit bluenote.com. Cline live-streams Mar. 21st at alternativeguitarsummit.com.

**Flow States**

**Marshall Allen, Roscoe Mitchell, Milford Graves, Scott Robinson (SciencSonic)** by Kyle Oleskiuk

*Flow States* is an answer to the question: what would a free jazz arcade game sound like? The album, by reedplayers Roscoe Mitchell, Marshall Allen, Scott Robinson and the recently-deceased drummer Milford Graves, includes long stretches in which the only sounds to be heard are electronic chirps backed by light drums and saxophone. This is by no means the majority—it takes up probably 15 of 20 minutes—but it is by far the most striking thing about it. The purpose of these 15 minutes seems to be to convince the listener that the cutting edge of jazz is in fact the *Super Mario Bros.* soundtrack. This is said just to tease the album, not diminish it. It is a strong album that can withstand teasing and is an adventurous album that invites it.

The adventurous approach taken likely has something to do with the unique recording location: SciencSonic Laboratories, a New Jersey recording studio/record label/dispensary of “creative and far-reaching musical experiences”, run by Robinson, who describes its recordings as including “a miniature symphony for contrabass sax and 7-ft. banjo... a solo multi-instrumental performance based on doctoral work in chaos theory... [and] the giant bells of Space Farms.” Among this milieu, the 15 electronic minutes of *Flow States* are well within the bounds of normalcy.

The remaining 55 minutes are a high-energy free jazz atmosphere fugue (in the “fugue state” sense), worthy of addition to the browsing music of any adventurous record store. This section is relatively standard; it is the kind of thing that most free jazz fans will feel they’ve heard a thousand times before but, like the blues, one never gets tired of hearing it.

For more information, visit sciensonic.net. Robinson live-streams Mar. 26th at kerrytownconcerthouse.com/ndgefest.

**Future Stride**

Emmet Cohen (Mack Avenue) by Scott Yanow

Emmet Cohen is a brilliant pianist who has a wide-ranging and flexible style. In fact, as he shows on this CD, he has several. Cohen has featured such greats as Benny Golson, George Coleman, Ron Carter, Jimmy Heath, the title of Cohen’s Mack Avenue debut should not be taken too seriously for it is simply the name of an original, not the concept behind the set. The enjoyable trio project, with Cohen’s longtime rhythm section of bassist Russell Hall and drummer Kyle Poole, begins with the most exciting performance, a wonderful revival of the obscure “Symphonic Raps”, a piece rarely played since the 1928 recording of Carroll Dickerson’s Savoyagers featuring Louis Armstrong and Earl Hines. Cohen’s playing (particularly his two unaccompanied choruses) makes the case that he can hold his own with any stride pianist around today. He also plays stride piano briefly on other selections but mostly is heard in a modern bop style.

Three selections add both tenor saxophonist Melissa Aldana and trumpeter Marquis Hill while the closing ballad “Little Angel” has Hill overdubbing himself on a second trumpet. The horns add to the melancholy mood of the atmospheric “Reflections at Dusk”, Aldana is particularly adventurous on “Toast To Lo” (which could have been subtitled “Future Hard Bop”) and they get to take heated but concise solos to the uptempo romp “You Already Know”.

The trio pieces include a slow and quietly emotional “Second Time Around”, a witty and surprising “Dardanella” and a relatively straightforward “My Heart Stood Still” with Poole sitting out on Duke Ellington’s “Pitter Panther Patter”, which has fine interplay between Cohen and Hall. As for the title track, while Cohen plays some hot stride in a humorous way during the opening and brief closing melody, it is otherwise a more minor-key blues.

Perhaps Cohen can be persuaded to record a full-length album of stride. That would be a joy to hear.


**Poems and Drawings**

Earl Freeman (50 Miles of Elbow Room/Wry Press) by Pierre Crépon and David Grundy

In pictures, the face of upright and electric bassist Earl Freeman, who would have turned 90 this month (he died in 1994) is shielded from the camera by heavy goggles and a pilot cap. Tall and thin, wearing custom military attire on and offstage and sometimes carrying a whip, he stood out among the already distinctive range of the ’60s jazz avant garde. Although the Korean War draft cost Freeman a lung, leaving him with mobility issues, he was widely traveled. Born in Oakland, Freeman entered jazz history via France, by way of Franco’s Spain. Already resident in Paris, in 1969 he appeared on several of the BYG-Actuel and America sessions. Without advance notice to the leader, Freeman can be heard reciting poetry on a Selwyn Lissack date. Returning to America, Freeman later counted among his admirers fellow bassist William Parker and recorded ambitious, if sporadic, projects of his own, for which he drew cover art. Something of a renaissance man, in the course of his travels, he left behind poems and ink drawings. 12 of the former and 4 of the latter have now been collected in this silkscreened box jointly published by 50 Miles of Elbow Room and Wry Press. Reflecting the peripatetic nature of Freeman’s life, the material is presented not as a conventional book, but as unbound, unnumbered facsimile postcards. The drawings combine sketchiness and density. Curlicues and tangled lines depict Black Panther George Jackson, a headless nude and patterns left by wind. Radically departing from cliché ideas of “jazz poetry”, Freeman’s poems are gothic and surreal, combining out-of-context anecdotal fragments, non-sequiturs and rule-breaking punctuation—piled-up dashes and equals signs, commas breaking into the middle of words. Shadowy forces appear, from a “narc” to “the Anglo Texan tax man” to villains from popular culture. In one instance, the robot gunsfighter from sci-fi western Westworld joins Dracula as “A true squire to the economy securing our military superiority over the heathen.” Elsewhere, there are fragmentary portraits of people and places. Poems and Drawings is a fascinating contribution to our sense of the multi-disciplinary undercurrents of the jazz avant garde.

For more information, visit 50mileselfbowroom.com.

**IN PRINT**

*Poems and Drawings* by Pierre Crépon and David Grundy
From Where We Came
Michael Feinberg (SteepleChase)
by Marco Cangiano

From the brief yet authoritative bass intro to “Louisville”, inspired by boxer Muhammad Ali, bassist Michael Feinberg’s new CD delivers a hard-edged Charles Mingus-like attitude. His sound, phrasing, drive and very concept of the group conveys a unique respect for and appreciation of jazz history while pushing the envelope further.

With each tune inspired by the geography related to some of the jazz greats and athlete inspirational figures, this CD continues Feinberg’s earlier dedications to figures such as John Coltrane and Elvin Jones. Eight originals show diversity in tempo and musicality across and within each piece, the group shifting from full ensemble to duos, trios and the leader’s frequent solo features.

The group is as tight as it can be and yet quite relaxed, from the joyful and somewhat aggressive “Cairo” through modal “East St. Louis” and delicate “Tryon” and “Tokyo”. Noah Preminger is one of the most spirited and original tenor saxophonists on today’s scene. Ian Froman’s supple drumming has been associated with Feinberg in a number of projects, most notably the Coltrane tribute Whatever Possessed Mr. Gary Versace, who concentrates on piano this time, is a most attentive accompanist and brilliant solo player, reasons why he is so sought-after. And finally David Liebman, who certainly does not need any introduction, raises the tension each time his soprano enters the picture. The blending of the saxophonists is very effective, much as their juxtaposition in approaching the material, Preminger developing his solo through slow combustion while Liebman tends to be more explosive, as illustrated by the exchanges in “Pontiac”, a nod to Elvin Jones, and their interaction in “Hamlet”, which is, of course, Coltrane’s birthplace.

While giving the impression of taking a back seat, in reality Feinberg drives the proceedings with firm hand and exceptional taste. With his solo intros, four overall, he communicates the direction and mood but then lets his partners develop the material. “Pontiac” is the perfect example: after stating the theme, the piece takes different turns at each solo, shifting from full ensemble to trios and even duos. An initial trio sequence with Preminger at his very best and Froman paying his dues to Jones segues into Versace’s almost Lennie Tristano-like single lines, adding tension as they proceed. Then Liebman descends from the stratosphere and engages Froman in an exciting conversation until Feinberg brings everybody home and initiates a series of exchanges among the principals. If one needs to argue jazz is alive and well, this CD is the hard evidence.

For more information, visit steeplechase.dk. Feinberg live-streams Mar. 22nd at soapboxgallery.org.

Dave Frishberg is the epitome of the hip, witty, creative pianist, songwriting and lyricist who should have been born in New York but wasn’t. He was born and raised in St. Paul, Minnesota, but he eventually found his way to the city where he created his musical life and built his reputation as a pianist and interpreter of material full of wit and irony. In today’s social media-linked world, it is a style of writing and performing that is unlikely to be either replicated or imitated.

Randy Porter is an Oregon based jazz pianist who plays with style, swing and curiosity. In this outing, he tackles the compositions of Frishberg with his trio. Generally, they are almost always offered in a vocal setting, because the tunes are all about the inventive and often goofy lyrics. Knowing that Frishberg, who turns 88 this month, had chosen to retire near Portland, Porter informed Frishberg of this recording. If there were any misgivings about Porter’s approach, the album would have appeased them.

Porter’s chops are undisputed and are certainly put to the test in dealing with the quirky time signatures and melodic juxtapositions in such numbers as “I’m Hip”, “I Want To Be A Sideman” and “Peel Me A Grape”. Given that each of the these tunes has an ear worm character, Porter slides brightly through each with melodic excellence.

In the other tunes not unnecessarily burdened with lyric familiarity, Porter and his cohorts, bassist John Wiitala and drummer Todd Strait, show that they can work together in a thoughtful and compelling flow. On the opening “Snowbound”, they establish a lightly swinging groove filled with clean expression and understated insight. Another jaunty offering is “Dear Departed Past”, in which Porter dashes off some daring lines while Wiitala delivers a big-toned, energetic intervention. Perhaps the attention given to this interpretation is due to Frishberg’s autobiography, chronicling his life, career and the stories behind those idiosyncratic songs, which was released in 2017 and was called My Dear Departed Past. The closer is “Zanzibar” which has an uncertain layered quality through the opening choruses. Porter then embarks on bubbling single-note runs while Wiitala and Strait support his efforts with percolating rhythmic figures.

In a Francis Davis-penned article for The Atlantic in February 1998, Frishberg commented that when he heard other singers performing his songs he thought: “I wish they wouldn’t sing so much.” With this release, he got his wish.

For more information, visit randyporter.com

Marilyn Mazur’s Future Song
LIVE REFLECTIONS

The band’s first live release: nine Mazur compositions, including two previously unreleased recordings from 1990 and 2008

Marilyn Mazur (percussion)
Nils Petter Molvær (trumpet)
Hans Ulrik (saxophone)
Makiko Hirabayashi (keyboards)
Eivind Aarset (guitar, electronics)
Klavs Hovman (bass)
Audun Kleive (drums)
Tone Aase (voice, electronics)
Aina Kemanis (voice)
Elvira Plenar (keyboards)
Krister Jonsson (guitar)

Danish drummer-composer-bandleader and world music pioneer Marilyn Mazur has, over the course of five decades, established herself as a master percussionist and musical visionary.
These two albums, recorded while Peter Brötzmann was in his mid to late 70s, affirm the great German saxophonist’s legacy as one of the most innovative practitioners of free jazz improvisation, still worthy of his status as enfant terrible, a disrupter of usual practices. While his take-no-prisoners approach has not diminished, there has been a maturation, which gives some of his playing a slightly less radical feel, though the changes are often subtle. Turning 80 this month, Brötzmann seems ageless and unstoppable.

*Tongue in a Bell* is a duo with Irish pianist Paul Smyth, who has previously recorded with saxophonists Evan Parker, John Butcher, Lol Coxhill and Charles Gayle and whose strong muscular approach makes him a strong partner. There is lots of red meat here, particularly on the opening title track, which takes up most of the recording, Smyth and Brötzmann wrestling each other with abandon. There is also enough variety to entice the most skeptical listener, as Brötzmann (alternating on tarogato) engages in his patented flair for unmitigated intensity, pounding out notes and soaring to altissimo potency, Smyth dazzling in support. The remaining two pieces, “Falling out of All the Towers of Space” and “Eyes Wide”, are more controlled and less dramatic, though each exciting in their own right. The former opens with Brötzmann on clarinet, showing a somewhat different side with a highly controlled presence, an initially gentler approach, which naturally breaks out into something more intense. Smyth focuses on dense chords while Brötzmann, having switched to tenor, flies in the altissimo register over thrashing chords as the velocity increases. Similarly, “Eyes Wide” offers a gentler saxophone and extended techniques on piano.

*The Catch of a Ghost*, in part due to the wonderful interaction of drummer/longtime collaborator Hamid Drake and Maâlem Mukhtar Gania, who is the brother of late Gnawa master Maâlem Mahmoud Gania, whose 1996 concert in Wels, Austria with Brötzmann and Drake, released on Okka Disk, is a seminal document. The opening title track, which takes up almost half of the album, is thoroughly engaging, with Gania’s guembri sounding somewhat like an acoustic bass and his melodic chanting a delight. Drake lays down a perfect groove and, after a mesmerizing contribution by the rhythm duo, Brötzmann joins in, enjoying the challenge. While he plays with his usual muscle, including characteristic shrieking and overblowing, it is the variety and the integrated heft of the trio that make this something a bit special. “Almost with the Sun” opens with the saxophonist in a rough-edged mode, but Gania and Drake provide a beautiful underpinning, which allows Brötzmann to stretch. Tarogato on “Sound that Shivers” pounds the pavement over the rhythm section, interjecting small phrases. The Closing “Dip and Dive” opens with a dramatic display by guembri, followed later by deep chanting and Brötzmann delivering short thrusts while Drake and Gania do their magic. This proves to be a totally splendid trio that delivers wonderfully with an accessible groove.

For more information, visit weekertoft.com and aaa-angelica.com
Playing Probabilities  
Joachim Kühn & Trummerschlunk (ACT Music)  
by Jim Motavalli

Playing Probabilities is not specifically a jazz record, though it’s overwhelmingly an improvisational one. Pianist Joachim Kühn sat down with electronic experimentalist Klaus Scheuermann (aka “Trummerschlunk”) at the former’s hideaway on the island of Ibiza to “explore the potential of the unlikely.” And they fulfill that mission. There are five pieces on this digital-only release. On some of them, including “Glückszahl 23,” Kühn is the dominant partner and the work comes across as probing piano solos with effective coloration. On “High Entropy” the Cecil Taylor-influenced keyboard is so dense it’s hard for electronics to find space. The appropriately titled “A New Balance” is more usefully collaborative: Scheuermann creates a rolling sense of menace, which Kühn enhances. The album comes together on two of the longer pieces, “A-R-T-E-N-E” and “The Preface.” The latter begins with a repetitive electronic figure, almost like a tolling Big Ben. Kühn enters in high drama, riding on that base with a compelling theme, perhaps pre-imagined, maybe a sudden inspiration. There are computer-generated handclaps as the music builds. The musicians are listening closely to each other and you won’t want it to end—but it does, in mildly swirling dissonance. “A-R-T-E-N-E” lets Scheuermann dominate, with a percussive beat, until Kühn makes a memorably skittering entrance halfway in. Again, the pianist finds an earworm theme that repeats with variation. It’s the most ‘commercial’ track, but that hardly matters. This track is the best showcase for the third collaborator, Tom Berkmann on bass. Those are his deep tones moving the music forward.

Touch The Light is a solo ballads project, also recorded (on the artist’s Steinway) at home on Ibiza. And here jazz is relevant, though the material draws on a long lifetime of experience. Let’s recap. Kühn, whose brother is the clarinetist Rolf, grew up in what was then East Germany and got his start as a concertizing pianist, but Rolf steered him into jazz where he’s been playing since the very early ’60s. The album opens, enchantingly, with Mal Waldron’s “Warm Candle”. The theme, played so memorably on the original by Eric Dolphy’s bass clarinet, is here essayed on the piano and it’s insanely gorgeous. The allegretto from Beethoven's Symphony #7 comes across as one of “the best-loved melodies of the classics”, a record package once hawked on TV. Joe Zawinul’s “A Remark You Made” is a ballad that comes via Weather Report’s Heavy Weather and it’s very poignant here. The pianist’s treatment of Milton Nascimento’s “Ponta de Areia” is another moment of still beauty, with a haunting melody. The record moves through some disparate material, via Prince, Bill Evans, Hoagy Carmichael, Bob Marley and more, from “Fever” to “Blue Velvet”. In each, the pianist finds the living heart of the song and wrings out every drop of emotional heft. The tempos are glacial, full of space. Musicians made whole careers out of playing pretty—and a record label, Windham Hill, was based on it—but this is far from “New Age.” The intensity of Kühn’s commitment will have you turning the record up, not placing it in the background. When the solo ballads album was first proposed, Kühn, who turns 77 this month, laughed and said, “Maybe when I’m 90.” We can be glad he didn’t wait that long.

For more information, visit actmusic.com

Many discovered Julius Hemphill via two mid ’70s records on the Arista Freedom label, Coon Birdness and Dogon AD, every bit as impressive as classic titles by Anthony Braxton and Oliver Lake the label released around the same time. Hemphill’s voice as a saxophonist was as well defined and his musical vision just as clear. But it’s fair to say that Hemphill had something else, as exemplified by the title of the long track on the B-Side of Coon Birdness, “The Hard Blues” (actually recorded at the earlier sessions which produced Dogon AD, though few 1975 listeners knew this). Hemphill’s feeling for the blues was not only deeper than that of most jazz musicians of any era, it was deep even before standards of Lightnin’ Hopkins or Clarence “Gatemouth” Brown.

In his excellent notes in the accompanying booklet, producer Marty Ehrlich warns us, though, that Hemphill never saw tradition, or even the blues categorization, as well as the solo piano piece, “Parchment”, performed brilliantly by Hemphill’s longtime partner Ursula Oppens, and three fascinating arrangements of Mingus tunes that might to life by the Daedalus String Quartet. Ehrlich’s comparison of these with Hemphill’s arrangements of pieces like “Lush Life” and “What’s Going On” for the WSQ is well made; Hemphill seems to enter the spaces created by musical avant-garde and model them from within. Initial hearings may have the listener wondering if Hemphill was inspired by string quartets by this or that composer, but then we realize that what it sounds like is his own writing for horns, dating back to the club days and late 70s LPs.

One wonders what Hemphill would have done without Wadud and vice-versa. They give the impression that they could have played together every day of their lives without ever ceasing to find new areas to explore and new approaches to try. Unfortunately the necessity of earning a living meant that their collaborations became rarer as time went on, so we are lucky to have an entire CD of previously unknown duos more tightly organized than the two largely improvisational records already extant and in some ways more satisfying. These pieces were written specifically for this duo, to explore possibilities that even master improvisers like this would never discover by chance. We also hear these musical brothers in several small group contexts scattered throughout the remaining 100 and odd minutes’ worth, in fact. Also present on many of these tracks is the musician who had an even longer association with Hemphill, Carroll. Drummers on these sessions include the likes of Philip Wilson, Warren Smith and Michael Carvin. We also hear a good deal of Alex Cline, barely out of his teens on his earliest appearances here, yet holding his own masterfully. There is also a quintet track that unites Hemphill with his teacher from Fort Worth days, John Carter, on clarinet, as well as a series of short but satisfying duos with Jerome Harris on electric bass and a delightful quartet version of “Pigskin” on which guitar virtuoso Jack Wilkins sounds like Tal Farlow on acid. The concert with Carroll, Holland and DeJohnette was a one-off in Woodstock, where all three men were living, and provides a perfect coda. Listeners wondering what Wilson, Smith, Cline and Carvin have left for any drummer to discover will be laughing at themselves when DeJohnette gets going “Mirrors” and “Daydream.” Male drummers have reached an absolute peak of his powers. It’s a pity Carroll and Hemphill didn’t get to do several dozen tours with this quartet, but honestly, one wonders whether they ever could have sounded much better than this.

For more information, visit newworldrecords.org
Just as attendance at Eton College followed by Oxford University gave students a pretty good chance of becoming Britain’s Prime Minister, so too did membership in Mike Westbrook’s bands prognosticate similar musical ascension. Here is just a sampling of those who were students of this august institution: Roy Babington, Guy Barker, Chris Bisco, Gary Boyle, Lindsay Cooper, Mike Gibbs, Brian Godding, Malcolm Griffiths, Alan Jackson, Chris Laurence, Henry Lowther, John Marshall, Harry Miller, Phil Minton, Mike Osborne, Paul Rutherford, Alan Skidmore, John Surman, John Taylor, Trevor Tomkins, Alan Wakeman, Ray Warleigh, John Warren, Kenny Wheeler and Norma Winstone.

The old Don turns 85 this month. Two recent releases show very different, though intertwining aspects of his craft: a 2016 solo piano recital and a 1974 archival recording with the Swedish Radio Jazz Group.

Paris was recorded in concert over two days at the 19 Paul Fort gallery in that city’s 14th Arrondissement. Like fellow piano-playing bandleader Duke Ellington, Westbrook prefers the orchestra as his instrument and, as such, Paris is his first solo recording since 1978. The album is 20 tracks, mostly in the two-minute range but with a couple of more expansive pieces, split into four sections: The Front Page; Bar-Room Piano; Love Stories; The Blues; plus a short encore. The pieces are from Westbrook’s vast oeuvre, alone or with wife/musical partner Kate (some co-credited to D.H. Lawrence, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe or Elizabeth Barrett Browning), John Lennon-Paul McCartney, Billy Strayhorn, Ellington, Thom Bell-Linda Creed (“You Make Me Feel Brand New”), Eric Maschwitz-Manning Sherwin (“A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square”) and Bessie Smith (“Good Old Wagon”).

While purposely edited together, the effect is highly reminiscent of Abdullah Ibrahim’s modern solo recitals. Westbrook puts the varied material—his own works, Philly Soul, British pop, blues, classic jazz—through an austere prism, such that everything flows despite the eclectic pedigree. In general, with only a couple of pieces peppered by a few percentage points, Paris is coldly beautiful, understated and gentle, pushed gingerly along by the spaces Westbrook leaves between his notes and phrases, the drops of melting snow at the top of a mountain rather than the turbulent rivers of other solo pianists.

Love and Understanding duplicates the all-Westbrook program found on his 1975 RCA album Citadel/Room 315 but predates it by almost a year. Whereas the latter was a London studio recording, with a cast including many of the players mentioned above, this newly unearthed release was waxed live in Sweden—the suite commissioned by Swedish Radio—with local musicians, but with Surman still the featured performer. While many of the names may be unfamiliar, some should be known to American listeners, like the reed section of Arne Domnérus, Claes Rosendahl, Lennart Åberg and Erik Nilsson and rhythm team of Rune Gustafsson, Bengt Hallberg, Georg Riedel and Egil Johansen.

Coming after early large-form works like Marching Song (1969), Love Songs (1970) and Metropolis (1971), by this point Westbrook has a highly assured composer and arranger. The nine pieces, plus a short “Overture” and “Finale”, flow from jazz-rock vamp to dreamy fanfare, funky honky-tonk to ballad, electric bebop to fantasia. Surman is the lead soloist on his three horns (baritone and soprano saxophone, bass clarinet) but some of the Swedes also get spotlights, most notably two trumpeters, Jan Allan on the title track and Bertil Lövgren on “Pastorale”. Those two pieces are the highlight of the suite, the former for its soul-jazz trappings, the latter for its swelling of volume and density for and under Surman’s soprano lead. Also fascinating is the massed horn polyphony on “Bebop de rigueur” and dialogue of clarinet (Domnérus) and two bass clarinets (Surman and Nilsson) to open “Sleepwalker Awakening in Sunlight”.

What is most compelling about the date, however, is that, with what one assumes to be relatively minimal prep time and a completely new set of players—after having spent a decade getting to know the regulars in his British band—the music is so cohesive and full of character, both that of its composer and group at hand.

For more information, visit westbrookjazz.co.uk and myonlydesirerecords.com
The union of two great underused horns, the cornet and the tuba, is the basis of Kirk Knuffke's *Tight Like This*. The collaboration is reminiscent of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (or, for the kids, of *The Lion King 1½*, starring Timon and Pumba): hearing the two of them share the spotlight for the album's hour-long runtime is like an indulgent vision into a bizarro world where the true jazz giants are the players of eclectic instruments like harp, euphonium and chromatic harmonica. But while jazz fans remain on this mortal coil, they will never get to hear anything as bonkers as Louis Armstrong tunes rearranged for the penny whistle and the kazoo; the closest they can get is *Tight Like This*.

Knuffke leads the trio on cornet. Bob Stewart, a giant of a giant instrument, now 75, has made some of the most significant tuba recordings since the '70s and recorded with a variety of musical greats. He adds a combative punch, which complements and contrasts with the warm, mellow tones of Knuffke.

Drummer Kenny Wollesen keeps largely to the background, holding the trio together with understated but serious competence while the two horns put new spins on old classics by Armstrong (the title track), Gene Ammons ("Jungle Soul (Ca’ Purange)"), Adderley’s Nat and Cannonball ("Cyclops" and "Shake A Lady", respectively), Pee Wee Russell ("Pee Wee’s Blues"), Teddy Wilson ("Blues in C Sharp minor"), in addition to some six Knuffke originals and one by regular Knuffke employer Matt Wilson ("Wind Spirit").

Like *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead, Tight Like This* may not be one for the ages, but it’s a very weird, very memorable and very entertaining creation.

For more information, visit steeplechase.dk

Cory Weeds is one of the most active jazz impresarios these days, besides leading his own recordings and joining forces with some of the most prominent yet relatively under-appreciated artists. This is the case with alto saxophonist Ian Hendrickson-Smith’s *The Lowdown*, a thoroughly enjoyable recording doubling as a tribute to Lawrence Leathers, a well-known, NYC-based drum who was murdered in 2019. Hendrickson-Smith is the prototypical musician capable of covering different musical styles—

For more information, visit cellarlive.com

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**The Lowdown**

Ian Hendrickson-Smith (Cellar Music)

by Marco Cangiano

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March 2
Hallie "Lockjaw" Davis 1921-86

March 9
Anat Fort b.1970

March 15
Vince Giordano b.1952

March 16
John Houston b.1939

March 22
Fred Anderson 1929-2010

March 23
Bill Frisell b.1951

March 25
Steve Kuhn b.1938

March 27
Jaco Town?

March 1
KC Lane 1904-44

February 27
John Zorn/Thurston Moore album you’ll need

February 28
Jaco Town?

February 29
Am I a drummer or am I a mouse?

March 1
Kiki Eldridge 1923-2004

March 5
Dana Leong b.1980

March 6
March 9
Anat Fort b.1970

March 11
Terence Blanchard b.1962

March 13
Mike Young b.1979

March 14
Frank Gratkowski b.1963

March 16
Woody Witt b.1969

March 17
Janet Thompson b.1920

March 18
Maurice Brown b.1942

March 19
Jaysonalberto b.1978

March 20
Caroline Wright b.1980

March 21
Brian Keenan b.1962

March 22
Frankfurt 1960-2015

March 23
Steve Kuhn b.1938

March 24
Steve Kuhn b.1938

March 25
Anat Fort b.1970

March 26
Oscar Peterson 1925-2007

March 27
Ronald Wilson 1928-99

March 28
Terence Blanchard b.1962

March 29
Pee Wee Russell 1906-69

March 30
Santos Colón 1959-99

March 31
Hiromi b.1979

ACROSS
1. First tune
2. 1949 Helen Humes
3. Let’s Go To The Ballpark
4. Four Brilliant Bob Wilber
5. 1940s Paul Desmond
6. "Satchmo"
7. 1956 "Some Other Time"
8. 1940s "Perugia"
9. "Caprice"
10. "Hotel for the Cuckolds"
11. "I Can’t Get Started"
12. "Chattanooga Choo Choo"
13. "Lettuce Have a Banana"
14. "One More Time"
15. "Lemon Tree"
16. "Billie Jean"
17. "Tuxedo Junction"
18. "Lakeview"
19. "Laura"
20. "My Little Boy"
21. "I Can’t Help Myself"
22. "I Want To Be Happy"
23. "Sister Sadie"
24. "Honeysuckle Rose"
25. "There’s No You"
26. "I’m Beginning To See The Light"
27. "It’s News to Me"
28. "This Is My Desire"
29. "Sonny Side Of Town"
30. "Johnny One Note"
31. "I Wish I Had Someone To Love"
32. "Body And Soul"
33. "On Green Street"
34. "The Prowler"
35. "All of You"
36. "After You’ve Gone"
37. "I Love You"
38. "Bi-De-Doo-Dah"
39. "Round Midnight"
40. "Tightrope"
41. "Meet Me In St. Louis"
42. "You Make Me Feel So Young"
43. "I Love You"
44. "Round Midnight"
45. "Tightrope"
46. "Meet Me In St. Louis"
47. "You Make Me Feel So Young"
48. "Bi-De-Doo-Dah"
49. "After You’ve Gone"
50. "I Love You"

DOWN
1. Electric bass pickup mode
2. "Honeysuckle Rose"
3. "I’ll Remember April"
4. "The Man I Love"
5. "The Man I Love"
6. "The Man I Love"
7. "I’ll Remember April"
8. "The Man I Love"
9. "The Man I Love"
10. "I’ll Remember April"
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46. "I’ll Remember April"
47. "The Man I Love"
48. "I’ll Remember April"
49. "The Man I Love"
50. "I’ll Remember April"
him and copying everything he was doing, only backwards—I felt a little bit like Ginger Rogers.

SA: Somebody once said something to or about Elixir, it’s three women, but it never... I admire Hal Merrill out on the West Coast. There’s also Bob Hofnarr, based in Austin, who does a lot of microtonal things and who studied with La Monte Young; Chas Smith, who studied composition at Berklee and was close friends with the late Harold Budd. There is a non-pedal steel guitarist Mike Neer whose work I am also quite fond of. Then there are Nashville players, like Paul Franklin and Tommy White, true virtuosos who can play anything. Buddy Emmons was the ultimate pedal steel guitarist. When he was in his prime, his energy was boundless. He was the Paganini of the pedal steel.

SA: When everything stopped in mid-March 2020, I took it as a great opportunity to write and record some really difficult music that I wouldn’t have had time to get into had I been touring. I started working on a new album built around Messiaen’s Quartet for the End of Time, particularly the section called “Abîme des oiseaux”. It was originally written for clarinet and the score calls for these tiny volume swells, which the clarinetist would normally create with the breath, I spent hours and hours trying to recreate that effect with my volume pedal, until my ankle eventually gave out. There were months during which I could only play for five minutes at a time. In any case, you live and learn. I think, I hope, that my instrument lent a little better than I used to and hopefully myself as well.

SA: At a fairly early age. I guess I just started by noodling. I was able to improvise over blues or country music—anything with one key center, but jazz seemed like an entirely different thing. I could play the tunes, but improvising did not come easily. Someone had told me to think of the scales for each chord. But then I met Conrad Johnson, an iconic jazz musician and educator in Houston, who taught me a way to play over chord changes using pentatonics. Then everything slowly began to make sense. Ornette Coleman and Harmolodics have also had a lot to do with how I hear improvisation. Another teacher I had, on pedal steel, was Maurice Anderson in Dallas, Texas. I only had one lesson with him, in the middle of which he stopped and said he wouldn’t charge me, but we stayed in touch his whole life. He was a great jazz musician who is little known outside the steel guitar community. Pauline Oliveros and her Deep Listening approach significantly changed how I approached the instrument as well. She showed me a different way of seeing what a note is, what sum it up is, the space that contains it and sound, including noise as music.

SA: As far as people doing something different with the instrument, there’s a player in New Orleans named Dave Easley who was the first to play steel at the Village Vanguard, where he played with Brian Blade. In France, Lionel Wendling just put out an album called Steel World. I admire Hal Merrill out on the West Coast. There’s also Bob Hofnarr, based in Austin, who does a lot of microtonal things and who studied with La Monte Young; Chas Smith, who studied composition at Berklee and was close friends with the late Harold Budd. There is a non-pedal steel guitarist Mike Neer whose work I am also quite fond of. Then there are Nashville players, like Paul Franklin and Tommy White, true virtuosos who can play anything. Buddy Emmons was the ultimate pedal steel guitarist. When he was in his prime, his energy was boundless. He was the Paganini of the pedal steel.

SA: Playing solo is different with the pedal steel, which can be very orchestral. When played in a certain way, it can fill up a whole sound world so that people don’t miss the presence of another instrument. And, of course, if I feel like changing something, I can do that at a moment’s notice. With a group, you have to follow what’s going on, but there’s a certain something about all those combinations of timbres that’s really beautiful, as well as the interaction with other instruments and other musical minds. There’s a sense of communion I feel with the music and the people with whom I’m sharing this experience. With a band, in many ways, you’re playing for each other. Of course, you’re playing for the audience too and you hope they like it, but attention is, by necessity, often focused on the other musicians and that one wild moment—the groove—when, like magic, everything just seems to fall in place.

Recommended Listening:
- Susan Alcorn—*Una* (Uma Sounds, 1999)
- Susan Alcorn—*And I Await The Resurrection of The Pedal Steel Guitar* (Olde English Spelling Bee, 2007)
- Ellery Eskelin/Susan Alcorn/Michael Formanek—*Mirage* (Clean Feed, 2011)
- Susan Alcorn—*Touch This Moment* (Una Sounds, 2010)
- Susan Alcorn/Joe McPhee/Ken Vandermark—*Invitation to a Dream* (Astral Spirits, 2017)
- Susan Alcorn—*Pedernal* (Relative Pitch, 2019)

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Big Band before the cancellations started as a result of the pandemic. Live recordings of Future Song from 2015 were released in August as the album, *Live Reflections*. When venues and travel open up again, Mazur will have plenty to do with regular groups along with several loose projects and a number of invitations, her priority being the projects she leads: Shamania, two quartets, a trio and solo performance. She co-leads the 13-piece semi-big band Malauka Orchestra and works regularly with the Makiko Hirabayashi Trio along with her husband, bassist Klavs Hovman. She is excited about a new composition for a chamber music festival this summer, a new trio with Jon Balke and Torben Snekkestad and a festival appearance featuring Norma Winstone. “In these quarantine times, it is clear to me how music can add to the spiritual well-being and keep people company even when isolated. For me, music and other abstract art forms are like openings into the essence of life itself. You can share and transform emotion, moods, experiences into energy, colors. Especially with improvised music we are able to live in the moment and react to each other.”

For more information, visit marilynmazur.com

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For more information, visit susanalcorn.net. Alcorn live-streams Mar. 3rd at youtube.com/channel/UCnKdQHYkGcgDQlK_dzw.

Recommended Listening:
- Lotte Anker/Marilyn Crispell/Marilyn Mazur—*Poetic Justice* (*Dacapo, 2000*)
- Marilyn Mazur/Jan Garbarek—*Elizir* (*ECM, 2005*)
- Jean-Michel Pilc/Mads Vinding/Marilyn Mazur—*Composing* (*Storyville, 2015*)
- Marilyn Mazur—*Shamania* (*RareNoise, 2017*)
- Marilyn Mazur’s Future Song—*Live Reflections* (*Stunt, 1990/2008/2015*)