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**Mid-Atlantic
Jazz Festival**

jazz & blues report

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"Buffalonious"

Our original mascot from the very early Buffalo Jazz Report days – mid '70s. He is older now, but global & still very cool!



Mid-Atlantic Jazz Festival February 15-17, 2019

STANDING UP FOR REAL JAZZ



Branford Marsalis

With the theme of "Celebrating 10 Years of Real Jazz," the Mid-Atlantic Jazz Festival (MAJF) returns February 15-17, 2019 to the Hilton Washington DC/Rockville Hotel Executive Meeting Center in Rockville, Maryland. The 10th year of the Festival brings together today's leading jazz artists along with jazz workshops and more. Among those artists headlining the 2019 MAJF are Branford Marsalis, Regina Carter, Bryan Lynch, Sean Jones, Jackie Ryan, Ralph Peterson Jr, Bobby Watson, Bill Pierce, Brian Lynch, Geoffrey Keezer, Essiet Essiet, Chelsey Green, Petra Martin, Lori Williams, and Paul Carr.

Produced by the Jazz Academy of Music, which hosts a burgeoning annual jazz camp for aspiring high school jazz musicians, the MAJF makes an enduring commitment to jazz education. This commitment is reflected by the Festival presenting a high school band competition, and some of the internationally reknown artists conduct teaching workshops for student-attendees. More information on the Festival (including purchasing tickets) is found on the website, <https://www.midatlanticjazzfestival.org>.

Story and photo by Ron Weinstock

Monterey Jazz Festival on Tour

Performing 26 Concerts

March 15–April 14 in 16 States and Canada



MJF On Tour (© R.R. Jones)

Fifth National MJF Group Features Cécile McLorin Salvant, Bria Skonberg, Melissa Aldana, Christian Sands, Yasushi Nakamura, and Jamison Ross

Monterey, Calif.; It's millennials only for the Monterey Jazz Festival's fifth national tour, March 15–April 14, 2019. Featuring some of the most critically-acclaimed, GRAMMY®-winning and GRAMMY-nominated jazz artists of their generation, including three winners of the Thelonious Monk International Jazz Competition, Monterey Jazz Festival on Tour will truly showcase the next generation of jazz legends, including Cécile McLorin Salvant, vocals; Bria Skonberg, trumpet, vocals; Melissa Aldana, tenor saxophone; Christian Sands, piano and musical director; Yasushi Nakamura, bass, and Jamison Ross, drums, vocals.

As the longest continuously-running jazz festival in the world, Monterey Jazz Festival will expand on its tradition of presenting the best in jazz, and of jazz's younger, international and diverse future in 2019. "This will be the 10-year anniversary of MJF on Tour and it is also one of our most exciting," said Tim Jackson, MJF Artistic Director. "With a strong female presence on the

front line with Cécile, Melissa and Bria, and the mastery of Christian Sands as our pianist and musical director, we are looking forward to spreading the joy of jazz, which is the essence of the Monterey Jazz Festival, to rest of the country."

The 31-day tour will perform 26 concerts in 16 states and Alberta, Canada. Highlights include New York City's Jazz at Lincoln Center; Los Angeles' Walt Disney Concert Hall; Berkeley's Cal Performances; Chicago's Symphony Center; Calgary Canada's Jack Singer Concert Hall; and many others.

Monterey Jazz Festival on Tour is produced by Danny Melnick for Absolutely Live Entertainment (ALE) and booked by The Kurland Agency, which also produced and booked two previous MJF tours in 2013 and 2016. Visit www.montereyjazzfestival.org for more information.

About the Performers....

One of the most acclaimed vocalists of her generation, Cécile McLorin Salvant is the winner of the 2010

Thelonious Monk International Jazz Competition. Other honors include selection for Jazz Album of the Year by the DownBeat International Critics Poll and NPR, as well as Top Female Vocalist from the Jazz Journalists Association. Cécile grew up in a bilingual household in Miami and traveled to Aix-en-Provence to pursue a degree in French law while training as a classical and baroque singer before switching to jazz. Her last two Mack Avenue releases, *For One to Love* and *Dreams and Daggers*, each won Grammy Awards for Best Jazz Vocal Album. Her newest Mack Avenue release, *The Window*, is an album of duets with pianist Sullivan Fortner. Rolling Stone describes Cécile as "...one of the greatest jazz singers of her generation, but that label sells her short."

Canadian singer, trumpeter and songwriter Bria Skonberg has been described as one of the "most versatile and imposing musicians of her generation" by the Wall Street Journal, recognized as one of 25 for the Future by DownBeat Magazine, and cited as a millennial "shaking up the jazz world" by Vanity Fair. Signed to Sony Music Masterworks' Okeh Records, Bria released her major label debut in 2016, winning a Canadian JUNO award and making the Top 5 on Billboard jazz charts. Her many accolades include Best Vocal and Best Trumpet awards from Hot House Jazz Magazine and DownBeat's Rising Star award. In addition to performing at jazz festivals around the world, Bria is an avid educator, giving numerous workshops and concerts for students of all ages.

Tenor saxophonist Melissa Aldana was born in Santiago, Chile, and in 2013, she became the first female instrumentalist and the first South American ever to win the Thelonious Monk Competition. Aldana attended the Berklee College of Music, studying with George Garzone, Danilo Pérez and Patricia Zarate, while hitting the clubs with Greg Osby and George Coleman, among others. She is also a recipient of the Martin E. Segal Award from Jazz at Lincoln Center and is a double recipient of the Altazor Award, Chile's highly prestigious national arts prize. She has released four albums as a leader, including her latest, *Back Home*, on Concord. Melissa "...balances technical bravura with musical depth, a hallmark of her playing," writes the Chicago Tribune.

Pianist and MJF on Tour Music Director Christian Sands is a five-time Grammy nominee. Growing up in New Haven, Connecticut, he started playing professionally at the age of 10, and received his bachelor of arts and master's degrees from the Manhattan School of Music. A protégé of Dr. Billy Taylor, Sands began a six-year association with bassist Christian McBride in 2009, and has followed in Dr. Taylor's footsteps by encouraging, inspiring and advocating for the preservation and history of jazz. In 2015, he started the Jazz Kids of Montmartre in Copenhagen, Denmark; he also teaches at Jazz in July, where he is an alumnus. His second Mack Avenue release, *Facing Dragons*, was reviewed by NPR as a "...crisply assured new album...that expresses new

ideas without abandoning the old."

Bassist Yasushi Nakamura is one of the most commanding voices on bass today. Born in Tokyo, Nakamura moved to Seattle, Washington, eventually receiving his bachelor's degree in jazz performance from Berklee College of Music, and an artist diploma from the Juilliard School. He has recorded or performed around the world with Wynton Marsalis, Wycliffe Gordon, Toshiko Akiyoshi, Hank Jones, Dave Douglas, and many others. As an educator, Nakamura has led master classes and summer intensive courses at Juilliard, The New School, Koyo Conservatory, Osaka Geidai, and Savannah Swing Central. Nakamura made his record debut as leader in 2016 with *A Lifetime Treasure*, followed by *Hometown* in 2017.

Grammy-nominated drummer and vocalist Jamison Ross won the Thelonious Monk International Jazz Competition in 2012. A Jacksonville, Florida native, Jamison received his B.A. in Jazz Studies from Florida State University and his master's from the University of New Orleans. He has toured internationally and recorded with Cécile McLorin Salvant, Jonathan Batiste, Dr. John, Jon Cleary, Christian McBride, and Carmen Lundy. His Concord debut, *Jamison*, was nominated as for a Best Jazz Vocal Album Grammy in 2015, and his latest, *All for One*, was released in 2018. Jamison's "roots in jazz and gospel give him thrilling chops and unflinching feel," writes NPR.

About Monterey Jazz Festival

The Monterey Jazz Festival celebrates the legacy of jazz, expands its boundaries, and provides opportunities to experience jazz through the creative production of performances and educational programs.

Visit www.montereyjazzfestival.org for more information and tour dates/locations. Below is a list of the cities on the tour.

March 2019: New York N.Y., Boston Mass, Troy, N.Y., Bethesda, Md., State College, Pa, Philadelphia, Pa., East Lansing, Mich., Omaha, Neb., Baton Rouge, La., Meridian, Miss., Memphis, Tenn., Fayetteville, Ark.

April 2019: Portland, Ore., Berkeley, Calif., Rohnert Park, Calif., Los Angeles, Calif., Seattle, Wash., Santa Barbara, Calif., Mesa, Ariz., Calgary, Alberta Canada, Chicago, Ill., Ann Arbor, Mich.

LIVE BLUES ON THE HIGH SEAS



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2019 Next Generation Jazz Festival Presented by Monterey Jazz Festival Now Accepting Applications

Monterey, Calif.; Monterey Jazz Festival, a leader in jazz education since its inception in 1958, is pleased to announce the 49th Annual Next Generation Jazz Festival, featuring the nation's most talented middle school, high school, conglomerate, and college instrumental ensembles, vocal jazz ensembles, and soloists at the Monterey Conference Center from April 5-7, 2019.

The free Next Generation Jazz Festival will feature drummer Allison Miller and bassist Derrick Hodge as the 2019 Monterey Jazz Festival Artists-in-Residence.

New for 2019 are online auditions for the Next Generation Women in Jazz Combo, open to top high school women jazz players throughout the United States. This new combo will perform at the Jazz Education Network conference in Reno, Nevada in January 2019, at the Next Generation Jazz Festival, and at the 62nd Monterey Jazz Festival.

Applications are now being accepted from middle school big bands; high school big bands, combos, vocal jazz ensembles, vocal soloists and composers; high school conglomerate big bands and combos; and college big bands, combos and vocal jazz ensembles through January 12, 2019. Application instructions can be found on the Monterey Jazz Festival website.

Next Generation Jazz Festival finalists are selected through recorded auditions reviewed by a panel of nationally-renowned jazz educators. In addition, special guest and international groups will also perform. In 2018, 100 groups attended the Next Generation Jazz Festival. The top groups will win cash awards and be invited to perform at the 62nd Annual Monterey Jazz Festival, in September 2019.

Online auditions for Monterey Jazz Festival's Next Generation Jazz Orchestra will also be held through March 30, 2019. As Monterey Jazz Festival's premier touring student ensemble, this group performs at jazz venues and festivals, both domestically and internationally, and will be featured in a Sunday Arena performance at the 62nd Annual Monterey Jazz Festival.

The Next Generation Jazz Festival also includes a big band composition competition, open to high school composers. Judged by college faculty from leading music schools across the country, the winning composer will receive the Gerald Wilson Award and a cash prize, with the winning composition to be performed by the Next Generation Jazz Orchestra on the final day of the 62nd Annual Monterey Jazz Festival.

All Next Generation Jazz Festival events and activities—from the April 5 Friday night Judges Concert presented by the California Jazz Conservatory, featuring the Next Generation Jazz Festival adjudicators—through Saturday and Sunday's High School and College Competition are free of charge and open to the public. The Festival will also conduct clinics, workshops, jam sessions, and auditions in



the heart of historic Monterey, with music to be performed at the Monterey Conference Center, as well as on spotlight stages in downtown Monterey.

About Monterey Jazz Festival...

The Monterey Jazz Festival celebrates the legacy of jazz, expands its boundaries, and provides opportunities to experience jazz through the creative production of performances and educational programs.

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This photo of Gary Bartz captured by Ron Weinstock at the 2008 Duke Ellington Jazz Festival is just one of hundreds of Ron's photos you can view online at www.flickr.com/photos/novaron

Why Some People Think Duke Ellington Is a Member of the Royal Family.

KIDS DON'T GET ENOUGH

ART THESE DAYS.

So you can see why some of them might accidentally confuse a jazz legend named Duke with royalty named duke. But it's finally time to set the record straight.

Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington didn't rule over a small English estate. Instead he reigned supreme over jazz institutions like The Cotton Club. He riffed

powerfully on the piano, but it was the full orchestra that he considered his most compelling instrument. He introduced improvisation to his compositions — a process unheard of using a 15-piece orchestra. The result was a different approach to jazz that sparked a revolution and an evolution. His music spread across the world with songs like "Sophisticated Lady," "In a



A piano player. A composer. An orchestra leader.
Duke Ellington reigned over a land called Jazz.

Sentimental Mood," and "Take the 'A' Train." His historical concert in 1953 at the Newport Jazz Festival has entered the lexicon of legendary live performances. There is no doubt about it, Ellington's brand of jazz has contributed significantly to the American songbook and to the lives of anyone who has ever tapped their foot to a beat.

Jazz is art, you dig? Art can

really transform lives.

In fact, the more art kids get, the smarter they become in subjects like math and science. And the more likely they'll become well-rounded, cool members of society. For Ten Simple Ways to get more art in kids' lives, visit AmericansForTheArts.org.



Royal dukes are squaresville.
They have no rhythm
And they wear crowns.



Art. Ask for More.

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We only bring you
the Cream of the Crop!



KENNY 'BLUES BOSS' WAYNE

Inspired By The Blues
SONY PLAIN RECORDS

The grand master of blues and boogie-woogie piano, Kenny 'Blues Boss' Wayne is back with his fourth album for Stony Plain (and I believe his tenth overall). He has written eleven new songs along with a live cover of "Georgia on My Mind." His vocals, piano, and organ are backed by a band including former B.B. King bassist Russell Jackson; Joey DiMarco on drums; Yuji Ihara on guitar; Dave Babcock on saxophones; and Bob Tildesley on trumpet. There are guest appearances from Billy Branch on harmonica, Duke Robillard on guitar, and Lynne Chwyl on backing vocals. Recorded live in Mexico, there is a different backing band for "Georgia."

Wayne is a strong blues and boogie-woogie piano player, primarily influenced by Fats Domino, Ray Charles, and Johnnie Johnson, but also Amos Milburn and Bill Doggett. He is able to handle a straight Chicago Blues like the opening "I Knew I'd Be Playing The Blues," on which Billy Branch adds his expertise. Then it's a bit of rock and roll boogie-woogie on "Start Rockin'," with the lyrics having a bit of his musical philosophy with a choice guitar solo as well. Even though it sounds like he is playing an electric piano on "I Like That Woman," Kenny's playing evokes Amos Milburn. There is some fine guitar that evokes early 50's jazzy blues guitar (is that Robillard playing here), before Wayne takes an organ solo to take this performance to its close.

There is "Jimmy and Johnny," a boogie-woogie rooted song that has a lyrical theme in the vein of "Frankie and Johnny." Tildesley plays an outstanding muted trumpet solo, while Wayne plays some of his

best, relaxed boogie-woogie playing here on a recording where he consistently plays strongly. "Make Up Your Mind" is a rollicking Chicago blues-styled shuffle that especially shows how solid Russell Jackson and Joey DiMarco are in keeping the groove. After his relaxed, yet rollicking boogie-woogie piano on the instrumental, "Lake Country Boogie," which also has a booting tenor sax solo, the Blues Boss pays tribute to Fats Domino with "Mr. Blueberry Hill." Wayne's lyrics, as well as his vocal and piano, captures the spirit of the Domino's legendary Crescent City recordings.

The album closes with the live recording from a Mexican concert of "Georgia," with Mati Vaarman's organ adding color as well as a greasy chicken shack solo along with Wayne's electric piano. His vocal, which is in the shadow of Ray Charles, is one of his best here, and guitarists Raul Ukareda and Jevgeni Lamba both take strong solos. Like the rest of this album, this selection is wonderfully played, and Kenny Wayne, a very affable singer, sings and plays wonderfully throughout this splendid new release.

Ron Weinstock



MIKE BOGLE TRIO

Dr. B!

MBP / GROOVE!

The Dr. B in this CD's title refers to Mike Bogle having a Doctorate in Musical Arts. A music educator as well as a marvelous keyboard player (here on the organ) composer and arranger, he is joined by guitarist Richard McClure and drummer Ivan Torres for a straight-ahead organ trio recording of mostly standards.

From the sprinter's tempo of the opening interpretation of "Cherokee," to the closing storytelling on "Walkin'," the Bogle Trio impresses with the crisp ensemble sound and their interplay. On the opening track all three solo and display their technical and musical command, with guitarist McClure's bright, single note solos being very appealing. McClure takes the lead on John Abercrombie's Ralph's Piano Waltz," while Bogle provides a harmonic base before his own pipe organ emulating solo while Torres puts down a crisp groove. There is a nice bluesy mashup of Neil Hefti's "Splanky" with Bobby Troup's "Route 66," that also includes some personable scatting and passable singing to go with the greasy organ-guitar here.

There is a relaxed, swinging take on "On The Street

Where You Live,” followed by the closing talking blues, “Walkin’,” with his engaging story-telling. McClure’s chicken picking guitar provides color to the vocal along with Bogle’s repeated stepping riff pattern. Although this is a somewhat brief CD (34 minutes or so), it is a wonderfully played organ jazz trio. **Ron Weinstock**



KEVIN BURT
Heartland & Soul
 LITTLE VILLAGE FOUNDATION

Mike Kappus notes he first was exposed to Kevin Burt as a judge for The Blues Foundation’s 2018 International Blues Challenge where the Iowan won not only in the single/duo category, but Kappus also notes Burt was the first artist in the Competition’s 34-year history to sweep the solo categories — also winning the Solo/Duo Cigar Box Guitar Award for the most promising acoustic player and the Lee Oskar Harmonica Award. Once having to work five jobs (two full-time, three part-time) as a young adult in Iowa City after a football injury in his senior year of college derailed his dreams of professional football, he has become a significant new acoustic blues voice.

It is not like he just started playing the music. In 1996, the sesquicentennial both of Iowa and of the Smithsonian, Burt was chosen by the state of Iowa to participate in a project of the American Folklife Center. “I got the opportunity to be a living exhibition at the Smithsonian representing the state of Iowa as a blues artist, and part of my responsibility was to have an educational component, so that’s when I started doing my research to be able to give accurate historical stories for the state of Iowa from the perspective of a musician.” He has also become quite involved in Blues in the School.

I suspect this is his debut recording and Kid Andersen and Jim Pugh produced this CD which was recorded and mixed at Greaseland. Burt, who wrote 11 of the 12 songs, sings and plays acoustic guitar and harmonica. Andersen adds guitar and melodica (on one track), and Pugh keyboards. Others on this include Jerry Jermmott on bass, Derrick ‘D’Mar’ Martin on drums, Jon Otis on percussion and Lisa Leuschner Andersen on backing vocals.

Listening to Kevin Burt, one is reminded of Ted Hawkins, a similar acoustic singer-songwriter who

had deep rhythm and blues roots. Whereas Hawkins displayed a strong Sam Cooke influence, Burt evokes Bill Withers with perhaps a dash of Al Jarreau. Withers is one of Burt’s cited vocal influences along with Aaron Neville, Bobby Bland, Luther Vandross, and Marvin Gaye. The song that perhaps is most suggestive vocally and stylistically of Withers’ is “I Don’t Want To See You No More,” where he sings about finding a note on the door and not understanding why she left him.

It is a varied program starting with the lively groove on the opening “Day Day” singing about how he makes her whole body grin, with a nice harmonica break with the percolating backing, but she will miss him if she leaves more than he will miss her. Then there is an austere cover of The Beatles’ “Eleanor Rigby,” backed by his solo guitar, where his phrasing and other vocal dynamics stands out. Pugh’s organ helps establish the mood for his expression of thanks for letting him be himself. The percolating groove of “Real Love” reminds me of the Doobie Brothers as he sings about a love they should hang on to and wants to share with nobody else with some rhythmic guitar and crying harmonica.

While the songs on this are more soul than blues, “Never” is a strong, evocative blues with Pugh’s piano and Andersen’s guitar standing out in the backing against Burt’s passionate singing. Another blues has him playing slide and harp for the first verse of “Smack Dab in the Middle,” an original, and not the song associated with Count Basie and Joe Williams, where he sings about going to the Crossroads and not having done nobody wrong. While there is nothing wrong with the band backing and he has a nice harp break, this performance to these ears would have been stronger if it remained a solo performance. This is a small quibble on an impressive recording full of memorable performances. Kevin Burt shows himself to be an exceptional artist.

Ron Weinstock



AIMÉE ALLEN
Wings Uncaged
 AZULINE MUSIC

On the performance of the Johnny Mercer-Hoagy Carmichael standard, “Skylark” that opens this album one is struck by the command and presence of Aimée Allen along with the strong backing from bassist Francois Moutin (who has been playing with her for some

time), pianist Billy Test and drummer Kush Abadey. She sings with clarity and on pitch, has a pretty wide vocal range while making subtle timbre changes as well as a phrasing that displays a strong sense of dynamics. Most importantly she simply has a lovely voice. The accompaniment is solid and there are imaginative solos from pianist Test (with his judicious use of dissonant chords) and bassist Moutin. "Skylark" is one of the six songs she provides fresh interpretations of and she herself has contributed five originals.

"Skylark" is followed by her original "Shooting Star," a love song with bassist Moutin providing the only accompaniment for the first verse. It is a good introduction to her gifts as a songwriter, not simply a singer and once again Test and Moutin solo while Abadey colors the performance with rhythmic accents. This writer is most familiar with instrumental renditions of "Invitation," Allen does a marvelous job in delivering Paul Francis Webster's lyrics as she sings about someone being a great temptation. There is a strong bass solo on this. The pace slows down for "In My Web," a moody and dark ballad performance.

Of her originals, perhaps the most remarkable one is a topical song, "Democracy How (Harmony And Dissonance)," with its call of action, asking how we can participate in a system when truth is ridiculed and divisions weaken the common ground we share. She sings movingly about false stories set forth to deceive and divide, about that he need for individual and collective action because democracy is on the line. There is splendid rendering of Jobim's "Fotografia," sung both in Portuguese and English with just piano and bass accompaniment, as well as a marvelous duet with just Moutin's accompaniment on "Autumn Leaves / Les Feuilles Mortes," sung first in French and then English with her phrasing perhaps the most horn-like of the entire recording. On sublime covers of Buddy Johnson's classic ballad, "Save Your Love For Me," and "Midnight Sun," Abadey also sits out while Test plays with restrained elegance.

This is my first exposure to Aimée Allen, although it is apparently her fifth album. She definitely impressed this listener with some superb singing and material with first-rate backing.

Ron Weinstock

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JOHNNY RAMOS & JAALENE DELEON

**Johnny and Jaalene
RIP CAT RECORDS**

This album introduces the modern teen idol duet of Johnny Ramos and Jaalene DeLeon on a program of mostly remakes of teen rock and roll recordings from the late fifties and sixties. The 19 year old Ramos, is a guitar playing son of blues guitarist Kid Ramos and is a guitarist as well as singer who is tearing things up in a blues, roots and rockabilly band. Jaalene is a 16 year old theater girl and choirs student turned rockabilly diva who has been called "The Queen of the Teens." The duo handle all the vocals, including a number of duets, while the younger Ramos plays acoustic guitar. Backing musicians include Kidd Ramos and Tommy Harkenrider on guitar, Brent Harding on bass and Kid Dabbs on drums with Jesus Cuevas adding Norteña accordion on 4 tracks and Rob Dziubla adding saxophone to three.

The appeal of the two (think Sha Na Na performance of oldies without the camp aspects of their stage act), is immediately evident on the pair's marvelous rendition of The Ronettes hit, "Baby I Love You." Jaalene's pure teen voice and Ramos' slight vibrato is so charming and puts to a lie that those hits were simply the result of Phil Spector's production and not the singing of Ronnie Spector. Kid Ramos has a brief, taut solo here. I suspect Carla Thomas might approve of Jaalene's wonderful singing of her hit "Gee Whiz." After Johnny's hiccup-ping take of Eddie Cochran, "Teenage Cutie," the two enchant us their sublime channeling of the Everly Brothers' hit, "Let It Be Me." With booting saxophone and some slashing guitar, Jaalene delivers a spirited vocal on Etta James' rock and roller, "Good Looking."

"Los Chuco Suaves" is one of the songs from the Mexican American tradition with Johnny's rhythmic acoustic guitar while singing in what many might find a melodramatic manner, with a choice button accordion solo. It is followed by another lilting teen ballad, "Angel Baby," as Jaalene sings about like it is being in heaven with Johnny. Johnny sings Doug Sahm's Tex-Mex lament, "Why Why Why," with booting sax and accordion in the backing. While perhaps not yet possessing the weight of Wanda Jackson as a vocalist,

Jaalene does a credible vocal on “Let’s Have a Party,” with some crisp guitar playing from both Ramos and Harkenrider. There is a lively rendition by Johnny of an obscure Bill Allen rockabilly recording, “Please Give Me Something,” that is more focused and hotter than the original.

After Jaalene’s delightful bilingual singing (with Johnny providing a genial harmony) on a Chicano rock ballad “Cuando Caliente,” the two perform a Norteña styled rocking rendition of The Danleers’ only doo-wop hit with surging grooves, hot accordion and strong singing. It closes an album that may bring back memories to the older roots music audience, on an enchanting recording that brings some fresh sheen to classic rock and roll music.

Ron Weinstock



GREG DIAZ & THE ART OF IMAGINATION JAZZ ORCHESTRA

Begin the Agora
AOI GROUP

An institution on South Florida’s music scene, Diaz plays reeds and is a vocalist, composer and arranger. He has toured with pop and jazz legends like Ben E. King, Nicole Henry, Phil Woods, Ira Sullivan, The Temptations, The Lettermen and Tito Puente amongst many. This recording allowed him to document this Orchestra with a short disc containing 5 songs. Diaz is on tenor sax, clarinet and sings on this recording.

It opens with a percolating groove on Kevin Eubanks “The Navigator” with his orchestration contrasting a deep bass tone against fiery brass. Guitarist Christian Davis’ fleet, spiraling single note solo is followed by the rolling bop-flavored piano of Eero Turunen with the horns adding heat before Diaz himself takes a robust, surging tenor sax solo. Davis and Diaz both are featured again against the strolling tempo of “Circadia” with its intricate rhythmic melody.

A centerpiece here is a lively exploration of New Orleans grooves in a medley of The Neville’s “Brother John,” Diaz’s “2nd Line Strut,” and Sugarboy Crawford and the Cane Cutters’ “Iko Iko.” Diaz is no slouch as a singer (he is a Professor of Jazz Voice at Miami Dade College) and takes the lead with bassist James McCoy adding backing voices as the horns punch riffs against the second line groove. It transitions to the “2nd Line

PAGE TEN

Strut” with drummer Matt Calderin’s parade rhythms trading off with tenor saxophonist Scott Klarman, guitarist Davis and others including Mike Brignola on baritone sax, and Turunen on electric piano. The performance transitions into a jubilant rendition of the Mardi Gras Indian chant “Iko Iko,” with Diaz singing over a fresh horn arrangement that likely would have impressed the legendary Wardell Querezgüe.

Also heard here is the brisk, bop minor-toned blues “Frank Blank” that has a number of notable solos with the rumbling, rambunctious trombonist Russell Freeland and trumpeter Kevin Wilde (blistering high note specialist) standing out before drummer Calderin takes a furious solo. Turunen on electric piano and Calderin’s stick work introduce the moody title track with plenty of color and interest provided not simply by some strong solos from Klarman on tenor sax with Turunen on electric piano adding a floating feel under his wholehearted playing, but also a fascinating electric piano solo, and sizzling high-energy guitar shredding from Davis and Diaz who starts in a contemplative manner while building up in intensity.

As indicated this recording represented Greg Diaz’s desire to document this big band and the solid performances here make this a band well worth documenting.

Ron Weinstock



BLUE LARGO

Before The Devil Steals Your Soul
CALIFORNIA GRINDS RECORDS

Eric Lieberman and Alicia Aragon form the core of this California based band. Lieberman writes the songs and plays guitar while Aragon lays down the vocals. The rest of the band consists of Marcus Bashore on drums, Mike “Sandalwood” Jones on bass, Taryn “T-Bird” Donath on piano and Rafael Salmon on Hammond Organ.

The band is joined here by a host of guest artists on horns, percussion, drums and backing vocals. The listed 14 songs and bonus cut cover a broad swath of music and topics. Musically, the band mostly falls into the esoteric territory inhabited by the likes of the Squirrel Nut Zippers or the Asylum Street Spankers who marry a bit of the blues with hip cha-cha grooves, “Monrovia,” Latin jazz, “Bodas De Oro,” gospel, “Be-

fore the Devil Steals Your Soul,” soulful ballads, “The Long Goodbye,” torchy jazz blues, “Feeling Good,” and even a bit of Motown, “What Becomes of the Broken Hearted.”

Lyrically, they mostly eschew standard blues themes of lyin’, cheatin’ and boozin’ in favor of pointed looks at current politics, “Wash Away,” the fact we all matter, “Same Race,” the power of music to inspire and connect people, “I’m Alive,” and the power of discovering joy, “Every Time You Call My Name.” While this disc strays pretty far from straight blues it is an enjoyable listen with spot on musicianship and vocals that are well suited for the diverse material. **Mark Smith**



MARSHALL GILKES AND THE WDR BIG BAND

Always Forward
ALTERNATE SIDE RECORDS

Composer-Arranger-Conductor-Trombonist Gilkes has an impressive resume including being a member of Maria Schneider’s Orchestra, who describes him as “one of those musicians who continually just drops my jaw and leaves me shaking my head in disbelief” ... as well as being a former member of the WDR Big Band with whom he previously recorded a Grammy nominated recording. About this second recording leading this celebrated big band, he observed “Standing in front of a band like that and writing for it...that’s a whole other drug. It’s one thing to play as a soloist and a member, but when you get to write and stand out front and hear all that hard work come back, it’s a pretty addictive thing.”

He is a multiple threat in all of his capacities here, and also joined by Germany’s swinging-est band that boasts such world class players and improvisers as alto saxophonists Karolina Strassmayer and Johan Hörlén; tenor saxophonist Paul Heller, trumpeter Andy Haderer; trombonist Andy Hunter; guitarist Paul Shighihara; bassist John Goldsby and drummer Hans Dekker. The hard driving swing of this band is evident from the opening of “Puddle Jumping,” which also showcases Wilkes’ spectacular trombone playing set against a heated orchestration and several tempo transitions. Then there is a rousing spectacular rendition of Cole Porter’s “Easy To Love” with marvelous scoring of the

horns with a tight statement of the melody from the brass here set with the reeds and a funky bass groove. There is a marvelous alto sax solo from Johan Hörlén here as well.

The mood changes with the gentle lyricism of “Morning Smiles,” with Wilkes playing in a mellow manner as the performance unfolds for a rhapsodic crescendo as the brass soars along with his trombone. “Switchback” opens with a driving funk groove and showcases saxophonists Strassmayer on alto (set against Goldsby’s bass riff) and Heller’s fiery tenor sax. Drummer Dekker also takes a short solo set against Simon Seidl’s comping on piano. Here and elsewhere, this big band plays with the tightness of a much smaller group with the orchestrations adding color.

Gilkes’s classical influences are displayed by the reeds and brasses providing a chamber-like opening to “Lost Words.” It has a relaxed, lyrical trombone solo followed by Seidl’s intricate playing bolstered by Goldsby’s emphatic bass. A lovely rendition of the ballad “Portrait of Jennie” has a lush arrangement and an exquisite flugelhorn solo from Andy Haderer.

The centerpiece of this recording is “The Denali Suite,” inspired by a trip to the National park in the State of Alaska. It features Hörlén’s swirling, spirited soprano sax on the rousing first movement, pianist Seidl playing in ruminative fashion on the hymn-like second part (wonderful scoring of the horns to engender that tone), and trombonist Andy Hunter growling a bit on the swinging third movement.

The album closes with the title track which according to Gilkes is about life and his own mindset that no matter what is going around, one has to push forward. Again this performance displays all the facets of his musical persona, as a composer, arranger, conductor and a superb trombonist as this wonderful band builds to an uplifting crescendo closing a remarkable recording. **Ron Weinstock**



HENRY TOWNSEND

Mule
OMNIVORE

Henry Townsend was the only blues artist to record in every decade from the 1920s to the first decade of the 21st Century. It was a career that had him record for Paramount and other labels before the depression,

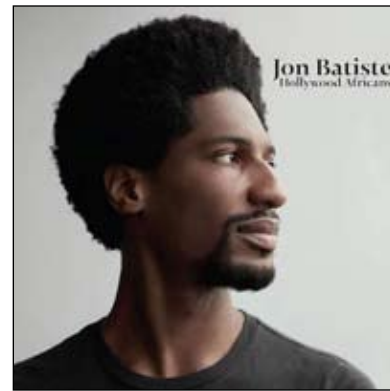
later participate in sessions with legends like John Lee ‘Sonny Boy’ Williamson, and Walter Davis, and then record for Folkways and Prestige before Adelphi issued an album in 1975. “Mule” was issued originally by Nighthawk Records in 1980 and warmly received by blues aficionados. Leroy Pierson, one of the co-producers of the original recordings and this reissue stated that the intention was to create an album worthy of his unique genius and secure him the recognition someone of his talent and historical purpose deserves. Omnivore has reissued this on CD augmenting the 13 recordings on the original recording. It also represented the transition of Townsend from being a blues guitarist and singer to becoming primarily a blues pianist.

I have the original vinyl LP, but it has been some time since I listened to it. Listening to this music again is a joy. Townsend’s sober, thoughtful blues evokes his old partner, Walter Davis, more than anyone else even when his piano displays some of Roosevelt Sykes’ influence. The opening “Bad Luck Dice” echoes some train blues as well as St. Louis Jimmy’s “Goin’ Down Slow,” with his bittersweet singing and piano accompaniment. “Nothing But Trouble” is a slow minor-key blues where he lightly moans a vocal about his woman being somewhere else in another man’s arm. Henry wrote “Tears Come Rollin’ Down” for Walter Davis. He remakes it here with a wonderful vocal from his wife, Vernell. Then there is the melancholic “Hard Road to Travel,” also performed in his restrained style.

Yank Rachell, who adds mandolin to several tracks, plays supporting, rhythmic guitar behind Henry’s pinched note playing on the peppy “Talkin’ Guitar Blues.” Henry proclaims “I’m Just An Ordinary Man” waking up every morning with the same thing on his mind with the moody tone accentuated by his rumbling bass and single note arpeggios. After the piano solo “Alley Strut,” Henry and Vernell share the vocal on “Can’t You See,” an appealing update of Jesse Thomas’ “Another Friend Like Me,” with Henry on guitar. Yank Rachell adds his mandolin behind Henry’s guitar on the Walter Davis-styled “Dark Clouds Rising.”

Among the previously unissued tracks are “The Other Night,” with an energetic boogie-inflected piano, and the somber “Going Back To My Baby,” with Norman Merritt adding guitar in a Townsend-influenced manner behind Townsend’s piano and vocal. Henry is on guitar on “Goin’ Back Down South,” which sounds lyrically as an adaptation of a John Lee ‘Sonny Boy’ Williamson recording, with Yank Rachell on second guitar. Townsend’s music may not have the immediate appeal of a Big Joe Williams, Roosevelt Sykes or Lonnie Johnson, but his direct, sober performances and craftsmanship as a songwriter make for some superb blues listening, with the bonus of the additional songs. Ron Weinstock

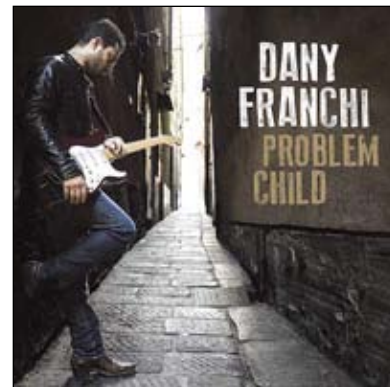
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JON BATISTE
Hollywood Africans
VERVE

As is often the case, another gem shows up towards year’s end. “Late Show” bandleader/musical director and pianist Jon Batiste serves up a minimalist hit of a set featuring solo instrumentals interspersed with some engaging vocal takes.

Leading off with a churning “Kenner Boogie”, Mr. Batiste further on will cross both classical and blues borders on “Chopinesque”. This fusion makes for a savvy segue into “St. James Infirmary”, the first track here adorned by subtle production touches; in this case, mournful vocal and horn choruses fade in and out. A particularly evocative version of the Louis Armstrong-popularized “Wonderful World” stands out among the vocal performances. Good stuff. *Duane Verh*



DANY FRANCHI
Problem Child
STATION HOUSE RECORDS

Sometimes a recording is overlooked when I first receive and listen to it. I am driving in my car and all the sudden a crackling good rendition of Little Johnnie Jones’ “Big Town Playboy,” based on Eddie Taylor’s shuffle blues recording comes on. Noting it was track from this album, it led me to listen to it anew, and the rest of the album struck me as equally good, whether his covers or new recordings.

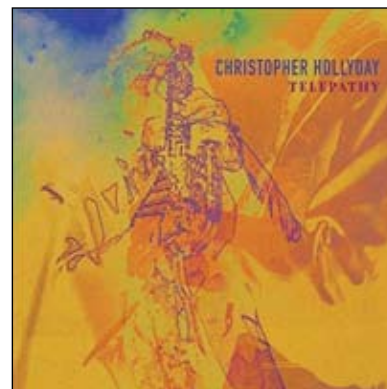
This Genoa, Italy born blues performer is championed by Anson Funderburgh, who produced this recording. Funderburgh has put together a fine band to support Franchi: Jim Pugh on keys, Wes Starr on

drums, and Nate Rowe on bass with the Texas Horns on several tracks and Greg Izor plays harp on “Big Town Playboy.”

This is a solid recording capturing the feel of classic West Side Chicago blues and Urban Texas blues of the fifties through seventies starting with the opening “Back To The River,” about going down to Memphis, and one is impressed by his robust, slightly parched singing, with little hint that he is from Italy, set against a solid horn arrangement and he displays his gritty guitar that here suggests Johnny Copeland. “Give Me A Sign” is a blues-infused rocker with Pugh’s honky tonk piano and more fine driving guitar displaying his tone as well as his ability to make a concise statement. Greg Izor’s fine harp helps make “Big Town Playboy” such a strong performance in addition to a fine, natural sounding vocal and some fretwork that Jimmie Vaughan (himself a big Taylor fan) would appreciate.

“Real Love” is a Memphis-styled ballad that again shows what a moving singer Franchi can be with more choice guitar playing. “You Don’t Want Me” has a swamp blues flavor and Franchi channels early Johnny Guitar Watson with his fierce guitar, while there is a touch of New Orleans in Pugh’s piano playing here. There is also a Crescent City feel to “Big Kind Hearted Man,” with more fine piano and a solid groove for the singing and stinging guitar. There is fine single-note fretwork, strong and grainy singing, and a booting tenor sax solo on “Don’t Steal My Time,” set against a lazy shuffle groove. “Sensation” is a first-rate homage to Freddie King’s “Sen-Sa-Shun,” both instrumentals based on “Got My Mojo Working,” while “My Only One” is an excellent slow blues ballad set against riffing horns. Franchi delivers a convincing cover of a Magic Sam recording, “Every Thing Gonna Be Alright.” Franchi sings fervently while his playing evokes the Chicago blues legend.

After “Wanna Know,” where his guitar sounds inspired by Albert King, the album closes with the title track, an atmospheric, understated performance with his sandpaper vocal set against a minimal backing. Production is crisp and clean which isn’t surprising given the participation of Funderburgh, and Dany Franchi’s impressive performances opened up these ears with some very good singing, marvelous playing, and strong, varied material. *Ron Weinstock*



CHRISTOPHER HOLLYDAY

Telepathy
JAZZ BEAT PRODUCTIONS

“Telepathy” is alto saxophonist Christopher Hollyday’s first recording in over 25 years when he recorded four albums for RCA. He started performing in public in 1983 at the age of 13 in Boston and headlined the Village Vanguard when only 18. While touring, he began giving clinics at local schools and became interested in music education leading him to study at Berklee. He moved to San Diego in 1996 where he has been a jazz educator and now gives private instruction after being a band director for over 20 years. “Telepathy” marks his return to the jazz world in full force.

With a formidable band that includes pianist Joshua White, trumpeter Gilbert Castellanos, bassist Rob Thorsen, and drummer Tyler Kreutel, Hollyday performs six standards that display that he still has plenty to share with listeners. The group starts in a Blue Note bag with an impressive hard bop performance of Freddie Hubbard’s “One of Another Kind.” Hollyday takes a blistering paced sax solo followed by equally intense trumpet as the rhythm section, and then pianist White, continues the torrid pace. Bud Powell’s “Hallucinations” follows at a slightly more relaxed groove with Hollyday playing in a Charlie Parker styled fashion while Castellanos’ trumpet has the mix of fire and mellowness that characterized Fats Navarro’s playing.

Kreutel uses brushes to give a soft-shoe groove to the mid-tempo arrangement of the ballad “Everything Happens,” with some lovely muted trumpet before Hollyday’s more extroverted sax. Hollyday’s touch with a ballad is on display on “Autumn in New York” on which Castellanos sits out. Thorsen and White also solo while Kreutel again deftly plays with brushes. Then there is a nice bop-flavored “I Got the World on a String” with more Parker-like alto set against Castellanos’ muted brass.

A crisp rendition of Charlie Parker’s “Segment” closes this six-tune recording with more hot bebop played at a torrid pace with the ghost of Bird present here. This is a marvelous bop recording showing Hollyday, backed by an excellent band, still is an imaginative saxophonist who plays with plenty of intensity.

Ron Weinstock

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BARBARA BLUE
Fish in Dirty H2O
BIG BLUE RECORDS

Barbara Blue may have originally been from Pittsburgh, but after spending years in Phoenix, Detroit and back in Pittsburgh, she landed a gig in 1997 at Silky O'Sullivan's on Beale Street in Memphis where she has been performing 5 nights a week for 21 years. Within this time frame, she competed at the early years of the International Blues Challenge and did a number of blues cruises where she met the Phantom Blues Band which led to recording three albums with them.

Jim Gaines produced, engineered & mixed this and there are some superb musicians on it including: Bernard "Pretty" Purdie - drums, Will McFarlane - guitar, David Smith - bass, Lester Snell keyboards, Rick Steff - Hammond B3, Mark Narmore - keyboards, Michael Toles - guitar, Lannie McMillan - tenor sax/horn arrangements, Jim Spake - baritone sax, and Marc Franklin & Steve Graham - trombone, along with some backing singers. There are cameo appearances by Al Kapone, Johnny Lee Schell (of the Phantom Blues Band), and Scott Sharrard.

This, her 11th album, is an impressive one marked by the authority of her husky, full-throated singing. She may be a powerful singer, but not an overbearing or strained one, as heard on the opening "My Heart Belongs to the Blues," with some nice guitar on a lyric by her, Narmore and Sandy Carroll about her singing and traveling singing the blues. Furthermore, the restrained backing complements her and does not overwhelm her. It is followed by "Johnny Lee" (I believe by by Scott Sharrard) which evokes memories of Katie Webster swamp-pond blues.

Johnny Lee Schell is on guitar here as Barbara wonders what Johnny Lee has done to her. Next up is a down and dirty slow blues that one can imagine Koko Taylor having done, "Accidental Death," with Sharrard's slide guitar heard over the relentless, driving groove. Blue is a very strong singer, although I would rate her a notch below Taylor and Webster.

There is a bluesy gospel number "Dr. Jesus," who will do what some real fine doctors can't do. "Meet Me In Memphis" is a full throated, soulful promotion of her current home with strong horns in the backing. The title track, a moody slow blues, was originally done

by Koko Taylor and Barbara Blue's compelling vocal is complemented by rapper Al Kapone in a duet that imaginatively reworks this song. It is followed by a superb, soulful performance on a ballad she wrote with Narmore, "Walk Away." Another notable performance is "Wild Woman," where she sings about some of the things some women do. "That's Working For Me" has a nice walking tempo and some really nice playing by saxophonist Lannie McMillan.

Spooner Oldham collaborated with Narmore and others on "Slow Born," as Barbara sings with smoldering fervor about memories burning slow, especially things one wants to forget on a gem of a southern soul performance. The album closes with a brooding interpretation of Robert Johnson's "Come In My Kitchen." Barbara Blue is a very strong singer, and even if I rate her a notch below Taylor and Webster, with quality songs, her own vocals and backing that supports her singing, she has produced a striking recording.

Ron Weinstock



ELLIOTT DEUTSCH
Make Big Bands Great Again
SOUNDWINGS

Elliott Deutsch has been leading a big band in the Los Angeles area since 2006, and as a composer has had works performed by the Arturo Sandoval Big Band, Columbus Jazz Orchestra, and others, while he has recently arranged music for Take 6, Martina McBride, Jane Monheit, and Lalo Schiffrin. This record did not start out as a political statement, but the present President was taking adverse actions that would make his life even more difficult, leading to the title of this album, and several compositions which obviously have reference to those actions.

After a brief rendition of "America the Beautiful," coming across almost as a hymn, his big band launches into "Fake News," referring to efforts to routinely discredit certain news sources under the rubric of "fake news." It is an energetic performance that "combines elements of many of my favorite non-jazz music, Chase, Tower of Power, Rage Against the Machine." To this I hear a bit of a Mingus influence in some of the textures and interplay between sections and Mike Rocha is featured on trumpet.

He describes "Repeal and Replace" as "a musi-

cal expression of the futility I saw in Trump's loosely proposed healthcare plan." The writing for ensemble is fascinating and there is a lively guitar solo by Will Brahm that is supposed to represent the individual no longer able to afford health care before the close of the performance echoes the brash beginning, representing the mess of health care. It segues into "The Great Wall," described as an "unabashedly joyous, intended to evoke the ill-informed idea that erecting a massive wall between the United States and Mexico would somehow create a migrant-free utopia." There is a terrific, soaring alto solo by Dan Kaneyuki sax solo well framed by Deutsch's orchestration.

This CD closes with a more genial, mellow "Pink Sunset," a "tribute to my hometown, Los Angeles ... with reverence to our beautiful evenings that are ironically decorated by pollution." It features a very sonorous trombone solo by Bob McChesney who helped complete this composition. In summary, this is a very enjoyable, straight-ahead Big Band CD, with focused wonderfully played performances which could be enjoyed even without awareness of the inspiration for the music here. One does wish there was more music (this only contains 18 minutes), but there is no fat or gristle on these lean performances. **Ron Weinstock**



JOSH SMITH
Burn To Grow
 VIZZTONE

Originally a blues-rock prodigy, Smith's latest release has some choice blues cuts mixed in with some rock and soul in this newest recording of his. On the ten originals Smith composed, he is joined by either Travis Carlton or Davey Faragher on bass, Lemar Carter or Pete Thomas on drums and Casey Frank on organ along with a horn section that includes Jamelle Adisa on trumpet, flugelhorn and horn arrangements, and Dan Bolsey on tenor and baritone saxophone.

If there is a blues-rock tint to Smith's guitar, he certainly doesn't hammer one over the head and he is a pretty good singer as he displays on the opening "Half Blues," a West Side Chicago styled blues with horns evoking Otis Rush's Cotillion album. It is a nicely paced performance with his guitar sounding like it is played through some sort of tone shifter that almost

suggests Lonnie Mack's sound. His solo builds in its intensity while he sings with fervor and conviction. There is a jazzy underpinning to "Through the Night," a song that to these ears has hints of Steely Dan with his fiery bursts and gravelly singing being convincing. On "That for You Too" his playing suggests Albert King as he sings fervently. It is followed by a terrific vocal from Monét Owens on the Memphis-soul flavored "Your Love (Is Making Me Whole)."

More of Smith's pop side is heard on his nice performance, "Look No Further," while "Let Me Take Care of You" is a driving, funky blues with buzzsaw guitar as he tells this woman who hasn't found her true one, drop down your guard and let me take care of you. "What We Knew" is a strong blues performance that evokes some of the better British blues of the sixties and seventies (think early Fleetwood Mac) with terrific guitar and nicely developed vocal. It is followed by "You Never Knew," with unusual twists in its melody and Bolsey's baritone standing out in the backing along with Smith's (at times) fluttering guitar.

The title track is perhaps the most typical blues-rock track with its plodding groove, but benefits from Smith's measured singing and his inventive playing. It perhaps is the least compelling track here for these ears, but does not change the fact that this is a strong set of blues and blues-infused music that are sung with conviction, backed by a very good studio band and displaying Josh Smith's very accomplished guitar playing. **Ron Weinstock**



FLAVIO LIRA
Coffee Gold Sugar Cane
 INTERROBANG RECORDS

A bass guitarist as well as composer, the Brazilian born Lira describes this recording as "my love letter to all of Latin America: a rhythmic fusion of samba, baião, regional folklore, tumbao, clave, partido alto, jazz influence from the north, classical fugue, and more. The strength of Latin America is in its incomparable diversity. In this project I have brought together 38 artists from 15 different countries."

The opening lively original "5to9," with Edmar Colon's sax spotlighted, is full of rhythmic and musical vitality. Then there is the Spanish language rendition

of “All the Things You Are,” captivantly sung by Nella Rojas with sterling piano from Anibal Cruz and some intricate bass from the leader. Lira contributes a funky bottom to the irresistible rhythms of “Solo No Frio,” while Howard Levy’s harmonica dances on “Cumbamba” over the percolating percussion. Valentine Komissarouk wordlessly sings on the breezy “Pra Frente,” with Lira soloing on his bass guitar and Ryan Fedak taking one on vibraphone.

There is a playful rendition of Luis Otavio Almeida’s “Laurinha no Frevo,” with its sunny rhythms as well as featuring the flute of Anggie Obin and soprano sax of Livio Almeida, followed by the driving groove of “A Rã,” by João Donato and Caetano Veloso with sparkling vibes from Fedak and synthesizer from Thiago Vitório. A dreamy rendition of Jobim and de Moraes’ “Favela (O Morro Não Tem Vez)” follows with more pulsating vibes, as well as another strong electric bass solo by the leader, and piano from Alexei Tsiganov and drums from Graciliano Zambonin. The wordless singing of Komissarouk along with the melodious clarinet of Juan Ruiz and the cello of Catherine Bent add to the charms of Lira’s reflective “Still in Movement,” while the bass flute of Fernando Brandão adds to the breezy tropical flavor of “Flopida at Night,” which also has a deft piano solo by Tsiganov. Vocalists Ronaldo Andrade and Keisel Jimenez and the electric piano of Anibal Cruz are present on the animated samba Vai Lá, Vai Lá,”

The closing “Bass Fugue” displays Lira’s guitarist approach to the bass guitar along with Fernando Brandão’s flute, and Kevin Scollins’s guitar. One can not overemphasize the percussionists present here (Kan Yanabe - pandeiro, tamborim, shaker and Julio Santos - tantan, repique de mão) and elsewhere in adding rhythmic and other accents to this splendid and memorable celebration of Latin and Brazilian jazz.

Ron Weinstock



JOHN AKAPO

Paradise Blues

MENSCH HOUSE RECORDS

Of Samoan background, John Akapo grew up in Alaska, spent his youth in American Samoa and is currently based in Hawaii. He is a singer-guitarist-songwriter who debuts on CD with a Robert Johnson cover, closes with a Tommy Johnson and contributes

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seven originals, mostly based in the blues that are delivered naturally without contrivance as can be heard on his relaxed vocal of “Ramblin’ on My Mind” that opens this recording, backed by guitar and what sounds like dobro. Rather than try to sing with a false urgency, he cleanly delivers the lyrics while playing a brief slide solo.

There is no identification of personnel in the press release for this release or on the CD package. There is nice acoustic harmonica backing his vocal on the original “Little Lani,” about this girl who gives John the blues by her behavior. “Maui Drive” has some more poetic imagery with easy driving slide guitar, harp backing and a slightly brisker tempo with his cleanly delivered vocal. His Muddy Waters cover, “I Can’t Be Satisfied,” benefits from Akapo’s easy going rendition. There is a country-folk quality to the delightful “Caracas,” with the slide/dobro lending a Hawaiian music tinge, and the lament, “Fighting For Love.”

“Hindsight” is a delightful, low-key original blues, and by the time he closes with Tommy Johnson’s “Big Road,” one has been thoroughly entertained by the performances here. He may not be able to invest this performance with the emotional force of the original, but like the opening Robert Johnson number, it benefits from his unforced, engaging performance that also characterizes this entire recording. *Ron Weinstock*



NYSQ

Heaven Steps To Seven

WHIRLWIND RECORDINGS

About the last album from NYSQ, “Sleight of hand,” I concluded “The strong ensemble playing, in addition to the many fine solos, and the imaginative reworking of the material make for a superb straight-ahead recording.” Now comes an equally engaging recording by saxophonist Tim Armacost, pianist David Berkman, drummer Gene Jackson, and double bassist Ugonna Okegwo.

The freshness they bring to the classic jazz and standards repertoire is evident on the opening reworking of Leonard Bernstein’s “Tonight,” that opens with a warm introduction before the ballad is transformed to a medium tempo vehicle for their exploration. It is followed by the transformation of Charlie Parker’s

blues, “Cheryl,” which sounds like a 1960s Blue Note recording with Berkman and Okegwo outstanding. A rendition of Horace Silver’s ballad, “Peace,” is a showcase for Armacost’s sensitive and thoughtful tenor sax. It is followed by a lively “If I Should Lose You,” that puts the spotlight on Armacost’s splendid soprano sax along with the imaginative accompaniment. They then provide couple of wonderful interpretations of Cole Porter, an imaginative interpretation of “Every Time We Say Goodbye,” and a splendid “I Love You,” opening with Okegwo’s bass intro. Then there is an exquisite performance of Bud Powell’s “I’ll Keep Loving You,” featuring Armacost’s warm, melodic ballad playing and Berkman’s deft piano.

A vigorous performance of Herbie Hancock’s “Eye of the Hurricane” places the spotlight on Berkman’s dynamic piano while Jackson is explosive in driving this concluding performance of another terrific straight-ahead modern jazz recording. **Ron Weinstock**



SCOTT SHARRARD

Saving Grace
WE SAVE MUSIC

Sharrard, for those like this writer who are not aware, was the late Gregg Allman’s Musical Director. On this release he takes center stage backed by the Hi Rhythm of Memphis (Howard Grimes on drums, Leroy Hodges on bass and Charles Hodges on organ), and the Swampers Of Muscle Shoals (Charles Gamble on drums, David Hood on bass and Spooner Oldham on a few selections), with Eric Finland on keyboards, Mark Franklin on trumpet (among horn players). Taj Mahal guests on Greg Allman’s last original (a collaboration with Sharrard), “Everything a Good Man Needs,” on which Bernard “Pretty” Purdie is on drums. With the exception of Terry Reid’s “Faith To Arise,” Sharrard penned ten of the eleven songs (two being collaborations).

Sharrard’s mix of blues, southern rock, swamp pop, and Memphis soul makes for quite an enjoyable release. He is a darn good singer with a soulful delivery, not as raspy as Allman, and a solid guitarist. The Southern rock heritage is perhaps most evident on Reid’s “Faith to Arise,” with some tart slide guitar in the vein of the Allman Brothers set against Sharrard’s

moving singing. The title track, with Gamble, Hood and Finland in the backing is a soulful, bluesy ballad and is soulfully sung. On “Everything a Good Man Needs,” Taj Mahal handles the vocal, singing about how his baby’s love keeps him humming and is all he needs. His strong vocal is backed Sharrard’s crying slide guitar, tight riffing horns and a funky R&B groove.

“Angeline,” with the Hi Rhythm Section is a Memphis funk take on swamp pop, while “Words Can’t Lie,” is simply a terrifically sung Memphis soul ballad. “She Can’t Wait” is another southern soul flavored original with the Swampers adding their own brand of funk as Sharrard sings about his part time love leaving him full of despair. “Sweet Compromise” is a brassy uptempo blues with slashing guitar followed by another blues, “Tell The Truth,” again with more high energy blues rock guitar. Sharrard impresses by his focused, thoughtful playing as opposed to simply shredding.

There are some real good songs, fervent and moving vocals, excellent guitar as well and first-rate backing and production. This blues traditionalist was quite impressed by this recording. Dedicated to Rich Hall, Butch Trucks and Greg Allman, Scott Sharrard does their memory proud on “Saving Grace.”

Ron Weinstock



SASHA MASHIN

Outside The Box
RAINY DAYS RECORDS

Russian-born drummer Sasha Mashin’s current set is “busy” in the best artistic sense of the word. Odd meters, angular themes and charted cross-currents come off not the least bit gimmicky, instead comprising a consistently engaging chemistry.

The leader’s own play provides the likely impetus; his own ability to “cook” while navigating metric shifts points the proceedings in a clear direction. Featured soloists- pianist Alexey Ivannikov, trumpeter Alex Sipiagin and alto saxophonist Zhenya Strigalev- take to the environment with apparent ease and Strigalev, in particular, speaks to the splendid quirkiness afforded by this energetic affair. Good listening.

Duane Verh

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DAVE KELLER
Every Soul's a Star
CATFOOD RECORDS

This writer has been a fan of the multi-talented Dave Keller since seeing him perform as well as back Johnny Rawls several years ago. This soul-blues singer, songwriter and guitarist impressed and impressed me enough to support one of his recording projects.

His new album is his first for the Catfood Records label, the label of his good friend Rawls, with Jim Gaines handling the production. He is backed by the label's studio band, The Rays, consisting legendary Motown guitarist Johnny McGee, along with Bob Trenchard – bass; Dan Ferguson - Hammond B3, Wurlitzer, keyboards; Richy Puga – drums; Mike Middleton – trumpet; and Nick Flood - tenor and baritone sax; plus backing vocals from Janelle Thompson and Shakara Weston; and percussion from Christopher Serrano.

With a voice that might suggest Delbert McClinton, gets right into a soulful groove with the opening “Don’t Let Them Take Your Joy,” adding a stinging solo to his stirring vocal as he urges the listener to remember what makes one happy and fly, fly, fly” It is a small gem of a performance in part due to the strong support provided by The Rays.

The title track is a celebration of folks being who they are and then followed by the one cover, Ronnie Shannon’s “Baby, I Love You,” where McGee takes the guitar lead with Keller’s adding his own phrasing, including a brief spoken rap, to a fresh interpretation of Aretha Franklin’s hit. Then there is a lovely heartfelt ballad “You Bring the Sunshine” that is so soulfully performed with the Rays coming off like the Swampers or Hi Rhythm Section (and Dan Ferguson shines on this).

Other highlights on a consistently fine recording include “It’s All In Your Eyes,” and “Kiss Me Like You Miss Me,” both with McGee’s concise solos. With strong original songs (one can easily imagine some of these being done by other performers), solid and empathic backing from The Rays, and Dave Keller’s fervent performances, Keller again has produced another soul-blues gem.

Ron Weinstock

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SAM BROVERMAN
A Jewish Boy's Christmas
SELF-PRODUCED

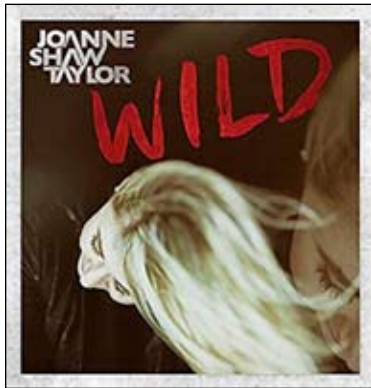
Toronto based singer, Sam Broverman has been presenting his cabaret show “A Jewish Boy’s Christmas” every holiday season for almost ten years. His inspiration was by the fact that many of the best known Christmas songs were written by Jewish songwriters. Turning this well-loved holiday revue driven by Sam’s love for comedy and novelty song into a recording, Sam enlisted the help of several of Toronto’s best musicians. These include his working band with pianist Peter Hill and bassist Jordan O’Connor. Featured as a guest vocalist is Broverman’s regular special guest, Whitney Ross-Barris while Ernesto Cervini handles the drum chair. Ross McIntyre is on bass for some songs while Drew Jurecka plays clarinet or violin where heard. Ken Whitely who produced this plays the guitars and organ.

This recording is a fun, light-hearted album that is witty (at times hilarious) as Broverman performs some parodies of a few Christmas classics and original novelty songs full of entertaining wordplay and imagery. The album’s rib-tickling tone is established as he asks “What’s a Jew To Do On Christmas,” besides going to the cinema and having Chinese food, as he wistfully asks why can’t pork be kosher for a day and wishes he had a stocking. Jurecka’s woody clarinet is delightful in his accompaniment and brief solo while Cervini adeptly plays with brushes. Jurecka adds some klezmatic styled violin as Broverman sings about various places to spend the Jewish holidays with clever word choices for rhymes (“I’ll be spending Hanukah in Santa Monica”), followed by singing these lyrics except this time in Yiddish.

Whitney Ross-Barris sings beautifully in a soft lament “Coventry Carol,” with the trio providing exquisite backing. It is followed by Broverman’s introduction to some familiar Yiddish phrases on “You’re Speaking Yiddish,” where he opens to the melody of “O Canada,” singing that to be a mensch one must know both French and English, but also must know another language that is neither Greek or Latin, before they start swinging. There are several parodies of Christmas carols including “The First Noel Parody,” as he sings about Jewish homes having Christmas wreaths and trees and the like or “Christmas Card From a Hooker in Minneapolis” with a melody evoking Randy Newman’s “Louisiana 1927” with a light-hearted Whitney

Ross-Barris vocal.

The album closes with Ross-Barris' wonderful, straight rendition of Mel Torme's classic "The Christmas Song," with Broverman adding a backing vocal. "A Jewish Boy's Christmas" is marvelously played and performed and a thoroughly charming recording of holiday cheer. This is scheduled to be released November 30. *Ron Weinstock*



JOANNE SHAW TAYLOR
WILD
SILVERTONE/SONY

First a disclaimer for any blues purists in the house: you may find this disc in your local music store in the "blues" section, but its guts are pure rock 'n' roll with an indigo thread running through it. Taylor is a young blonde British guitarist who was discovered by Dave Stewart of the Eurythmics and has a pretty good following on the Continent and is now trying to spread her fame in the USA.

As a matter of fact, WILD is a re-release from a different label now that Taylor has signed with Sony for a new release in 2019. Not sure why, but I kept getting flashes here to some of the late Johnny Winter's middle career, but with less on a blues angle to it. Drummer Greg Morrow pounds hard in all aspects, starting with "Dyin' To Know." "Ready To Roll" has a touch of funk to it and keyboardist Steve Nathan makes his first appearance on WILD via "Get You Back." Morrow also drives "No Reason To Stay" and, even more so, during "Wanna Be My Lover," which is the best offer I've had this week. "I Wish I Could Wish You Back" is on the melodic side and sets up the grand finale "Summertime." The latter is standard yet ethereal as Taylor sings it. It may not make you forget the Janis Joplin version, but this one makes its own points. Lastly, I have to mention "Nothin' To Lose," another solid rocker.

To use an obvious British cliché, WILD might not be everyone's cup of tea, still you don't have to wait until 4 p.m. to drink it up.

Peanuts

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RICHIE COLE
Cannonball
RICHIE COLE PRESENTS

Julian 'Cannonball' Adderley is the veteran alto saxophonist Richie Cole's favorite alto sax player, and this new recording is Cole's homage to the legendary Adderley.

Cole leads an ensemble drawn from his home base in Pittsburgh, including Cole's frontline partner on "Cannonball," trombonist Reggie Watkins, who is a surrogate for cornetist Nat Adderley. Tenor saxophonist Rick Matt and trumpeter J.D. Chaisson are present on four of the album's 13 tracks, while guitarist Eric Susoeff, keyboardist Kevin Moore, bassist/producer Mark Perna, and drummer Vince Taglieri fill out the rhythm section. There are a dozen songs associated with Adderley along with a Cole original "Bell of the Ball," dedicated to Adderley.

Highlights include Bobby Timmons' "Dat Dere," with Cole preaching here, and a stunning "Matchmaker, Matchmaker," where Cole alludes to Coltrane's "Moment's Notice" in his solo. There is the driving "Jeanine" with the full horn section followed a relaxed "Jive Samba." Cole's original, "Bell of the Ball," has the feel of an unrecorded Adderley tune, while "Sack o' Woe" has a guest appearance from former Horace Silver drummer Roger Humphries.

While Scott Yanow's liner notes suggests turning "Mercy, Mercy, Mercy" into a swinging number is innovative, these ears found this transformation not very convincing. Much more satisfying is a bossa nova accented rendition of Buddy Johnson's classic ballad, "Save Your Love For Me," warmly sung in Portuguese by Kenia. Cole and Watkins play sublimely on this performance that guitarist Susoeff arranged. After a barnstorming rendition of Sam Jones "Unit 7," the album closes with a bonus track of Kenia singing "Save Your Love For Me" in English.

Cole and his ensemble may not play with the bite of Adderley's original recordings, but how many musicians have the force of nature presence Adderley and band had including a terrific rhythm section that included bassist Sam Jones and drummer Louis Hayes. Still, these are extremely enjoyable performances with excellent solos and a first-rate backing band.

Ron Weinstock



VIVIAN LEE
Let's Talk About Love
TARA RECORDS

This is an album of love songs sung by Ms. Lee, whose musical associates, include pianist Brenden Lowe (Joe Gilman plays on (Track #3,); bassist Buca Necak and drummer Jeff Minniweather. Jeff Clayton, who mentored Ms. Lee, plays alto sax on one track). These are musicians that she plays with regularly around Sacramento and the imaginative arrangements of these songs in part reflect that.

In the booklet she talks about love having “many faces and angles, plots and twists,” which she approaches from the various songs included. Bassist Necak opens “Wives and Lovers” before Ms. Lee enters with her understated, intimate, evocative style while Lowe has an intriguing piano solo on this swinging first track. John Clayton wrote the music while Alan and Marilyn Bergman provided the lyrics for the ballad “Before We Fall in Love,” with Lowe’s restrained, light accompaniment while Minniweather plays softly. Her vocals employ a narrow range, but her enunciation and phrasing along with her soft delivery have considerable charm. “Secret Love” returns to a swinging groove with a sprite, imaginative piano solo, and deft use of brushes by Minniweather while Necak provides the anchoring bass line.

Lowe’s bubbly piano evokes Jimmy Rowles on “You Turned the Tables on Me,” while Jeff Clayton’s moving alto sax adds to the flavor of her performance of the Johnny Mercer-Johnny Mandel ballad, “Emily.” The Gershwin classic “The Man I Love,” is taken at a slightly brighter tempo than more familiar versions (such as that of Billie Holiday), and again Lowe impresses with his imaginative and thoughtful accompaniment and soloing.

Jimmy Webb’s lovely ballad “Didn’t We” is a wonderful vehicle for her understated singing, while she shows a gentle playful sense on “Waltz For Debbie,” as she sings Gee Lee’s words to this Bill Evans’ classic. This song about a child growing up is followed by “Bein’ Green,” from Sesame Street that closes this appealing vocal jazz album.

Ron Weinstock

www.jazz-blues.com



MS ZENO THE MOJO QUEEN
Back in Love
BLUE LOTUS RECORDINGS

While I heard about Ms Zeno, it was not until I heard perform her with my friend Memphis Gold, that I had a chance to experience this powerful singer.

Originally from Louisiana, she moved to Memphis after Little Milton heard her, and had her join his backing vocal group. After several years she launched her solo career with Albert King helping introduce her to Beale Street where she became an institution. When B.B. King’s Memphis Club opened, Ms Zeno & the Famous Unknowns became the house band. Recently after some personal issues were resolved she signed with Blue Lotus Recordings and made this album of twelve original songs.

This session is produced by label head Paul Niehaus IV who plays bass, guitar, drums, keys, tenor sax, vocals, mandolin, and French horn on this along with Kevin O’Connor who contributes drums, guitar, keys, baritone & tenor sax, and trumpet as well. Special guests include guitarist G Weevil who appears on 4 selections and harmonica wizard Brandon Santini who appears on two. Guest vocals are provided on various tracks by Gene Jackson and Roland Johnson, while Dustin Shrum contributes trumpet and Tom Martin lends his accordion to one selection. The strings of Andy Hainz on cello; Mark Hochberg on viola; and Abbie Steiling on violin sweeten three selections.

As mentioned above, I have seen Ms Zeno appearing with Memphis Gold, but as much as I enjoyed seeing her perform, listening to her here impressed me even more on a recording centered on deep soul and soul-blues. As a singer she impresses with not simply her power or sense of dynamics (ranging from a pussycat’s purr to a lioness roar), but the authority she manifests that is evident on the opening title track, a surging Memphis soul number.

After her celebrating being back in love she sings a bluesy lament, “In My Shoes,” as her romance is falling apart. It is one of several tracks with strings and has a feel of a classic Hi Records recording. Then there is the brassy “That’s How I Know,” with a groove reminiscent of Tyrone Davis and other deep soul Chicago singers, as she sings about her man being satisfied with her and she is satisfied with how he treats her. Then the mood

shifts to the down home blues of “Willie Brown,” with the effective guitar-harmonica accompaniment from Little G Weevil and Brandon Santini and rhythm. There is even a touch of zydeco on “Mojo Queen.”

Throughout, her robust vocals are performed without artifice, or hysterics. In addition to Ms Zeno’s singing, the backing is superb this throughout. Producer Paul Niehaus IV and Kevin O’Connor put together a marvelous backing even although they obviously employ overdubbing, while the guests are seamlessly incorporated into the songs of this strong debut recording of a superb soul-blues singer. **Ron Weinstock**



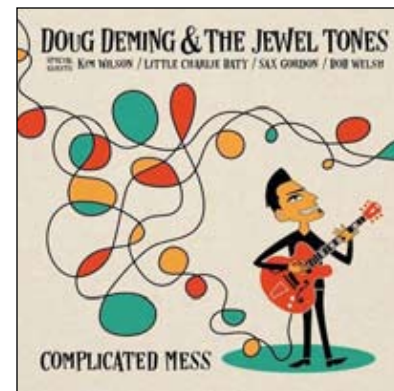
JAKE EHRENREICH
WITH THE ROGER KELLAWAY TRIO
A Treasury of Jewish Christmas Songs
SELF-PRODUCED

Jake Ehrenreich is a musician, author, and playwright who has appeared on Broadway. A child of Holocaust survivors, growing up in Brooklyn he developed a love affair with Christmas music with many of these Holiday classics having been penned by Jewish songwriters. On what is subtitled “A Cool Jazz Tribute To The Jewish Songwriters,” Ehrenreich is backed by Roger Kellaway on piano, Bruce Forman on guitar, Dan Lutz on bass and Kevin Winard on percussion.

The songs on this album will be quite familiar but Kellaway’s orchestrations and the accompaniment makes such songs as “A Holly Jolly Christmas,” “Rudolph The Red Nosed Reindeer” (with a bossa nova tinged arrangement), “Winter Wonderland,” a brisk “Home For The Holidays,” a lively “Let It Snow,” “The Most Wonderful Time of Year,” and “The Christmas Song” sound fresh.

Ehrenreich’s voice at times reminds me of Tony Bennett, although I make no claim he is a singer near the level of Bennett. His vocals convey considerable warmth while the backing is wonderful. Forman is superb whether playing single note solos on electric guitar or chording on an acoustic guitar (as on the closing “The Christmas Song” and “Rudolph The Red Nosed Reindeer”).

Kellaway is similarly marvelous with his accompaniments, solos, and fills. The result is a charming album full of holiday cheer. **Ron Weinstock**



DOUG DEMING AND THE JEWEL TONES

Complicated Mess
ELLERSOUL RECORDS

A new recording by Doug Deming and the Jewel Tones is quite welcome for fans of traditional Chicago blues as well as Texas and West Coast swing with a dose of honky tonk country mixed in. Deming is a very good, honest singer and a deft, fleet guitarist whose primary inspirations include Charlie Christian, T--Bone Walker and Robert Lockwood Junior.

He has quite a nice group of musicians backing him on ten originals and three covers. Andy Gohman handles the bass, while Marty Dodson handles the drums except for one track where Sam Farmer occupies the drum chair. Little Charlie Baty adds guitar to three tracks, while Harmonica players Kim Wilson and Madison Slim each play on two tracks. Sax Gordon and Tino Barker play (where heard) tenor and baritone saxophones respectively, while Bob Welsh is on piano and Chris Codish handles the organ. With the exception of one track, this was recorded by Big Jon Atkinson at his Big Tone Records studio and this recording has a wonderful sound.

It sounds like Deming incorporates, into his playing, a Buddy Guy riff from Junior Wells’ “Snatch it Back and Hold It” on the opening title track where he sings about trying to do his best but he and his woman are through. There is strong Kim Wilson chromatic harp present on the moody “Sweet Poison,” about this seductive lady with a forceful vocal. Little Charlie Baty joins Deming on an imaginative country-tinged rendition of “You Rascal You,” with some jazzy, swinging guitar from both along with a straight-forward vocal. Codish’s organ helps lend a Memphis soul cast to the soulful “Hold On” Madison Slim adds harp behind the lazy Jimmy Reed shuffle groove on “Need My Baby,” with Slim evoking Reed in his playing here. There is a country tinge to a rocking rendition of Lazy Lester’s “Blues Stop Knockin’,” with Welsh playing rollicking piano and Wilson adding some complimentary harmonica.

It sounds like Deming is channeling sixties Buddy Guy with his strong playing on a fine slow blues “Deep Blue Sea,” with Welsh again outstanding behind a potent vocal. “Someday Pretty Baby,” with the two

saxophones present (Gordon plays a strong tenor sax solo), suggests Chicago artists like Ricky Allen and Harold Burrage. "Captain's Quarters" is a very appetizing instrumental with Baty and Deming each showcasing their fleet, swinging fretwork. "Just A Moment Of Your Time," is a swamp pop original with a booting baritone sax solo from Barker followed by Deming evoking Guitar Slim and Earl King with his gritty guitar here.

"I'm Walkin'" is a credible, high stepping cover with a booting Gordon solo. It is followed by the delightful "Cookin' at the Kitchen," a variation on Amos Milburn's "Chicken Shack Boogie," with fresh spoken lyrics about some of the folks at this session with Madison Slim's harp adding sax-like lines. An ebullient instrumental, "Rat Killin'" allows Deming, the horns and rhythm section to all solo and it provides a close to this splendid recording.

Ron Weinstock



ROSCOE MITCHELL SEXTET

Sound
DELMARK RECORDS

This is a reissue of a pioneering Delmark release that was one of the earliest recordings by members of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM). It is hard to overstate the historical importance of the Delmark AACM releases as well as the excellence of the musical performances they made available. Mitchell, still a visionary original on alto sax, clarinet, recorder and more, was joined by Lester Bowie on trumpet, flugelhorn and harmonica and Malachi Favors on bass, who would all be members of the Art Ensemble of Chicago. Also present was Lester Lashley on trombone and cello, Maurice McIntyre on tenor sax and Alvin Fiedler on percussion.

Mitchell composed the three compositions here, two of which are also presented in alternate takes. There is the relatively brief "Ornette," with a pastiche of an Ornette dirge leading to the interplay between Mitchell and Bowie with Favors and Fiedler rumbling underneath and then McIntyre playing at the upper registers in the holy ghost manner of Albert Ayler. "The Little Suite" opens with harmonica and what sounds like a slide whistle along with other little instruments before Bowie buzzes in as a slide whistle goes wee before transitioning into a Bowie led march segment

that evokes an Ayler composition before a segment where McIntyre's tenor sax honks over the plucking of bass and cello with harmonica and recorder adding accents followed by Bowie's bugle-like bursts are a manifestation of what Elbio Barilari, Artistic Director of Delmark, notes about "the value of timbre, the overlapping and succession of textual blocks and the emphasis is given to musical 'color' are trademarks of the Chicago school" There is playfulness along with moments of controlled chaos.

The centerpiece is for the title track that Mitchell, on alto sax, opens somewhat plaintively first with Favors, and then Lashley and Bowie enter, and the ensemble as a whole explores the sonic possibilities in their instruments while also embracing the value of silence as part of a performance that can be mesmerizing. There is little of the Ayler-esque shrieks or the like. Nor is there the traditional development of melodic themes, but rather one hears explorations (sometimes accompanied only by bass) of tones and timbre. If "Sound" might have sounded strange decades ago, the succeeding years and music contributed by members of the ensemble here and others have made such sounds much more familiar, and accessible, to many ears. This expanded reissue of a landmark 'free jazz' recording is most welcome.

Ron Weinstock



KIRK FLETCHER

Hold On a Little Bit Longer
SELF-PRODUCED

I have been a fan of Kirk Fletcher since I first became aware of him with his debut JSP recording. Subsequently he recorded for Delta Groove and recorded and toured with The Manish Boys, recorded with Lynwood Slim Bobby Jones, the soul-jazz group Groove Legacy, Deb Ryder and others, toured and recorded with Kim Wilson, and more.

This is his fifth album under his own name and was recorded at Canyon Sound in Bristol, England with a trio that also includes drummer Matt Brown and Jonny Henderson on organ. The theme for the eight originals according to Kirk is "It's about love, a general love for humanity. I wanted to write songs about more than just boys and girls, and maybe give some answers and hope to this crazy time we live in." The songs themselves crosses genres from R&B and soul, to jamming jazz

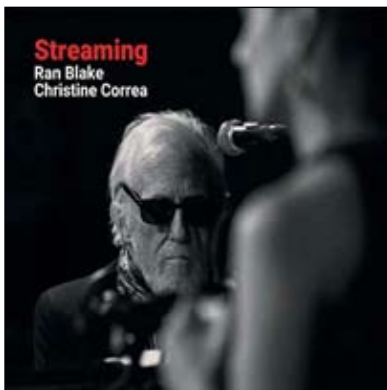
and deep blues.

Fletcher has mostly been heard playing but this is the first chance to hear him sing at length and he is an able, but not great, singer as on the driving funk of the opening "Two Steps Forward," a vocal duet with Mahalia Barnes where he also plays some searing guitar including a bit of hot wah-wah guitar before a closing section where the fire keeps building. There is a nice vocal on "You Might Need," where he implores his lady to not give up set against a nicely paced groove with Fletcher tossing in some crisp licks against an effervescent backdrop. "Sad Sad Day" is a terrific boogie inflected rocking blues, coming off like a speeded up Jimmy Reed song. The tempo slows down for the more reflective "The Answer," with his understated guitar playing matching the flavor of his heartfelt vocal while Henderson lays down organ grooves and Brown maintains a steady groove.

"Time's Ticking" is in more of a blues-rock manner with Brown's heavy pounding a beat while Fletcher pulls out all the stops, even shreds a bit, in his hot furnace playing. It is followed by the crisply played, playful instrumental "Dupree," with its bouncy, funky groove and some chicken scratching jazzy guitar with unexpected turns and twists and some nice organ from Henderson while Brown is rock solid. "Gotta Right" is a nice, lazy shuffle with some nice straight ahead guitar as Fletcher sings about his right to sing the blues. "Hold On," a modern gospel-tinged song of hope for global harmony has vocalist Jade McCrea supporting Fletcher's vocal and a very fine, well-constructed, sinewy guitar solo.

A very diverse set of performances from straight blues to smooth jazz funk that are nicely played by Fletcher, and he capably sings, if he is not a great vocalist.

Ron Weinstock



RAN BLAKE • CHRISTINE CORREA

Streaming
RED PIANO RECORDS

This is the latest recorded collaboration between Blake, the celebrated pianist and educator who is the founder and long-time chairperson of the Third Stream Department (currently called Contemporary Improvisation Department) at the New England Conservatory in Boston, MA, and Correa, the Mumbai born

avant grade vocalist who is on the faculty of The Louis Armstrong Jazz Performance Program at Columbia University. Consisting mostly of duets on material ranging from standards to Ornette Coleman's "Lonely Woman," there are also three improvised piano solos and one vocal solos here.

This is not one's usual piano-vocal duet although it starts with "Don't Explain," with Blake's spare, dissonant chords providing a foundation for Correa's haunting mix of half-spoken, half-sung vocal with Blake's own solo having its own evocative quality.

Correa's vocal on "Out of This World" is arresting as Blake's chords and short single note runs are more a response than a simple accompaniment. Correa sounds almost like a Cantor at the beginning of Ornette Coleman's "Lonely Woman," followed by Blake's spare statement of the theme and then she explores Margo Gunyan's lyrics with horn-like phrasing and a vocal having the passion of a raucous Sidney Bechet soprano sax. After this, the first of three interpretations of George Russell's "Stratusphunk" with unusual voicings and use of silence comes almost as a relief.

The bouncy "Bebopper" is comparatively mainstream with hints of the "I Love Lucy" theme and "Lullaby of Birdland" in Blake's accompaniment and solo. The brief "Ah, El Novio No Quiere Dinero" stands out with the minimal see saw accompaniment and a vocal of sounds that evokes the mideast.

A haunting rendition of Ivan Lins 'Love Dance is the longest performance here, while "Wende," composed in part by Blake, is a striking unaccompanied vocal. This album closes with "No More," which displays both Correa's vocal and expressive range as he opens the song in a defiant manner before singing more traditionally, set against the intriguing accompaniment.

One may wish to preview a few selections, as some may be turned off by Correa's singing, while others, including this writer, will find the performances compelling.

Ron Weinstock

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LUCIA JACKSON
You And The Night and The Music
 RONI MUSIC

This album of jazz vocals is the debut recording by Lucia Jackson, who also has busy careers as both a dancer (she studied ballet and flamenco in Madrid) and a model. Produced by her father, celebrated guitarist Ron Jackson, she is also backed here by pianist Yago Vazquez, bassist Matt Clohesy and drummer Corey Rawls, with guest appearances by Daniel Garcia on flamenco guitar, violinist Frederika Krier, Javier Sanchez on bandoneon and percussionist Samuel Torres playing cajon and congas.

This album consists mostly of standards and Ms. Jackson quickly shows off her clear diction, and fluid timing in her gentle singing. There is a nice range of material and tempos starting with the lively, ebullient interpretation of Cole Porter's "Just One of Those Nights," as she does not falter at the quick tempo. During her swinging rendition of "Beautiful Love," there is a strong guitar solo from her father. Esther Phillips had a hit with her adaptation of a Beatles' ballad, "And I Love Him," which led the Beatles to fly her to London to appear on British TV. Ms. Jackson does a wonderful, tender interpretation backed solely by her father's 7-string steel guitar. They also duet on a genial performance of "Toda Una Vida," from Cuban composer Osvaldo Farrés.

"You and the Night and the Music" starts as a tender ballad before shifting into a brisk tempo and she easily handles the tempo change with her clear enunciation of the lyrics. "Yaacov Mayman guests on tenor sax and has a strong solo. The presence of Sanchez on bandoneon and Krier on violin lends a gypsy jazz flavor to her vocal that is full of longing for a former lover on "I'm A Fool To Want You." "Feel The Love," that she wrote with guitarist Dan Garcia (who plays a classical guitar here), has a flamenco cast to it with Samuel Torres on cajun. Pianist Vazquez stands out with his introduction to the Duke Ellington standard, "Sophisticated Lady," and after the first verse that is performed as a piano-vocal duet, the rest of the backing band smoothly joins in and caresses her honeyed singing.

Other musical delights here include the genial swing of "No Regrets"; the yearning she expresses

in "Never Let Me Go," which also showcases bassist Clohesy; the clarity of her singing on "I Fall in Love Too Easily," with another splendid electric guitar solo from her father; and the easy swing of "When You're Smiling," where she softly scats for a chorus and pianist Vazquez and her father both solo. This latter number brings this most delightful recording to a close, and one looks forward to more from Lucia Jackson in the future.

Ron Weinstock



SHEMEKIA COPELAND
America's Child
 ALLIGATOR RECORDS

Unlike many children of blues luminaries who try to ride their parent's coattails into the spotlight, Shemekia Copeland has always honored her father Johnny Copeland by charting her own course into the music world.

This, her sixth Alligator Records release, (with a couple of releases on other labels) finds her taking a tough look at the current great divide that has infected our relationships with our fellow citizens. She makes it clear from the get-go that she has no patience for the intolerant, "I Ain't Got Time for the Hate," and calls the question for those who profess superiority when they have the choice between dying and accepting help from someone they deem inferior, "Would You Take My Blood."

She pines for simpler times where truth isn't a rabbit you pull from a hat and cards aren't all up someone's sleeve, "Smoked Ham and Peaches." Not everything is a look at the big picture of modern society: On "The Wrong Idea" she focuses on the more immediate problem of a guy at the bar who thinks she's there for him when in reality she's just out for a good time with her friends, and she's joined by John Prine on "Great Rain" where the two follow a swampy groove and talk to a young Mark Twain.

"I Promised Myself" finds her taking back her promise to never fall in love again after having her heart stomped flat and on the Kink's "I'm Not Like Everybody Else" she proclaims her distinctive place in the world. "In the Blood of the Blue" is a scorching blues history lesson and "Such a Pretty Flame" finds her ruminating on how easily things you take as true can turn to ashes if you focus only on the spectacle of

the fire rather than what is fueling it.

Throughout she's backed by a crack band including Will Kimbrough on guitar, Lex Price on bass, Pete Abbott on drums and a cast of guest vocalists including John Prine, Emmylou Harris and Mary Gauthier. While this is more a blues informed disc than a straight blues release it is terrific from beginning to end and belongs in your library whether you are a blues purist or a blues tourist.

Mark Smith



JUDITH LORICK
The Second Time Around
JLJ INTERNATIONAL

Besides being the title of one of the standards, the title of this album (Lorick's second) also refers to her own story of a love lost in youth which gets rekindled 44 years later. She is joined on her exploration of love lost and found by pianist Eric Reed, who collaborated with her on her prior recording, Kiyoshi Kitigawa on bass, McClinty Hunter on drums, Jeremy Pelt on trumpet and Chris Lewis on tenor saxophone.

The cd package contains her reflections on the meaning of each song. For example, on the opening "Why Did I Choose You," she writes "We meet in 1967 and I see the heart you hide so well." For Tadd Dameron's classic "If You Could See Me Now," she notes "1970, You leave me, and I'm heartbroken." She states about the title track, "Lovelier, twice as wonderful, this miracle we found."

Her notes may relate to the selection of material, but what stands out it is her performance of these songs. This is an album of mostly ballads. Despite the predominance of languid tempos, the combination of Ms. Lorick's vocals, Eric Reed's arrangements, and the instrumental accompaniment leads to a marvelous recording. One is struck by the warmth and emotion that Ms. Lorick expresses throughout.

she sings softly with clear enunciation, her vocal dynamics and phrasing that brings out the meaning of these songs, whether she expresses a longing for a love that seems to have been lost as in the Dameron classic (bassist Kitigawa stands out in his solo here as Hunter deftly plays with brushes), or celebrates in a restrained manner finding her lost love on the title track (accompanied solely by Reed's sophisticated backing). Reed's accompaniment on "He Needs Me," also gracefully supports the expression of longing in her vocal.

The support Kitigawa and Hunter provide adds to the

appeal of these performances as do the solo contributions of Pelt (the soft, expressive playing on "Why Did I Choose You" or his bright middle register playing on "Wild Is the Wind") and Lewis (who provides a lovely tenor sax break on "Lucky to Be Me"), both enhancing the sophisticated elegance of the performances on this superlative, moving recording.

Ron Weinstock



JOE LOUIS WALKER • BRUCE KATZ
GILES ROBSON

Journeys to the Heart of the Blues
ALLIGATOR RECORDS

English harmonica player Robson states in the liner notes that this album represents a shift from what many consider the blues today "which is a loud and proud classic rock-infused sound" that "is something quite distant from the music's roots... ." The present collaboration between Robson, the Blues Hall of Famer Walker and keyboard wizard Katz, best known perhaps for playing with Ronnie Earl, is meant "to be a celebration of the dynamics, grooves, lyrics and, above all, the feeling of unadulterated traditional blues. Blues played intimately and at a low volume and with the wonderful space that is created when drums and bass are taken out of the equation."

Robson also notes this recording has antecedents going back to Muddy Waters' "Folk Singer," the Blue Thumb recording "Buddy and the Juniors" with Buddy Guy, Junior Wells and Junior Mance, and the European acoustic recordings by Sonny Boy Williamson. Despite the stripped down setting and acoustic instrumentation, the playing here is not far removed from the blues these artists usually play, absent amplification. I point to the Washboard Sam recording "Run Me Down," where what Walker plays is not far removed from what he would play in an acoustic setting. I should be mentioned Katz is really fine here and Walker sings pretty much as one might expect.

There is an interesting choice of material, mostly rarely covered songs, starting with Papa Lightfoot's "Mean Old Train" that opens this, along with a forceful vocal by Walker on Sunnyland Slim's "It's You, Baby." "Murderer's Home" derives from Blind Willie McTell, but the performance here has more of a stop and go feel as opposed to the fluidity that characterized McTell's music. Roosevelt Sykes' "Feel Like Blowin' My Horn," is dedi-

cated to Robert Lockwood Junior who played on a Sykes recording of this song and Walker models his guitar here on Lockwood. More examples of Katz's superb playing can be heard on his accompaniment to Walker's singing on Big Maceo's "Poor Kelly Blues" and his rollicking boogie woogie piano on Maceo's "Chicago Breakdown," a spectacular solo piano performance. Robson impresses throughout with his harmonica and is showcased on the instrumental "C & J Boogie" where Walker is providing a simple boogie guitar backing to the energetic wailing harmonica. A highlight might be Walker's terrific vocal on Son Bonds "Hard Pill to Swallow," with Robson and Katz providing dynamic support.

It might be best described as blues unplugged as opposed to traditional blues, but this trio has put together solid and entertaining blues performances even if they may not take us to the Heart of the Blues. **Ron Weinstock**



KEN WILEY
Cuerno Exotica
KRUG PARK MUSIC

The French horn, usually heard backing other instruments and normally providing texture and color in brass and wind ensembles, has become in the hands of Ken Wiley a solo instrument providing a distinctive solo voice. I was impressed by his previous recording "Jazz Horn Redux," and the varied music on his latest album builds upon that. Mark Leggett's acoustic guitar and the flute of Dan Higgins (who also plays tenor sax, clarinet and piccolo as well as did the arrangements) are the other principal soloists here. There is a rhythm section of Dave Loeb on piano (Wiley also plays piano but the selections he plays on is not identified), Dominick Genova on bass, Bernie Dresel on drums, and Luis Conte and Kevin Ricard on percussion that ably provide tasteful, supportive backing.

With the 'Bolero Horns' added, the album opens with a Latin-tinged take on Ravel's celebrated "Bolero," with Wiley's melodious playing set against the easy pulse of the backing. Leggett's acoustic guitar opens up "Carilô," with Higgins' soaring flute also featured on this diverting performance. "Cubano Blue" is an easy going, bluesy performance with a light Afro-Cuban groove with Loeb's clean piano leading to Wiley's evocative solo. Other pleasures here include a breezy take on Cal Tjader's Black Orchid," and more energetic treatment of McCoy Tyner's modal "Sama Layuca," opening with Higgins on tenor sax set against Loeb's insistent piano with Loeb taking a more

energetic solo before Higgins takes a robust, twisting sax solo. Genova takes a dynamic bass solo before Wiley's dulcet horn provides counterpoint to Higgins who leads the performance to a faded close. The stately "Gato Magico" evokes the bull fighter's ring with the harmonious unison statement of the theme by Wiley and Higgins along with concise, appealing solos.

The album closes with the title track which sports a light, Afro-Cuban groove provided by the rhythm section on a soothing, yet stimulating performance with the charm characteristic of the beautiful music throughout "Cuerno Exotica."

Ron Weinstock



BLUE & LONESOME DUO
Pacing the Floor
ELLERSOUL RECORDS

The Blue & Lonesome Duo is comprised of Richmond's Li'l Ronnie on vocals, harmonica and foot drum and Gordon Harrower on vocals and guitar for an unassuming set of informal, stripped down blues performances that perhaps break new ground, but provides some very enjoyable listening. There is a mix of covers and some originals starting with a nice rendition of John Estes "Drop Down Mama" (wrongly credited to Honeyboy Edwards) with a nice vocal by Harrower with Owens providing some dynamic harp. It is followed by a traditionally based original, "Wine Headed Woman," with Owens singing through his harp mike (like Papa Lightfoot) with Harrower's providing a strong bass line to anchor the performance.

"Mean Red Spider" is a nice take on a Robert Lockwood song that Muddy Waters covered and Harrower's attractive vocal is more in the vein of Lockwood, and followed by a rollicking rendition of Jimmy Rogers' "Act Like You Love Me," with Owens playing superbly in the manner of the legendary Big Walter Horton. Another notable track is "Careless Love," with a heartfelt vocal and more fine harp from Owens. The title track is an original, easy rocking blues boogie with Owens upfront and Harrower providing simple, effective backing. There is even a blues duo cover of James Brown's lament "Try Me," along with nicely rendered covers of Jimmy Rogers' "Out on the Road" and Slim Harpo's recording of "Raining in My Heart." On the latter recording the two capture the feeling of Harpo's swamp blues Excello original.

While one would be hard-pressed to call this an essential recording, there is plenty to enjoy on this highly diverting recording.

Ron Weinstock