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Awareness (Suite)-Omnipotence- Babylon-Unity-Humility (Trio For Two Bassists and Tenor)
Buddy Terry

0:00

Ugly Beauty

Ugly Beauty: The Month In Jazz – January 2018

Phil Freeman @burn_amb | January 22, 2018 - 1:26 pm

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CREDIT: Dr. Lonnie Smith (photographer: Mark Sheldon)

Welcome to Ugly Beauty, Year Two. Writing this column last year was a genuine thrill, almost entirely because of the people who read it and chose to comment and discuss not only the music I covered every month, but also stuff I didn’t, either because it wasn’t particularly to my taste or because I just wasn’t aware of it. So please keep tipping me off to stuff!

New York’s annual Winter Jazzfest was held last week. The focus, of course, was the traditional Friday and Saturday marathon. Over the course of two nights, 109 groups played at 11 venues, with another 20 artists playing special events and showcases. It’s impossible to see everything, because of the overlap between events — for example, two bands I love, Jaimie Branch’s Fly Or Die quartet and Gard Nilssen’s Acoustic Unity trio, were both playing at 8 PM on Friday night — and because Winter Jazzfest shows are raucous, jam-packed events with audiences that are much younger than the typical night at a jazz club. It’s exciting as hell.

I chose three bands I really wanted to see on Saturday night, and managed to get into the room for each one. In the first case, it was tough; trumpeter Marquis Hill’s Blacktet (with alto saxophonist Joshua Johnson, vibraphonist Joel Ross, bassist Junius Paul, and drummer Makaya McCraven) were playing a small theater on the second floor of the New School’s jazz building on 13th Street, and it was completely jammed. I was in the doorway for

the first 10 minutes, and then managed to squeeze inside and find a spot against the back wall. The music was amazing — its roots were modern hard bop, but the intensity level, particularly from Paul and McCraven, was breathtaking. The drummer was turning swing beats into breakbeats throughout, and his solo threatened to explode into full-on grindcore blasting. The Blacktet’s album *The Way We Play*, from 2016, is killer; I hope they record a sequel very soon.

From there I headed downtown to Le Poisson Rouge to see drummer Mark Guiliana’s Jazz Quartet, with saxophonist Jason Rigby, pianist Fabian Almazan, and bassist Chris Morrissey. They were playing tunes from Guiliana’s latest album *Jersey*, so as a New Jersey native, I knew I had to check them out, and they were terrific. Rigby’s playing was fierce and high-energy, and Almazan backed him with jagged, forceful chords. Guiliana is also the drummer in Donny McCaslin’s band, and played on David Bowie’s *Blackstar*; his style incorporates versions of electronic rhythms played on a real kit, but he was more subtle and less aggressive than McCraven. Both of the Jazz Quartet’s albums, last year’s *Jersey* and 2015’s *Family First*, are well worth your time.

The last performance I saw, in the New School’s Tishman Auditorium, was the best of all. Harriet Tubman — the trio of guitarist Brandon Ross, bassist Melvin Gibbs, and drummer JT Lewis — joined forces with tenor saxophonist James Brandon Lewis’s trio (featuring bassist Luke Stewart and drummer Warren G Crudup III), plus alto saxophonist Darius Jones and trumpeter Jaimie Branch, to perform an interpretation of Ornette Coleman’s classic 1961 piece “Free Jazz.” As Gibbs explained in a brief introduction, Harriet Tubman has been together for over 20 years, but “last year, the universe decided to care,” with their album *Araminta* landing on multiple year-end lists. So they’re taking advantage of their moment to do dope shit.

The original “Free Jazz” was performed by a double quartet: in the left channel, Ornette on alto, Don Cherry on pocket trumpet, Scott LaFaro on bass, and Billy Higgins on drums; in the right channel, Eric Dolphy on bass clarinet, Freddie Hubbard on trumpet, Charlie Haden on bass, and Ed Blackwell on drums. Brief collective fanfares by the ensemble introduced each player’s solo. The Harriet Tubman version used the same structure, with Branch soloing first, followed by Lewis, Jones, Gibbs, Ross, Stewart, Crudup, and finally JT Lewis. Watching it all happen was fascinating, because the horns — and Branch in particular — seemed to be conducting the whole thing. When she decided it was time, she’d murmur something to Jones (who was standing to her right), and they’d step up to the microphones and blare out a high-energy fanfare, as if to say, “All right, that’s enough out of you — next!”

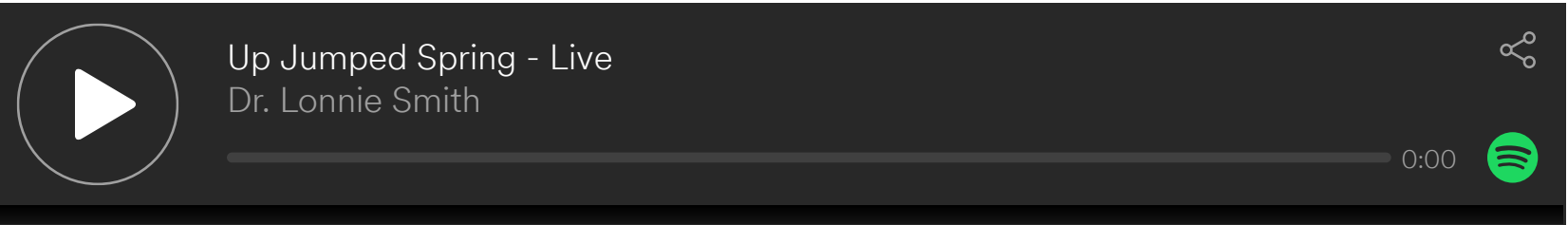
Everyone was playing in a relatively “free” mode. Branch and the saxophonists came off hard and fierce; Gibbs used multiple pedals to create a doomy sound reminiscent of his work with the Rollins Band; Stewart took an almost noise-rock approach to his attack on his instrument; Ross shredded hard; and Crudup’s drum solo was positively apocalyptic. (Which made JT Lewis’s decision to follow the younger man with a series of delicate taps on cymbals and snare rim — he got louder eventually, of course — all the more attention-getting and smart.) It was a fantastic performance, and exactly the kind of one-off event that Winter Jazzfest does best. If you’ve never gone, put it on your calendar for next January.

And now, the best new jazz albums of the month!

Archival Find Of The Month: Buddy Terry, *Awareness* (Wewantsounds)

In the early 1970s, soul-jazz saxophonist Buddy Terry released a trilogy of albums for the Mainstream label. The first of these, 1971’s *Awareness*, featured Cecil Bridgewater on trumpet, Roland Prince on electric guitar, Stanley Cowell on piano and electric piano, Buster Williams and Victor Gaskin on bass, Mickey Roker on drums and Mtume on congas. Two of Cowell’s compositions, “Stealin’ Gold” and “Abscretions,” are included, along with “Kamili,” by Mtume. But the album’s two longest pieces, the opening “Awareness Suite” and “Sodom And Gomorrah,” are by Terry, and they reveal him as a multifaceted dude as interested in psychedelic explorations as funk. Cowell’s keyboards add a spacy element, and the double electric bassists, drums and percussion create complex, shifting rhythmic bed that sometimes gets closer to Can than the Crusaders. This remastered reissue includes single edits of the “Babylon” section of the “Awareness Suite” and “Stealin’ Gold” as bonus tracks.

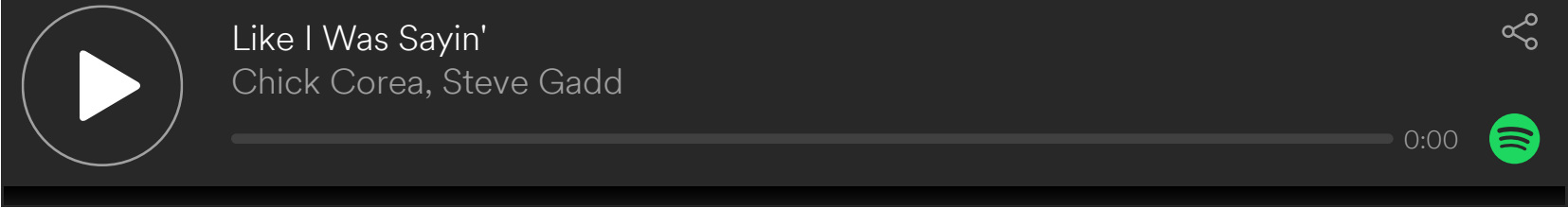
Stream “Awareness Suite (Omnipotence/Babylon/Unity/Humility)”:



Dr. Lonnie Smith, *All In My Mind* (Blue Note)

Organist Dr. Lonnie Smith (I haven’t been able to lock down exactly what institution awarded him his doctorate, but whatever) got his start on Blue Note in the late ’60s and early ’70s, making funky soul-jazz albums like *Think!*, *Drives*, *Turning Point*, and *Move Your Hand*. His last few albums, particularly 2013’s *In The Beginning*, recorded live with an octet, and 2016’s return to Blue Note, *Evolution*, which featured guest appearances from Robert Glasper and Joe Lovano, have shown that he’s much more than a groove master, though. His new album, *All In My Mind*, is a live disc, recorded at the Jazz Standard in New York with guitarist Jonathan Kriesberg and drummer Johnathan Blake. It opens with a moody version of Wayne Shorter’s “Juju,” and includes a 10-minute expansion of Paul Simon’s “50 Ways To Leave Your Lover.” The last track is one of the most beautiful; it’s a version of Freddie Hubbard’s “Up Jumped Spring,” with a lightly bouncing rhythm from Blake — whose cymbal work is particularly delicate and eyebrow-raising — and gentle but still high-energy interplay between Smith and Kriesberg.

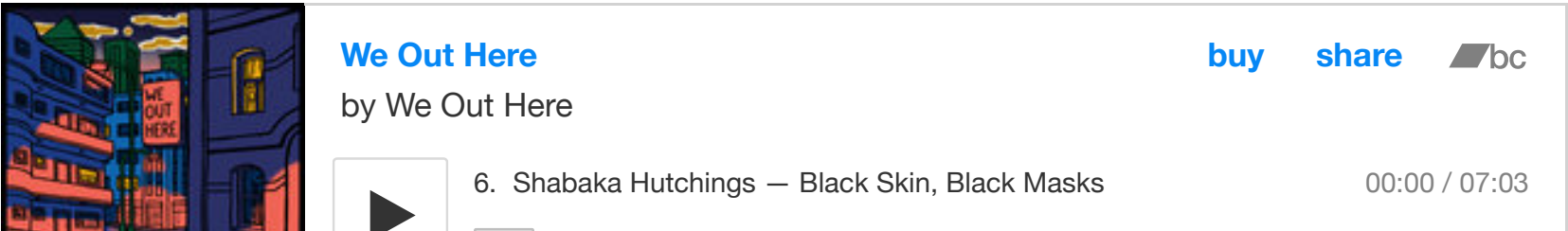
Stream “Up Jumped Spring”:



Chick Corea/Steve Gadd Band, *Chinese Butterfly* (Concord)

Keyboardist Chick Corea and drummer Steve Gadd have a creative relationship that goes back decades. The list of albums they’ve made together includes *My Spanish Heart*, *Three Quartets*, *Friends*, *The Leprechaun*, and *The Mad Hatter*. He also played on the original version of Return To Forever’s *Hymn Of The Seventh Galaxy*, but when he said he didn’t want to tour, Corea re-recorded the album with Lenny White on drums. Gadd’s playing is astonishing; his combination of explosiveness and precision is presumably what inspired Donald Fagen and Walter Becker to hire him for the song “Aja.” That same thunder is present on “Like I Was Sayin’,” a track from the new double CD *Chinese Butterfly*, by the Chick Corea/Steve Gadd Band, which also features saxophonist Steve Wilson, guitarist Lionel Loueke, bassist Carlitos Del Puerto, and percussionist Luisito Quintero. (Earth, Wind and Fire vocalist Philip Bailey sings on one track.) “Like I Was Sayin’” is primarily a duo piece, though Del Puerto is also present. Corea’s keyboards have a spacy, ’70s feel, with so much reverb it sounds like he’s floating in space. Gadd’s lightness on the kit initially makes it sound like he, too, is suspended in midair, but as the piece progresses, and becomes more and more about the drums, the intensity rises and rises without ever going over the top, and the way the two men bring it back down to a simmering funk groove at the end is fantastic.

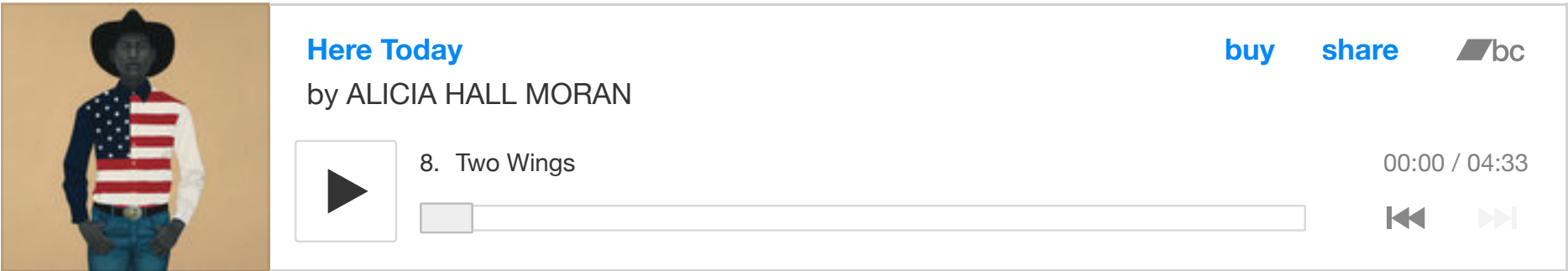
Stream “Like I Was Sayin’”:



Various Artists, *We Out Here* (Brownswood)

The British jazz scene seemed to explode last year. Brownswood Recordings, a label run by tastemaker DJ Gilles Peterson, has released this compilation of some of the best and most interesting players on the UK scene, with saxophonist Shabaka Hutchings serving as musical director. He’s in two great groups of his own — Sons Of Kemet and The Comet Is Coming — and also released a killer 2016 album, *Shabaka And The Ancestors*, where he teamed up with South African musicians, including keyboardist Nduduzo Makhathini (more about him below). The nine tracks on *We Out Here*, all newly recorded, also include pieces led by drummer Moses Boyd of Binker & Moses; tuba player Theon Cross, who’s in Sons Of Kemet; saxophonist Nubya Garcia; and the Afrobeat/jazz collective Kokoroko, who haven’t put out a record yet, but I really hope they do, and soon. Hutchings’ contribution to *We Out Here*, “Black Skin, Black Masks,” clarinet and bass clarinet wind around each other, as in the background, haunted-sounding piano, throbbing bass, and frantic drums keep the music churning like a cross between Charles Mingus and whatever the latest iteration of post-drum ‘n’ bass from London is called. (I don’t keep up on these things.)

Stream Shabaka Hutchings’ “Black Skin, Black Masks”:



Alicia Hall Moran, *Here Today* (Independent/Self-released)

Singer Alicia Hall Moran is a ferocious talent. This album, her second to be released solely on Bandcamp, combines original tunes with re-interpretations so imaginative that calling them “covers” would be insultingly reductive. The album opens with Moran combining Stevie Wonder’s “Signed, Sealed, Delivered” with “Habañera,” from Bizet’s *Carmen*, backed by a string trio in a frankly stunning, operatic performance. She also delivers versions of “Feeling Good” and “God Bless The Child,” as well as “Two Wings,” a spiritual that Led Zeppelin lifted lyrics from for their version of “In My Time Of Dying.” Her husband, pianist Jason Moran, plays on a few tracks, while on others, she’s backed by Harriet Tubman, the trio of guitarist Brandon Ross, bassist Melvin Gibbs, and drummer J.T. Lewis. Their playing on “Two Wings” is subtle, but powerful, Gibbs unleashing deep blues rumbles like he did on the Rollins Band’s “Liar,” as Lewis shuffles the beat with brushes and Ross seems to just let notes waft off his guitar all on its own. For listeners expecting a typical jazz/blues singer, Moran’s operatic vocal style may take some getting used to, but the art-song qualities of this album are what make it so amazing. (Note: both Morans charge \$20 an album, but they’re worth every penny.)

Stream “Two Wings”:

Dat Feelin'

Chris Dave and The Drumhedz, SiR

0:00

Chris Dave And The Drumhedz, *Chris Dave And The Drumhedz* (Blue Note)

Chris Dave is an extremely highly regarded session drummer; he can be heard on Adele’s *21*, Maxwell’s *BLACKsummer’snight*, Robert Glasper’s *Black Radio*, and D’Angelo’s *Black Messiah*, among other albums. The Drumhedz are a studio assemblage more than a band-band, but the core of the ensemble includes bassist Pino Palladino, guitarist Isaiah Sharkey, and trumpeter Keyon Harrold. The album is absolutely stacked with guests, including Anderson .Paak, Bilal, Tiffany Gouché, Tweet, SiR, Kendra Foster, and Goapele, but the music is much more than just a backdrop for the vocals. “Dat Feelin’” is a stuttering, chopped-up blend of jazz, funk, gospel, and soul, with Dave’s churchy drumming pushing it forward at all times as numerous voices and Harrold’s horn float above and around the swirling, organ-fueled groove.

Stream “Dat Feelin’”:

WILDFLOWER

by Idris Rahman, Leon Brichard, Tom Skinner

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2. Where the earth meets the sky

00:00 / 04:38

Wildflower, *Wildflower* (Independent/Self-Released)

Wildflower are a British trio featuring saxophonist Idris Rahman, bassist Leon Brichard, and drummer Tom Skinner. Rahman and Brichard are also members of the group Ill Considered, who put out a studio album and a live album last year. Wildflower’s music is slow and trance-inducing, with Brichard alternating between upright and fretless bass, depending on the tune and Skinner playing a small, spare kit with precision and delicacy. Some tunes have an almost Krautrock minimalism, with bass and drums locking into repetitive grooves that could go on all day as Rahman blows long, exploratory lines that occasionally veer toward ecstasy. “Where The Earth Meets The Sky” is one of their more meditative pieces, the horn murmuring toward the bottom of its range, gradually working up to muted cries of sorrow, as the bass and drums lope and clatter along like a weary horse crossing an endless field of grass.

Stream “Where The Earth Meets The Sky”:

Posi-Tone Records

New Faces - Happy Juice

SOUNDCLOUD

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New Faces, *Straight Forward* (Posi-Tone)

Like the Blue Note All-Stars album from last year, New Faces is a collective put together by a label to showcase its up-and-coming talent: In this case, the label is Posi-Tone, and the artists are trumpeter Josh Lawrence, saxophonist Roxy Coss, vibraphonist Behn Gillece, pianist Theo Hill, bassist Peter Brendler, and drummer Vinnie Sperrazza. Their debut album, *Straight Forward*, lives up to its title, presenting a collection of upbeat, swinging hard bop tunes, some of which are newly composed — Gillece contributes three and Lawrence two — as well as a version of Herbie Hancock’s “King Cobra” and new interpretations of pieces by other Posi-Tone artists like organist Brian Charette and pianist Jon Davis. The Davis composition is the album-opening “Happy Juice,” on which the four lead instruments tackle the perky main theme in unison. The harmony between trumpet and saxophone is terrific, with both players opting for a clean, smooth tone, while Gillece’s vibes add an extra shimmer around the edges.

Stream “Happy Juice”:

HighNote-Savant Records

05 Renatus

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Danny Grissett, *Remembrance* (Savant)

I’ve been a fan of pianist Danny Grissett since hearing him with trumpeter Jeremy Pelt’s quintet; the four albums they made between 2008 and 2012 (*November*, *Men Of Honor*, *The Talented Mr. Pelt* and *Soul*) were modern extrapolations of the work of the mid ’60s Miles Davis Quintet, but much more than that, too. Grissett has made five albums for the Criss Cross label as a leader, always teamed with bassist Vicente Archer and bringing in various horn players and drummers. His final release for them, 2015’s *The In-Between*, featured Bill Stewart behind the kit and Walter Smith III on saxophone; this time, on his debut for Savant, the lineup is Grissett, Archer, Stewart, and saxophonist Dayna Stephens. On “Renatus,” Grissett switches to organ for a simmering ballad. His melody line has the flavor of ’70s Bob James, and Stephens’ soprano saxophone is subdued, never rising to squawky heights. Archer’s bass is present, but only just (until he solos at about the three-and-a-half-minute mark, anyway) and Stewart keeps time with softly smacking brushes, occasionally touching a cymbal.

Stream “Renatus”:



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TWIO

by Walter Smith III


9. Contrafact

00:00 / 06:00

Walter Smith III, *Twio* (Whirlwind)

Tenor saxophonist Walter Smith III may be best known for his longtime association with Ambrose Akinmusire; he’s on the trumpeter’s first three albums, and Akinmusire played on Smith’s first four releases. On *Twio*, Smith is joined for five of nine tracks by bassist Harish Raghavan and drummer Eric Harland — it’s basically a session by Harland’s band Voyager (who I saw in August [https://www.stereogum.com/1958188/ugly-beauty-the-month-in-jazz-august-2017/franchises/ugly-beauty/]), minus keyboardist Taylor Eigsti. On the other four pieces, Christian McBride takes Raghavan’s place, and Joshua Redman guests on two tracks. “Contrafact,” which closes the album out, is one of those two-saxophone tunes, with McBride on bass. The two men chase each other through the intricate melody line, based on the standard “Like Someone In Love,” after which they toss ideas back and forth and launch spiraling, discursive solos while McBride and Harland bounce the rhythm around.


Stream “Contrafact”:



Canción Contra La Indecisión

Bobo Stenson Trio


0:00



Bobo Stenson Trio, *Contra La Indecisión* (ECM)

Norwegian pianist Bobo Stenson hasn’t released an album with his trio (bassist Anders Jormin and drummer Jon Fält) in six years; their last was *Indicum*, in 2012. Stenson himself doesn’t write that many tunes. He’s only got one composer’s credit on this album, while Jormin has five. There’s also a collective improvisation, “Kalimba Impressions,” and versions of classical pieces by Béla Bartók and Erik Satie. The album’s title track is by Cuban singer-songwriter Silvio Rodríguez, and the trio sticks close to the gentle melody, Stenson seeming to model his piano lines on the vocals as much as the acoustic guitar of the original. There’s a Keith Jarrett-esque rolling lyricism to his solo, but the rhythm section keeps things anchored, rather than launching free flights of their own the way Gary Peacock and Jack DeJohnette do.

Stream “Canción Contra La Indecisión”:



fullyaltered

Davis/Taborn - Ossining


SOUNDCLOUD

Kris Davis/Craig Taborn, *Octopus* (Pyroclastic)

Two-piano albums are relatively rare in jazz (or any other music), but often interesting. Cecil Taylor made one with Mary Lou Williams that’s like two rams charging at each other headfirst. This record, featuring Kris Davis and Craig Taborn, is significantly less combative. In 2016, Davis made *Duopoly*, a collection of duets with Tim Berne, Don Byron, Bill Frisell, Julian Lage, Billy Drummond, Marcus Gilmore, Angelica Sanchez, and Taborn. Once it was out, Davis and Taborn toured together, and recorded the gigs. “Ossining,” named for a town in upstate New York, is a Davis

composition. She’s using a prepared piano that sounds weirdly muted, with almost no reverb to it at all. Her notes sound like someone tapping a metal rod on a granite countertop, and she sticks to an almost maddeningly steady rhythm, ticking like a machine. Taborn plays little burbling figures that match her mechanical/twitchy energy, but with a fuller piano sound. The effect is like watching a robot dance while listening to a gentle autumn rain hit the window.

Stream “Ossining”:





Thelonious Sphere Monk

by Mast

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16. Misterioso (digital only)

00:00 / 04:10






MAST, *Thelonious Sphere Monk* (World Galaxy)

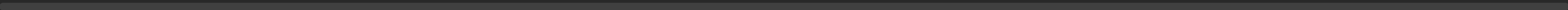
MAST is the solo project of Philadelphia-born, LA-based guitarist Tim Conley. On this album, the follow-up to 2016’s Love And War, he tackles 15 of Thelonious Monk’s best-known compositions, including “Evidence,” “Epistrophy,” “Bemsha Swing,” and “Straight No Chaser,” with a rack of electronics and an array of guests. Conley programs ticking electro rhythms and swooshing, oceanic synths that turn Monk’s lurching, knuckled-up piano melodies into something closer to the early ’70s work of Herbie Hancock; meanwhile, saxophonists Chris Speed and Gavin Templeton, trumpeter Dan Rosenboom, trombonist Jonah Levine, pianist Brian Marsella, and drummers Makaya McCraven and Anwar Marshall all contribute to various tracks. On the album-closing “Misterioso” (the album actually starts with “Misterioso (Reprise),” giving the whole project a looping structure), Conley slows the melody down and picks it apart until it’s like a cross between Bill Frisell and Hawaiian guitar genius Sol Hoopii, as the electronics tick and ping like a symphony of small household objects.

Stream “Misterioso”:





Amathambo

Nduduzo Makhathini



0:00

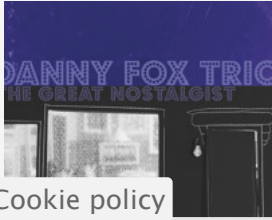





Nduduzo Makhathini, *Ikhambi* (Universal)

Nduduzo Makhathini is a South African pianist and bandleader who’s made eight albums since 2014, including this one. I haven’t heard any of the others (they’re all on Spotify, though), but this one is great. He’s working with an ensemble that includes saxophones, trombone, harp, bass, multiple percussionists, and vocals (his own lead voice and a chorus behind him). Ikhambi includes two three-part suites, “Umthakathi” and “Impande,” each of which is more than 10 minutes long; other tracks like “Holy, Holy” and “Innocent Child” seem to express an overtly Christian message, but it’s not heavy-handed or anything. “Amathambo,” the opening track, has a slow and patient gospel-blues groove, adorned with trilling piano and harp and ecstatic saxophone solos, that will remind many listeners of albums like Alice Coltrane’s *Journey In Satchidananda* or Pharoah Sanders’ *Thembi*.


Stream “Amathambo”:





Braithwaite & Katz

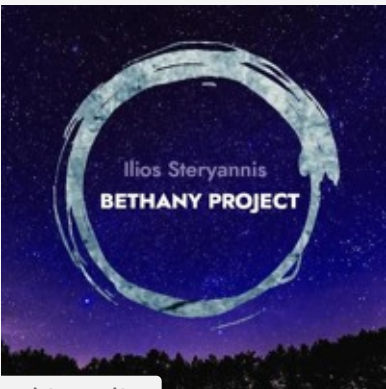
Adult Joe - Danny Fox Trio


 SOUNDCLOUD

Danny Fox Trio, *The Great Nostalgist* (Hot Cup)


Hot Cup Records is run by Mostly Other People Do The Killing’s bassist/leader Moppa Elliott, and while MOPDTK’s catalog makes up the bulk of its output, a few other artists also release music through the label. The Danny Fox Trio, which features Chris van Voorst van Beest on bass, Max Goldman on drums, and Fox on piano, is one of those non-MOPDTK acts. Their third album and second for Hot Cup, *The Great Nostalgist*, was recorded in the living room of a 100-year-old house in upstate New York. Consequently, it has a warm, reverberant feel; all the musicians were in the same space, with no headphones or baffles to keep the sounds from blending together. It has the feeling of an Ahmad Jamal recording from the 1950s, particularly since Fox’s melodies have a chamber music quality bolstered by the booming swing of the rhythm section. On the opening cut, “Adult Joe,” Goldman’s drumming is practically martial, propelling the group along as Fox lingers in the keyboard’s lower middle register, picking out short, meaningful sequences of notes that gradually develop into larger lines, like he’s building a wall. Van Voorst van Beest is a fairly minimalist player, thumping along below the surface, though he does take a solo that demonstrates a lot of power, in the vein of a ’50s player like Paul Chambers.


Stream “Adult Joe”:






[ILIOS STERYANNIS](#)
The Group Of 7

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Ilios Steryannis, *Bethany Project* (Independent/Self-Released)

As some of the other records reviewed this month demonstrate, it seems like African and Latin grooves are more and more welcome in mainstream jazz lately, without anyone feeling the need to explicitly call them out or wall the resulting music off into even more confined spaces like “Latin jazz.” Toronto-based drummer Ilios Steryannis is joined by alto saxophonist Sundar Viswanathan, baritone saxophonist Kenny Kirkwood, bassist Connor Walsh, conga player Adam Hay, and Larry Graves on timbales for this self-released album that combines a variety of international styles into a unique blend. Tracks not only deploy Afro-Cuban rhythms, but also bring in melodies from Greek and Eastern European folk music, explore West African-style interactions between saxophone and guitar, and more. “The Group Of 7,” the album’s opening track, is based on rumba guaguanco, a rhythm played in 7/4. The bed of interlocking percussion laid down is the ideal foundation for the dancing interplay of the alto and baritone saxes, each of which is given equal placement. Viswanathan takes the first solo, but Kirkwood delivers just as strong a statement.

Stream “The Group Of 7”:

Tags: [Alicia Hall Moran](#), [Bobo Stenson Trio](#), [Buddy Terry](#), [Chick Corea/Steve Gadd Band](#), [Chris Dave And The Drumhedz](#), [Craig Taborn](#), [Danny Fox Trio](#), [Danny Grissett](#), [Dr. Lonnie Smith](#), [Ilios Steryannis](#), [kris davis](#), [MAST](#), [Nduduzo Makhathini](#), [Shabaka Hutchings](#), [Walter Smith III](#), [Wildflower](#)

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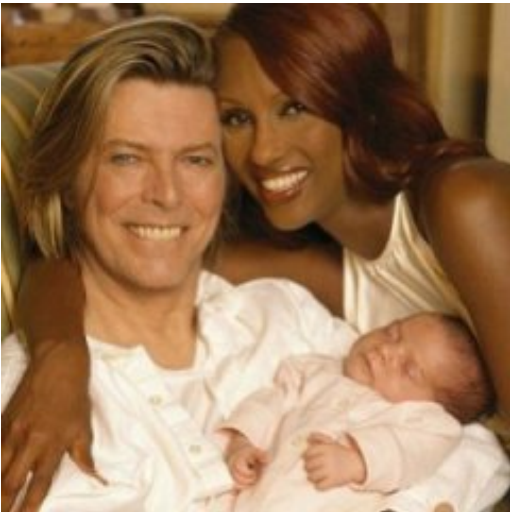
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[Livestream Kanye West’s Wyoming Listening Party For His New Album *Ye*](#)



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[Album Of The Week: Oneohtrix Point Never *Age Of*](#)

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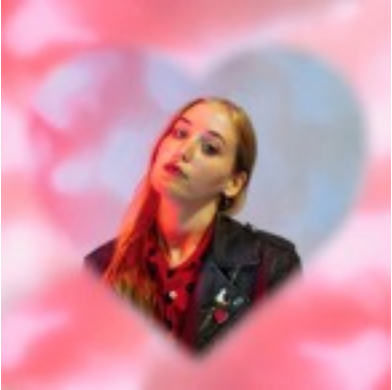
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