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PANAMA JAZZ FESTIVAL

Jazz & blues report

Editor & Founder Bill Wahl

Layout & Design Bill Wahl

Operations Jim Martin
Pilar Martin

Contributors

Michael Braxton, Mark Cole, Kelly Ferjutz, Nancy Ann Lee, Peanuts, Matt Simpson, Wanda Simpson, Mark Smith, Dave Sunde, Joerg Unger, Duane Verh, Emily Wahl and Ron Weinstock.

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Comments...billwahl@jazz-blues.com
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"Buffaloniuous"

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

Jazz & blues report

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7° PANAMA JAZZ FESTIVAL



Danilo Pérez

SEVENTH ANNUAL PANAMA JAZZ FESTIVAL, LED BY ARTISTIC DIRECTOR DANILO PÉREZ, ANNOUNCES 2010 LINEUP

Panama's annual cornerstone cultural event, the seventh Panama Jazz Festival will be held January 11-16, 2010. With upwards of 100,000 people in attendance since the festivals 2003 inception, this year's edition is dedicated to Panamanian pianist, Ellerton Oswald (better known as Sonny White), noted for his work as Billie Holiday's accompanist and his role in the production of her seminal recording *Strange Fruit*. About Oswald, Artistic Director and Festival founder Danilo Pérez commented, "despite the lack of information in Panama about this extraordinary artist, whose career in the United States dates back to the 1930's, his participation on *Strange Fruit* was considered ground breaking." Oswald was also best remembered for his collaborations with such jazz greats as Sidney Bechet and Dexter Gordon.

Among the artists slated to perform are Grammy award winning saxophonist Joe Lovano, the famed New Orleans pianist Ellis Marsalis, Grammy award winning vocalist Dee Dee Bridgewater, Grammy award winning bassist John Patitucci, drummer and composer Terri Lyne Carrington, percussionist Jamey Haddad, flamenco guitarist Juanito Pascual, and saxophonist Carlos Garnett.

"I love seeing our festival grow. We had the biggest theater in Panama sold out in 2009 with the Wayne Shorter Quartet, and the free outdoor concert had 10,000 people," states Artistic Director Danilo Pérez. "I can say now Panama and Latin America have some of the biggest supporters of jazz music on the planet!"

The Panama Jazz Festival's Commitment to Education

A core mission of the Panama Jazz Festival is music education. This year the Panama Canal Authority will sponsor classrooms, where all invited artists will teach master classes and hold music clinics for students

from all parts of Latin America. Several institutions make Panama their Latin American musical hub, offering lessons and holding auditions for admission and scholarships to their different academic programs. This year the institutions confirmed include Berklee College of Music, New England Conservatory, Conservatorio de Música de Puerto Rico, and The Goldansky Institute.

"The educational component of the festival is the highlight of all the annual programs we do at the Danilo Pérez Foundation in Panama," explains Pérez. "In 2009 we had almost 1,000 students from Panama, Venezuela, Costa Rica, Colombia, Chile, USA, Mexico. This year, we are expanding to European countries and hope to have even more students."

The Berklee Global Jazz Institute, based in Boston, MA and led by festival Artistic Director, Danilo Pérez, will officially be announced in front of national and international vip guests during the PJF Gala Night. The Global Jazz Institute is designed to foster creativity in an interdisciplinary environment. It is to become a center of musical creativity that will emphasize personalized goal-setting, directed study, experiential and service learning with a special emphasis on nature and the environment, along with intensive access to world-class visiting artists.

Also of note among the festival's educational programs, The Golandsky Institute, will offer a week-long program of daily master classes for jazz and classical pianists as well as other instrumentalists, emphasizing the application of the Taubman approach to build technical ease and to explore musical interpretation. This approach has proven to be highly effective in the resolution of technical and artistic limitations, as well as in curing and preventing repetitive stress injuries in musicians. At the 2010 PJF, Edna Golandsky will give private lessons and instruct a class on the proper use of computer and Blackberry keyboards so as not to harm playing.

The Panama Jazz Festival also offers master classes on Panamanian Folkloric music taught by Maestro of the Panamanian tambor, Ricaurte Villareal, dance with members of the Panamanian National Ballet, classical music with renowned national and international musicians from Panama and the New England Conservatory, a literature program and a technology program with the Technology Division of Berklee College of Music, as well as a summer music program for children aged 4-16 years.

Festival President and Founder Danilo Pérez

A Grammy award-winning artist, composer, educator, President and Founder of the Panama Jazz Festival, Danilo Pérez is among the most influential and dynamic musicians of our time. In just over a decade, his distinctive blend of Pan-American jazz (covering the music of the Americas, folkloric and world music) has attracted critical acclaim and loyal audiences. Pérez has recorded and performed with the likes of Wayne Shorter, Steve Lacy, Roy Haynes, Jack DeJohnette, Charlie Haden, Michael Brecker, Joe Lovano, Tito Puente, and Wynton Marsalis, among others. Recently signed to Mack Avenue Records and plans to release

his debut Mack Avenue Records album in 2010.

Born in Panama in 1965, Danilo started his musical studies at just three years of age with his father, a bandleader and singer. By age 10, he was studying the European classical piano repertoire at the National Conservatory in Panama. After receiving his bachelor's degree in electronics, he moved to the United States to enroll at Indiana University of Pennsylvania and, after changing his major to music, transferred to the prestigious Berklee College of Music. From 1985-88, while completing his studies in jazz composition, he performed with Jon Hendricks, Terence Blanchard, Claudio Roditi and Paquito D'Rivera, producing the critically-acclaimed *Reunion* album (Messidor) featuring D'Rivera and Arturo Sandoval. In 1994, Danilo also appeared on Sandoval's Grammy-winning album, *Danzon*.

Pérez is also a part of the Wayne Shorter Quartet, voted "Best Small Ensemble of the Year" by the Jazz Journalists Association in 2002 and 2004. He is featured on Shorter's Verve releases, *Alegria* and *Footprints Live!* Shorter invited Danilo to join his first all-acoustic group after hearing him play, "[Pérez] was adventurous and fresh," Shorter observes (Jazz Times, 2002). "He wasn't playing to show off his technique. He was interested in telling stories."

Currently, Pérez serves as the Ambassador of Goodwill for Unicef, Cultural Ambassador of Panama, Artistic Advisor of the innovative Mellon Jazz "Up Close" series at the Kimmel Center in Philadelphia, and Artistic Director of the Berklee Global Jazz Institute in Boston. For the last five years he has performed with Ben Street and Adam Cruz in his own trio.

Pérez recently signed with Mack Avenue Records. The signing was made official at the 2009 Detroit International Jazz Festival and he is planning to release his debut Mack Avenue album in 2010.

Additionally, in October, Pérez was one of five Panamanian individuals to receive the prestigious Legacy Award from The Smithsonian Latino Center in Washington D.C. The award recognizes Panamanian achievement in the arts, science and the humanities.

The Panama Jazz Festival is made possible with the support of ATP (Tourism Authority of Panama), INAC (National Institute of Culture) and ACP (Panama Canal Authority). For more information on the festival, go to www.panamajazzfestival.com. You'll find a link to the English version in the upper left.

LIVE BLUES ON THE HIGH SEAS



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www.jazz-blues.com

click the Notable' button

ORION INDEPENDENT MUSIC FESTIVAL DEBUTS IN PARK CITY, UT; JAN. 14-20

National and International Artists to Showcase Before Industry, Visitors, and Locals

PARK CITY, UT – Different flavors of music will treat audiences and music industry leaders at the inaugural Orion Independent Music Festival, Jan. 14 – 20, 2010. Seeking to revolutionize the music business, the Festival will provide exposure to unsigned music acts in a similar way the world-renowned Sundance Film Festival does for filmmakers. The festivals will complement each other, as they occur during back-to-back weeks.

During the Orion Independent Music Festival, artists will perform in several venues throughout Park City's historic Main Street. Music genres will include rock, pop, jazz, R...B, lounge, country, and hip hop. All performances are open to the public

Orion is the brainchild of Salt Lake City musician Steffon Olsen. The Festival's creation was inspired by Olsen's own experiences as a singer/songwriter and his desire to positively impact the music business by highlighting new ways for artists to market themselves.

"I've grown frustrated by the music industry's general lack of interest in the art of music while it becomes more focused on profits and artistic control," Olsen explains. "Music is on the cusp of a revolution thanks to the internet empowering the independent artist with the ability to self-promote. Our mission is to create an annual forum in Park City for independent acts to be discovered."

The Orion Independent Music Festival will be a convergence of industry professionals from record labels and internet marketing companies who are seeking cutting-edge talent and fans looking to broaden their musical horizons. During Park City's busy ski season, Main Street's live music venues will be buzzing with visitors and locals who will enjoy the rare opportunity to discover new talent after a day on the slopes.

"Park City has a great track record of hosting high caliber events and offers an unrivaled international stage for these artists," says Olson. "Its charming ski town setting will give this music festival a unique character. The proximity of the Main St. venues to each other makes it easy for people to see multiple performances each night, and we expect to take the apres-ski experience to a whole new level."

Several Main Street venues have committed to showcasing Festival artists, including Cisero's, Doolan's, Downstairs, Flanagan's, Harry Os, Lindzee O'Michaels, The Sidecar, The Spur Bar ... Grill, and The Star Bar. Each will serve the signature Orion cocktail. Part of the Festival proceeds will benefit Mountain Town Music in Park City.

Opening ceremonies will be held Jan. 14 at 8 p.m. at Park City's historic Egyptian Theater. Park City Mayor Dana Williams will welcome festival attendees and treat them to some of his own original music.

Festival wristbands, allowing access to all venues, are available online at www.orionmusicfestival.com for just \$40, or people can pay \$5 at the door for individual showcases. For more information, visit www.orionmusicfestival.com.

BLUES WATCH

BY MARK SMITH

If you find yourself bewildered about what to purchase your favorite blues buddy for Christmas or if you are stumped about what to put on your own list so that your clueless non-blues friends don't buy you the same Stevie Ray Vaughan disc they bought you last year, consider a few of the following ideas:

1. Read all about the blues: A Subscription to *Blues Revue Magazine*- \$27.95 a year (6 issues). Call 1-800-258-7388. Subscribers will also receive three Blues Revue sampler discs featuring a wide variety of established and up and coming artists; A subscription to *Big City Blues Magazine*- \$30 per year (six issues), \$50 for two years (12 issues) and \$75 for three years (18 issues). Subscribers have several bonus options including discs, T-shirts and extended subscriptions. For more info, call 248-52-1544. Send a check or money order to Big City Blues, P.O. Box 1805, Royal Oak, MI 48068-1805. Rounding things out: a Subscription to *Living Blues*- \$25.95 a year (6 issues). Call 1-800-390-3527.

2. Decorate with the blues: Get cool, blues related art- www.primitivekoolart.com. Or try a personalized blues poster or blues record label with your name as a performer along with the likes of Muddy Waters or Lightnin' Hopkins- available through Mojo Hand at www.mojoand.com; Vintage W.C. Handy Awards posters and other memorabilia is available at www.bluesmuseum.com;

3. Play the blues: How about learning how to play the blues? Put one of the following books on your list: *Blues Guitar for Dummies*- By Jon Chappel; *Jazz & Blues Piano: The Complete Guide (with cd)* – By Hal Leonard; *Blues Lick Factory: Building Great Blues Riffs*- By Jesse Gress; *The Art of Acoustic Blues Guitar: The Basics (with cd)*- By Woody Mann; *Fingerstyle Blues Songbook: Learn to Play Country Blues, Ragtime Blues, Boogie Blues and More*- By Steve James; *Paul Butterfield- Blues Harmonica Master Class: Book/cd*- By Paul Butterfield (all available at Amazon.com);

4. Taking a Blues Road Trip? Then you need the following books- *The Blues Highway: New Orleans to Chicago, 2nd Ed.: A Travel and Music Guide*- By Richard Knight; *Lonely Planet Road Trip Blues and BBQ (Road Trip Guide)*- By Tom Downs (all available at Amazon.com);

5. Get up to speed with blues history: Still confused about Sonny Boy 1 and Sonny Boy II? Do a little research in the *All Music Guide to the Blues: The Definitive Guide to the Blues*- By Hal Leonard Corp or *The Big Book of Blues*- By Robert Santelli;

Have a great holiday with the blues!! -Mark

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 rified

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.

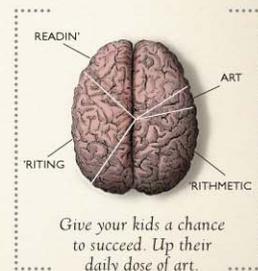
Sentimental Mood," and "Take the 'A' Train." His historical concert in 1953 at the Newport Jazz Festival has entered the lexicon of legendary live performances. There is no doubt about it, Ellington's brand of jazz has contributed significantly to the American songbook and to the lives of anyone who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



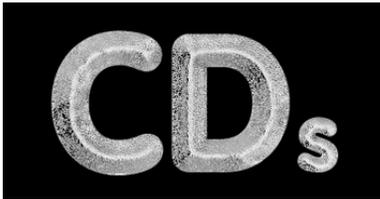
Art. Ask for More.

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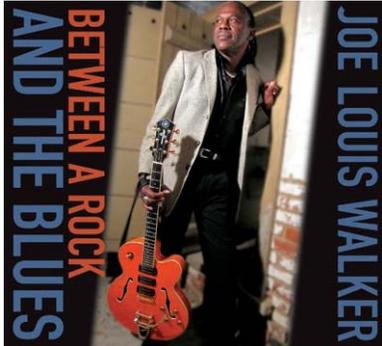


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JOE LOUIS WALKER
Between A Rock And The Blues
STONY PLAIN MUSIC

A new Joe Louis Walker recording is always welcome and Stony Plain has just issued "Between A Rock And The Blues." I believe this is his second album for Stony Plain and, like the prior one, is produced by Duke Robillard. It is Walker's 19th album that is not a compilation of prior recordings.

Walker has produced the most impressive of any artist in the blues over the past quarter of a century, and has not produced a disc that was not at least good. This present release may be his best release in a decade with its consistently strong playing, solid backing support, impassioned singing and varied, interesting material. Ten of the tracks were in Rhode Island with a band that included Robillard, Bruce Katz, Doug James and Carl Querforth on nine and the closing "Send You Back" an acoustic duet with Sugar Ray Norcia's harmonica.

The ensemble playing here is leaner, tighter and sharper sounding than on Walker's last few albums and his own playing seems to be more focused. There is a good range of material right from the rocking opening "I'm Tired," where he recites a litany of things he is tired up. It is followed by a hot, bluesy reworking of Travis Phillips' rockabilly stomp, "Eyes Like a Cat."

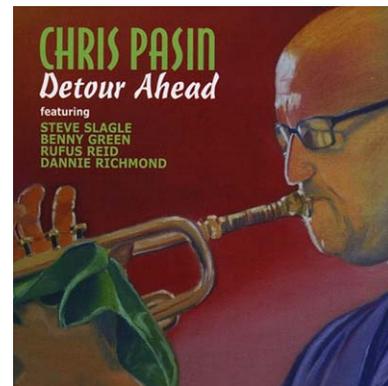
"Black Widow Spider" is a nice original with solid keyboards from Katz and sax from James while Walker is strong on guitar and vocals on Murali Coryell's "Way Too Expensive," a solid jump blues styled number with a solid Robillard solo added.

**Christmas CDs...
See Page 14**

Two of the songs were recorded with Kevin Eubanks (you know the one who is associated with Jay Leno) with a band that includes Eubanks, the great Henry Oden on bass and Ellis Eugene Blackwell on keyboards. "If There's a Heaven," is typical of the two with an intense driving backing supporting a fervent vocal and some driving slide guitar by one of the blues slide guitar masters of today, evoking Elmore, Muddy, Tampa Red and Earl Hooker, yet immediately recognizable as his own sound.

"I've Been Down," the other tune with this band is a driving Rolling Stones inspired blues rocker. "Prisoner of Misery," with Robillard's band is back to the West Side Chicago blues while Steve Hall's "Hallways," is built on a soulful lyric embellished by Walker's guitar with Katz taking a solid piano solo while his organ helps set the atmosphere here.

The Boss Talker is back with one of the best recent blues albums by anyone.
Ron Weinstock



CHRIS PASIN
Detour Ahead
H2O Records

Born in Chicago, but raised outside New York City, trumpeter Chris Pasin had a notable career including stints with Buddy Rich's Big band, and that of Toshiko Akiyoshi/Lew Tabackin, and working with Jack McDuff, and Salsa and Brazilian bands. He had attended the New England Conservatory where he studied with Gunther Schuller, George Russell and Jaki Byard (later he studied composition with Richie Beirach) and in 1987 recorded the just issued "Detour Ahead" (H2O Records).

This 1987 recording has him with a fine ensemble including Steve Slagle on saxophones, Benny Green on piano, Rufus Reid on bass and Dannie Richmond on drums. The inclusion of Richmond is not a surprise given that Charles Mingus is a significant influence on Pasin's writing along with Byard and Beirach. Pasin took a hiatus from music as he raised a family, and recently has resumed playing.

The opening "Lost and Found" would have made a nice title for the disc and is a pretty nice composition typical of the hard bop from the 70s and 80s with Slagle's sweet and sour soprano here along with the leader's pungent trumpet on a performance suggestive of some of the combos Woody Shaw led during this period. The notes for this recording state that "It Doesn't Matter Now" allude to "Monk's Mood," but I found the flavor of this com-

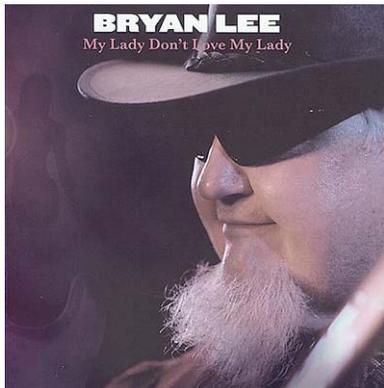
position reminiscent of some of Charles Mingus' compositions (such as the slower portions of "Sue's Changes") with a double time tempo change occurring throughout as evident during Green's lovely solo followed by Pasin's solo with his appealing, round tone.

"Jackburner" is a burner, which opens with a hot duo between Pasin and Richmond before a hot solo from Slagle on soprano. The title track is not a Pasin original and is a ballad he first heard done by Cedar Walton and allows him to display his bright sound with just the rhythm section and Slagle sitting out. "Light at the End of the Tunnel" is a multi-sectional number that opens with a somber lugubrious Middle-Eastern tone before kicking into a hotter tempo led by Green's piano with nice concise playing from the leader followed by Slagle on alto, with a forceful solo from Reid.

The aptly titled "Enigma," has Pasin playing more aggressively that the notes' description of Milesish muted trumpet would suggest followed by Slagle's somewhat serpentine soprano playing with the rhythm section adding some unusual accents underneath the two horns.

The Rogers and Hart standard "My Romance" is a strong straight-ahead vehicle for the quintet. The light island groove on "Island" has nice muted playing from the leader along with Slagle on flute. Pasin's playing is wonderfully delivered throughout this recording whether bright and mellow on a ballad, or with a crisp pungent attack elsewhere and the rhythm section of Green, Reid and Richmond is superb throughout.

If the extraordinary music here had been released when recorded we would be saluting the reissue of a classic session. This is available from, amongst other sources, amazon, cdbaby and iTunes. Chris Pasin's website is www.myspace.com/chrispasin. **Ron Weinstock**



BRYAN LEE
My Lady Don't Love My Lady
 JUSTIN TIME RECORDS

Whether you call Bryan Lee The Blind Giant of the Blues or Braille Blues Daddy, it does not matter. Lee, a New Orleans institution since 1982 had a long-time residency at the Old Absinthe House on Bourbon Street with his Jump Street Five.

This writer saw Lee there in the eighties and was impressed by his Albert King influenced style and husky straightforward singing to get the vinyl album they had for sale. When the Old Absinthe House stopped being a

bar with entertainment, he moved on to other Crescent City venues as well as toured throughout the US and Europe. Since 1991 he has recorded for the Canadian Justin Time label which previously issued 11 albums (one being a compilation) by Lee, has just issued "My Lady Don't Love My Lady," the third Lee recording that Duke Robillard has produced and it is a typically strong recording.

Robillard put together the studio band of some of his long-time associates including bassist Marty Ballou, pianist Dave Maxwell, and saxophonists Gordon Beadle and Doug James with guest appearances by Buddy Guy and Kenny Wayne Sheppard.

A Bryan Lee album and performance has one constant, his straight-forward blues vocals and guitars. Even when covering familiar material such as Willie Mabon's "I Don't Know," he adds his own accent to the vocal and arrangement (although Dave Maxwell certainly contributes a fresh solo here and Beadle rips off a blistering tenor solo on this).

There is some terrific material including a wonderful Doc Pomus-Mac Rebennack composition "Imitation of Love," that opens this disc and a lesser-known Earl King blues about a cheating woman "Three Can Play This Game," with more fine piano from Maxwell and tenor from Beadle.

For some reason Junior Wells is given authorship for "Early in the Morning," which was first recorded by the great pianist Charlie Spand in the twenties and which Junior likely picked up from John Lee "Sonny Boy" Williamson. Lee is in fine form here as is Maxwell while Buddy Guy adds his guitar to spice this track.

Kenny Wayne Sheppard helped write the shuffle "Let Me Up I've Had Enough," and adds the hard rocking guitar solo pyrotechnics. Ballou's walking bass opens the nice cover of Ray Charles' "Heartbreaker," with Maxwell's piano evoking The Genius and solid solos from Beadle on tenor sax and James on baritone sax.

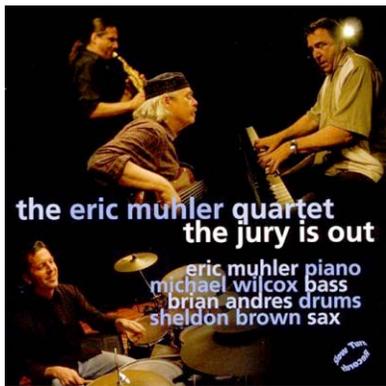
Lee contributes three originals including "Too Many Wolves," a slow blues with a terrific lyric about too many wolves hanging around his door with some blistering fretwork from Lee, and the title track, with a nice funk groove as Lee laments his lady makes him feel so good but does not dig his guitar.

Big Bill Broonzy's "When I've Been Drinking" benefits from the late night, jazzy setting Robillard provides for Lee's low-key vocal with Duke taking a fine solo here. It takes a brave man to cover a song connected with the late Johnny Adams, and Bryan does a more than a credible job on the country-tinged R&B gem, "Reconsider Me," if not up to the Tan Canary's original.

Bryan Lee's lady may not love Bryan's other lady, but Bryan continues to deliver some of the toughest blues to be heard. This may be one of Duke Robillard's finest efforts as a producer with the studio band being terrific. Add a blend of material with even the best-known covers injected with Lee's personal approach and one has another terrific album of blues by Bryan Lee.

Bryan Lee was hospitalized in early November with infections in his legs. According to his website, he is making a steady recovery. We wish him the best.

Ron Weinstock
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THE ERIC MUHLER QUARTET

The Jury Is Out SLOW TURN RECORDS

Pianist Eric Muhler releases his fifth album, a seven-tune quartet set recorded live at The Hillside Club in Berkeley, CA in July 2008 with Michael Wilcox (Fodera bass), Brian Andres (drums) and Sheldon Brown (sax).

At age 60, Muhler is no kid, but why we may have not heard his name is that he was a stay-at-home dad for his two daughters for 20 years. Although he worked on a variety of music projects during that time, his performances were rare.

Nonetheless, his seasoning shines through on this smart club set of exhilarating, fresh-sounding straight-ahead originals that range in duration from 8 to 13-plus minutes. His team is a tight unit driven by Andres' extraordinary traps artistry. Muhler's tastefully executed keyboard elegance is apparent throughout. He's enhanced by Brown's crisp, imaginative solo expressions, especially on the title tune. One of the loveliest numbers (9:40 minutes) is "1990 for Jane," with a pretty melody, joyful beat and a spotlighted solo of Wilcox on electric bass with Muhler comping underneath. "Jane at Home" closes out the set and it's a busy, beat-driven 13:10 minute foray that features fine solos all-around.

The jury may be out on Muhler but your ears will tell you that his case is one to be heard. This is an enjoyable listen from start to finish. Hopefully, he'll release another quartet with these same cats in the near future. Together, they sparkle and soar!

Nancy Ann Lee

CLARENCE BUCARO

NEW ORLEANS HYENA RECORDS

While New Orleans is ground zero for some of the most upbeat party music you'll ever hear, it is also home to plenty of great Soul and R & B. The likes of Irma Thomas, John Boutte, Johnny Adams and Aaron Neville provide a welcome respite from the hip-shaking dance floor with songs that burn low, slow and sweet.

Ohio native Clarence Bucaro became smitten with the soulful side of New Orleans and joined forces with Anders Osborne (guitar and vocals), Kirk Joseph (Sousaphone), Mike Burkart (B3/keys) and Doug Belote (drums) from the local scene to lay down the 10 tracks collected here. Like all good Soul music, this set is intensely personal and lures you into its emotional web. While most of the cuts are low key and focus more on the vocals than the groove,

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there are a few semi-upbeat exceptions including *Light in Your Eyes*, *The Other End*, *Let me Let Go of You* and *Red Herring*. While Bucaro has a ways to go to be mentioned in the same breath with long term members of the scene, his supple voice and the well crafted tunes collected here have him on the right path.

A good bet when it's time to move the party from the dance floor to the dark and quiet corner. *Mark Smith*



ORAN ETKIN

Kelenia MOTEMA MUSIC

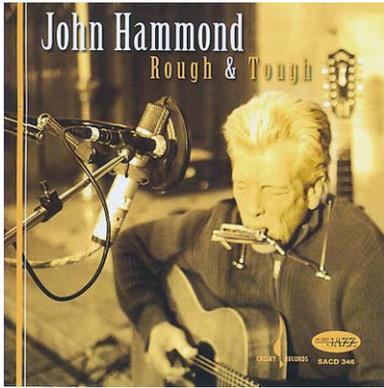
Born in Israel where he first heard Louis Armstrong as a youngster, Oran Etkin's influences are many but it was playing Malian music in New York led him to travel to Mali where he stayed with the family of percussionist Jon Camara where he met and had the opportunity to play with some of the great griots. When he returned, he resumed an association with Balla Kouyate (on balafon) leading to Group Kelenia, which also includes Makane Kouyate on calabash, and Joe Sanders on bass. Kelenia comes from the Bambara word for love between peoples who are different from each other.

On Etkin's new recording "Kelenia" (Motema Music), Etkin introduces us to a marvelous meeting of ancient and modern, Jazz and African music, calls to prayer of different traditions for an enchanting experience. He primarily plays clarinet and bass clarinet with occasional tenor, and Etkin's deep woody tone resonates against Balla Kouyate's dancing balafon while Makane Kouyate's calabash adds a gritty texture along with the haunting vocals of Abdoulaye Diabate. Both "Yekete" and the title track illustrate this, with overdubbing allowing Etkin to play off clarinet versus the bass clarinet.

"Not a Waltz" is one of several tracks that feature Lionel Loueke's guitar and John Benitez on bass with Mohamed 'Joh' Sidi Camara adding the talking drum. What is fascinating is the constant conversations that take place between the various musicians. Etkin's tenor adds a honking tinge to "Nama," as he plays over a vamping accompaniment from Balla Kouyate. "It Don't Mean a Thing" has the ensemble adding a unique touch to the Ellington jazz standard as Etkin's clarinets set the tone before Balla Kouyate continues the musical dance with his solo. The music on "Kelenia" will enchant and invigorate the listener with the freshness and vigor of the music here.

For more on Oran Etkin, visit www.oranetkin.com/group_kelenia.htm, or www.motema.com/artist/oran-etkin, where you can purchase this. It is available from amazon and iTunes.

Ron Weinstein



JOHN HAMMOND
Rough & Tough
CHESKY RECORDS

John Hammond has made a career of covering first generation blues players. This disc features him not only covering their tunes but emulating their straight up and simple recording style as well with no overdubs, no production and a “what you play is what you get” performance.

Recorded live, but without an audience, at St. Peter’s church in New York, Hammond applies his considerable instrumental skills and vocals to Muddy Waters’ *Still a Fool* and *I Can’t Be Satisfied*, Howlin’ Wolf’s *My Mind is Ramblin’* and *No Place to Go*, Little Walters’ *Up the Line* and *Got to Find My Baby*, Jerry McCain’s *She’s Tough*, Blind Willie McTell’s *Statesboro Blues* and a host of others.

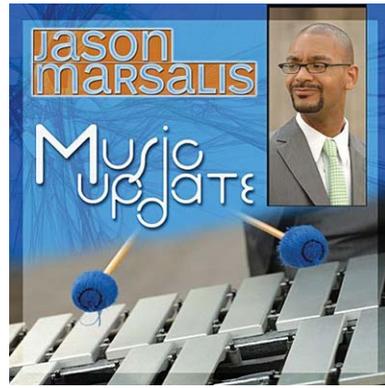
While recording live knowing that the safety net of studio tweaks isn’t going to be used to save the day causes many an artist to play it safe, Hammond seems inspired by the risk and plays with the abandon that makes live performances shine compared to over-scrubbed studio efforts. Hammond’s intricate National Steel guitar work is captivating throughout and age has added an edge of hard won wisdom to his voice.

When he throws harmonica into the mix the interplay with his guitar is so tight that you could be forgiven for assuming that someone else must have jumped in to accompany him.

While the tunes collected here have mostly been covered to the point that their names alone could evoke a Mustang Sally flinch by blues fans, Hammond has stripped them of their electric city roots and presents them as mesmerizing acoustic numbers. While you’ve heard them all before, most come across as almost new.

Adding to the sense of new discovery is the re-imagined *Chattanooga Choo Choo* and the hard charging take on Tom Waits’ *Get behind Mule*. You owe it to yourself to give these old tunes a new listen.

Mark Smith



JASON MARSALIS
Music Update
ELM RECORDS

The youngest of the musical playing sons of New Orleans pianist Ellis Marsalis, Jason has developed quite a reputation as a drummer, and in more recent years started playing the vibraphone. On his new album, “Musical Update” (ELM Records) he has five selections where he plays all the drum tracks, and these are interspersed among the 8 selections with his quartet of Austin Johnson, piano; Will Goble, bass and David Potter, drums with Marsalis on vibes.

The solo selections might be entitled “The Discipline Suite,” reflecting the titles to most of the five and through overdubbing have him as a one-man drum corps with a most definite snap, crackle and pop from the opening “Guess Who’s Back?,” which conjures up some tap dancers. It is followed by the quartet’s “Offbeat Personality,” with the piano vamping under Marsalis’ vibes with a bouncy feel to the performance, while “Ballet Class” has a bit more structured, almost military groove with pianist Johnson building on its rhythmic foundation in his solo before he comps under Marsalis. The drum corps returns on “Discipline Returns Once Again” with a funk-tinge groove before the atmospheric, “Characters” by the quartet followed by the lively “Blues For the 29%ers (down to 19).”

There are lively renditions of Lionel Hampton’s “Midnight Sun” and Charlie Christian’s “Seven Come Eleven,” with the interaction between Johnson and Marsalis particularly lively on the latter performance. The ballad “Durango Kid” is a lovely performance followed by the mellow strut of “Western Vacation Ranch,” with solo spots for the quartet members before the closing “Discipline Spotted Baby and Zutty at Studio 54,” with its repetitive groove, which helps conclude this captivating look at what Jason Marsalis is currently up to.

Ron Weinstock

TERRY WALDO’S
GUTBUCKET SYNCOPATORS

The Ohio Theatre Concert Featuring Edith Wilson
DELMARK

Delmark has continued its issuance of some classic jazz with its latest release, “The Ohio Theatre Concert,” by Terry Waldo’s Gutbucket Syncopators with special guest Edith Wilson.

This concert from Columbus, Ohio dates from April 13, 1974 and includes some solo piano performances by Waldo along with some Dixieland styled classic jazz from



Waldo's band with a number of vocals from Edith Wilson along with one by William B Saxbe, then Attorney General of the US and who was a long time fan of the group.

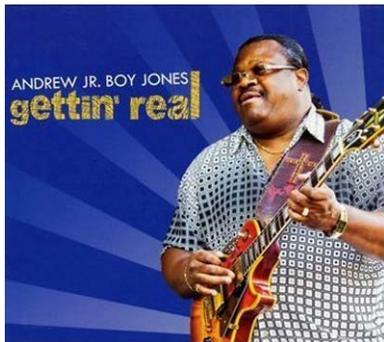
There is some marvelous traditional jazz including the opening "Some of These Days," taken at a nice walking tempo and some exceptional trombone from Jim Snyder, followed by a lively "I Would Do Anything for You," with sparkling muted trumpet by Roy Tate and the tenor sax of Frank Powers, whose heavy vibrato is characteristic of the better tenor players in the 30s.

Eubie Blake was originally supposed to perform, but was ill so Waldo did several solo piano pieces including "Maple Leaf Rag," which is taken at too brisk a tempo for these ears and "Twelfth Street Rag," which starts off at an exaggerated slow tempo much to the audience's delight before midway he accelerates to a breakneck tempo. A fun performance.

There is a lovely rendition of "The Entertainer." Waldo handles the vocal on the novelty "How Could Red Riding Hood," backed by stride flavored piano. A lively trad jazz "Sweet Georgia Brown" is followed by seven vocals from Edith Wilson. Wilson was one of the earliest black women to record. Her first Columbia session was a year and a half before Bessie Smith. Fats Waller wrote "Black and Blue" for her as part of the 1929 revue "Hot Chocolates," which she is heard singing here along with the twenties standard "Am I Blue," a lively "There Will Be Some Changes Made," and W.C. Handy's "St. Louis Blues." Another notable performance is the rendition of Duke Ellington's "The Mooche."

This was originally issued on Blackbird Records, and the Delmark reissue contains 9 unissued performances including two of the piano solos and 5 Edith Wilson vocals.

Ron Weinstock



ANDREW "JR. BOY" JONES
Gettin' Real
ELECTRO-FI

It's been a few years since Andrew Jr. Boy Jones has had a new release out. The Canadian label Electro-Fi has just released the Texas guitar slinger's latest disc, "Gettin' Real," with some muscular guitar and husky vocals from the one-time Freddie King band member. His first release was for JSP and led to a solid release on Bullseye Blues.

Having a new release from him is certainly welcome. He makes no attempt to break new ground by recycling blues-rock as rock. Instead what we have on this collection is some straight-ahead Texas blues along with two jazz-inflected soul-funk instrumentals. The opening, "Struggle," sets the table here with an insistent vocal of a

PAGE TEN

lyric about losing his job and things being unsettled on the home front accompanied by some searing guitar. John Street's keyboards add to the feel of the "People Say I'm Crazy," as Jr. Boy sings about how this woman breaks his heart so many times he's crazy to love his woman. He tells his lady he's tired of her "Negative Talkin'," as Cheryl Arena adds some down home harmonica with Street rollicking on piano.

The rest of the rhythm, bassist Tommy Tucker and drummer Jamie Byrom keep things in the pocket. The old Wilson Pickett groover "Don't Let the Green Grass Fool You" is given a driving instrumental treatment as Jr. Boy opens with some tasty mix of jazzy chording and single note runs which would be also be interesting if he employed this approach backing some of his vocals here. "Don't Get It Twisted" has a slow funky groove with a melody suggestive of "Mustang Sally," as Andrew wonders who is driving his new car and wearing his new suit. A nice change of pace is afforded by the soulful ballad "Good Lovin'."

This varied and entertaining disc closes with some more jazz-inflected playing on an instrumental rendition of "What's Going On." Given what passes for blues today, it is refreshing to listen to such a strong, straightforward blues recording that doesn't claim to break new ground, but simply deliver straight blues to the listener.

Ron Weinstock

WAYNE WALLACE LATIN JAZZ QUINTET

°Bien Bien!

PATOIS RECORDS

When I reviewed trombonist Wayne Wallace's 2008 quintet release, *The Nature of the Beat*, I wrote that "his Afro-Cuban music bristles with energy and spirit that will leave you eagerly awaiting his next album!" Well, here it is—a whole album of Latin jazz on his independent Patois label, performed with his quintet—Murray Low (piano, vocals), Michael Spiro (percussion, vocals), David Belove (bass, vocals) and Paul van Wageningen (trap drums and vocals). Special guests are trombonists Julian Priestler and Dave Martell, and vocalists Kenny Washington and Orlando Torriente.

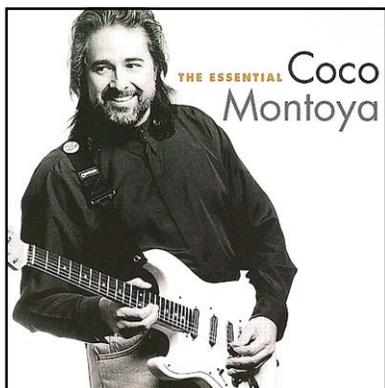
Included in the nine-tune set are three enticing Wallace originals—the title tune and "Mojito Café" (both performed in Latin Jazz style) and his cha-cha-cha, "Playa Negra." The band also transforms Eddie Harris' "Freedom Jazz Dance (Baile De Libertad)," and reinvents straight-ahead tunes by Duke Ellington ("In A Sentimental Mood," "Going Up!"), Sonny Rollins ("Solid"), and the album closer, John Coltrane ("Africa") performed in Latin Jazz style.

Wallace has extraordinary vision. Performing "In A Sentimental Mood" as a bolero is not a big stretch, but somewhat ingenious. Plus, it gives Wallace the change to show off his warmth, depth and skill on muted trombone. One of the more exciting, uptempo (danceable) tunes is his Cu-bop take on Rollins' "Solid," the shortest tune at 4:54 minutes. All the other tunes range between five and seven minutes, giving the musicians (and, ultimately, the party dancers) opportunities for a real workout.

Wallace has been noted in the *Downbeat* Critics Poll

for two years in a row as “Talent Deserving Wider Recognition” and was listed among trombone talents in the magazine’s 57th Annual Critics’ Poll. If his last two albums are any indication, there’s no doubt that this rising star will continue to thrill listeners with his creativity and talents.

Nancy Ann Lee



COCO MONTOYA
The Essential Coco Montoya
BLIND PIG

Since his 1995 solo debut, *Gotta Mind To Travel*, Albert Collins protégé and John Mayall alum Montoya has amassed a respectable catalog of sturdy, energized blues-rock fare, marked by fiery, focused lead work and suitably matched powerhouse vocals.

This collection, taken from his mid-90’s output, tastily showcases Montoya’s skills. With the rapid succession of songs such as “Am I Losing You”, “Seven Desires” and “Too Much Water”, the disc also highlights his bias towards minor keys. With the possible exception of Robert Cray, no blues balladeer/axeman takes to the darker chords as consistently as Montoya. Newcomers and later adapters to his work should find this a good add to the shelf.

Duane Verh

FREDDY COLE
The Dreamer In Me
HIGHNOTE

Recorded live at Dizzy’s Club Coca-Cola, vocalist-pianist Freddy Cole splits the piano chair with John di Martino to sing 11 tunes, bolstered by Jerry Weldon (tenor sax), Randy Napoleon (guitar), Elias Bailey (bass) and Curtis Boyd (drums).

The first in a series of HighNote recordings to be recorded at Dizzy’s Club Coca-Cola in New York City, this disc contains a mix of standards and lesser-knowns that allow Cole to demonstrate his ability to satisfy his audience.

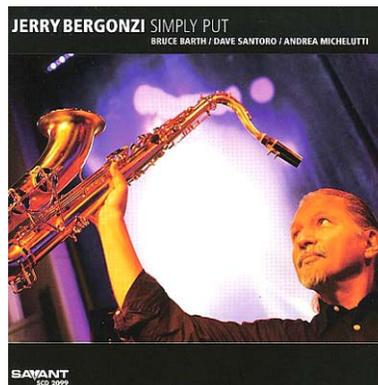
With his raspy voice and perfected style of phrasing, Cole sings mostly romantic gems, plus a few swingers and a blues number. He takes the piano chair for his first recorded performance of “I’m Making Believe,” a 1994 hit for Ella Fitzgerald and The Ink Spots. Cole also accompanies his vocals on piano for “You’re Sensational,” “Where Can I Go Without You?,” “More Than Likely,” and “You’re Bringing Out the Dreamer In Me.”

DiMartino is at the keys for the first three tracks and the final three tunes. Cole ends the set with a swinging adapta-

tion of “What Now My Love?.”

Album producer Todd Barkan and Cole believe this is the best band Cole has toured with. Together, they’ve made a very enjoyable recording that you’ll want to replay again and again.

Nancy Ann Lee



JERRY BERGONZI
Simply Put
SAVANT

Saxophonist Jerry Bergonzi is not a household name in the jazz world, but listening to his new Savant release, “Simply Put,” leads one to suspect that the fact he is based in Boston, where he teaches at the New England Conservatory, is the primary reason he is under the radar among the general jazz audience when folks talk about great saxophonists of today.

His peers, such as Bradford Marsalis, marvel at his playing. The notes make mention of Marsalis’ admiration of his mastery and personal distillation of the tonal personalities of Shorter and Coltrane. He plays often around Boston and also tours Europe several times a year. He did spend a stint with “Two Generations of Brubeck,” which included Dave and his sons and later with the Dave Brubeck Quartet.

His band on this recording (his 4th for Savant) consists of pianist Bruce Barth, bassist Dave Santoro and the Paris-based Italian drummer, Andrea Michelutti.

The selections include seven Bergonzi compositions and three very personal interpretations of standards. With the band evoking the classic Coltrane Quartet, Bergonzi displays his deep, fat tone on the opening “MB,” a tribute to his late friend, Michael Brecker, with the band swirling behind his strong playing. “Dancing in the Dark” is a swinging interpretation of a song from an old Fred Astaire movie and illustrates his attention to the song and the underlying lyrics.

“Casadiche” is how his Italian-American parents used to pronounce the TV cowboy, Hopalong Cassidy, which moves back and forth (the notes talk about the Mingusian ambiance) from a plaintive ballad to an angular double-time refrain. “Come Fly With Me” is a lively romp through a song most associated with Frank Sinatra.

“Crossing the Naeff” focuses on the interplay between Bergonzi and pianist Barth, while there is a tangoesque feeling imparted to his reharmonized rendition of “Out of Nowhere,” a favorite of jazz players since the bop era, while his unique minor blues “Transphybian,” sports a

nice Tyner-esque solo from Barth.

The concluding “Malaga,” named after the Andalusian Port City finds him navigating the soprano sax (displaying more of Shorter than Coltrane here) on an unusual 11/4 time signature.

After listening to the music on “Simply Put,” one again might wonder why Jerry Bergonzi is not a household name in the jazz world. He is a superior, passionate and thoughtful musician and composer, with a terrific band and he deserves to have a wider audience commensurate with the high level of the music he produces. **Ron Weinstock**



HARRISON KENNEDY
One Dog Barkin’
ELECTRO-FI

One of the pleasures I had at the Pocono Blues Festival this past summer was to hear Harrison Kennedy. Kennedy, one of the group The Chairmen of the Board which had several hit recordings, has turned to acoustic blues in the past few years and his most recent disc “One Dog Baking,” (Electro-Fi), should hopefully spread the news about his musical alchemy.

Kennedy plays a variety of instruments including guitar, harmonica, banjo, mandolin and percussion assisted by keyboards and bass that help provide the foundation for this recording, without detracting from the focus of his playing and vocals. He is an adept instrumentalist and an outstanding vocalist who often is riveting.

The originals on “One Dog Barkin’ ” range from the title track, a strong downhome performance a topical lyric about the environmental crisis (a theme touched in other songs like “The 90s Blues,” or the soul-tinged “Leading Lady,” with his banjo embellished by the dreamy keyboard backing, as he sings about his lady being a shining star in his universe. “Cruise Control,” singing about the long drive to New Brunswick and with cruise control can travel those country roads as his banjo accompanies a field holler-like vocal.

“Could Be You, Could Be Me” is a blues about being homeless with hard rock for a pillow, and nice sky only blanket while sleeping on a cardboard bed as he encourages sighting to help the homeless with effective guitar and harmonica backing.

With some rollicking piano in the background, Harrison sings in “Hair of the Dog,” about losing his woman and best friend too and going downtown to drink away these blues which is followed by some nice slide playing and harmonica on “Ode to Huddie,” a moving song about Leadbelly intermixing biographical facts with

song titles and lyrical fragments by the legendary songster. “Hogtown Blues” is a delta-styled blues as his phone rings and his baby has called saying she is in Hogtown and found a new ride with Kennedy singing and moaning his vocal with hints of “Rollin’ & Tumblin,” in the backing.

It is tracks like this that should how rooted in tradition and yet contemporary Kennedy gets. Sounding like some delta bluesman of the 30s and 40s he convinces us elsewhere of “The Healing Power of the Blues,” recounting some of his travels as he helps souls needing healing from the hurt within, while his accompaniment on “Cry For Mother Africa” suggests some of the griots from Africa that have recorded in recent years, with Kennedy’s insistent, repetitive accompaniment matching his ethereal falsetto.

The vigor of the performances on this album match the freshness in which Kennedy uses traditional blues materials to craft these impressive, contemporary acoustic blues performances, making for a superb album that is highly recommended. **Ron Weinstock**

2009 Gift Guide

A cross-genre guide to help you select gifts for a wide variety of musical tastes, for the holidays or any occasion. Coming to the website by Monday, December 7!

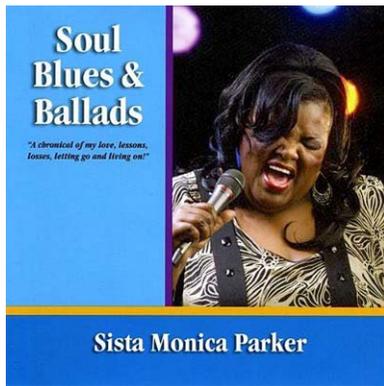
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SISTA MONICA
Soul Blues & Ballads
 MO MUSCLE RECORDS

Vasti Jackson was the one who described Sista Monica Parker as “The Lioness of the Blues,” which suggests the power she brings to her performances. In the writer’s humble opinion, she has been the finest female blues singer of the past decade and a half.

I have had the pleasure of seeing her at the 1997 D.C. Blues Festival, one of the few performances she has made on the East Coast of the US and it was one of the most memorable performances in the 20 odd years of this event. She can belt out the blues with the power of Etta James, Koko Taylor or Big Maybelle, yet she delivers and caresses the lyrics with the subtlety of Ruth Brown and Irma Thomas.

Her new CD, “Soul Blues & Ballads,” is a compilation of her recordings over the past 15 years. On her website she expounds about the songs here, “They have been carefully tucked between up-tempo, high energy, rock n’ Chicago style blues songs on eight (8) different CDs. They span almost two decades of expressing my love, my lessons, and my losses. I have had to let go and live on. It’s been healing to sing my blues!”

On the CD insert she dedicates this to the three great women who inspired and influenced her Katie Webster, Koko Taylor and Ruth Brown. “These women paved the way for me to open up and write about my heartaches and expose my woundedness.”

As for the music, there is a focus on slower and medium tempo songs where she caresses a lyric and goes from a whisper to a scream (to borrow the title of a classic Esther Philips album and Allen Toussaint song). The opening “I’m a Woman,” by Vasti Jackson, is a different song from the Leiber-Stoller song associated with Peggy Lee and others or the Koko Taylor answer to Muddy Waters and Bo Diddley, while her own “Honey’s It’s Your Fault,” with Danny Beconcini on keyboards and Larry McCray on guitar, is a strong mix of singing and spoken parts. “Behind My Back,” is another strong soulful performance about how her lover has been cheating on her with Monica belting out about how “you have been playing behind my back with my best friend,” and not taking it anymore.

Notice how relaxed and powerful her singing is. She opens “Leave the Door Open,” almost whispering before she starts singing about loving her baby down to her bone and wondering if enough to stay at home but tired of fight-

ing about every little bitty thing. “I’m leaving the door open and you can come through,” with nice organ and jazzy guitar from Chris Cain.

Most would emote or sing over the top on Etta James’ “Come To Mama,” but Sista Monica is right on the money here with an outstanding piano solo. I’m not going go through every track, but a couple standout.

One can look at how she and her accompaniment build things up so her vocal and the backing just explode towards the end of “Never Say Never,” as well as on Katie Webster’s “Pussycat Moan,” where she sings about a woman who is mad at her lover, and moans about him telling her best friend “he didn’t want her no more,” but knowing its a lie because when Sista turns her back he tries to come in Sista’s back door with a terrific piano solo break from Beconcini before she comes back in snarling “why don’t you pack your bags, don’t you see I don’t need you no more... this here pussycat ain’t gonna be your pussycat no more,” then vocalizing and moaning against Mike Osborne’s blistering guitar. From her first CD, “Get Out of My Way,” this still resonates and sounds as fresh today as when it first came out. The CD closes with the uplifting gospel-soul rendition of Warren Haynes “Soul Shine.”

There is a generous amount of music here with thirteen outstanding performances for about 70 minutes by one of the blues and R&B world’s finest singers. I add that she could have selected a dozen different performances from her earlier recordings, and had as compelling a recording. She is just that dynamic and soulful. For those lacking anything by the Sista, here is a good place to start. This is available at cdbaby, amazon, itunes, rhapsody and other locations. For more information on Sista Monica, and her other recordings, performance schedule and such, go to her website, www.sistamonica.com.

Ron Weinstock

GARAGE A TROIS

Power Patriot

ROYAL POTATO FAMILY

Precedents for the musical chicanery favored by Garage A Trois can be found among the more esoteric wing of the 70’s Brit prog/art rock scene.

When sampling tracks on *Power Patriot*, one might sense the presence of bands such as Henry Cow, Gong or Soft Machine in the room. The four card-carrying iconoclasts that comprise the current edition of Garage: Skerik-saxes, Marco Benevento- keyboards, Mike Dillon- vibes and percussion and Stanton Moore- drums, share a flair for spirited eclecticism with those storied bands as well as for creating music that consistently resists labels.

While clever, angular “heads” and urgent tempos, topped typically with Skerik’s benevolently brash horn, are obviously band favorites, the underplayed elegance of “Dory’s Day Out “ ultimately steals this set. Centered around a graceful, insistent keyboard figure and laced with layers of mellow mallet work and beguiling, post-Zappa harmonics, it’s this track generates the most vivid recall upon repeated listening.

Props also to the title track, on which Skerik’s staccato nips bump up against a Crescent City second-line strut. Worth your time.

Duane Verh

PAGE THIRTEEN

JESSE COOK
The Rumba Foundation
KOCH RECORDS

Make yourself a present and give a listen to Jesse Cook's, *The Rumba Foundation*. The thirteen tracks of this album take the listener on a trip around the world stopping only to pick up audio souvenirs from numerous exotic ports of call.

The Rumba Foundation is rooted in Cuban and Colombian sounds while beautifully incorporating wide ranging influences from Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia. At first glance, these styles might seem an incongruent combination at best; Cook manages to coax them into graceful co-existence.

At first, the ear will be convinced of Cook's beautiful flamenco guitar and is tempted to label *The Rumba Foundation* as such; but beware of labeling as the music just might take an elegant detour to the Caribbean or Middle East. There is depth in this collection of songs, all of which are delightful.

"La Rumba D'el Jete" is only one among standout tracks on this album. "Rain Day" relaxes and refreshes and "Bombay Diner" sprinkles the collection with aromatics.

Not easily confined to one genre, Jesse Cook's acoustic guitar has landed him high on both the smooth jazz and New Age charts. A lesson in musicianship and international pleasure, Jesse Cook's, *The Rumba Foundation* is highly recommended.

Wanda Simpson

CHRITMAS CDs

We received quite a few Christmas CDs this year. Here are the ones we liked the best....

HOT CLUB OF SAN FRANCISCO
Hot Club Cool Yule
AZICA RECORDS

For their twelfth album, The Hot Club of San Francisco releases their first holiday disc in their 20-year career.

The current edition of the HCSF has been together for six years and includes Paul Mehling (solo guitar, baritone guitar, vocals), Clint Baker (string bass, trumpet), Evan Price (violins), Jeff Magidson (rhythm guitar, bass, vocal) and Jason Vanderford (rhythm guitar).

The band delivers 12 lightly swinging gems such as "The Christmas Song," "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town," "I'll Be Home For Christmas," "Auld Lang Syne" and more. Remaining faithful to the original tune, Isabelle Fontaine joins Magidson for a sweet vocal duet on "Baby It's Cold Outside." Mehling arranged an adapted "Djingle Bells," an obvious swinging twist on Django Reinhardt's legacy. One of my favorites is the brief (3:35 minutes) "Sugar Rum Cherry." Based on the Tchaikovsky piece and re-written by Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn, it's given a sultry, bluesy twist by the HCSF and features Baker's muted trumpet musings.

Gypsy-jazz pioneers Reinhardt and Stephane Grappelli (the inspiration for the HCSF) never recorded a Christmas album. That's what makes this delightful album all that more special. The superb musicianship, tidy arrangements, and clever improvisations add to your listening enjoyment.

Nancy Ann Lee

RAY CHARLES
The Spirit of Christmas
CONCORD RECORDS

Available for the first time in more than 12, years, this 10-tune digitally remastered Ray Charles reissue CD features the legendary, Grammy Award-winning artist with a studio orchestra (or combo) and soloists Freddie Hubbard (trumpet/flugelhorn) and Rudy Johnson (tenor sax). Jeff Pevar and Kevin Turner play guitars and The Raeletts provide background vocals.

Singing and playing keyboards, Charles gives soulful twists to traditional tunes such as "What Child Is This," "The Little Drummer Boy," "Santa Claus Is Coming To Town," "All I Want For Christmas," "Winter Wonderland," and other. On the bonus track, "Baby It's Cold Outside," Charles performs a duet with Betty Carter.

One of the highlights is the funky, grooving Charles/James Polk arrangement of "Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer."

This CD is just the ticket to put you in a holiday mood or give as a gift to that special person on your list.

Nancy Ann Lee

FRANK SINATRA
Christmas With Sinatra and Friends
CONCORD RECORDS

Vocalist Frank Sinatra is featured on eight of the 12 songs on this compilation that includes tracks performed by Mel Torme, Tony Bennett and Bill Evans, Rosemary Clooney, and

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Ray Charles and Betty Carter.

Backed by a studio orchestra, Ol' Blue Eyes sings a mix of favorites and lesser known tunes such as "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town," "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day," "The Little Drummer Boy," "The Christmas Waltz," "Mistletoe and Holly," "An Old Fashioned Christmas," "Whatever Happened to Christmas," and "Christmas Memories."

Torme delivers his classic "The Christmas Song (Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire)," and Bennett and pianist Bill Evans collaborate on a lush (though brief) 3:18-minute version of the Thad Jones classic, "A Child Is Born." Rosemary Clooney sings the Irving Berlin tune "White Christmas." Charles and Carter sing a soulfully sweet duet to "Baby It's Cold Outside."

This is a pleasing album to brighten your holidays.

Nancy Ann Lee

ALEXIS COLE

The Greatest Gift: Songs of the Season

MOTEMA

Vocalist Alexis Cole performs with family and over 50 musician friends on this 14-track disc of Christmas music to benefit World Bicycle Relief, an organization that provides "sustainable access to healthcare, education and economic development in needy countries through The Power of Bicycles."

Cole and colleagues remake "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" into a bluesy swinger and "Hark The Herald Angels Sing" is given an uptempo Latin twist. Her mid-

range voice graces "Have A Merry Little Christmas," performed as a nonet without too much alteration and some great instrumental jazz solos. A string quartet and the St. James Quartet (vocals) sweeten Cole's standard rendering of the prelude to and the main tune of "Christmas Time Is Here." Among my favorites is the catchy, riffing, time-switching rendition of "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," performed as an instrumental by Cole's father Mark Finkin (piano), Gottfried Stoger (sax), John Menegon (bass) and Alvin Atkinson (drums). The final track is an uplifting Christian song, "Jesus Is the Best Part of Christmas," performed with instrumentalists and the St. James Quartet.

Cole was raised in Florida where she was injured by a car while riding her bike and began her spiritual quest. She later enrolled in the University of Miami Jazz Studies program and religious/philosophy studies. She completed her Bachelors of Music degree at William Paterson University in New Jersey. Cole immersed herself in community, church, and prison ministry work, sang in a gospel choir, and released her first CD in 1999. She earned her Masters degree in music in 2005 and began to perform in New York City clubs and released a second CD.

The fresh music performed on this disc should provide plenty of diverse holiday listening pleasure and help bring notice to the non-profit organization. The attractive packaging includes a donation form. For more information about Cole and the organization go to alexiscole.com and worldbicyclerelief.org.

Nancy Ann Lee

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