

# Record Reviews



## IDRIS ACKAMOOR AND THE PYRAMIDS

### AN ANGEL FELL

*Tinogé; An Angel Fell; Land Of Ra; Papyrus; Soliloquy For Michael Brown; Message To My People; Warrior Dance; Sunset (67.32)*

Ackamoor (as, ts, v); Sandra Poindexter (vn, v); David Molina (g); Skyler Stover (b); Bradie Speller (cga); Johann Polzer (d). London, no date.

### Strut 164

The Pyramids is a world music/jazz ensemble led by Ackamoor. The saxophonist grew up in Chicago, and founded the Pyramids in the early 1970s at Antioch College, Ohio, as part of Cecil Taylor's Black Music Ensemble. The band developed

#### JJ CONTENT

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its Afro-jazz-funk fusion during a long tour of Africa, in which they lived in Ghana, Kenya and Ethiopia. Ackamoor added musicians and instruments before returning to the US and settling in San Francisco.

The original group split up in 1977. We Be All Africans Now from 2016 marked the band's latest renaissance. This follow-up album, on the same label, has an almost entirely new line-up – only violinist Sandra Poindexter, whose playing is reminiscent of the roughened textures of Billy Bang and Leroy Jenkins – survives from We Be. As the leader explains, "the songs explore global themes [including] the rise of catastrophic climate change ... but positive themes too, the healing power of music, collective action and the simple beauty of nature".

The result is a totally engaging album whose groove takes in hip-hop, rock and, on one track, reggae, with brief vocals on some tracks. There are echoes of Fela Kuti and Sun Ra, especially on *Land Of Ra* – the latter's cosmic jazz, with its political messages, no longer seems so esoteric. The relaxed groove of the plangent *Message To My People*, with a piercing solo by the leader, is a highlight. The moving *Soliloquy For Michael Brown* is named after the young African-American shot dead by a policeman in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014. The album was recorded in London, and produced by Malcolm Catto of The Heliocentrics. Highly recommended.

Andy Hamilton

## DAVID AMBROSIO

### FOUR ON THE ROAD

*Way Too Long So Far; Fabulous Freep; Melody; Four On The Road; Legroom; Sunset Bird (51.10)*

Ambrosio (b); Loren Stillman (as); Russ Meissner (d). 2018.

## Fresh Sound New Talent FSNT 552

Bassist Ambrosio has worked with the group here for many years and this is just their second CD together. It followed a road trip through northern Spain when they were constantly aware of a graphic image on walls everywhere they went. It turned out to be the work of a French urban artist called Invader and they reproduce it on the cover and all over this CD. Thus the four on the road in this context is the trio plus the image that followed them all round northern Spain.

Ambrosio likes to bring certain compositions to a recording date, along with some from his colleagues and just play them without prior planning or rehearsal. It does make for a spontaneous approach, which is evident on many tracks of this record. The leader and Meissner play brightly flowing rhythms as Stillman creates free style alto lines in a manner that dates back to early Ornette Coleman.

The rhythm section lock together well throughout and bass and drum solos are slotted in but it is the solo work of Loren Stillman that gives this disc its impetus. He has a raw, blues-based sound and creates fascinating lines throughout. The themes are light but adequate for the trio's needs and were composed by the members of the group.

Derek Ansell

## GEORGES ARVANITAS

### SOUL JAZZ: QUINTET SESSIONS 1960-1961

*This Here; Bemsha Swing; Oblivion; Sonnymoon For Two; Mister X; Un Poco Loco; Bohemia After Dark; Monk's Mood; Bouncing With Bud; (2) Brigitte Strip Blues; La Bride Sur Le Cou; (3) Extrait De Suite No. 1 En Ré Bémol Pour Quartetette De Jazz;*

## 245; Blues En Ré Mineur (58.18)

(1) Bernard Vilet (flh); Francois Jeanneau (ts); Arvanitas (p); Michel Gaudry (b); Daniel Humair (d). Paris, 22 & 24 June 1960.

(2) as (1) but Gaudry & Humair out; Luigi Trussardi (b) Michel Babault (d). Paris, 19 April 1961.

(3) as (1) but Gaudry out; Pierre Michelof (b). Paris, RTF broadcast February 1961.

## Fresh Sound FSR-CD 961

In the mid-to-late 1970s Arvanitas (1931-2005) released back-to-back albums with the distinctly unfashionable titles *Feeling Jazzy* and *Swing Again*. This excellent reissue carries its original early 1960s title, alluding to a fashionable piece of "soul jazz" of the time like the Bobby Timmons opener, *This Here*. But the title also offers perfect summation of the timeless qualities – as swinging as they are jazzy – of music distinguished by arresting readings of such modernist classics as Monk's *Bemsha Swing*, Powell's *Bouncin' With Bud*, Rollins's *Sonnymoon For Two* and Pettiford's *Bohemia After Dark*. The reissue is rounded out by a bonus bucketful of blues-shot grooves, including Eric Dolphy's *245* – and Martial Solal's *Suite* swings considerably more than its title might suggest.

Born and raised in Marseilles, Arvanitas was a noted tyro on the local scene before gravitating to Paris. Garner and Parker were early influences and bop continued to offer a seemingly bottomless well of energy, intelligence and inspiration. Following a key recording with Doug Watkins and Art Taylor, Arvanitas moved into the sort of commandingly crisp register of harmonic and rhythmic literacy – and melodic penetration – heard on these quintet sides: hear the standout *Un Poco Loco* and *Monk's Mood*. The latter is graced by a resonant line from the muscular yet elegant Jean-

neau. Like the Davis-oriented Vilet – who also has a touch of Clark Terry to him – the Coltrane-oriented reedsman is in sparkling form throughout.

If it's good to get an early glimpse of Jeanneau – who would go on to make such notable "avant" albums as the 1977 *Ephemere* – it's also a treat to hear a young Daniel Humair coming on hot and strong, e.g., on Powell's *Oblivion*. Another unmissable cracker, with richly illustrated sleeve, from Jordi Pujol's Fresh Sound.

Michael Tucker

**KENNY BARRON**

**CONCENTRIC CIRCLES**

DPW; *Concentric Circles*; *Blue Waters*; *A Short Journey*; *Aquele Frevo Axe*; *Von Hangman*; *In The Dark*; *Baile*; *L's Bop*; *I'm Just Sayin'*; *Reflections* (66.22)

Mike Rodriguez (t); Dayna Stephens (fs); Barron (p); Kiyoshi Kitagawa (b); Jonathan Blake (d). NY, 18-19 March 2017.

**Blue Note 6747897**

Long admired as one of the top pianists around, Kenny Barron made a huge impression alongside Stan Getz during the saxophonist's golden autumnal career. Since then, he has occasionally led a quintet on record, featuring mostly his own tunes. This is in the spirit of similar albums from the 90s, although the themes tend more towards the fashionably abstract that I find rather boring.

However, they do inspire worthwhile solos so one should not complain. Mike Rodriguez and Dayna Stephens have both been around for a while, though this is my first experience of what they can do. Probably influenced at some point by Wayne Shorter, Stephens has a pleasantly rounded, slightly soft tone and enjoys juggling a phrase into odd patterns. Rodriguez grows on one as a solid technician able to exploit tone and range where necessary: his ballad feature *A Short Journey* can take its place alongside the flights of, say, Terence Blanchard or Booker Little.

Always sprightly and incident-packed, Kenny Barron's solos dance around rather than drive hard. The change of pace offered by the bossa nova *Aquele Frevo Axe* illustrates this perfectly and he also sparkles rather un-Monk-like on the latter's *Reflections*.

Ronald Atkins

**CRITICS' CHOICE**

The 10 CDs JJ critics most wanted to hear from this month's review pile

|                                 |                                |                                 |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| David Ambrosio                  | Four On The Road               | Fresh Sound New Talent FSNT 552 |
| Kenny Barron                    | Concentric Circles             | Blue Note 6747897               |
| Terence Blanchard               | The E Collective Live          | Blue Note 6746254               |
| Nels Cline                      | Currents, Constellations       | Blue Note 6742910               |
| Hubert Fol                      | And His Be-Bop Minstrels       | Fresh Sound FSR-CD 955          |
| Mike Gibbs                      | Symphony Hall, Birmingham 1991 | Dusk 116                        |
| Marcus Miller                   | Laid Black                     | Blue Note, no number supplied   |
| Van Morrison & Joey DeFrancesco | You're Driving Me Crazy        | Sony Legacy, no number supplied |
| Oscar Peterson & Fred Astaire   | The Astaire Story              | Essential Jazz Classics 55733   |
| Frank Sinatra                   | Songs For Swingin' Lovers!     | Essential Jazz Classics 55734   |



**NIK BÄRTSCH'S RONIN**

**AWASE**

*Modul 60, Modul 58; A; Modul 36, Modul 34; Modul 59* (65.21)

Bartsch (p); Sha (as, bcl); Thomy Jordi (b); Kaspar Rast (d). Pernes-les-Fontaines, France, October 2017.

**ECM 673 5867**

Nik Bartsch's sixth Ronin or Mobile outing – this time a slimmed down quartet set with Thomy Jordi on bass replacing the usual extra percussionist – finds the group in a more agile and interactive mood, gently easing into proceedings with the opening *Modul 60*, a short, slow-burner that gradually unfolds its melodic content. The lengthy *Modul 58* changes the mood, a slowly repeating bass motif underlining Sha's shadowy alto before the piece alternatively picks up and then slows its tempo as the mood turns increasingly to menace and then to joy as the motoring drums kick in. A, reedman's Sha's first composition on record, derives its own tension from its strong rhythmic markers before *Modul 36* starts sweetly but soon gears up with a twitchy, manic beat driven along by insistent drums and a drawling, repetitive piano line. As ever, tempos and melodic motifs change abruptly as if at the click of a finger, the sign of a band totally in sync with itself. Both the final two *Moduls* continue this pattern, hypnotic in their intensity

and forward movement, the final *Modul 59* unveiling a beautiful theme on first piano and then alto.

The set's title *Awase*, by the way, is an Aikido martial arts term meaning "moving together" in the sense of matching energies, very apt for a group that delights in dynamic precision, balletic minimalism and tight, highly organised grooves. As ever, Nik Bartsch's Ronin have delivered another mesmerising set.

Simon Adams

**BEVERLEY BEIRNE**

**JAZZ JUST WANTS TO HAVE FUN**

*Come On Feel The Noize*; *Prince Charming*; *Bette Davis Eyes*; *Ghost Town*; *Deeply Dippy*; *When Smoky Sings*; *Cruel Summer*; *Pop Muzik*; *Too Shy*; *Hot In The City*; *Waitin' For A Girl Like You*; *Girls Just Want To Have Fun* (44.38)

Beirne (v); Sam Watts (p); Flo Moore (b); Ben Browne (d, pc); Rob Hughes (ts, f). UK, 2018.

**BBR 002 (beverleybeirne.com)**

Beverley Beirne (see Profiles, JJ 0718) asked US producer Jason Miles (Miles Davis, Marcus Miller) to come over to London and produce her album with her "amazing young musicians from the Royal Academy in London", by way of a Facebook enquiry followed by a Skype chat. Well, it worked, and she managed to convince him that doing a set of



pop songs from her college days arranged as jazz standards would work. He was doubtful that songs like Adam Ant's *Prince Charming* or Billy Idol's *Hot In The City* would work as jazz but in Beverley's hands they do. She even manages to swing songs like *Waiting For A Girl Like You*, and *Girls Just Want To Have Fun* turns briefly into a jazz staple.

Such is Ms Beirne's skill that she sings these pop favourites from her college days as though she were singing Gershwin, Porter or Berlin. *When Smokey Sings* receives the slow jazz ballad treatment with highly appropriate support from Watts on piano and Hughes on tenor sax. It does, perhaps, demonstrate that this material had more quality than some of us thought when it was aired first time round. Or is it down completely to the skill, invention and originality of Beverley and her sterling crew of musicians? You decide; Beverley just wanted to have fun.

Derek Ansell

**TERENCE BLANCHARD FEATURING THE E COLLECTIVE**

**LIVE**

*Hannibal*; *Kaos*; *Unchanged*; *Soldiers*; *Dear Jimi*; *Can Anyone Hear Me*; *Choices* (74.11)

Blanchard (t); Charles Altria (g); Fabian Almazan (p, syn); Oscar Seaton (d); David "DJ" Ginyard (b). Minnesota, Cleveland and Dallas 2016/17.

**Blue Note 6746254**

The album title takes on a more poignant meaning when you take into account that Blanchard chose to record it in three American cities that had become infamous for police killings of black African/Americans and in turn the killing of five law enforcement officers. But this is not so much a "political" album – more