

Record Reviews



BRANDON ALLEN THE GENE AMMONS PROJECT

Please Baby Won't You Please Say Yes; The Breeze And I; Ger-ru; You're Not The Kind; I Sold My Heart To The Junkman; Piece To Keep Away Evil Spirits; Ben; The Black Cat; Lucille; Son Of A Preacher Man (53.46)

Allen (ts); Ross Stanley (p); Arnie Somogyi (b); Matt Home (d). No location or dates listed.

RT Jazz Records 001

★★★★

Allen is a great admirer of legendary tenor sax master Gene Ammons and designed this set to reflect his admiration for the musician. He has played in the manner of Ammons and put together sets for live gigs to expand his admiration for him.

JJ CONTENT

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Ammons was one of the founders of the Chicago style of tenor saxophone playing but Allen feels that he was underrated and in the shadow of contemporaries like Sonny Stitt, Dexter Gordon and Wardell Gray. It was Brandon's intention to transcribe a handful of Ammons songs and play them to "let the influence of the player come out as naturally as possible but still try to be myself". Does he succeed? Largely yes, I think he does; the sound is big and bluesy, which suggests Ammons, but still gives an impression of Allen as an individual stylist.

Allen glides through music associated with Ammons like *Ger-Ru*, *The Black Cat*, *Son Of A Preacher Man* and that unlikely masterpiece *I Sold My Heart To The Junkman*. There is a warm glow and a blue streak around the edges of Allen's playing here that reminds us of the great player he is paying homage to. He has a first-rate rhythm section in support with pianist Ross Stanley offering light and lyrical solos along with his accompanying duties. Somogyi and Home are steady and supportive throughout. Ammons should be remembered and heard and perhaps CDs like this will send enthusiasts back to investigate record gems like *Blue Gene* and other Ammons recordings.

Derek Ansell

ANTHUS CALIDOSCÒPIC

Cubs, Esferes I Cilindres; Elisa; Mediterraneum; Hipnosi II. Lustrada; Metropolis; Miratges; Música Els Tu; Adéu-Siau Pare; 800Km; Homocromia (49.50)

Anthus (v, comp, arr); Pol Padrós (f, fh, sea shells); Max Villavecchia (p); Manel Fortià (b); Ramon Díaz (d, pc). Barcelona, 2016.

Temps 1616-GE16

★★★

The opening *Cubs* (Cubes,

Spheres And Cylinders) is a musical reflection of Cubism, one of Anthus's favourite art forms. It features a lot of C# diminished 7th, the diminished tonality lending an immediate sense of tension and emotional unease as well as resonating with angular Cubist geometry. It's dissonant but not free, the rhythmically organised theme giving way to a medium-tempo Tony Williams-type beat that supports an improvised duet between Anthus's light operatic voice and wah-wah trumpet redolent of 70s Miles.

Elisa, a melodic ballad with functional chord changes, brings repose, Anthus's dulcet vocal and the Hancock-like piano filigrees giving substance to the title "The Crooner of Mediterranean Jazz" conferred on Anthus a few years ago (a childhood hero was Sinatra). *Mediterraneum* is a paean to ancient Mediterranean culture in the form of a short suite with lyrics in a composite Mediterranean language; jazz ears will tune in to Villavecchia's fluent post-bop piano solo. Other tracks feature rubato reveries over shifting modal centres, boleros, dissonant uptempo vamps, Latin ballad and, in *800Km*, tight funk and a rapped message that distance cannot change what we feel inside ourselves.

Anthus's history is fascinating. After his conservative father serially dismissed his musical ambitions, he left his Sicilian homeland in the late 1990s at age 19 and went, unsupported and un-introduced, to Dublin, eventually studying at the city's Guildhall School of Music and Drama. By 2003 he was missing the Med and on visiting Barcelona decided it was the place for his music and life. The story of his auteur struggle to perform, like his voice and stylistic ambition, is striking.

Mark Gilbert



LOUIS ARMSTRONG THE UNIVERSITY OF LOUIS ARMSTRONG 1925-26

(1) *My Heart; Yes! I'm In The Barrel; Gut Bucket Blues; (2) Come Back Sweet Papa; (1) Georgia Grind; Heebie Jeebies; Cornet Chop Suey; Oriental Strut; You're Next; Muskrat Ramble; Georgia Bo-Bo; Drop That Sack; (2) Don't Forget To Mess Around; (1) I'm Gonna Gitcha; Dropping Shucks; Who 'sit; He Likes It Slow; The King Of The Zulus; Big Fat Ma And Skinny Pa; Lonesome Blues; Sweet Little Papa; Jazz Lips; Skid-Dat-De-Dat; (3) Big Butter And Egg Man; Sunset Cafe Stomp; (4) You Made Me Love You; Irish Black Bottom; (1) Drop That Sack (alt) (79.47)*

(1) Armstrong (c, v); Johnny Dodds (cl); Kid Ory (tb); Lil Armstrong (p, v); Johnny St Cyr (bj). November 1925 to November 1926. (2) Johnny Dodds also plays alto. (3) May Alix (v) added. (4) Henry Clark (tb) replaces Ory.

HQ Discs 02

★★★★★

Here's the real seed-corn of jazz. The world of music stood with its collective jaw hanging open when faced for the first time with this unique manifestation of genius. Armstrong apparently lacked the ability to make music that was less than inspired and inspiring.

Louis led his brave associates through these nine recording sessions with a supreme confidence that dragged the others

into performances that they never bettered away from his leadership in the years that followed. Armstrong's virtuoso playing requires no qualification from me. However, this version of the music has had a dozen or so veils lifted from the sound quality so that, particularly in the case of Louis, Johnny Dodds and Lil Armstrong, the tracks come to us as completely fresh.

Many of us had our schooldays made the more bearable by the warmth injected into them by this new experience. If you didn't listen to these tracks as a kid, then you should have encountered them over the ensuing years. If not, then I urge you to fill the hole in your experience by listening to them now. And if you are familiar with the originals, then you will want to hear the music with a series of sound veils removed. They have never sounded remotely as good as this. A bonus is the magnificent alternative take to *Drop That Sack* – a jazz classic indeed.

Dave Bennett has spent countless hours of hair-splitting to produce unlimited versions of each of these tracks over a period of years and now has finally selected what he considers to be the best version of each one. Look forward to the later Hot Fives, the Hot Sevens and the Oliver's to come.

E-mail blackbird@waitrose.com to order.

Steve Voce



**LOUIS ARMSTRONG
TOWN HALL CONCERT PLUS**

Rockin' Chair; Ain't Misbehavin'; Back O' Town Blues; Long, Long Journey; I Want A Little Girl; Mahogany Hall Stomp; Pennies From Heaven; St. James Infirmary; Save It, Pretty Mama; Someday You'll Be Sorry; Sugar; Snafu (37.20)

Collectively: Armstrong, Bobby Hackett, Charlie Shaver (†); Jack Teagarden, Vic Dickenson, Kid Ory (†b); Barney Bigard, Peanuts

CRITICS' CHOICE

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

Avishai Cohen	1970	Sony 88985462022
Roy Eldridge/Richie Kamuca	At The Half Note New York City	Sounds Of Yester Year 2079
Dizzy Gillespie	Live At Singer Concert Hall	Fondamenta 1704028
Edmond Hall/Ralph Sutton	Live At Club Hangover	Sounds Of Yester Year 2076
Stacey Kent	I Know I Dream/The Orchestral Sessions	Sony 88985462882
Volker Kriegel	Spectrum	MPS 0212413MSW
Kim Myhr	You/Me	Hubro 2593
Buddy Rich	The Channel One Set	Lightyear Entertainment
Shorty Rogers And His Giants	A Rendezvous With	Sounds Of Yester Year 2073
John Taylor Trio	Decipher	MPS 0212425MSW

Hucko, Jimmy Hamilton (cl); Charlie Beal, Dick Cary, Billy Strayhorn, Duke Ellington, Johnny Guarneri (p); Allan Reuss, Reno Palmieri (g); Ernie Caceres, Bud Scott (bar); Red Callender, Bob Haggart, Al Hall, Chubby Jackson (b); Sid Catlett, Cozy Cole, Minor Hall, Zutty Singleton (d); Don Byas (ts); Johnny Hodges (as). NYC, 1946-1947.

RCA LPM 1443, vinyl
★★★★★

The first three tracks on each side of this LP have Louis Armstrong at something like his considerable very best. The Town Hall concert in NYC of 1947 presented a band that really were all stars. The combo are in commanding form on *Rockin' Chair* where Louis and his top sidekick Jack Teagarden sing and play their way through, hamming it up on the vocals but playing incisive solos on trumpet and trombone respectively. *Ain't Misbehavin'* benefits from a driving, uptempo reading sparked by Big Sid, his spurs and accents spot on and the swing guaranteed. *Back O' Town Blues* is equally impressive with Louis singing and Bobby Hackett playing delightful fill-in lines behind him. Even so the final trumpet solo by Louis puts the piece to bed in style. On side two it is more of the same high quality traditional jazz with Armstrong showing his supreme trumpet mastery on *Pennies* followed by a sombre, well-crafted *St. James Infirmary*. *Save It Pretty Mama* wraps up these top selections from the NYC Town Hall in style – uptempo, Louis soaring, Teagarden on top form and Big Sid driving hard as only he could.

The extra six tracks are very good but the Town Hall six are some of Armstrong's finest recorded music. The rating is for those pieces because they alone are worth more than five. One gem on the other tracks is *Long, Long Journey* with Louis swapping

choruses with the likes of Shavers, Hodges and Don Byas with Duke on piano. Sterling stuff from purepleasure records.com.

Derek Ansell

**ANDREW BAIN
EMBODIED HOPE**

Accompaniment; Hope; Practice; Responsibility; Surprise; Listening; Trust; Hope (Reprise) (60.03)

Jon Irabagon (ts); George Colligan (p); Michael Janisch (b); Bain (d). Windcraft Studios, Cotswolds, 11 November 2016.

Whirlwind 4715
★★★

Here's a quartet that knows exactly what it's doing. All four musicians are inevitably accomplished, but what separates them from the contemporary jazz pack is the speed of their responses. This is a skill that no amount of schooling can teach, and is evident on the aptly-titled *Surprise*, where changes in tempo are negotiated with consummate ease, most notably by Irabagon, and Bain shows himself to be an integrated rather than a grand-standing leader.

Bain's compositions and arrangements are nicely tailored for these musicians, although as is so often the case these days they're not thematically strong. The lengthy *Hope* is the exception that proves the rule, and it's a tribute to the quartet's skills that inspiration doesn't flag over 12 minutes. That said, Irabagon doesn't pace himself too well.

Trust has a ruminative air which serves as a nice contrast to the often over-busy music which is this quartet's staple. Colligan is expansive in his accompaniment for Irabagon's flight and the compositional demands keep the music flowing nicely while contrivance is happily avoided.

Nic Jones



**BAHLA
IMPRINTS**

Nigun Simcha; The Paths Of Sirkeci/Pasha; Piyut; Pierogi; Imprints; Aman; Beneath Soreles Cradle; Masah (48.05)

Inês Loubet (v); Tal Janes (g); Joseph Costi (p, kyb, org); Andrea Di Biase (b); Ben Brown (d, pc). Wales, 16-18 December 2016.

Bahla Records 246
★★★

While most JJ readers would be able to make an educated if probably sardonic guess at what "cinematic jazz" means, perhaps fewer would know that it now comprises a category with capital letters. Bahla subscribes to it. Film music tends to be just grouting, or paste without the tiles: in other words, a reminder of what's missing. But that's not what's meant by "cinematic jazz" in this case, though there are parallels in the way much of it alludes to narrative. Its use of samples of recorded live jazz (as we know it), sequencing, and polystylism is possibly the best example of how jazz in its conventional guise has been operating beyond the perimeters for longer than many of us would care to admit.

Bahla's self-released debut album adds multiculturalism to the mix, the quintet having been formed by Venezuelan pianist Costi and British guitarist Janes, who discovered a mutual interest