

Jazz/Worldbeat

All reviews based on a five star rating system

Jan Garbarek Twelve Moons (ECM/BMG)

If you haven't heard the Norwegian saxophonist for a few lunar orbits, *Twelve Moons* is the place to get back in touch. Sure, all of Jan Garbarek's records pit his keening soprano or ruminative tenor against icy Nordic backdrops, but this one's exciting because it covers all the territory he's staked out in the past two decades. With German pals Eberhard Weber and Rainer Brüninghaus on liquid bass and piano, and percussion chores bouncing from Manu Katché to Marilyn Mazur, the tunes range from hypnotic minor-key vamps ("Brother Wind March") recalling Garbarek's days with Keith Jarrett to affectionate revivals of old Norse folk tunes, as in Edvard Grieg's "Arietta" and songs featuring traditional vocalists Agnes Buen Garnås or Mari Boine. The long title composition suggests the cinematic sweep of his work for Greek film composer Eleni Karaindrou, and the set even closes with a reprise of the late Jim Pepper's "Witchi-Tai-To", first recorded for one of Garbarek's earliest albums. By integrating these styles into a seamless and intoxicating whole, the moody, self-taught saxist has created more than a gorgeously recorded retrospective: it's a launch-pad for twenty more years of polar exploration.

Jazz Kings Love & Liberté (Columbia/Sony)

These savvy French wanderers are down a few members and searching for a new sound. That means an unfortunate move towards bland posturing a la Ottmar Liebert, but instrumentals like “Guitarra Negra” and “Ritmo de la Noche” still pack a flamenco kick. Maybe if they make enough money from this filler-fest, they’ll go back to their pre-“growth” best.

aterial Hallucination Engine

(Axiom/PolyGram)

You never know who Bill Laswell will round up for his next Material excursion; the oh-so-New York bassist even combined out-there sax-man Archie Shepp with Whitney Houston for an early-’80s cut! This time he has regulars like Zakir Hussein, Aiyb Deing, Trilok Gurtu, and Sly Dunbar in the percussion section, along with Bernie Worrell on keyboards, and Simon Shaheen, Shankar, Bootsy Collins, and Nicky Skopelitis on various stringed instruments. It’s much the same lineup as on the latter guitarist’s last Axiom album, Ekstasis, and it continues that record’s fixation on things Egyptian. Sometimes the connection is direct, with Fahim Dandan’s swirling Arabic vocals, but even when Wayne Shorter swoops in with a sax solo, on the opening “Black Light”, or William S. Burroughs drops by to give “Words of Advice”, instruments like oud, ney, and ganoun keep percolating in the background. That may sound pretty dense, but the disc is actually characterized by a spacious, Weather Report-like sound—this is made explicit on a re-do of Joe Zawinul’s “Cucumber Slumber” and an airy update of John Coltrane’s “Naima”. Reggae, African, and Eno-esque electronics also float through the crystalline mix, making this both the edgiest and the most accessible Material set yet.

ABKAS BABKAS

(Songlines)

The name’s an acronym, based on the first and last initials of altoist Briggan Krauss, drummer Aaron Alexander, and guitarist Brad Schoepach. It also implies something about the controlled babble of sounds welling up from this recently formed Seattle threesome (although the latter two, known for their work with singer Jay Clayton, are New York-bound). Managing to combine jazz and New Music sensibilities with refreshing vigour and visceral spontaneity, the fifteen cuts (with evocative names like “Clang”, “Czugy Stodel”, and “Big Bird Razor”) on their 67-minute debut disc run a surprising gamut of angular improvisations, quirky, John Zorn-type formalism, and smooth bebop-fusion (like the long opener, “Your Sign Here”). There’s even a stately reading of “Hungarian Dance #20”, by that old swinger Johannes Brahms. Some of the freer pieces could be pruned of group noodling, but Krauss’s probing, vibratoless sax is engaging throughout, and Alexander fuels the affair with effortless, and restrained, versatility. And Schoepach’s tense, swirling electronics could draw fans of the guitar atmospherics of Bill Frisell, David Torn, and Allan Holdsworth. Heck, commercial jazz stations might even play this.

at Hendrix Before the Rain

(Lion's Gate)

For about a decade, Kat Hendrix has provided the spacious-sounding drums for Vancouver's Skywalk. His first solo venture finds him still thumping artfully in the fusion field, with able accompaniment from hornmen Tom Colclough and Vince Mai, as well as Skywalk synth-man Miles Black. All the players contribute tunes to the clear-sounding, self-produced disc, but there isn't one you're likely to remember. Mainly, it comes across as a pleasant soundtrack in search of a TV series that's already been cancelled.

astern Rebellion Simple Pleasure

(MusicMasters/BMG)

Pianist Cedar Walton and drummer Billy Higgins are the constants in this irregular neo-bop group, which now boasts bassist David Williams and English reed-player Ralph Moore. They play extra-pretty on ballads on "My Ideal" and "Theme for Ernie", and step up the tempo on some bluesy-funky originals. The pacing, however, is a bit on the slack side, and the record is enervated by a staid polish that invites admiration, not replays.

ill Frisell This Land

(Elektra/WEA)

continues his
same
Little Faith in
prairie howls, this
afternoon beers.
Americans" and
ride will be
Byron and Billy

In which the Seattle guitar auteur (guitteur?)
musical cruise across America, with much the
passengers. But where the previous Have a
Me was all spacious sunsets and midnight
one is about changing tires and grabbing
Titles like "Amarillo Barbados", "Unscientific
"Jimmy Carter (Parts 1 and 2)" tell you that the
a bumpy, noisy, jocular one. Reed-men Don
Drewes and trombonist Curtis Fowlkes have

no trouble
the David
angular,
a cut called
plenty of gas
question, Bill: Are we

shifting gears from the polka frenzy of “Rag” to
Lynch misterioso of “Strange Meeting” or the
buzzing modernism jazzers would expect from
“Julius Hemphill”. The guitarist (at left) has
and maps be damned. Just one more
there yet?

Stanley Turrentine *If I Could Tell You*

(MusicMaster Jazz/BMG)

One of the most overlooked tenormen of the fertile '60s and crossover '70s, Stanley Turrentine has lately roared back to form, if not innovation. In fact, his spate of releases for the MusicMasters Jazz label, complete with old pals like flutist Hubert Laws, bassist Ron Carter, and pianist Roland Hanna, intentionally recalls Creed Taylor's CTI label, albeit with exceedingly ugly covers. The funky “June Bug”, Evans-dedicated “I Remember Bill”, and 15-minute, Latinate “Caravan” are ensemble standouts. Still, there's little satisfaction here you couldn't get from a reissue of Sugar or any other, earlier Turrentine opus.

Peter Delano *Peter Delano*

(Verve/PolyGram)

This absurdly young New York pianist—he'll be 18 this year—is bristling with enough talent to attract major sax-men like Michael Brecker and Gary Bartz to his big-label debut. He's equally at home in an ensemble romp like “Miles' Mode” or lush solo rhapsodies like the closing “Reminiscence”. In between, though, some of his slower melodies are muddy, and Delano can get pretty vague in the rhythmic department. That chestnut- of-chestnuts, “Autumn Leaves”, usually lopes at a nostalgic gait, but the young pianist fumbles it distractedly; perhaps a lack of accumulated memories is the problem.

Shuffle Demons *Extra Crispy*

(Stubby)

The Shuffle Demons's latest offering is strictly for people who think jazz is some kind of goofy novelty act, and that titles like “Deli Tray”, “The Funkin' Pumpkin” and “Reggae

Man” (featuring a vaguely Polish-Rasta accent from drummer Stich Wynston) are inherently funny. Maybe if the band, currently a quintet, would just shut up and play music, they might be okay, but by the time the thinly recorded, over-70-minute disc gets to its long closing instrumentals, the welcome mat is worn through by inane, baggy-pants posturing and tiresome (as in just-plain-bad) vocalising. And what does it say about these alleged composers that their best new songs were written by Gordon Lightfoot (“The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald”, done Celtic-style) and a TV-show hack (“Hawaii 5-0”)? Extra Crispy? I think they’re done.

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