

Jazz Picks

GREG DRYGALA PICKS SOME RECENTLY RELEASED JAZZ FAVOURITES

MARIO ROM'S INTERZONE

Everything is Permitted

Traumton 705304462225



Austrian trio Interzone is run by trumpeter Mario Rom, who composed six of the ten pieces on this disc; three

more come from band-mate and bass player Lukas Kranzelbinder. (The final track is the Bernie Wayne classic *Blue Velvet*.) The sound throughout is fresh and vivid, showing great artistic imagination. From the first note, the opening trumpet solo's straightforward bright tone takes no prisoners, and the section working hard behind shows the same unstoppable vitality. It's hard to believe that such a wall of sound really comes from just three musicians.

Every band member has the room to show their individual skills in the slow compositions, and they do it brilliantly, without any showing off. The title piece mixes lovely Balkan harmonies with the best Jazz traditions, reminding me very much of Miles' blowing on the *Lift to the Scaffold* (*Elevator to the Gallows*) film score, with similar madness lurking in the rhythm section, and the feeling of something suspicious about to happen, just behind a corner.

The track *Bill Lee*, with its spooky percussion sounds and drunken trumpet, recalls Jim Jarmusch's *Down by Low*, another excellent dark movie soundtrack, with a mood somehow between The Lounge Lizards and Tom Waits' sonic universes. The classic closing theme is again inextricably linked with movie memories, but when Angelo Badalamenti's sophisticated arrangement will keep forever Isabella Rossellini's face in my mind, Mario Rom's approach would find me asking Juliette Binoche to come to the dance floor of the transatlantic ship from Giuseppe Tornatore's iconic *The legend of 1900*.

THE SIRKIS/BIALAS INTERNATIONAL QUARTET

Come to Me

Stonebird Productions B00PF81D12



This impressive project, co-led by an Israeli drummer and a Polish singer, brings together a warm romantic tradition with a

nostalgic journey through jazz landscapes. The International Quartet here is completed by British keyboard player Frank Harrison and American bassist Patrick Bettison, both of which make an important contribution. But the core co-operation here is the mesmerising connection between Sylwia Bialas and Asaf Sirkis, who listen to each other very closely and carefully, with outstanding results.

The lyrics here are all in Polish (a translation is available in the liner notes) and are more like short poems than songs. As Polish is my native language I take the words very much to heart, but am curious to know how they would appeal to an international audience. I certainly understand the romantic nature of the poems, whose Polish folk and classical music traditions are perhaps comparable to Schubert Lieders, whose feelings and emotions now belong to every human being. Bialas' gentle alto voice creates a very intimate structure, and the trio accompanies her with great sensitivity, but it can be even more challenging when her voice is presented in purely instrumental terms. Here she dialogues with Sirkis' drums as well as the bass and piano, which often closely repeat her lines.

Nostalgia is constantly present, and the bass lines often set a mood that reminds me of the 1970s. But 40 years on, nothing is the same; hence this modern approach. The so called new is always harvesting from the past, but the most important thing is to find the seeds of creativity inside one's own soul.

ASAF SIRKIS TRIO

The Monk

SAM Productions 8015948090152



This is an earlier recording from the trio, dating back to 2008, but I was tempted to revisit it due to its electric instrumental line-

up. I rate Sirkis highly for his versatility and his bravery to jump into different territories: exploring, learning and adding even more variety into his artillery of expression. *The Monk* is altogether more minimal than other music I know from him, and is not even particularly rooted only in jazz. Careful listening, however, helped me discover many connections between the band members, and I have to admit that I am still learning more and more from this disc.

Compositionwise it shows great maturity. Asaf's drumming creates very three dimensional structures on which the guitar notes find a foundation. It reminds me of climbing, where one wouldn't survive without other's belaying. Asaf's compatriot, bass player Yaron Stavi, supplies a tight 'walking' core for the rampant rides that Greek guitarist Tassos Spiliotopoulos brings to the party.

The music is a blend of many schools, and keeps challenging those listeners prepared to look for and find loose ends and knots. An interesting view comes on a piece called *Alone*, on which guest drummer Adriano Adewale takes the leader's stool, and clearly shows the importance and fragility of a percussion framework. *The Monk* touches my imagination; its strongest point is the way it changes new layers of engagement into listening pleasure. I'm interested in hearing more music from this trio, to discover whether their music has any borders.

GREG DRYGALA



**TERENCE BLANCHARD
FEATURING E-COLLECTIVE
Breathless**

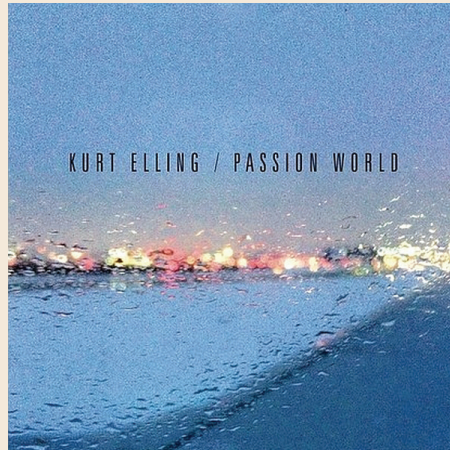
Blue Note

This is Blanchard's second great project since his return to Blue Note two years ago, with the *Magnetic* session I reviewed in 2013. Despite an apparent lack of recordings he's always busy, and has even recorded a so far unreleased jazz opera.

Here, he has assembled the E-Collective band to explore a world of groovy fusions, funky harmonies and R&B plethora. Right from the opening bars, the version of Les McCann's standard *Comparing to What* rides straight over the unsuspecting listener's head and takes no prisoners. With the phrasing of the trumpet howling and the band following in a funky manner, P.J. Morton's vocal brings to mind Prince and The Revolution at their best. Even his voice has a similar timbre. And I've not even mentioned the choirs, which will come as a real surprise to the jazz fan,

This is a versatile and eclectic project that is really easy to enjoy, and the more time spent listening to it reveals ever greater intellectual layers. Even for the dance-floor there is plenty that is fit for purpose. As always with Blanchard I like both his respect for tradition and his rare ability to make things sound fresh, even discounting his spectacular skills as an arranger.

It is often difficult to handle controversial subjects, but for me this recording is an absolute revelation and the most important thing in American popular music since the Rap movement in the 1980s ultimately spawned groups like Public Enemy. The meaning here is similar, but the texture is rather different.



**KURT ELLING
Passion World**

Concord Jazz

This American singer is well known across the world for his extended songbooks, touching many subjects including, naturally, love. He certainly knows enough about it to make a dedicated album, but this goes far beyond the normal boundaries of love songs. It embraces passion, and also gathers influences from many cultures to round off the complexity of human affection.

It uses songs from around the world, sometimes with original lyrics, like the Scottish *Loch Tay Boat Song*, or U2's *Where The Streets Have No Name*. Those perfect examples have cultural contexts deeply anchored in tradition, but the artist's makeover give them a completely new life, and to take things even further he often sings in original languages, like Portuguese *Voce Ja Foi A Bahia*, or Spanish *Si Te Contara*. That gives the listener a chance to explore a song through the specific feelings of various nations.

From love's first discovery, through a routine of sadness to the mature acceptance of the life as it is, this miraculous album is not only a journey through life and love's twisted paths, but also explores many of the differences of human nature. The complexity of life meets the complexity of the various Jazz styles mixed together here – too many to list, but enough to show Jazz's incredible vitality and ability to blend with everything else (just like love and life). And he didn't even scat once.



**GERARDO NUNEZ
Jazzpaña Live**

ACT Music 614427958525

This year's *Jazzpaña Live* project is something very special in ACT Music's catalogue: essentially a return to the label's roots. The original idea on which the whole concept was created was proved so right and was so well received that it won a German Grammy award in 1992, and again in Y2k when the second act called *Jazzpaña II* appeared. Now it has been revived again some 15 years later: when the Live tour hit the festivals its success was guaranteed. What started as a fusion of Jazz and Flamenco Nuevo stars two decades back has continued to evolve, as has life itself, but it has never lost its freshness or natural vitality.

Without getting into the details, it's obvious that the world we live in now has no borders. Whether it's Flamenco, Fiesta, Sol, or all the Jazz styles, it's all there: sparkling, vivid and communicating with today's listener. With a line up based on familiar and highly eloquent names, the entire band is like a bulldozer going through a young forest. Simply unstoppable.

When I bought the original *Jazzpaña* when it first appeared I was just undergoing transition from rock music moth to Jazz butterfly. It opened my mind and shaped me, so today, as I am writing these words, I cannot be more grateful.