

TIM LAPTHORN TRIO
Natural Language

Basho SRCD 9-2
Pianist Laphorn graduated from the Guildhall in 2000 and often accompanies singers on the London scene. I've liked his animation and attack but sensed that he could do much more so this trio recording is especially welcome. He works here with bassist Tom Herbert and Pat Levett on drums, their compatibility evident from bar one of 'Loopy', a Laphorn original whose stuttering theme has a touch of Monk about it. I guess that great stylist would also have approved of Laphorn's stately take on 'Hard Times', a Ray Charles blues, spacious and calm. 'Loose Connection', again by Laphorn, has a funkier strut and might appeal to someone like Junior Mance. Laphorn's album is likeable all the way through, hard swinging and fluent when it has to be, but reflective in the Jarrett manner when the mood dictates. I'll be playing it lots. You should too. (PV)

SAXOPHONE SUMMIT
Gathering Of Spirits

Telarc CD-83607
Perhaps the reaction to this album, which features three of today's top saxophonists, depends on what one expects. If, as I did, you are looking for the latest in the line of tenor saxophone duels, you will be disappointed. The awesome talents of Michael Brecker, Joe Lovano and Dave Liebman are slanted more towards post-Coltrane sounds, understandable enough given their backgrounds; even the opener, based on a familiar chord sequence, finds Liebman on his favourite soprano and they never get stuck into each other. The trio perform well enough, but I couldn't suppress the hope that Wardell Gray and Dexter Gordon were just around the corner. (RA)

STAN SULZMANN
Jigsaw

Basho SRCD 10-2
Marc Copland, that gently dominant American pianist who seems to have

distilled essences of Jarrett and Hancock in ways completely his own, has been sharing a musical relationship with British saxophonist Stan Sulzmann for a long time - and has apparently concluded from the experience that Sulzmann is one of the underrated sax giants of the world jazz scene. All the evidence for that contention is on this fine session featuring the Jigsaw quartet - the two toured the UK with this music recently, though the lineup here has Americans Larry Grenadier on bass and Bill Stewart on drums. If you were expecting only reflective, private music from the evidence of Sulzmann's and Copland's previous meetings, forget it. A lot of this is hard-hitting postbop in the Brecker manner, with some very personal takes on the whimsically serpentine style of Wayne Shorter too. The most meditative piece is the Kenny Wheeler composition of the title track, but its underlying rigour and elegance is characteristic of the whole set. Stan Sulzmann might have taken a while building his reputation as a true

original rather than a workmanlike expert, but this album definitely clinches it. (JF)

ALL NIGHT LONG
Original Soundtrack

Harkit HRKCD 8095
Film expert David Meeker thought this 1961 UK movie 'ludicrous' but the soundtrack more than compensates for any narrative shortcomings, on the evidence of this re-mastered presentation. Notable for the on-screen presence of Charles Mingus and Dave Brubeck, the film boasted a lively score (predominantly) by Philip Green and performed by 'about two thirds of the entire (British) modern jazz world', according to Benny Green's notes. The sheer élan of many of these tracks quite takes the breath away, with local heroes like Tubby Hayes (vibes and tenor), John Dankworth (on his own 'Fall Guy) and the impeccable altoist Johnny Scott seizing the moment in these often programmatic and sometimes fragmentary pieces. Mingus is heard

making tracks



briefly, once, and Brubeck appears at greater length, clunky as ever, on 'Raggy Waltz', with crystalline trumpet from Bert Courtney and more fine alto from Scott. Forget the film - just dig the music. (PV)

KENNY WHEELER/JOHN TAYLOR
Where Do We Go From Here?

CamJazz CAMJ 7764-2
Incredibly, Kenny Wheeler is approaching his 75th birthday. Those unfamiliar with his prolifically imaginative playing and composing over the years might conclude that the occasional hesitations and ambiguities on this duo session with pianist John Taylor are therefore simply signs of the times. But Wheeler's trumpet and flugelhorn playing have never operated in Maynard Ferguson territory, or even Dizzy Gillespie's. The Toronto-born trumpeter has spent a lifetime searching for ways to make jazz more subtly expressive, and he's as eloquent at it now as he has ever been.

Wheeler and Taylor converse on ten songs here, mostly their own compositions. On the face of it, the atmosphere is mostly fragile and delicate, with a strong classical undertow furnished by Taylor's broad tastes, but there's an underlying intensity to these exchanges that gives the album immense character. The two play sly call-and-response on

Miles Davis

The Complete Seven Steps To Heaven

(Columbia C7K90840)

Just when you thought you could safely ignore another Miles box, along come the complete 1963-64 recordings. Except for the studio-recorded set alluded to in the title (*Seven Steps To Heaven*), this is exclusively 'live' material and the original album names say it all: *In Europe*, *My Funny Valentine*, *Four And More*, *In Tokyo* and *In Berlin* are each classics. For those who still remember the excitement of these items when they were new (the last two as exotic imports), perhaps it's no surprise that the adventurous rhythm-section is still exciting - thanks to Herbie Hancock, Ron Carter and Tony Williams all extending the roles of their predecessors. As a result, Miles himself took on a new lease of life, and responded thrillingly to the challenges thrown at him.

It proves to be no disadvantage at all that the repertoire is mostly that of his previous quintets or that some tunes are repeated, including 'Milestones' and 'So What' both taken far faster than the originals. The only new material is the three British compositions from the studio session (pianist Victor Feldman's 'Joshua' and 'Seven Steps' also showing up in live, and again faster, versions). But there's also the variety achieved by using George Coleman on the earlier sessions, the then unknown Sam Rivers on the Tokyo set and the arrival of Wayne Shorter in Berlin. He's also the star of a 'Stella By Starlight' that's one of the previously unissued tracks. (BP)



'Squiggles', the title track is a tentative dance that gathers momentum as its postponed theme emerges, and there's even a track of trumpet overdubs so attractive you could have wished for more of it. Two improvising giants in imaginative harmony. (JF)

GRAND PIANO

The Lion/Ewell/Hopkins/Thompson

Sackville SK2CD-5011

This double-CD reissue is like a mini compendium of pre-bop piano styles, with the duo of Willie 'The Lion' Smith and Don Ewell representing the exuberance of stride, Claude Hopkins the transition from stride to swing, and Sir Charles Thompson the benefits of a Tatum-Teddy Wilson education.

With three vinyl albums, newly conflated into one CD, this is quite a package. Smith and Ewell were in exhilarating form in Toronto back in '67, mentor and pupil as one, no fumbling or unhappy collisions, just a case of mutual kinship at work or more properly, at play. Hopkins enjoyed a long career as a bandleader of consequence, only blossoming as a soloist in his late years. He plays in a reflective, melodic manner, each piece calmly considered, the embellishments quite subtle, with no flamboyance or loose edges. He can play convincing stride, too, as on his own 'Crazy Fingers' and neat blues. Unlike the others, Sir Charles lives on but is retired. Caught solo in '84, his attack is

more immediate, as on his timeless 'Robbin's Nest', the harmonies denser, the Basieish right hand crisp and swinging. (PV)

PETE CHURCHILL/BOBBY WELLINS

The Bad and the Beautiful

33Jazz107

Pianist Pete Churchill, Mark Murphy's favourite British accompanist and highly respected guru of so many London musical situations, finally steps out front with his own thing. For me, this is the most exciting vocal album since David Tugham's *Just in Time* last year. What's to like? First, Churchill's voice - warm, with a casual, lived-in feel, slightly lazy and laid back. I'll bet he likes Hoagy and Mose; but he doesn't try to sound like them. Second, he's a marvellous piano player without seeming to have supersonic chops - so much meaning lies in the placing of the chords behind his vocal lines. Third, an absolutely stunning rhythm pairing of Steve Watts (bass) and Dave Wickens (drums) who, together with the leader, provide the perfect platform for the great Bobby Wellins performing at the peak of his powers.

Just check Wellins' unique cry as he enters on 'Going Back To Joe's' and then the sheer swing of his playing over Wickens's subtle shuffle after it segues into 'Learning The Blues', with Watt's walking bass line locking the whole thing together. Catch the cheeky back beat groove on Ellington's 'Lucky

So and So' as well, it makes you want to grin like a fool. Churchill writes good songs. 'I've Made Up My Mind' is a jazzy waltz, and the lovely ballad 'Ocean' once again brings out the best in Wellins. They even take on 'Nice 'N Easy', redolent of the '60s sub-Sinatra club scene, and win. Now, that really takes some doing. (BB)

GWYNETH HERBERT

Bitter Sweet & Blue

Universal UCL9867896

Another British jazzy singer who shuffles the Broadway songbook and some hip-sounding contemporary input from classy pop and the odd quirky original? Well, as she indicated when she first dropped a demo disc on former Dean Street Pizza Express music boss Peter Wallis, Gwyneth Herbert is definitely not reducible to a major-label jazz-revival marketing formula. Herbert gets inside songs with an intelligent sensitivity that revives old ones and makes the unfamiliar jump out of the speakers, and her voice is both as elegantly and jazzily sumptuous as Jane Monheit's and as low-light and subtly nuanced as Diana Krall's. This powerful debut mixes classics like 'Fever' with Portishead's 'Glorious', Tom Waits' 'Looking For The Heart of Saturday Night', standards including 'The Very Thought of You', and three good originals. Nigel Hitchcock and guitarist John Parricelli feature in a punchy band. Herbert has definitely come to stay. (JF)

GILAD ATZMON

Musik - Rearranging the 20th Century

ENJA TIP 8888482

The Orient House Ensemble's predecessor to this album, 2003's very successful *Exile*, had to be a very hard act to follow. With his new disc, the resourceful British-resident reedman has confirmed that he doesn't believe in letting time stand still. The haunting Palestinian singer Reem Kelani isn't present for this one, but Atzmon has recruited Argentinian singer Guillermo Rozenthuler to catch a Latin vibe without a Latin cliché in sight, and that national treasure Robert Wyatt guests for one track, reflecting on the possibility that the devil invented bebop ('beelzebop') and in the process definitely ensured that he had the best tunes.

Some of the pieces have a dolorous, Kurt Weillian lonely-cafe feel, some whirl like a tango session on *Come Dancing* fuelled by some fearsome illegal stimulant. Atzmon, a brilliant jazz virtuoso, is sometimes yearning and Coltrane-like on soprano sax, sometimes jaunty and amiable as a wedding-band player. 'Roll Out The Barrel' bursts out of noisy street-scene sounds, 'Mac The Knife' turns into a New Orleans jam session, and Atzmon somehow makes a contemporary phenomenon out of 'Lili Marlene'. It's more uneven than the triumphant *Exile*, and the leader's own intonation of his poetry might be for his most fanatical followers only. But nobody occupies his own ground as idiosyncratically and convincingly, and he's a free spirit we all need. (JF)

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Reviews by Ronald Atkins, John Fordham, Pete Martin, Peter Vacher, Chris Yates.

JazzUK's Indie Files

A regular news and info guide to the output of the UK jazz independents.

THREE UPBEAT CDs released in October display the continuity of New Orleans music. URCD 197 *A Portrait of George Lewis from Bergundy Street to Berlin*, showcases the singing clarinet of the New Orleans master and includes previously unissued material from 1959. URCD 1987 *The Lost 1954 Royal Festival Hall Tapes - Ken Colyer's Jazzmen and Skiffle Group*, represents more from the well-documented band that included Chris Barber and Monty Sunshine. URCD 196 *Sunset at Sand Bay*, is from a Weston Super Mare 2000 session and features the Ken Colyer Trust Band with ex-Colyer clarinetist Ian Wheeler keeping the flame burning. (CY)