

CODA

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CANADA'S
JAZZ
MAGAZINE

Michelle Grégoire

Reaching the national stage
with her debut disc

Denny Zeitlin

Psychiatry and solo piano

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CHAD MAKELA QUARTET

Flicker
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BRAD TURNER QUARTET

What Is
MAXIMUM JAZZ MAX 16972

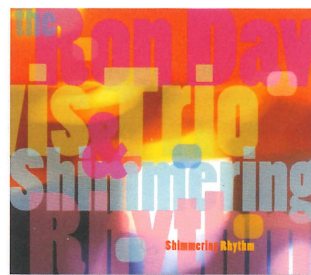
Baritone saxophonist Chad Makela makes his debut with *Flicker*, recorded live at Vancouver's Cellar jazz club. He's got a highly individual sound on an often cumbersome instrument: his light, quick-moving approach and corkscrew lines owe more to players like Coltrane, Ornette Coleman and Joe Lovano than to the obvious baritone models. Without a harmony instrument in the group, Makela and trumpeter Brad Turner feed off the deft grooves set up by bassist Paul Rushka and drummer Jesse Cahill—Turner slicing pertly into the music like a stone skipping over water, Makela pushing at it hard from the inside. Two trio tracks take the music temporarily off the boil, giving each horn-player a chance to shine: Turner's feature is a likeable if slightly cute and overlong "My Ideal," while Makela's original "Seventh Day Rain" is one of the disc's finest moments: a gently-unfolding rubato ballad of the sort Coltrane used to include on his Impulse albums, though in Makela's hands it almost feels like a blues. The rest of the album is fleet and buoyant, right down to the closing sprint through Lovano's dizzy post-Ornette line "Uprising." Makela is clearly a name to watch.

Turner's new album, *What Is*, is his third with his usual rhythm section of pianist Bruno Hubert, bassist André Lachance and drummer Dylan van der Schyff; as it happens it too was recorded at the Cellar, though it's been released by Maximum Jazz rather than the club's house label. Turner has always been a chameleon: a trumpeter, pianist and drummer, comfortable anywhere from jazz's mainstream to its outer edges, not to mention the deafening fusion of Metalwood. Even on the same instrument and within the idiom he can sound quite different depending on the context: the darker, more vulnerable sensibility of *What Is* seems the work of an entirely different character than the whimsical trumpeter of *Flicker*. On the surface the music is quite rhythmically active, but Turner's originals nonetheless grow out of floating, lushly chorded harmonies and a slow-burning melancholy, the mood gradually warming and deepening over the course of the entire performance. There's often a striking contrast between the leader's long-lined solos, full of peals and throbs in the manner of Miles Davis or Booker Little, and Hubert's more fragmented improvisations, constructed out of expansive lyric gestures cut down to emphasize rhythm rather than melody. Just to keep you on your toes, though, Turner dips into his free-jazz bag on "Second Son" in the company of van der Schyff, one of the movers and shakers of the Vancouver avant-garde scene. Both *Flicker* and *What Is*, different as they are, offer fine examples of Turner's playing; followers of Vancouver's fertile jazz scene will want both discs.

NATE DORWARD

Christensen is a pedestrian walking on Lateef's sidewalk, only that he's not necessarily after the highwire energy that informs the New York School's poets and painters to whom he dedicates this recording. Instead, his use of form comes in a flowing, non-linear variety of shapes and sizes. Perfect for this wandering is Satoshi Takeishi, who long ago found freedom from the trap set's rhythmic forwardness. Here Takeishi melds into the ensemble, making declarative bumps that don't imply musical progress so much as they illuminate motion. It's purposeful, but it's not destined for one (or even two) melodic or harmonic locations. Nary a kick drum booms across the album. Christensen and his reeds-wielding sidekick Walt Weiskopf stray around rhythmic assertions, paying close attention to Kermit Driscoll's likeminded bass as they work together flying function over form, a displaying of rhythmic decenteredness that coaxes the ear away from structures. It's part free-bop, part global-jazz.

ANDREW BARTLETT



Ron Davis Trio & Shimmering Rhythm

Shimmering Rhythm
DAVINOR 3455

Can music evoke an era without referring directly to a stylistic landmark or dominant trendsetter? Toronto pianist Ron Davis's ambitious *Shimmering Rhythm* appears to flit through several periods and styles—pre-jazz, bop, Third Stream, hard bop—although the composer and his arranger, Tania Gill, avoid any blatant plagiarism. Sure, there's a hint of Gershwin in the use of raggy piano and klezmerish clarinet, and a dollop of Gunther Schuller in the shadowing of strings and reeds behind the core piano trio. But Davis is largely his own man here, and his collaboration with Gill—who arranged all 12 pieces—is in service of a personal, albeit nostalgic, vision.

Two traditional Passover songs, both featuring vocals by Davis' elderly father, set a timeless, melancholy mood, and Sasha Boychouk's haunting work on various reeds keeps the traditions of Eastern Europe in the foreground. Although it is less evident than the phrasing and tonality of Boychouk's clarinet, there is also something curiously old-fashioned about Davis's approach to piano, too. Again, it's not so much a stylistic thing as it is an attitude—one lacking in postmodern

irony. His is a genuine fascination in things past. Not everything works here; the strings lack a certain energy, and the mix doesn't always serve Davis's piano well when the full ensemble accompanies him. Those things aside, *Shimmering Rhythm* is a unique, heartfelt project whose legitimacy shines through.

JAMES HALE

Mick Rossi

One Block From Planet Earth
OMNITONE 15207

Mick Rossi displays the spirit of adventure that many musicians on today's jazz scene lack. Leading a crack quintet made up of multi-reed player Andy Laster, trumpeter Russ Johnson, bassist Mark Dresser and drummer Charles Descarfino, the pianist utilizes nearly every musical style from his wide-ranging background as a performer within his compositions. A regular at the Knitting Factory, Rossi's music teases listeners with a series of musical segments that stand almost completely independent of one another, yet somehow work together. The quirkiness of "Page X" is reminiscent of the work of Joel Forrester or Philip Johnston, while the sudden segue into a driving 5/4 rhythm provides a solid background for Johnson's turbulent solo. "Henry and Ribs" showcases Lester's gutbucket baritone sax and a diverse piano solo by the leader. "Stasis" is full of twists, acting like its going to evolve into a ballad, shifting suddenly into a blues vehicle for a bar or two, but with wild interplay between the musicians throughout. The finale "Whatever," features a series of alternating duets, with Descarfino ducking in and out behind the soloists. Mick Rossi's remarkable live performance at the Knitting Factory will easily stand the test of time.

KEN DRYDEN

Burton Greene - Roy Campbell Quartet

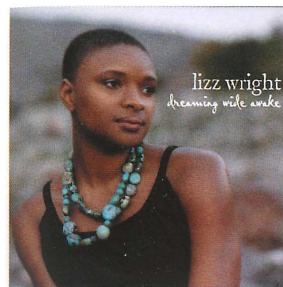
isms out
CIMP 316

There's something about a pair of masters co-leading a quartet. OK, there's everything about that. Pianist Burton Greene and trumpeter Roy Campbell individually have decades of experience playing and leading groups, and together share a dedication to their art that puts them in the upper echelons of the field: they're inventive but melodious, approachable while being energetic.

On their new *isms out*, the pair turn (as the title might be intended to suggest) styles and expectations on their heads. They've both long straddled mainstream and avant successfully, and together manage to run confidently through a variety of styles without being trite or overly referential. The opening "Booker's Lament" is an upbeat bit of Brubeckism which leads to more adventurous ground with Campbell's pinpoint playing on "Careful" and bassist Adam Lane's

moody setting for "Carnival of Mother Kali." Drummer Lou Grassi is unobtrusively anchoring throughout the band's angular grooves and loose strides. Resolving with the brief, muted "Epilogue," the quartet is never lazy or overstimulated, but just plain good.

KURT GOTTSCHALK



Lizz Wright

Dreaming Wide Awake
VERVE FORECAST B000406902

The strum of an acoustic guitar. The gentle pat of a hand drum. I can name that producer in one bar! The big news about Lizz Wright's new CD was in the production booth, and Craig Street is the kind of superstar producer who can upstage his artist with a quiet chord from a Wuritzer piano. And he almost does that with *Dreaming*. All the producer's signatures are here: quiet, roomy arrangements favoring guitars, covers of unlikely Sixties pop tunes ("A Taste of Honey," "Old Man"). Just when you can almost smell the grande lattes, something in Wright's strong, firm voice wakes you from the daydream. While the 24 year-old Georgia native does Street's languid, barefoot thing very well, there's an urgency in that church-trained voice that's subtly at odds with the setting, bright metal amid the gauze and soft cotton. The production will inevitably raise comparisons to Cassandra Wilson's Street-produced hits, but while Wilson is a coy seducer, Wright looks you straight in the eye. Same sound, different approach, and one that makes you anxious to hear the real Lizz Wright, the one we haven't heard yet.

JOHN CHACONA

Kenny Wheeler

What Now?
CAM JAZZ CAM 5005

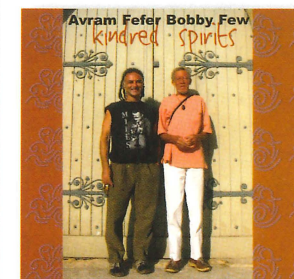
Anyone who believes that intensity needs to be created with some combination of speed or volume or crashing crescendos or grand gestures should be required to listen to *What Now?*. The quartet of the veteran trumpeter Wheeler, pianist John Taylor, tenor saxophonist Chris Potter, and bassist Dave Holland creates intensity through the sheer force of authority in their playing. No cheap tricks. No clichés. Heck, not even a drummer.

The group held a full house spellbound at the Spectrum in Montreal, a club better suited to rock acts, during their performance at the 2003 Montreal

jazz festival, and they bring the same magic to the album, recorded in New York City in June, 2004. The eight Wheeler compositions clock in at 64 minutes, an hour and a fraction of a myriad of subtleties and nuances of mood. Lyricism and deep wellsprings of invention are the strong suits that all the players bring to the music, especially so for the three senior members of the group. This is not to slight Chris Potter; it is testament to his talent that he is in this company—and the bar is very, very high.

Taylor's melodic right hand lines sing in unexpected twists and turns, and his left hand alone could comp for anyone. Holland never doesn't swing, even when he is playing counterpoint to one of the other three and not explicitly playing rhythm. Wheeler's rich tone and puckish melodicism underpin the ethos of the project. Strong, strong stuff.

MIKE CHAMBERLAIN



Avram Fefer / Bobby Few

Kindred Spirits
BOXHOLDER 048

Heavenly Places
BOXHOLDER 049

In releasing these two discs simultaneously, Bobby Few and Avram Fefer invite listeners to explore the full spectrum of possibilities in creative music, connecting the brilliance of Monk, Ellington, and Mingus to the contemporary currents of instant composition. These recordings suggest that theirs is a collaboration as significant to creative music as that of their peers Taylor and Lyons.

To come to grips with this music, start with *Kindred Spirits*. Fefer's reeds (tenor and soprano saxophone, clarinet) and Few's piano offer graceful readings of these compositions, revealing the craftsmanship concealed in the material. Now in his seventies, Bobby Few is one of a rare breed of pianists (Misha Mengelberg is the only other that comes to mind) who can penetrate the logic in Monk's compositions, allowing the colors and tensions in the music to surface without needlessly smoothing the rough edges. Few conjures deep blues roots that sit comfortably alongside the tangy modernism of Thelonious. Fefer likewise loses no time staking his own claim to the territory that these pieces inhabit, charming the ear with his soulful tenor sound. This music has a depth of expression and soul that is unmistakable.

Heavenly Places is the opposite number to *Kindred Spirits*. "Heavenly Places" (composed by Fefer) takes an outbound path from its beginning, firing up the rocket that will carry the performers (and the lucky audience last summer in Antwerp, Belgium) into the wild places that only the adventurous can locate. Few's piano work is tumultuous here, bounding through the music in an unfettered way, pushing Fefer along with tidal intensity, though one should not be too fast in dismissing this as a free music blowout. While ten minutes into "Happy Hour," the hectic pace drops altogether to reveal Fefer's piquant clarinet melodies, the focus and energy level never wavers. Five minutes further into the piece, the two players murmur together like doves. Focus and dynamics are crucial elements in the approach of these players. "Heavenly Places," written in dedication to Oliver Johnson and Wilbur Morris, opens with spartan chording and a restless theme, Fefer's tenor playing conveying the shock of emotional separation. Comparing the two available versions of this composition (it appears in abbreviated form on *Kindred Spirits*) yields some keen contrasts but the live version rules the day, gripping the heart like Billie Holiday with a strength and vulnerability that is startling. Recommended.

STEVE VICKERY

