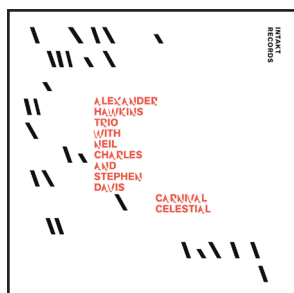


Benedetti's talent for composing and arranging is evident throughout. The laid-back Hawaiian environs of "Tickles" gives way to a sparse John Lee Hooker-like slow burn in "1971". "Magnolias" meanders, returning to the muggy vibes of "Tickles" before seamlessly transitioning into the dreamy "Oh, Hi" and the exquisite "Joe Pass" (a tribute to the legendary guitarist who died almost two decades ago). While this recording leans toward elegance rather than hard-edged bravado, Benedetti's masterful playing is continually on display.

For more info visit lucabenedetti.com. Benedetti's album release concert is at Barbes Aug. 13. See Calendar.



Carnival Celestial
Alexander Hawkins Trio (Intakt)
by Stuart Broomer

English pianist Alexander Hawkins, like contemporaries Kris Davis, Kaja Draksler, Eve Risser and Cory Smythe, is a historically-informed radical, here pressing the traditional jazz piano trio into new terrain. His working trio of Neil Charles (bass) and Stephen Davis (drums) accompanied Anthony Braxton during an epic European tour that has been preserved on the 13 CDs of *Quartet (Standards) 2020*. And here they extend their sonic palette, with Charles adding percussion to his role and Hawkins augmenting his piano with synthesizer, sampler and additional percussion.

Given that Hawkins carries history lightly and with a fleet touch, it's remarkable just how much of it he carries at all. In his liner notes, Bill Shoemaker mentions Hawkins once, naming Ellington's *Money Jungle* trio (bassist Charles Mingus and drummer Max Roach) and Art Tatum's 1956 recordings with bassist Red Callender and Papa Jo Jones as his favorite piano trios, an appreciation of both deep history and the special energy of collisions. His lineage as pianist/composer includes Andrew Hill ("Fuga, the Fast One") and Paul Bley ("Canon Celestial"), demonstrating an acuity about the ways that intervals of pitch and time can together shape a complex line's identity.

Beyond that compound sense of tradition—as playground and library—Hawkins is both a thoroughly in-the-moment creator and a thoughtful composer, with a lively sense of detail and subtle linear movement. His compositions come in sets: several canons, a few "Celestials". The canon is a particularly tight contrapuntal form, and it goes to the heart of the trio's music, often a rapid three-way slicing-up of time that emphasizes Charles' and Davis' incisive attention to detail. The eleven tracks vary widely, but each is layered and multi-directional. The opening "Rapture" levitates on Charles' slightly exotic bass line and the ethereal bumbles of Hawkins' synthesizer and sampler, reminiscent of Sun Ra, before piano assumes the foreground. On "Rupture", Hawkins' left hand doubles Charles' bass line, fraught with cinematic dread. Hawkins' sense of orchestration similarly serves an uneasy social vision in "If Nature Were a Bank, They Would Have Saved It Already" and an ethereal anxiety in "Echo Celestial".

For more info visit intaktrec.ch. Hawkins is at The Stone at New School Aug. 17 with Tomeka Reid. See Calendar.



Jiggs' Back in Town
Jiggs Whigham Copenhagen Trio (Storyville)
by Ken Dryden

Though trombonist Jiggs Whigham often leads big bands, he has led small ensembles, too. Several years ago when he planned a series of Stan Kenton tribute concerts with the Danish Radio Big Band, the COVID-19 lockdown intervened. So, when he arranged a return trip in 2021, he was paired off with two young Danish musicians—Pelle von Bülow (guitar) and Matthias Petri (bass)—for a series of concerts and these studio sessions. Although decades younger than the trombonist (who becomes an octogenarian this month), von Bülow and Petri not only provide excellent support, but the trio feels like

a working band and the sparse format allows one to focus on the leader's expressive solos.

The program ranges from Swing era standards to bop and bossa nova. "It Had to Be You" is the easygoing opener, a toe-tapping arrangement where Whigham's lyricism is on full display. Older generations may remember Alfalfa in the *Our Gang* comedy shorts attempting to sing the 1935 romantic ballad "I'm in the Mood For Love", but Whigham's inspired improvising transforms the piece into a viable 21st century jazz vehicle. "Blue Funk" is a novel treatment of Thelonious Monk's "Blue Monk", in which Whigham's loopy statement of the theme adds just the right touch of dissonance. He was clearly impressed with his young accompanists, giving them several duo features. Their fluid, energetic arrangement of Branislav Kaper's "Invitation" showcases their inventiveness as soloists, and they modernize "Tea For Two" with a masterful, swinging arrangement on which they trade the lead back and forth. The sessions wrap with a luxurious, deliberate interpretation of the Gershwin's "Embraceable You". Whigham's expressiveness matches that of any vocalist, while the spacious backing by von Bülow and Petri approaches perfection.

For more info visit storyvillerecords.com

GLOBE UNITY



Flute 'N' Bass: Traces
Stephanie Wagner/Norbert Dömling (Unit)
The Way We Speak
Spaces Unfolding (Bead)
Healing Rituals
Naïssam Jalal (Les Couleurs du Son)
by George Grella

While there's no way that just these three albums could represent the state of contemporary flute music, they do cover quite an impressive range. Only one is a "jazz" record per se—*Traces*, from the duo of Stephanie Wagner (flute) and Norbert Dömling (bass)—but all of them feature music directed substantially, if not completely, toward improvisation, and all are fine examples of the genres and styles they represent.

Traces is straight-ahead, swinging modern jazz. The sparseness of the duo instrumentation is belied by how rich the music making is. Wagner in particular spins out a constant flow of ideas. She's an exciting jazz player and a tremendous flutist; her sound is even and full through all registers, and her alto and bass flute playing have the same focused sound as the C-flute. The writing is also excellent, from the opening "Salsa Torcida" to the noirish ballad "State of Suspense". On the title track, they indulge in effects and sound processing, setting aside the marvelous playing, perhaps the only flaw in an otherwise superb jazz album.

While *Traces* is a slight outlier in this company, so is the free improvisation captured on *The Way We Speak*, played by the Spaces Unfolding trio of Neil Metcalfe (flute), Philipp Wachsmann (violin) and Emil Karlsen (drums). It is uncommon to hear completely improvised playing that eschews extended techniques of sound production and sticks closely to clear notes and musical ideas rather than using instrumental effects for expressive purposes. In other words, the trio's focus is melodic. The result is an engrossing, satisfying and often quite beautiful album. Karlsen is the central figure, having played with each of the other

musicians before, but this was their first meeting as a trio, so ultimately the album is about skilled musicians discovering, through pure improvisation, how to make music together. It is one of the finest documents of how improvisation is made that this listener has heard, on par with the two astounding *The Life of a Trio* albums (by Paul Bley, Jimmy Giuffre and Steve Swallow). All the music is thus process: there are passages where things aren't particularly exalted or even directed, and times when the musicians listen closely to each other, suggesting ideas and possibilities and finding consensus. The effect is clear and relaxed; things that don't work, such as Karlsen's mallet playing at the start, are gently neglected in favor of a more promising phrase from flute or violin. Metcalfe's tone is silvery and the acoustic space is both resonant and intimate. The album is broken up into five tracks but these seem arbitrary, and once the music starts the listener is more likely to listen to it as a whole, following the development of a group language.

Naïssam Jalal's *Healing Rituals* is also one to listen to in a single attentive sitting. The title is both literal and serious: this is a ritual in integrated parts meant to heal the mind, body and soul and comes out of some difficult experiences that Jalal only got through with the help of the musicians playing here. This kind of music always comes with possible disconnects between intents and effects, but Jalal has created a seamless, sincere and indeed effective musical ritual. She plays flute and nay and does some wordless vocalizing through and separately from her instruments; together with the accompaniment of Clément Petit (cello), Claude Tchamitchian (bass) and Zaza Desiderio (drums), the group sound has dimensions of space and color beyond expectations. Credit her compositional organization, which always has a firm idea at the core. The flow of moods from the propulsive opening of "Rituel du Vent"—with a fiery solo from the leader—to the subdued "Rituel de la Lune" and beyond is elegant and has an immersive emotional logic. She plays the flute with a slightly breathy tone that suits the fragments of gnawa, Hindi and other traditions which she weaves into her writing. The music is lovely, but what matters most is that it has force and power.

For more info visit unitrecords.com, beadrecords.com and lescouleursduson.com