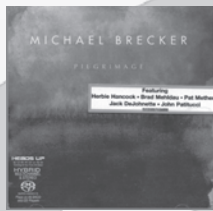


Super Fidelity

By John Sunier

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Pilgrimage | Michael Brecker | Heads Up SACD HUSA 9095

This historic SACD is the final recording by the pre-eminent jazz saxophonist and composer Michael Brecker, who died early last year after a long battle with MDS and leukemia. His dedication to the music kept him going for this last session of August 2006, and his advanced condition was kept from most of the leading players who joined him in the studio. Pat Metheny called it "...one of the great codas in modern music history. It's one of the most amazing, powerful, unbelievable things that I—and all who were there—have ever experienced or will ever see."

All nine compositions are from Michael Brecker. Most are not strong on diatonic melodies but maintain interest with frequent harmonic and rhythmic changes. *Half Moon Lane* seems to have the most unforgettable melody; Brecker's tone in the upper register is very smooth. *Tumbleweed* is a wildly tumbling extravaganza followed by the quiet introspective ballad *When Can I Kiss You Again?*

Tomorrow's Jazz Classics 2005 | Nagel Heyer Records | SACD NH 1022, [Distr. by Qualiton]

Sorry it took us so long to learn about this SACD, but now here it is and if you're a jazz fan with an SACD capability it shouldn't be missed. All 14 tracks are all first-rate, and all in 5.0 surround. Saxophonist Greg Osby does a fantastic solo on *Night Call*, Donald Harrison's quartet turns in a version of Miles' *So What* that's just as great as the original except in hi-res surround, a two-guitar/violin/doublebass quartet known as String Zone offers an original gypsy jazz number, one of today's best clarinetists—Ken Peplowski—shepherds his quintet through *With Every Breath I Take*, Trumpeter Brian Lynch dips into trad jazz for a swingin' *West End Blues*, and top bassist Frode Berg beautifully bows his way through his attractive original *Victor*. Most of these tracks made me want to have the entire CD they were taken from.

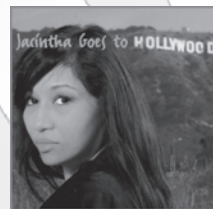


Sibelius: Symphony No. 2 | Pohjola's Daughter | LSO/Sir Colin Davis | MCH SACD LSO-0605

Sibelius' most popular symphony has received herein a performance and recording that will be difficult to surpass, in spite of the many competing versions. The first movement is the most Nordically cool of them all, it still has the catchy main theme which has become one of Sibelius' "greatest hits"—so much so that it showed up on a CD of "Hooked On the Classics" themes. Opening the disc with the quarter-hour-length Pohjola's Daughter is an appropriate move in that the work can be regarded as a very compact one-movement symphony—something like the composer's Seventh. Sibelius viewed it as his own Hero's Life, but the wizard-hero of the tale loses in the end his effort to seduce the daughter of the moon-god. The extremely subtle and quiet chamber-music writing in much of the score is more clearly heard and appreciated than on most standard-res recordings of the work.

Jacintha Goes to Hollywood | Groove Note | Stereo-only SACD GRV1040-3

Jacintha Abisheganaden delivers her English lyrics with such precision and lack of accent that it's easy to forget she's a well-known actress in Singapore. The tunes are all from hugely popular movies. No effort was made to include an obscure discovery or two. Jacintha's backing band is always top-flight and this one is no exception. Guitarist Anthony Wilson, who has a couple of killer albums on Groove Note, is a standout. Jacintha works very close to the mike for a sexy and intimate sound something like the jazz thrushes of the 1950s. She is the No. 1 jazz vocalist with many audiophiles due to her and Groove Notes' high technical standards—whether on SACD, standard CD or vinyl. Tracks include: *On Days Like These*, *Raindrops Keep Falling On My Head*, *Alfie*, *Windmills of Your Mind*, *California Dreaming*, *A Man And a Woman*, *Easy Living*, *Que Sera Sera*, *The Summer Knows*.



Masters and Commanders | Music from Seafaring Film Classics | Telarc Mch SACD-60682

This is the 84th album Kunzel and his Cincinnati forces have recorded for Telarc. Swashbuckling high-seas-type movies are not at the top of my must-see list, but I found the variety of hearty musical fare in this program more appealing than some of Kunzel's past collections. Some of the greatest composers for the silver screen are represented in these stirring themes, including Korngold, Elmer Bernstein, Franz Waxman and Miklos Rozsa. A nice variety is added to the selection by including some themes from films as far back as the 1940s. I'm afraid the scores by Klaus Badelt and Hans Zimmer for two of the current Pirates of the Caribbean series don't measure up, but all 18 tracks are performed with gusto and displayed in the best 5.0 surround you could want.

The Kinks | Low Budget | Konk/Koch Records Stereo-only* Hybrid SACD, VEL-SC-79817

Low Budget was the last really great pre-new wave rock album. Released in 1979, it shot to prominence thanks to the satirical track (*Wish I Could Fly Like*) *Superman*. The Kinks were one of the truly great live bands, but Ray Davies always felt that the public only remembered their classic songs, so with Low Budget, he abandoned the "concept" approach of the previous recent string of Kinks albums. The resulting disc offered several big hits along with numerous well-crafted rock songs with much of the wit and humor of classic Kinks output, and received critical praise and commercial success. Compared to my MFSL SACD version of the same disc I couldn't discern much difference other than a slight bass boost on the MFSL disc, so at half the price, I'd definitely go with the Koch version. The SACD layer trounces the Red Book layer in every respect. Highly recommended.

