

Jazz Track

By John Shand

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Phil Slater Quartet|The Thousands|Kimnara NARA007

Weightlessness is not exclusively the domain of astronauts. The Phil Slater Quartet creates it with the phenomenal sense of suspension they achieve. The opening *Burden of Corners* has pianist Matt McMahon, bassist Lloyd Swanton, and drummer Simon Barker implying an insistent pulse, yet seldom overtly stating it, while Slater's trumpet shoots rapid-fire phrases across the rhythmic void. On the beautiful *Crest* there's a tinkling lightness of cymbals, piano, and bass against Slater's legato phrases and also during a three-way dialogue without the horn. *Tedium* has a Necks-like underwater piano figure, against which the percussion surges and crashes, while Slater delivers splintered lines of staggering power. *Rhyme of Knife and Mantra* drifts ominously, and *Lissom* levitates through its own velocity. These are the 21st century implications of Miles Davis's 1960s Quintet.

Paul Motian|Live at the Village Vanguard Vol 1|Winter & Winter|Birdland 910 133-2

Some creative people have a surge of activity in later life, urged on by time trickling away. Now 76, Paul Motian has surely been jazz's most prolific recording artist in recent years. Every few months there is a new disc with him leading one of his bands, or contributing his extraordinary conception on the drums.

This live CD is of the trio with tenor saxophonist Chris Potter and bassist Larry Grenadier, augmented by pianist Masabumi Kikuchi and alto saxophonist Greg Osby. It is a quintet which flares and floats with equal ease. Compared with some of the more rarefied studio sessions, the music is often energetic and the drums sound impressively fat. Motian may be jazz's ultimate expressionist, but he also burns when the music demands it.



Enrico Rava Quintet|The Words and the Days|ECM 1982

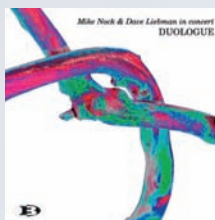
Trumpets can shout at you in scarlet joy, or tear at you in deep-sea-blue desolation. The three great contemporary European trumpeters—Kenny Wheeler, Tomasz Stanko, Enrico Rava—have created career-long blue periods, although Rava is more inclined to balance the wrist-slashing with some jollity. His quintet still has trombonist Gianluca Petrella, bassist Rosario Bonaccorso, and drummer Roberto Gatto, while pianist Andrea Pozza has replaced Stefano Bollani.

Rava can build sadness into his compositions, then perform them so his cries have a detached serenity, partly due to the roundness of his sound. At other times he just impales you on razor-sharp blasts. He can also swing. *Echoes of Duke* beckons a rambunctious foray from Petrella, before Rava slices across Pozza's splintered harmonies with wonderful rhythmic buoyancy.

The Mahavishnu Project|Return to the Emerald Beyond|Cuneiform Rune 242/243

There are tributes, and then there is love, devotion, and surrender. The Mahavishnu Project not only performs the fiendishly difficult repertoire of John McLaughlin's Mahavishnu Orchestra—the 1970s band that instantly made jazz-rock the domain of full-frontal virtuosity—it occasionally raises the stakes.

This third album concentrates on the most extravagant of all Mahavishnu releases, *Visions of the Emerald Beyond*, performed live and in its entirety—something McLaughlin never attempted. Brilliant New York drummer Gregg Bendian has assembled an 11-piece band capable of expanding the tunes' improvising potential, thereby spreading the original LP's contents across two CDs (with three extra tracks). The daunting guitar duties are thrillingly executed by Glenn Alexander, although singer Maria Neckam proves a weak link. Despite this, fans of the original band should definitely have a listen.



Mike Nock & Dave Liebman|Duologue|Birdland BL 009

Collaborators from the 1970s, pianist Mike Nock and saxophonist Dave Liebman were reunited and recorded at the 2004 Wangaratta Festival. The intricacy of their interaction is starkly evident on *Star Crossed Lovers*, as they constantly extend each other's ideas, so the melodic line is a sinuous, continuous whole, here colored by piano, there by saxophone. Liebman obtains a soprano sound that is intrinsically emotive and beautiful, while his mastery of timbre and vowel shape is so thorough as to routinely give his improvising a vocal dimension. Then there are the sudden squalls erupting out of the more languorous lines. Around it all Nock laces such an open weave that he is never corralling Liebman, but liberating him, just as his own glorious solos maintain relevance to the tune, without being hemmed in by it.

Kenny Werner|Lawn Chair Society|Blue Note 74896

The post-Magritte images on the cover suit Kenny Werner's music, in which initial impressions can be turned on their head. Werner has used synthesizers before, but the American pianist has never gone so far down the electronic highway as he does here. A past associate of Joe Lovano, Archie Shepp, and Dizzy Gillespie in a 35-year career, Werner now embraces computers to periodically treat the acoustic instruments, aid textural about-faces, or just to frost the edges of his music with peculiarity. Pull the plug on the computer, and a New York jazz aesthetic is firmly in place. Werner's quirky, surprising compositions and multi-faceted playing spawn thrilling contributions from Dave Douglas (trumpet, cornet), Chris Potter (tenor saxophone, bass clarinet), Scott Colley (bass), and Brian Blade (drums). A modern Blue Note classic.

