



Manu Katché|Playground|ECM 2016

Manu Katché has drummed with Jan Garbarek, Peter Gabriel, Sting, Joni Mitchell, Joan Armatrading, Youssou N'Dour, and scores more on more than 200 albums. His "Neighbourhood" album was a key 2005 release, and here he has retained pianist Marcin Wasilewski and bassist Slawomir Kurkiewicz (from Tomasz Stanko's band). But where "Neighbourhood" gloried in the combined brilliance of Stanko and Garbarek, trumpeter Mathias Eick and saxophonist Trygve Seim don't put such a firm stamp of individuality on the music. Nor are Katché's compositions as strong this time, although they do gradually insinuate themselves. Understated grooves and textural subtlety are the mainstays, and given that the man with one of the planet's most beautiful-sounding drum-kits has been well recorded, the aesthetics are not in question. You just feel there was another level that Playground could have reached.

Mike Nock Project|Meeting of the Waters|Jazzhead HEAD086

Despite being made by a marvelous nonet, this CD's ultimate glory is three minutes of more or less solo piano on a heart-rending little lullaby called *Sho's Cradle Song*. The spiky styles of trumpeter Eugene Ball and alto saxophonist Tim Wilson contrast with the more fleshy approaches of trombonist James Greening and tenor saxophonist Julien Wilson. Meanwhile, Dale Gorfinkel's vibraphone and Stephen Magnusson's guitar blur the line between horns and rhythm section. Bassist Brett Hirst solos pensively over the gentle wash of *Cyboréal* (as does Nock), and robustly on the title track. *Mysteries* has the vibraphone and guitar clouding the ensemble in a shimmering heat-haze, after which a woolly, languid tenor solo occasionally arches up to a plaintive high note, around which Magnusson instantly paints a tiny aura.



Judy Bailey Trio|Pendulum|Birdland BL017

Those who still dabble in "generic post-bop jazz" often are merely echoing a style, rather than molding substance. Pianist Judy Bailey, however, has been steeped in this music for half a century, and deploys an effervescent lightness of heart with a commensurate lightness of touch (especially notable here on *Night and Day*). This album, with bass-

ist Craig Scott and drummer Tim Firth, is centered around breezy standards. After an overly fussy arrangement of *Love Walked In*, Bailey deftly slides into an improvisation encrusted with glistening, gem-like ideas. She weights the notes with aching precision on the delicate *Flamingo*, and lilts and skips on the ¾ title track. Scott develops a compelling narrative in his solo on *You and the Night and the Music*, while Firth swings throughout and solos melodically.



Maria Schneider Orchestra|Sky Blue|ArtistShare AS0065

Maria Schneider eschews the tired cliché of big-band writing. She treats her orchestra as exactly that, so the trumpet section, for instance, is not a block of sound, but a set of possibilities. Nor does she have a chain of solos over a given backdrop. Rather, each solo is a true extension of the composition, specifically colored by the orchestrations. *The Pretty*

Road has Ingrid Jensen's digital delay-treated trumpet soloing elegiacally against ever-changing water-color washes from the orchestra. It's such a glorious piece of music that the tune it resolves into seems bland by comparison. Any big band is only as good as its rhythm section, and guitarist Ben Monder, pianist Frank Kimbrough, bassist Jay Anderson, and drummer Clarence Penn provide a mighty foundation for this kaleidoscope of beauty.

Enrico Rava/Stefano Bollani|The Third Man|ECM 2020

Although the expectations of rapturous lyricism from trumpeter Enrico Rava and pianist Stefano Bollani were not disturbed, this album still surprised, as though hearing music for the first time, so each note glistened, newmade and just thought of. The source of this surprise is not how brilliantly the pair play, but where the music takes these old colleagues (a generation apart), between whom the music falls as naturally as a waterfall. Perhaps that is the source of the album title (and an enthralling free improvisation), *The Third Man*: the phantom player who emerges as a combination of the two. The piano is supremely well-recorded, and needs to be to capture all the subtlety of Bollani's playing as he delicately cross-hatches the sadness and exultation spilling from that silvertined trumpet.



Albert Mangelsdorff Quintett|Folk Mond & Flower Dream|Nekta/Planet 68.861

Inside a few notes a brilliant wind player tells you just as much about himself as a good singer. The late Albert Mangelsdorff was already one of the world's great trombonists when this was recorded in 1967. The German virtuoso had not yet developed multiphonics (the art of playing more than one note at once) and was five years away from launching his famed unaccompanied concerts. Already in place, however, was a powerful sense of the warmth of the man just bursting out of the bell of the trombone. His sound is as plump and inviting as a ripe mango, and finds perfect foils in his Quintett's two slicing saxophonists (the other instruments being bass and drums). His lively original tunes are adventurous, but never anarchic: Mangelsdorff would rather charm than bully you.