

CDREVIEWS//

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NEW RELEASES//A-Z

Ben Bastin Trio

The Missing Piece

Pastiche Records PR00002 | ★★★

Ben Bastin (b), John Turville (p), Joshua Blackmore (d), Raven Bush (vln), Danny Keane (clo), and Amelia Tucker (v). Rec. date not stated

Young bassist Ben Bastin was a member of the Bedfordshire Youth Jazz Orchestra before arriving in London in 2004 and studying on the Middlesex University jazz course, joining a diverse alumni in the process from Jason Yarde through to the members of Led Bib. Bastin has recorded and toured as sideman for Gilad Atzmon and singer Sarah Gillespie and this, his piano trio debut has a romantic flavour in the Phronesis mould, but extends the sonic texture with an element of chamber classical music on a few tracks involving strings. The less than pristine recording quality is strange, I'm assuming it's intended, especially the piano sound and could conclude that the album title *The Missing Piece* actually refers to a producer. Otherwise Bastin's bass is full-bodied, crunchy and his themes create expressive, gracefully lyrical ideas right until the last track. Selwyn Harris

Ben Crosland Brass Group

An Open Place

Jazz Cat JCCD 114 | ★★★

Steve Waterman (t, flhn), Martin Shaw (t, flhn), Mark Nightingale (tb), Barnaby Dickinson (tb), Steve Lodder (p, kys) and Ben Crosland (b) Rec. February 2010

This modest line-up of mid-life British jazz instrumentalists has more in common with some of their younger counterparts than meets the eye. The airy, mellow English pastoral qualities and folksy singer-songwriter-like harmony and textures of this brass ensemble led by north of England-based electric bassist Ben Crosland, is a predecessor of the septet of bassist Will Collier and saxophonist Adam Waldmann's Kairos 4tet, for instance. Crosland is joined by a couple of long time associates, the John Surman and Carla Bley recording artist/trumpeter Steve Waterman, and keyboardist Steve Lodder, who have all played together in various quartets and quintets since 1990. The recording is inspired by the sculptures of Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth among others located in the Yorkshire Sculpture Park and the lack of drums makes for more of a plus than a minus here, in the smoother textures and steadying anchor of Crosland on the electric version of his instrument. *An Open Place* boasts themes that are written and arranged by Crosland, with the ear massaging not to mention ear catching, sometimes choral-like brass (but not brassy) harmonies and riffs being the real highlight of the recording. Selwyn Harris

Ahmed Dickinson & Trio Mestizo

The Havana Suite

Cubafilin Records ALC003 | ★★★

Ahmed Dickinson (g), Emma Blanco (v), and Hamadi Rencurrell (perc). Rec. 2011



Why isn't Ahmed Dickinson better known on the UK jazz circuit? The Cuban-born classical guitarist has been making ripples here for some time now, performing everywhere from the Bath International Guitar Festival to the Wigmore Hall. A first class honours graduate from Havana's Superior Institute of Art, an ex-student of both London's Royal College of Music and the Guildhall (thanks to a scholarship or two somewhere), he was awarded best instrumental soloist and best instrumental album at Cubadisco 2009 for *Ahmed Dickinson Plays Nico Rojas*, a homage to the late Cuban great Jose Antonio Rojas. Perhaps this similarly excellent but more jazzy release with violin and percussion will assist his deserved crossover: a diverse collection of tracks that represent the eclecticism of Cuban music and convey its magic, *The Havana Suite* sparkles through passages dark, light and all shades in between. Dickinson's fingerwork and rhythmic drive are compelling throughout; a larger profile awaits. Jane Cornwell

Empirical

Elements of Truth

Naim Jazz Records CD168 | ★★★

Nathaniel Facey (as), George Fogel (p), Lewis Wright (vb), Tom Farmer (b) and Shaney Forbes (d)

Since winning the EBU Jazz Competition at the North Sea Jazz Festival in 2007, Empirical seem to have undergone a process of both flux and artistic growth since their eponymously titled debut album produced by Courtney Pine in 2007. With only Facey and Forbes remaining since the early days, this, their third album, is their most adventurous statement to date. From the attention-getting introduction to 'Say What You Mean, Mean What You Say' they appear more willing to explore beyond the hard bop certainties that characterised their early work, aware that others (Eric Dolphy, for example, the inspiration behind their last album) have been there before them, they are now willing to incorporate a wider range of influences into their music – the shimmering vibes ostinato that opens the title track or haunting introduction on 'An Ambiguous State of Mind' that presages an angular, boppish theme a tempo that simultaneously shows where they have come from and where they are going. Stuart Nicholson



Steve Coleman And Five Elements

The Mancy Of Sound

Pi | ★★★★★

Steve Coleman (as), Jonathan Finlayson (t), Tim Albright (tb), Thomas Morgan (b), Jen Shyu (v), Tyshawn Sorey, Marcus Gilmore (d), and Ramon Gracia Perez (perc). Rec. 2007

Although jazz guide books invariably flag up Steve Coleman's unorthodox approaches to meter and rhythm, it is worth noting that the Chicago alto saxophonist has been extending what might be called Afro-Latin jazz since his debut three decades ago. His comprehensive research of Yoruba philosophy as well as music has produced a signature sound that is not entirely disconnected from Dizzy Gillespie and Chano Pozo's 1940s innovations but is significantly more enigmatic and ancestral. It's as if Coleman conceives of newness by way of fathomless oldness, of concepts that reach as far back as possible, and on this set, recorded in 2007, the sense of fraught, dawn-of-time ritualism is marked. Curt, compressed basslines jockey with percussion patterns that stumble forward rather than land rigidly on a designated beat to give the seven-piece band a firm, flexible chassis, but it is Coleman's sax, Jonathan Finlayson's trumpet, Tim Albright's trombone and Jen Shyu's voice that make the strongest impact. They act as overlapping or concentric circles – as befits the diagram on the album sleeve – that rotate around a central tonal idea, playing flicker-like phrases that are often unsettlingly, eerily dissonant. Shyu's role is absolutely crucial as her mostly wordless *timbres*, loosely evoking Jeanne Lee or Lauren Newton, make her a piercing, flute-like presence in the midst of the heavier brass, and that brings balance to the dynamic range. Coleman's music can be overwhelmingly dense and Shyu infuses air and light. If she excels on 'Odu Ifa', the song cycle based on Yoruba divination, then the album's lengthy closer, 'Noctiluca', which features the leader's most measured, incisive soloing, makes an essential point: as closely tied to non-western folklore as Coleman's music is, it draws greatly on European religious and classical traditions, be they Gregorian chants or opera. These forms are astutely integrated (horns frequently imply a 3/4 flutter without waltzing *per se*, vocals suggest sanctity without being sacred), confirming that Steve Coleman's ultimate value to modern creative music lies as much in the considerable breadth as well as depth of the historical sources that he constantly channels. Kevin Le Gendre

Bill Frisell

All We Are Saying

Savoy Jazz SVY 17386 | ★★★

Bill Frisell (g), Greg Leisz (steel g) (g), Jenny Scheinman (vln), Tony Scherr (b) and Kenny Wollesen (d). Rec. date not stated

What luxury to be awash in so many Frisell recordings, especially as he's tapped such rich musical veins of late. In contrast to the complex intimacies of his recent 858 Quartet release, *All We Are Saying* is a love song to one of Frisell's all time heroes, John Lennon. The quintet play the songs with little adornment, allowing those

unforgettable tunes to ring through. There's an elegiac 'Beautiful Boy', a swoonful 'Julia' but the album is no exercise in nostalgia. For Frisell, Lennon is a living artist, his ambiguities and soul searching, let alone ethical struggles partly reflected in the guitarist's own constant questing. So 'Revolution' crackles and sparks, 'Come Together' is decidedly eerie and the darkness of 'Mother' isn't avoided. But it's the early extraordinary songs, 'You've Got To Hide Your Love Away' and a tear jerking 'In My Life' that stay with you long after the CDs slid back into the sleeve. Andy Robson