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NEW RELEASES//A-Z



Jaimeo Brown and Chris Sholar

Ralph Alessi Quartet

Quiver

ECM 477 0382 ★★★★★

Ralph Alessi (t), Gary Versace (p), Drew Gress (b) and Nasheet Waits (d). Rec. September 2014

The Californian, New York-based ex-Steve Coleman trumpeter Ralph Alessi releases his second quartet recording for ECM with a telling change of personnel in which Gary Versace replaces Jason Moran on the piano. Versace, more familiar on the New York scene for his specialist organ playing, is a different proposition to the brilliantly idiosyncratic Moran, a less punctuating, more ambient accompanist as well as warmer harmonically. The recording in this instance has a more wistful and affective character than was the case on his debut *Baida*. Alessi's compositions here are of a very high quality, and their connection to the improvisational passages is both seamless and organic. The rhythm section of Nasheet Waits – who was present on another trumpeter Avishai Cohen's ECM debut last month – and Drew Gress are highly responsive yet unobtrusive with it. In his solos Alessi creates a tension between a tender, lyrical tonality and a pointed dissonance that has echoes of the late Kenny Wheeler. It is perhaps a more accessible side to this trumpeter than we have heard to date, as well as being a thoroughly outstanding piece of work.

Selwyn Harris

Nik Bärtsch Mobile

Continuum

ECM 2464 ★★★★★

Nik Bärtsch (p), Sha (b cl, cb cl), Kasper Rast (d, perc), Nicholas Stocker (d, tuned perc), Etienne Abelin, Ola Sendeci (vn), David Schnee (vla), Solme Hong and Ambrosius Huber (clo). Rec. March 2015

Pianist-composer Bärtsch's well-received Kings Place residency at last year's London Jazz Festival provided an opportunity to hear a version of this new band as well as the long running and much-loved Ronin. They are different, though remain wedded by the power of repetition and subtle shifts in harmony and meter. While the latter group makes much of the hard crunch of electric instruments and backbeats borne of Bärtsch's interest in funk and hip-hop, this acoustic ensemble capitalises on the icier timbres of strings and percussion, straying mildly into more overtly Reichian territory on occasion. Opting for a very distilled, limpid, often spacious sound canvas, the pianist hammers out edgy left hand bass lines and punches right hand trills with all of the eerie intent of a ghost story soundtrack, the effect of which is enhanced by the prods and purrs of the strings. Although at times a discreet presence, Sha's bass clarinet and contrabass clarinet are a vital element of the group insofar as they shore up the low end all the while ensuring the fluidity and lightness of touch of an ensemble voice that, for the most part, is bold rather than bulky. Bärtsch may

be the leader, but Mobile is a band in which the whole is greater than the sum of the not inconsiderable parts. This makes for a satisfactory debut. **Kevin Le Gendre**

Sarah Bernstein Quartet

Still/Free

Leo CD LR 746 ★★★★★

Sarah Bernstein (v), Kris Davis (p), Stuart Popejoy (el b) and Ches Smith (d). Rec. 6 and 7 January 2015

New York-based Californian violinist, Sarah Bernstein, has worked with Anthony Braxton as well as various alumni of that maverick composer/improviser's bands including cornet-player Taylor Ho Bynum and drummer Satoshi Takeishi. It's a connection that makes perfect sense in the context of her own quartet, which combines cerebral composition, ludic puzzles and feisty improvisation with ease. The album's name serves as a neat statement of intent, in fact, with the title track journeying from Kris Davis' opening minimalist piano strategies, through Bernstein's yearning expressionism and into the rolling yet controlled tumbling of Ches Smith's drums. But it's not all so conceptually driven. Elsewhere, Bernstein enjoys a more visceral sense of play, diving into solid, driving post-bop on 'Cede' and, on 'Jazz Camp', sketching a fractured, Downtown melodic hook with Stuart Popejoy's throbbing electric bass ostinato providing enough momentum for her to let rip with wild, soaring stridulations, mixed with spoken snatches of original poetry. Plenty to savour here. **Daniel Spicer**

Jaimeo Brown Transcendence

Work Songs

Motema 234152 ★★★★★

Jaimeo Brown (d, elec), Chris Sholar (g, elec), Jaleel Shaw (as), JD Allen (ts), Marcia Miget (f), Brandon McCune (org), Big Yuki, James Francis (ky), Lester Chambers, Falu, Marisha Rodriguez, Cadence Brown and Gee's Bend Quilters (v). Rec. 2014

The fact that Brown has taken the title of his previous album *Transcendence* as the name of this group, or rather ongoing project, tells you all you need to know about the significance of said recording. It was one of the

key releases of 2013, putting the drummer-composer on the map and making the point that the use of samples – excerpts of haunting folk songs from the Deep South – could be integrated within a real-time playing context without compromising artistic integrity. The socio-cultural setting for the audio is different this time round as the 'work songs' refer to the sound of the men, as dear departed Sam Cooke taught us, on the chain gang in addition to 'coal miners, gandy dancers, stonemasons and cotton pickers'. Yet what links this new offering to its predecessor is the coherence with which Brown's band weaves its way into and around source material that has a real emotional charge, especially the prison laments. That said, the wild card is the use of traditional Japanese folk songs on a few tracks, which is entirely coherent, as the keening soprano vocals resonate vividly with the sharp upper register work of the excellent Jaleel Shaw's alto sax as well as the overarching ambience the composer-producer has crafted. Brown namechecks hip-hop beatmakers J.Dilla, Dre and Premier in the booklet, and at times there is a subtle echo of those pioneers. If there is one criticism it is that the running order could have been altered to simply vary the tempo and mood around the middle of the set, but *Work Songs* is confirmation of *Transcendence* as both a concept and band that has substantial potential for growth. **Kevin Le Gendre**

Patrick Cornelius

While We're Still Young

Whirlwind Recordings WR4682 ★★★★★

Patrick Cornelius (as, ss, f), Jason Palmer (t), Nick Vayenas (tb), John Ellis (ts, bcl), Gerald Clayton (p), Miles Ozaki (g), Peter Slavov (b) and Kendrick Scott (d). Rec. 14 December 2014

US alto-saxophonist Cornelius is a semi-regular visitor to Britain, often at the behest of bassist Mike Janisch and it's on the latter's Whirlwind label that Cornelius's new suite is released. Having lately seen it performed with just two of the players who appear on this launch album – the rest were UK-based musicians – it's instructive to hear the New York version. Cornelius was