

## GLOBE UNITY



**Postcard Collection**  
Hazel Leach & The Composers' Orchestra Berlin  
(JazzHausMusik)  
*Fukushima*  
Satoko Fujii Orchestra New York (Libra)  
*Echo Painting*  
Peggy Lee (Songlines)  
by Tom Greenland

Although women like Lil Hardin (musical director of Louis Armstrong's Hot Fives/Sevens), Blanche Calloway and Ina Ray Hutton led groups from the late '20s onward, female big band composer/arranger/conductors came to greater prominence with the work of Toshiko Akiyoshi, Carla Bley, Maria Schneider and others. Today, female-led large ensembles are flourishing worldwide.

For its third album, the Composers' Orchestra Berlin turned baton and writing chores over to Hazel Leach. Inspired by folk/dance musics of Venezuela, Argentina, Northumberland, Peru, Greece and Germany, she penned eight distinctive pieces, or "postcards", all in triple meter. One might expect 'rhythmic fatigue' over the almost-hour-length set, but her varied treatments provide ample relief: "Postcard 10 Caracas" is in fast 6/8 with tricky counter-figures; "Postcard 11 Tucumán" boasts a grandiose orchestral sweep à la Schneider; "Postcard 7 Berwick upon Tweed" resembles a Scottish jig (with lush backdrop); "Postcard 8 Lima" shows her deft hand with heterophony. Strong, usually short, improvisations heighten the immediacy of each track, Meike Goosmann's clarinet solo on "Postcard 9 Kalávrita" being a highlight.

Now 60, celebrating *kanreki*, the beginning of a new life cycle, Japanese pianist Satoko Fujii is busier than ever. *Fukushima* is her tenth outing with Orchestra New York, her 20-year-old group containing some of the city's finest avant improvisers, like saxophonists Ellery Eskelin and Tony Malaby, trumpeter Herb Robertson and trombonist Joe Fiedler, plus a fine rhythm team in guitarist Nels Cline, bassist Stomu Takeishi and drummer Ches Smith. A memorial to the horrific 2011 nuclear power plant meltdown, the album benefits from Fujii's knack for concise yet open-ended pieces balancing structure and freedom. Bookended by breathing, an affirmation of survival, the music spills out in ripples and tsunamis of sound. The 13 voices (Fujii forgoes piano for conduction) overlap, blend or interrupt each other, like conversations around a dinner table.

*Echo Painting* documents Vancouver cellist Peggy Lee's project with violinist Meredith Bates, trumpeter Brad Turner, tenor saxophonists Jon Bentley and John Paton, trombonist Rod Murray, guitarist Cole Schmidt, pedal steel guitarist Bradshaw Pack, bassist James Meger and drummer Dylan van der Schyff. Lee's compositions show a range of styles: "Snappy" and "Foreground" utilize extended techniques and effects; "Painting Echoes" is influenced by raga; "Strange Visit" would work for a hoedown; while "Nice Collection" and "Hymn" are beautiful chorales. Turner's operatic trumpet shines on the latter and on "Out on a Limb". The set concludes with three bits of 'Northern Americana': the driving "Weather Building", anthemic "End Piece" and The Band's "Unfaithful Servant", sung by Robin Holcomb.

For more information, visit [jazzhausmusik.de](http://jazzhausmusik.de), [librarecords.com](http://librarecords.com) and [songlines.com](http://songlines.com)



*Telavava*  
Itai Kriss (Avenue K)  
by Tom Greenland

One hears many influences in flutist Itai Kriss' style. Raised in Israel at the nexus of Middle Eastern, North African and Southeastern European musical currents, he's lived in NYC for 15 years, immersed in the Latin music scene, playing Salsa, AfroCuban, Timba and Latin jazz gigs. *Telavava*, a portmanteau title derived from Tel Aviv + Havana, is his exciting sophomore release of not-so-classifiable but yet imminently danceable music. Representing the front half of the suitcase are Kriss, bassist Or Bareket and drummer Dan Aran; representing the back half are Miami-raised trumpeter Michael Rodriguez, Cuban pianist César Orozco and Puerto Rican conguero/percussionist Marcos J. López – with a cameo each by Turkey's Tamer Pinarbasi (qanun) and Cuba's Yosvany Terry (chekeré).

Kriss is an equally fine composer and improviser. His melodies are inspired by the long-limbed, adroitly ornamented sequences found in Arab music, a few borrowing the idiomatic intervals as well, set in meters of four, five, six or seven beats. Songs like "Sahadi's Serenade", "Hong Kong Overture", "Rak Beinatayim" (a Nurit Hirsh cover arranged by Kriss) and "Para Venezuela" contain many elements typical of Latin jazz (montunos, claves, et al.), but the run-on phrases, through-composed melodies, intricately laced counterpoint and frequent modulations make them something else as well. On "Shabazi", featuring Pinarbasi's pianistic qanun, Kriss even finds some of the half-flat intervals of Arab *maqam* (modal music), mimicking perhaps the 'bent' tones of the end-blown ney. Here and on "Havana Special", he delivers some of his most stirring improvisations: incisive sequencing on the former, inspired exchanges with Rodriguez and Orozco on the latter, where the pianist demonstrates his mastery of rhythmic modulation. López' congas resonate on "Mafroum" while Bareket fashions quietly affective statements on "Buttered Scones and Tea" and the intro of the flamenco-esque "Azules".

With this strong, effervescent set of motley influences and animated soloing now behind him, it will be interesting to hear where Kriss is headed next.

For more information, visit [itaikriss.com](http://itaikriss.com). This project is at The Django at Roxy Hotel Jul. 7th and Smalls Jul. 20th. See Calendar.



*Crazy Lights Shining*  
Sarah Bernstein Uneathish (Phase Frame Music)  
by Elliott Simon

The world that violinist/poet Sarah Bernstein and percussionist Satoshi Takeishi created on *Uneathish* (2011) demanded further exploration and *Crazy Lights Shining*, the duo's sophomore release, offers just that. Through a unique partnership they create musical flora and fauna drawing sustenance from biting sarcasm, stinging political statements and voices from

the other side. There are innumerable warnings here and opener "For Plants" is an ambient admonition that illusion abounds. The duo then take a frenetic interstellar journey with a "Map or Meaningless Map", which finds peace among the constellations but falls back through the ice clouds to its starting point. Bernstein's spoken words are powerful and as tension builds through violin shots against a percussive backdrop her call to arms that "Drastic Times" require tragic measures is ominous and frightening. Its end of the world scenario is all too relevant.

The title cut is a victim's diatribe against trouble: "...you want blood you want loyalty but I'm gone..." It quickly reaches an incessant fever pitch through pizzicato and bells, becoming semi-apologetic before repeating the sequence. Her chilling forewarning to "Be Safe" when you're not safe is supported by a pleasant Asian-informed Pollyanna-ish melody. Most of these tracks are short and brevity allows for compact powerful statements like the casual "Little Drops" of meaningless conversation that ends with shock, the sweet pathos of "The Place" that allows us to shut out the horror.

This all leads up to surprising session closer "Four Equals Two", eschewing words for an exquisite scalar exploration that sounds an optimistic final note. Bernstein and Takeishi have a unique bond and while it is not surprising that Bernstein perfectly mirrors her own thoughts with her strings, Takeishi is equally proficient at reflecting her mood and emotion with his sensitive percussion work. No other artists could make this special duo concept flourish with the same emotion, immediacy and relevancy.

For more information, visit [sarahbernstein.com](http://sarahbernstein.com). Bernstein is at Downtown Music Gallery Jul. 8th and Wonders of Nature Jul. 17th. See Calendar.

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