

DROP THE NEEDLE



The Cry!
Prince Lasha Quintet (featuring Sonny Simmons)
 (Contemporary-Craft)
 by Pierre Crépon

Upon its 1963 release, some saw *The Cry!* as the first album made by followers of Ornette Coleman. Other avant gardists—Cecil Taylor and Eric Dolphy, for example—traveled parallel tracks, but Prince Lasha (who passed away 16 years ago this month at age 79) and Sonny Simmons (who died over 3 years ago at age 87), two unknown California-based woodwind players at the time, could be seen as messengers confirming that, yes, a Coleman tide was impending. In producer Lester Koenig’s liners, Simmons says, “When Ornette came along, that did it, because the way he was expressing music, I felt was the way you are supposed to express it—just free, flowing naturally through you. He told me, ‘You don’t use any chord changes. The only thing you have for direction is the way the melody is formed.’” For his part, Lasha expounded on the friendship formed with Coleman in their native Fort Worth, TX.

But Lasha and Simmons’ debut was not an indistinct derivation. On eight originals, Lasha stuck to the flute while Simmons took the lion’s share of solos (on alto). There are no throwaway generic themes, the melodic material framing the orderly improvisations is of prime quality. Excellent support is provided by bass great Gary Peacock, partly in tandem with fellow bassist Mark Proctor, while drummer Gene Stone delivers forceful hits when needed. The band does not match the seemingly endless agility of the early Coleman quartet, but it is very tight and clears the way for the statements the co-leaders planned to make: yes, Coleman’s method works for others; new compositional voices have arrived and Simmons is one hell of a soloist. Did Lasha, who’s primarily known as a flutist and saxophonist, stick to the flute to establish a clear commercial identity for the duo? “Free jazz” labeling often obscures business aspects; when Yusef Lateef heard Lasha’s flute work during a blindfold test, for instance, he thought of the well-known Herbie Mann. At the other end, “Lost Generation”, a trio track opening with unaccompanied alto, points to future free playing developments.

The album represents young and vibrant music announcing serious developments to come in an accessible manner. If there was really such a thing as an avant garde jazz classics cannon, *The Cry!* would unquestionably belong there. Craft Recording’s Acoustic Sounds series 180g vinyl reissue (cut from the original tapes) sounds excellent. Peacock’s bass work is rarely heard so well. Historical liner notes would have arguably added value, but this might not be a real issue: it is rumored that Sonny Simmons’ anticipated autobiography will soon see its long overdue publication.

For more info visit craftrecordings.com



Sings Mr. Paganini
Rick Bogart (Arabesque)
 by Elliott Simon

Sings Mr. Paganini showcases vocalist-clarinetist Rick Bogart’s unmistakable style in a jazz experience that salutes tradition and offers a comforting, soulful homage that will resonate deeply with fans of jazz standards. Throughout the album, he draws listeners in with a smoky voice that feels right at home with each song, supported by Marc Daine (guitar) and Jon B. Roche (bass), each of whom bring their own elegance and skill to the recording.

Bogart’s delivery of the title track stands out as the album’s high point. A classic by Sam Coslow, the piece is reborn in his hands, as he weaves a story through its rhythms and melodic twists, his nuanced interpretation giving the familiar song a soulful depth. Ethel Ennis’ “Since I’ve Been to You”, the album opener, is an emotional number that Bogart approaches with sensitivity, setting a nostalgic tone for what’s to come. “The Magic of Manhattan” (co-written by Bogart with Ron Watt) features an interpretation that radiates with energy and celebrates the allure of NYC with a sense of wonder that reflects his connection to its vibrant jazz scene. “You Are My Lucky Star” (Nacio Herb Brown, Arthur Freed) is full of Bogart’s warm, sentimental vocal style and feels like a heartfelt ode, wrapping the album in a soft, romantic glow. “There Will Never Be Another You” (Harry Warren, Mack Gordon) begins with a clear, round tone on clarinet, for which Bogart is known for. Here he captures the charm and warmth of the jazz classic, giving it a fresh yet timeless appeal.

Throughout *Sings Mr. Paganini*, Daine and Roche create a rich, textured background that enhances each song without overpowering it. The arrangements are minimalist yet thoughtfully crafted, placing Bogart’s voice front and center and allowing the nuances of his phrasing to shine through. Each track carries a sense of sincerity, creating an atmosphere that feels both intimate and timeless. For jazz lovers, the chemistry between Bogart, Daine and Roche, paired with the careful selection of songs, brings a classic elegance to each track.

For more info visit rickbogart.com. Bogart is at Backstage Tavern Fridays and Tio Pepe Sundays. See Calendar.



To Be Other-Wise
Sylvie Courvoisier (Intakt)
 by John Sharpe

On her second-ever solo release, Brooklyn-based, Swiss-born pianist Sylvie Courvoisier demonstrates yet again why she is such an enduring fixture on the NYC jazz scene. Though many of the dozen offerings seem spontaneously generated, Courvoisier imparts a sense of poise, logic and high drama to even the most “out-there” sonic explorations. Already one of the

most adroit deployers of on-the-fly preparations of her instrument, the studio setting affords Courvoisier the opportunity for yet more complex interventions. As a result, almost every track comes laced with an array of unconventional timbres, from shimmering hum to clanking rumble to marimba-like plonks, giving the whole date a distinctive and at times other-worldly air. But as an unfailingly rhythmic player, the momentum she engenders, however short-lived, means she swerves the dreaded impressionistic tag.

Scripted or extemporized, Courvoisier’s approach thrives on contrasting different sonic elements, whether that be the dark stomp from the bass register and furtive tiptoe from the treble of “Preluding (For Conlon Nancarrow)”, or juxtaposing the prepared and unprepared keyboard segments of the skittish “Chilling (For My Three Cats)”, or pitching abstraction against melody on “To Be Other-Wise (For Amy Sillman)”, where the scuttling among dampened keys and distorted reflections resolve into one of her most memorable tunes “Éclats For Ornette”. Her predilection for cannibalizing her earlier output also surfaces on “Twisting Memories (For Sarah Turin)”, which reimagines parts of “Just Twisted” from her trio on *Free Hoops*, with explosive spurts and cascading interludes falling midway between barrelhouse and Cecil Taylor.

While there is not usually any obvious link between each piece and its dedicatee, it is not overly fanciful to suggest that the pianist’s exclamatory figures and gamelan echoes on “Scooting (For Olivier Messaien)” evoke the birdcall inspirations of the French composer. Even so, there is no doubting the tenderness of the multifaceted “Ballade for My Dad”. Here she repurposes the drifting vamp heard on “Le Pavot Rouge” (from the recent *Chimaera*), cossets it with bluesy phrases and scintillating variations and makes it something else again. It caps an outing which blurs improv, chamber and the jazz tradition into something deliciously personal.

For more info visit intaktrec.ch. Courvoisier is at Roulette Dec. 8 (part of Catalytic Sound Festival). See Calendar.



Live at Mezzrow
Ken Peplowski (Cellar Music)
 by Pierre Giroux

Ken Peplowski is a musician known for his warm clarinet and full-tone tenor saxophone, both of which were captured to perfection on *Live at Mezzrow*. Joined by Ted Rosenthal (piano), Martin Wind (bass) and Willie Jones III (drums), the reedman dives into various tunes by composers such as Hank Jones, André Previn, Thelonious Monk and Duke Ellington, among others. The overall result is a balanced, deep respect for the jazz tradition and fresh, forward-thinking interpretations.

Album opener “Vignette” (Hank Jones), a contrafact based on the chord changes to “Sweet Sue”, swings along gloriously, with the leader conveying a lyrical warmth and shaping each phrase with careful expressiveness. The group’s interaction on the chart is solidly in line with the tempo, contributing to its upbeat atmosphere. “All the Things You Are” (Kern, Hammerstein) has become a popular jazz standard due to its strong melody and logical chord structure. With Peplowski on clarinet, he and the band deliver a melodically sublime version, highlighting his mastery of the instrument’s range and color. Wind also has solo space and confirms that he