

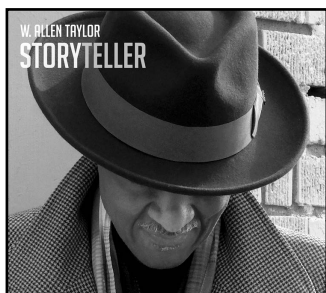
The Storytellers
Paolo Bacchetta Yerkir (Auand)
 by John Pietaro

As part of a moving homage to the late Paul Motian, Italian guitarist Paolo Bacchetta devised *The Storytellers*, an album featuring works inspired or composed by the late, celebrated drummer-composer. His trio Yerkir, (Armenian for earth) completed by organ player Giulio Stermieri and drummer Zeno De Rossi, well illustrates the multiple faces of Motian's career.

Right from the top, "White Magic", a churning blast of instrumental rock from 1982, takes the message and grit further than Motian envisioned, adding organ blasts to tear holes in the audio terrain. It's fair to say that downtown's post-punk confluence is here resurrected to its obvious conclusion. Throughout, guitar sings, slashes, whispers and lures. Stermieri and De Rossi not only complement his sizzling lines, but also cast a network of empathic sound, at once agitating and terse.

Spacious cuts like the pensive "Abacus" (Motian) and sleepily restless "Chinese Café" (Stermieri) paint much of the atmosphere one associates with Bill Evans, Motian's best loved and remembered employer. While the organ is a wholly different animal than the acoustic piano (particularly Evans'), Stermieri's touch, executed with the delicacy of a surgeon, lends itself well to this effort. And while the drummer's role here could be daunting—Motian's purposeful tacits, sensitive drive and visceral awareness put him into a unique category among modern drum artists—De Rossi displays considerable fluidity and chops with masterful dynamics and undying patience, paying tribute but never copying. Makes sense that in *The Storytellers*, he offers gripping commentary (listen for this in his own "Sournoise" and "Jean"). Bacchetta's "La Danza Macabra" is the standout, an uptempo waltz, which brings to mind Motian's brilliant trio with Joe Lovano and Bill Frisell. The guitarist's overdrive and burn easily share space with Frisell-like arabesques as Stermieri's swells inspire De Rossi to climb over and above. Yes, you want this album.

For more information, visit auand.com



Storyteller
W. Allen Taylor (s/r)
 by Marco Cangiano

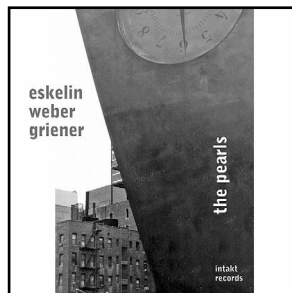
This is W. Allen Taylor's much-awaited debut CD. His activity has been centered on Bay and DC area venues, thus preventing wider audiences from appreciating his singing. He has been labeled as "a jazz singer from the old school...combining originality with a style reminiscent of the golden age of jazz singing." The list of his vocal influences includes Jon Hendricks and Eddie Jefferson, among others, but traces of Mark Murphy can also be found. This makes Taylor one of the regrettably dwindling number of vocalese practitioners. His natural swing and taste allow him to

revisit well-throttled standards with gusto and originality. Much of the credit though is due to his partners. Saxophonist Lionel Lyles delivers a number of very compelling solos and Chris Grasso's piano provides tasteful comping that aptly complements Taylor's singing. Bassist James King and drummer Mark Prince come across as true royalty in driving and supporting the proceedings with firm hands.

The material could not be more challenging but Taylor and his partners surf through it with confidence and concision—the average length is slightly above four minutes. From the opener, Miles Davis' "So What", through Andy Razaf-Don Redman's "Gee, Baby, Ain't I Good to You" and Sonny Rollins' "Doxy" there is an underlying blues feeling shared among the group. But Taylor's mastery of ballads such as Bobby Troup's "You're Looking at Me" and Billy Strayhorn's "Day Dream" is equally impressive thanks to his capacity to interpret the text (he had a long career in theater prior to rediscovering music as his passion).

The highlight is a heartfelt version of Charles Mingus' "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat". Introduced by Lyles' short statement on tenor, the immortal melody rolls slowly over the gently bouncing rhythm section until tenor reemerges with a very inspired solo, reminiscent of Booker Ervin's underrated balladry, prior to Taylor's coda. The CD is wrapped up by an uptempo version of Dizzy Gillespie's "A Night in Tunisia" with Hendricks' lyrics in which Taylor's scat-singing is featured once again. A welcome debut by an artist who definitely deserves wider exposure and appreciation.

For more information, visit watjazz.com



The Pearls
Ellery Eskelin/Christian Weber/Michael Griener
 (Intakt)
 by Steven Loewy

With a substantial history of subverting the way in which we hear music, saxophonist Ellery Eskelin has made a career of stretching and twisting melodic lines in a wholly individualistic style that substantiates an innovative vision. His immediately recognizable singular tone, approach and fluid lines are in evidence on *The Pearls*, a sort of sequel to this trio's earlier Intakt album *Sensations of Tone*. In contradistinction, *The Pearls* focuses on time: with the self-deprecating qualification that Eskelin is a musician and not a philosopher, he asks, "...[D]oes time exist? Is timekeeping itself time? Are we time?" In this he is more astute than he realizes, mimicking the famous proposition put forth by British thinker J.M.E. McTaggart that time is an illusion.

Eskelin's questions are addressed with a mix of free pieces mixed among upbeat older tunes, such as the title track by Jelly Roll Morton, a couple of eccentric rags, including one by Scott Joplin, and "Jive by Five", a popular swing melody penned by Harry "Sweets" Edison and performed with verve and panache.

Eskelin's performances are characterized by a floating quality, where he produces cascading flurries of notes at low volume, often at remarkable speed and belying any preset time signatures. This is evident on several tracks, including the opening "ABC", in which his playing is tight, swift, soft and fluid, and the closing "Black Drop", where a delicate opening slowly advances to just above a whisper. Strong contributions from bassist Christian Weber and drummer Michael

Griener undergird the saxophonist's escapades, an anchor over which he buzzes timelessly.

With a tip of the hat to Henry Threadgill, Eskelin navigates the two rags without eviscerating their essence, retaining their toe-tapping qualities while expanding them just enough. "Eccentric Rag", in particular, is played at an eccentrically fast pace: short, fun and exhausting. To sense how Eskelin totally modernizes the original, listen to the seminal 1914 version performed by Russell Robinson, its composer. Primarily by manipulating time, Eskelin takes the piece to a new dimension, making it his own.

For more information, visit intaktrec.ch

UNEARTHED GEM

BORAH BERGMAN WILBER MORRIS SUNNY MURRAY

MONKS

Monks
Borah Bergman/Wilber Morris/Sunny Murray
 (Somerealmusic)
 by Pierre Crépon

Pianist Borah Bergman began his career solitarily in the '70s-80s, before moving to duets and trios. It was then that he organized this 1996 New York studio date with bassist Wilber Morris and drummer Sunny Murray. Once the session had been completed, the DAT masters were found to be overloaded beyond repair. Recently discovered safety tapes, salvaged through extensive engineering work, made it possible to hear the music for the first time in excellent quality, though none of the principals are with us any longer.

The bop pioneer's influence is such in many corners—brilliant and not so brilliant—that the "Monk album" is almost a mandatory stop in a discography. But although entirely dedicated to Monk material, this session has nothing to do with formulaic exercise. "A Free Association Peregrination in the Fecund and Funky Fields of Monkdom", the title of the sole non-Monk piece, indicates the general direction.

Bergman is constantly "exploding the tunes into fragments, re-assembling, expanding and abstracting," writes producer Joseph Chonto. It holds true for the collective work of the trio, which often happens at extreme pace, for stretches of time of a median 20 minutes, Bergman's crossed-hands ambidexterity redoubling the relentlessness. Yet the pianist does not eschew short motives to reroute the music's flow to stunning effect while the drums and bass thrust forward. Murray is far too infrequently credited for the diversity of his playing; he is here in full deployment mode, bordering on the combative, but the two opening takes of "Well, You Needn't" show clearly his capacity for nuance, his cymbal magic happening in full effect only the second time around. Morris manages the arduous task of finding the appropriate sonic space to make his bass sing while holding a constantly strong bottom. Cooler numbers provide welcome opportunities to focus on his playing.

The session is presented in a fashion usually reserved to the masters of Monk's era: in its entirety, incomplete takes and studio chatter included. *Monks* contains a lost album, but what would have made the cut is left up in the air. It only enriches this significant addition to all three players' discographies.

For more information, contact somerealmusic@earthlink.net