

Oasis: The Music of Gregg Hill
Rodney Whitaker (Origin)
by George Kanzler

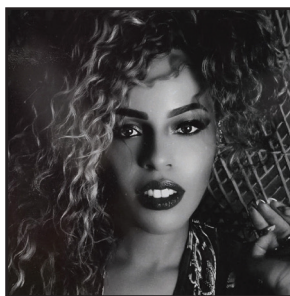
Two distinguishing features of this album are the repertoire and the band. 10 of the 11 tracks were written by Gregg Hill, who only started composing after retiring from a career far outside of jazz. And the quintet led here by bassist Rodney Whitaker (who celebrates his 55th birthday later this month) is that rarity in jazz, a working group: one that comes together for gigs and projects with a rotating leadership of its members. They are Whitaker, Terell Stafford (trumpet/flugelhorn), Tim Warfield (tenor/soprano), Bruce Barth (piano) and Dana Hall (drums). Also worth noting: this is the third album of Hill's compositions by Whitaker's band.

Joining the quintet on 4 tracks is singer Rockelle Fortin (the bandleader's daughter), whose voice is more memorable than her self-penned lyrics. She jumps into the opening track, "Betty's Tune", kicked off by the rhythm section at a barnburner tempo, her quicksilver words carrying the melody. The musicians race through their solos and a short shout chorus caps things off. Hill's tunes fall squarely into the post-bop acoustic mainstream while exploring new avenues and possibilities. "Puppets" features overlapping meters;

the form of "Sunday Afternoon" is 24 bars, with two A sections, but not a blues; and "S'Cool Days" is in the familiar pop song AABA, but 58, not 32 bars, the A's 16 bars and B 10 bars. "To the Well" develops like a mini-suite, over dominant tom-toms, from drum solo to rubato horns to modal harmonies ushering in an exotic, processional rhythm.

That this is a working band is evident in the cohesion and subtle interplay of its members. Stafford and Warfield sometimes shadow one another's solos with obligati, or most notably by intoning the melody behind the other's solo, strikingly with muted trumpet and soprano on "Puppets". The quintet also meshes perfectly in grooves like the minor key hard bop wail of "Minorabilia", the loping swing of "Fan O Gram" and the greasy backbeat of the title tune. Their rapport is especially evident whenever they engage in trading fours.

For more info, visit originarts.com



La Bruja
Lauren Henderson (Brontosaurus)
by Alex Henderson

Vocalist Lauren Henderson has cited Julie London, Shirley Horn and Anita O'Day as three of her inspirations. But the Massachusetts-born singer is not content to simply emulate Cool School vocalists. Instead, the 36-year-old Henderson has combined cool jazz with R&B (sometimes sounding a bit like Sade) and a wide range of Latin music. She is as expressive and fluent in Spanish as she is in English, and sticks to Spanish on *La Bruja* ("The Witch").

Latin music is famous for big-voiced female vocalists, from Cuban salsa icon Celia Cruz to Mexican ranchera/mariachi favorite Lola Beltrán. But Henderson is far from a belter, and favors subtlety and understatement. That approach serves her well throughout this self-produced album, whether on originals such as "Amistad" ("Friendship"), "Así" ("Like That") and "Deseo" ("Desire") or well-known Latin standards such as Rafael Hernández's "Silencio" ("Silence") and Maria Teresa Vera's "Viente Años" ("20 Years").

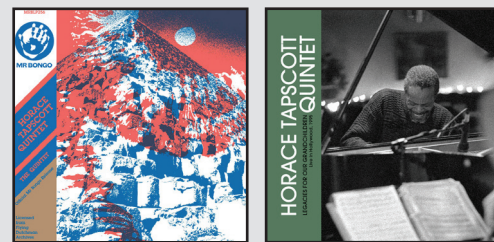
Henderson also tackles Alberto Dominguez' 1930s standard "Perfidia", which has been recorded by everyone from Mexican mariachi bands to Glenn Miller's swing orchestra to surf rockers The Ventures; its melody was even heard in a scene in the movie *Casablanca* (1942). Henderson's hushed, noir-ish interpretation combines cool jazz with the bolero (Latin ballad) tradition, choosing the song's Spanish lyrics over the English lyrics written by Milton Leeds.

The title track is a famous Mexican standard closely identified with the son jarocho style; Henderson's interpretation successfully blends son jarocho with cool jazz. Meanwhile, her own "Amistad" is heavily influenced by Spanish flamenco.

Henderson's accompaniment on *La Bruja* includes Sean Mason or John Chin (piano), Joel Ross (vibes), Nick Tannura or Gabe Schneider (guitar), Eric Wheeler (bass) and Joe Dyson (drums) - all expertly sustain the appealing Latin jazz-noir mood that Henderson is going for.

For more info, visit laurenhendersonmusic.com. This project is at Birdland Theater Feb. 23rd. See Calendar.

UNEARTHED GEM



The Quintet (Mr. BONGO)
Legacies for Our Grandchildren (Dark Tree)
Horace Tapscott Quintet
by Pierre Crépon

The blurb for *The Quintet* contains the expected archival release vocabulary: "unearthed", "lost recording", "intended to be a follow-up album to the classic *The Giant Is Awakened*", "produced by one of the pivotal figures in jazz, Bob Thiele". Neither the CD nor LP version though includes liner notes, only indicating that the music was recorded at pianist Horace Tapscott's aforementioned Flying Dutchman debut session, which would be April 1969.

A first listen leaves the impression that the story is not as simple. Would the sophomore LP of a group being tentatively introduced nationally have included a composition already featured on its debut? Without this extended version of saxophonist Arthur Blythe's "For Fats", it feels like at least another session would have been needed to complete an actual album. A look at Tapscott's autobiography, *Songs of the Unsung* (Duke University Press) yields the following: "We recorded *The Giant Is Awakened* and part of another album that I never finished. Thiele and I had some arguments." Thiele denied him creative control on the final product, Tapscott adds, cementing his distrust of record companies. This suggests that the distinction between a lost album and an unfinished project would have mattered to the pianist.

This state of affairs accounts for the spottiness of Tapscott's discography in this era - *Giant*, a Sonny Criss date, two Elaine Brown LPs - and makes this half hour valuable. Of particular interest is drummer Everett Brown Jr.'s "World Peace". Here, the group departs from the repetition of rhythmic motifs (the dominant approach on *Giant*) for "outer" territories. The soloing is concise, but it completes the picture of what was then going on in Los Angeles.

Attention to the details of Tapscott's history is where French label Dark Tree shines. *Legacies for Our Grandchildren*, its fourth Tapscott title, contains an actual unreleased album, recorded live at Hollywood's Catalina Bar & Grill in 1995. The story is recounted in informative liner notes by Los Angeles Times writer Don Snowden, who produced the sessions to give exposure to Tapscott's regular L.A. quintet but was not able to interest any label.

Tapscott passed just a few years later, 24 years ago this month, making the project feel like a failure, Snowden wrote. What remained was a high quality recording with saxophonist Michael Session, trombonist Thurman Green and the bass/drums team of Roberto Miranda and Fritz Wise. Vocalist Dwight Tribble guests on half the numbers. He interestingly brings to mind Leon Thomas, who, before finding fame with Pharoah Sanders, advanced his style after encountering Tapscott in L.A.. The version of "Motherless Child" featuring Tribble is likely to be a standout for most listeners.

Taken together, those early and late career documents underline the plain openness of the music Tapscott played. It acquired a greater fluidity over time, and in an alternate universe where it received a contemporary release, *Legacies for Our Grandchildren* certainly could have appealed to a wide spectrum of listeners.

For more info, visit mrbongo.com and darktree-records.com

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