



King's Dream
George Colligan (PJCE)
by Fred Bouchard

A man, a plan, a piano. On *King's Dream*, veteran pianist George Colligan shares an intimate, reflective solo suite from his home in post-pandemic Portland, OR. He transports us into that heady ether between seamless, breathlessness and spirituality, holding us aloft with power and grace. He boldly captures the deliberate elan of modal masters McCoy Tyner and Joe Bonner on sweeping *tours-de-force* such as the stage-setting "Clearing The Mind" and "Daddy Go Bye Bye".

His full-spectrum palette may evoke dark Rachmaninoff forest rumbles here or the oriental whole-tone pastels of Debussy there, always with an eye cast onto the greater organic picture. His sturdy walking left hand scrawls under an ironic, twisting "Doom Sandwich", and in wry homage to the late bassist (and early '90s collaborator) Dwayne Burno.

With "Golden Years", Colligan's sweet legato gestures to a panorama of peace, harmony and gratitude. It's cut from the same strong whole cloth as the titular ode to Martin Luther King, Jr.—highminded, restless, offering an uplifting vision—with a final jubilant carillon. "Liam's Lament" builds dreamily layered, cascading chords somehow evocative of Sir Roland Hanna. Waxing rhapsodic, he peers meditatively into the cosmos. By the end of this the 67-minute set (each original a firm first take), we're pretty much reaching out there with him and yet, with our feet, remain blessedly planted on solid earth.

For more info, visit PJCE.org. Colligan is at Mezzrow Mar. 27. See Calendar.



Ashanti
Santi Debriano & Arkestra Bembe (JoJo)
by Keith Hoffman

Like his contemporary, Cuban-born pianist Elio Villafranca, bassist and composer Santi Debriano is both a child of the West African Diaspora and a gifted ethnomusicologist. Born in Panama but raised in Brooklyn, Debriano took a degree in that discipline from Wesleyan University. During the lockdown he invited musicians to his Staten Island home for sessions he conceived as "bembe"—the Yoruba word for cultural celebrations with music and dance, food and drink. Gradually, as the kindred musicians workshopped his compositions, à la Charles Mingus, they took a more definite form.

When he premiered the work at Smalls in July of last year, there was the palpable excitement of novel creation. His opener there, "Imagined Nation", just blew the doors off. Of course, there was also the difficulty of fitting his nonet into the space, and the imperfections inherent when a large ensemble does so and without monitors.

On *Ashanti*, Debriano and Arkestra Bembe—Andrea Brachfeld (flute), TK Blue (alto), Tommy Morimoto (tenor), Ray Scro (baritone), Emile Turner (trumpet), Adrian Alvarado (guitar), Mamiko Watanabe (piano), Robby Ameen (drums)—manage to keep a great deal of that excitement while sanding away the imperfections in the studio. The recording is clean, surprisingly airy for such a large group and extremely well-balanced. For example, the outstanding guitar work of Alvarado—lost in the live mix—is front and center on album opener "Angel Heart". Brachfeld's outstanding solos on "Spunky" and "Arkestra Boogaloo" are clean, lovely and unforced.

While the quality of the compositions, arrangements and performances is excellent throughout, a few merit special attention. "Imaginary Guinea", based on the Haitian notion that the souls of the departed float home to Africa, is a long, languid and gorgeous piece in 6/4. And Bobby Hutcherson's "'Til Then", the album's lone non-original, gets a loving update.

This is an excellent addition to Debriano's substantial and perhaps under-appreciated body of work as leader.

For more info, visit jojorecords.com. This project is at Iridium Mar. 18. See Calendar.



The Source
Kenny Barron (Artwork)
by George Kanzler

Saying "That's Kenny Barron" when you hear a piano on record isn't always easy. Barron is less about style than approach, an approach that is tailored to the material he's playing. On this, his first solo recording since the 1980s, Barron's masterfully encompasses a broad range and history of jazz piano styles. Over nine tracks including four originals, Ellington-Strayhorn and two by Monk plus the old Fats Waller hit "I'm Confessin'", he embraces a panoply of jazz piano styles, gestures and approaches, all in service of the tunes being addressed.

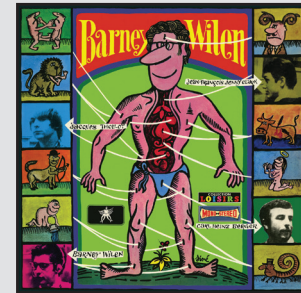
Kicking off these proceedings is his own "What If", introduced by pounding rubato chords that skirt atonality, before he sidles into a 21st century version of stride that underpins and propels his right-hand improvisational forays. Later, on "I'm Confessin'", he demonstrates his proficiency in traditional stride, creating a catchy bounce for his bright, lilting right hand figures. The two Strayhorn pieces offer contrasting approaches: "Isfahan" stresses the insistent descending figure in the melody, while "Day Dream" emphasizes the tune's dreaminess in its slow reverie of legato notes.

A veteran of Monk tribute band Sphere, Barron is a creative interpreter, never aping the master's style while still illuminating it. He applies a Monk-ish touch to "Teo" (Monk's contrafact of "Topsy"), repeatedly emphasizing the opening bars. In contrast, "Well You Needn't" becomes a quicksilver fantasia on the familiar melody, hidden in the uptempo framework.

Barron's other originals offer three distinctive approaches. "Dolores Street, SF" is saturated in the melancholy feel elicited by his delicate touch. "Sunshower", which unfurls as a full Afro-Latin piece on his group recording, sways along in a gentle, partly implied, montuno. And "Phantoms" bounces along on an infectious propulsive mid-tempo rhythm.

For more info, visit pias.com. Barron is at The Appel Room Mar. 24-25 with Rosa Passos and The Apollo for "A Great Night in Harlem" Mar. 30. See Calendar.

DROP THE NEEDLE



Zodiac
Barney Wilen
(Disques Vogues-We Are Busy Bodies)
by Pierre Crépon

There were many phases to the career of French-American saxophonist Barney Wilen who would have turned 85 this month (he died in May 1996). *Zodiac* dates from the beginnings of a relatively short period of public identification with free jazz. In October 1965, Wilen came out of retirement and began a residency at the Reunionese restaurant Le Requin Chagrin with drummer Jacques Tholot as his main partner. Over the course of a full year in that Parisian cave, they were joined by various bassists, most often Jean-François Jenny-Clark. Their audience included artists such as filmmaker Chris Marker and cartoonist Siné, the creator of *Zodiac's* cover art. Aged 28, with a résumé including Miles Davis and Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers, Wilen had already surpassed what could reasonably be expected for a French musician. But he felt that he had engaged bop when the music was already over, and he kept looking for other avenues. What he turned to in free jazz was Ornette Coleman's elimination of chord changes, not the outer register explorations of Ayler or, increasingly, Coltrane.

On *Zodiac*, the trio were joined by German vibraphonist Karl Berger. No recording date is listed, but circumstantial evidence—including Berger and Jenny-Clark's work in Paris with Don Cherry's great quintet—confirms the circulating date of January 1966. For this record, the group attempted something specific: the creation of twelve 3-minute miniatures based on each zodiac sign. "Each composition will illustrate the characteristics of one of these signs," Wilen told *Jazz Magazine* before the session. "For Aquarius ["Verseau"], for instance, it is Saturn, impulse, mystery: right away, this gives an idea of the atmosphere, of the theme." Non-astrologically-inclined listeners won't be able to gauge the success of the enterprise, but the music can stand on its own. A certain gentleness and a cinematic quality predominate. It is not surprising to learn in photographer Jean Larivière's notes that a related film project once existed. For French musicians, it seems that freeing jazz at first did not mean cracking open the sonic frontiers but rather investing the freedom to organize preexisting material in new ways. Wilen, for instance, possessed a beautiful sound, serviceable in West Coast contexts, and he did not leave it behind. This repress by Toronto label We Are Busy Bodies was not sourced from the original tapes but from an extremely clean vinyl copy and is sonically very good. It is a well-done reissue of a non-essential but quite interesting record.

For more info, visit wearebusybodies.bandcamp.com