# CD REVIEWS

The Music of Michael Jackson (And Original Compositions): Live SFJAZZ Center 2015
SFJAZZ Collective (SFJAZZ)
by Matthew Kassel

Since launching in 2004, the SFJAZZ Collective has taken upon itself the noble task of interpreting the repertoire of jazz greats. Occasionally, however, the group will set its sights on a more pop-oriented musician such as Steve Wonder in 2011 and, most recently, Michael Jackson. The result of the latter homage is a kinetic, two-disc live set from 2015, which includes, as usual, 16 tracks: one arrangement of a Jackson song by each member along with eight original compositions. This exquisite, horn-heavy octet is comprised of Miguel Zenón (alto saxophone), David Sánchez (tenor saxophone), Sean Jones (trumpet), Robin Eubanks (trombone), Warren Wolf (vibraphone), Edward Simon (piano), Matt Penman (bass) and Obed Calvaire (drums).

Standout originals include Wolf's "Gray Skies in Baltimore", on which he displays his virtuosic soloing style à la Milt Jackson, Simon's cinematic "Beauty of Space" and Calvaire's "150 Million Gold Franks", with a lively bit of vocal call and response at the end. The hits, of course, are accounted for: "The Love You Save", "Thriller", "Smooth Criminal" and "Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough". Lesser-known tracks (kind of an oxymoron when discussing a pop king like Michael Jackson) include "Blame It on the Boogie", "Rock With You", "This Place Hotel" and "Human Nature". The album is a funky affair, with pockets of swing, spacey interludes and rock-ish riffs throughout.

Most of the covers are only obliquely related to their original melodies, though you can still identify them easily enough. "Blame It on the Boogie", for instance, arranged by Penman and Zenón, has a lovely bass-saxophone duo evolving into a kind of free-form jam and ends with an overt nod to the tune itself. On "Smooth Criminal", the well-known riff is clear but it is still its own song, arranged, once again, by Zenón. "Thriller" is the most straightforward cover, though it sounds somewhat like a Herbie Hancock song with Simon on synthesizers and laser-sharp drumming from Calvaire. An ideal melding of jazz and pop.

For more information, visit sfjazz.org. This group is at Miller Theater Apr. 1st. See Calendar.
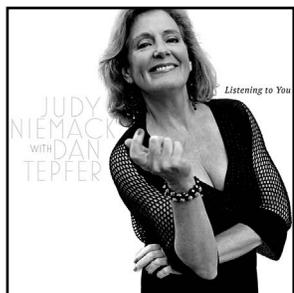
Listening to You
Judy Niemack/Dan Tepfer (Sunnyside)
by Alex Henderson

Throughout her long recording career—which started with *By Heart* on Sea Breeze Records in the late '70s—Judy Niemack has been a jazz singer who identified strongly with instrumentalists. Sheila Jordan, Betty Carter, Annie Ross and Ella Fitzgerald have directly or indirectly influenced her risk-taking vocal style, but Niemack's improvisatory spirit also owes a great deal

to Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk and other non-singers. Niemack has added lyrics to a long list of bop and postbop instrumentals along the way and her sense of adventure continues to serve her well on *Listening to You*.

This date finds the Los Angeles native/New York City resident accompanied only by acoustic pianist Dan Tepfer, whom she met through veteran alto saxophonist Lee Konitz. Though Niemack and Tepfer come from different generations (the former just turned 63 while the latter was born in 1982), the pair have a lot of common ground. In addition to the Konitz connection, some of the pianists who have influenced Tepfer are people Niemack admires (including Monk and Chick Corea). Both are very much in sync whether turning their attention to postbop melodies or Tin Pan Alley standards.

Niemack reminds us how sensitive an interpreter of lyrics she can be on introspective performances of Harry Warren's "There Will Never Be Another You", Jerome Kern's "All the Things You Are", Jay Gorney-Sidney Clare's "You're My Thrill" and Edward Heyman's "Body and Soul". Niemack is equally mindful of songs that instrumentalists have composed, bringing lyrics to pianist Ronnie Mathews' "Like a Butterfly" and two Konitz pieces: the title track and "Chick Came Around", the latter paying tribute to Corea with Niemack and Tepfer's rapport especially strong. The outlier is Monk's "Epistrophy", which underscores her talents as a scat singer and Tepfer's passion for Monk's angular pianism.

Listening to You is a fine addition to Niemack's catalogue and her decision to record with Tepfer was clearly a wise one.

For more information, visit sunnysiderecords.com. This project is at Jazz at Kitano Apr. 1st. See Calendar.

Supernovae
Leap of Faith Orchestra (Evil Clown)
by Donald Elfman

Composer and instrumentalist PEK (David Peck) has created a big band experience decidedly different from nearly any other. Not for PEK are standard charts with themes and room for soloists; instead an extended (some 77 minutes) 'composition' for orchestra is replete with various and sundry unusual instruments and delineated sections in which a variety of colors and textures take center stage, leaving a listener with the distinct feeling of experiencing something of note. The composer employs what he describes as Frame Notation, where the score is seen by players in written descriptions and symbols within duration bars. The musicians thus derive an understanding of their individual parts and, more importantly, an expansive sense of the shape of the entire piece. In performance, the players track the time on a sports clock but get no melodic, harmonic or rhythmic information (the reader/listener is advised to go to evilclown.rocks/lofo-supernovae-score.html).

So while what we have, sonically and by description as well, seems to have no shape, the actual music upon closer and repeated listening, takes on its own sense of direction. The non-traditional and unusual instruments—fog horns, rachets, crotales, bowls, flex-a-tones, crank siren, et al.—govern the first ten minutes of the work at which point strings, reeds and brass begin to emerge. There are moments of

quieter, more isolated 'noise'—the lonely bleat of a brass instrument, smear from a guitar or violin, tinkle or roar of a percussion instrument and at about 45 minutes in a dark melody with free improvisation blanketing it is introduced. There's a dazzling and explosive percussion display that leads to the kind of music that opened the performance, this time rich with everything that has come before it.

If these descriptions seem vague and non-defined, be assured that as a full musical experience, there are wonders to be discovered.

For more information, visit evilclown.rocks. This project is at Downtown Music Gallery Apr. 2nd. See Calendar.

RECOMMENDED NEW RELEASES

- **Anyaa Arts Quartet**—*Harmattan* (Voxlox)
- **Bill Brovoldf/Jamie Saft**—
  Serenity Knolls (RareNoise)
- **Chicago/London Underground**—*A Night Walking Through Mirrors* (Cuneiform)
- **Ornette Coleman**—*Celebrate Ornette* (Song X)
- **Billy Mintz**—*Ugly Beautiful* (Thirteenth Note)
- **Matt Mitchell/Tim Berne**—
  Førage (Screwgun)
- **Neuköllner Modelle**—*Sektion 3-7* (Umlaut)
- **Sam Newsome**—*Sopranoville* (s/r)
- **Kjell Nordeson**—*Walking with Mirabeau (Solo Improvisations)* (Not Two)
- **Günter "Baby" Sommer**—*Le Piccole Cose (Live at Theater Gütersloh)* (Intuition)

Laurence Donohue-Greene, Managing Editor

- **Curtis Brothers Quartet**—*Syzygy* (Truth Revolution)
- **Harris Eisenstadt**—*Recent Developments* (Songlines)
- **Joe Fiedler**—*Like, Strange* (Multiphonics Music)
- **Joana Gama/Luís Fernandes/ Ricardo Jacinto**—*Harmonies* (Clean Feed)
- **Jimmy Giuffre 3**—*Bremen & Stuttgart 1961* (hatART/Verve - Emanem)
- **Massimo De Mattia/Bruno Cesselli**—*Teatro Arrignoi* (Artesuono)
- **Melech**—*Plays Gebirtig* (Multikulti Project)
- **Reflections in Cosmo**—*Eponymous* (RareNoise)
- **Howard Riley**—*Constant Change 1976-2016* (NoBusiness)
- **Trio 3**—*Visiting Texture* (Intakt)

Andrey Henkin, Editorial Director