

the composing is strong, it is really the deployment of the substantial resources that is most impressive. The range of nuances of each piece, the carefully managed movement from crescendo to diminuendo among the brass and reeds, the sense that every composition is a mini-suite within the suite: these traits are superb, enabling Elsaffar to create an orchestral work that retains a small group dynamism and narrative stealth. Some of the best soloists on the New York and Chicago scenes are featured but the end result is still a collective rhapsody, in which certain sounds, whether a soar of quarter tones from the strings or a hissing of vibraphone and percussion, slide in and out of focus to good effect. To a certain extent Craig Taborn's piano, which blurs melody, rhythm and soundscape with siren tension, is almost an interface between all of the above. Ultimately, Elsaffar's greatest achievement here is the strong undercurrent of lyric poetry running through the performance. There is an intimacy, both comforting and questioning, created by a band that evokes much stir and solace in its handling of very ambitious scores.

Kevin Le Gendre

Harris Eisenstadt Recent Developments

Songlines SGL 1620-2 ★★☆☆

Harris Eisenstadt (d, comp), Anna Webber (f), Sara Schoenbeck (bsn), Nate Wooley (t), Jeb Bishop (tb), Dan Peck (tba), Brandon Seabrook (bjo), Hank Roberts (clo) and Eivind Opsvik (b). Rec. 13 June 2016



On *Recent Developments*, his 20th release as bandleader, New York composer and

percussionist Harris Eisenstadt revives the flagging jazz careers of both banjo and tuba, structuring a keen alliance between Dan Peck's flatulent horn and Brandon Seabrook's porch-side treatments. Seabrook is a particularly exciting proposition, a gutbucket maverick who's as happy hiccupping in hickory winds as he is ruffling feathers with blasts of bad weather bellicosity. Here he reels out a series of mutant old-time rolls and raggedly plucks, collapsing Dock Boggs' death-rattle blues amid a low-end setting of bellowing hippo-hipped brass and grouchy cartoon strings, a reductionist fresco teetering between jug band joust and laugh-it-up lampoon. Eisenstadt, for his part, restricts himself to an unobtrusive Paul Motian-like shading, his magic woven through the organisational fecundity of these profoundly original arrangements. **Spencer Grady**

Antonio Farao Eklektik

Warner 5054197610424 ★★

Antonio Farao (p, ky, prog), Marcus Miller, Dario Rosciglione (el b), Mike Clark, Manu Katché (d), Robert Davi, Snoop Dogg, Krazy Bone, Claudia Campagnol, Walter Ricci, Fabiana Rosciglione (v), Didier Lockwood (vn), Biréli Lagrène (g), Luigi Di Nunzio (as) and Enrico Solazzo (programming). Rec. 2016

Italian pianist Farao's career to date has seen him swing hard with the likes of Jeff 'Tain' Watts and Jack DeJohnette but this latest venture, as the title suggests, takes him into a world much broader than post-bop. In industry terms this is the 'urban' project with rap, R&B and electronica the predominant flavours in the mix. The presence of big name guests, from Snoop Dogg to Marcus Miller, may boost the appeal across markets but they actually end up creating more imbalance than coherence, especially as the more interesting harder edge of what they do so well is softened by predominantly high gloss sounds in the mix. In fact, a major part of the problem is the prevailing blandness of the programming and beats that lack the thrust to take the songs, a few of which are not unappealing, beyond wallpaper radio fare. Farao's talent as well as the quality of the line-up save this from being an entirely second rate affair, but the material and production are far too pedestrian to bring to fruition a project that has the grandiose aim to both 'explore new horizons' and 'break down all kinds of boundaries'. **Kevin Le Gendre**

Scott Hamilton The Shadow of Your Smile

Blau 016 ★★☆☆

Scott Hamilton (ts), Dena DeRose (p), Ignasi González (b) and Jo Krause (d). Rec. 7 December 2015

Once the boy wonder of neo-mainstream, Scott Hamilton is now, unbelievably, in his early sixties. No longer tied to his US Concord contract, he records prolifically in and around Europe. A case, I guess, of have saxophone, will travel. Recent releases have worked rather like a Cook's tour of the continent, taking in like-minded collaborations in the UK, France, Switzerland and Denmark, with a significant cluster occurring in Spain, and Benicàssim in particular, this 2015 concert session just the latest in his Iberian sequence. Writer Dave Gelly recently referred to Hamilton's "undiminished brilliance" and it's easy to see what he means. Every piece here is played by Hamilton with a kind of languid ease, each melodic variation following the other, quite

inexorably, his sumptuous tenor sound brilliantly caught in this live recording. There's an unhurried quality to his approach, a lived-in character to his phrase-making that is very engaging and while it might lack the fire and brimstone of youth, it is compensated for by the well-honed values of experience. US pianist DeRose sings too, on 'How Deep Is The Ocean', and plays her boppish clusters with real authority while Gonzalez, a carry-over from an earlier release, makes every step a swinger. Make no mistake: Hamilton still has a lot to offer. **Peter Vacher**

Harriet Tubman Araminta

Sunnyside SSC 1459 ★★☆☆
Recommended

Brandon Ross (g), Melvin Gibbs (b), J.T Lewis (d) and Wadada Leo Smith (t). Rec. 2016

Harriet Tubman has proved itself the power trio that does not play a standard power trio card for the best part of two decades now. Free of the road tested tropes of 'fusion' the group processes on a much more primal blues byway in which the smear of a note or its enticing decay to silence defines a piece as much as any pentatonic twist or sideways drag into half-time. The presence of trumpet hero Wadada Leo Smith invites inevitable comparisons to electric Miles, but while the reference is not irrelevant this new quartet also invigorates the lineage of 'hard but loose groove', where the tension of an ostinato riff is engulfed in a haze of drifting, smoldering chords and flickering off-beats, building on the foundation of Band Of Gypsies and 'Blood' Ulmer, both with and without Ornette. HT's alternation of violence of tone and tenderness of motif is one of its strongest suits, and Smith fits into the tailoring well, his solos binding to Ross's by way of a strong suggestion of vocal cry that can be as vividly pained as it is defiant. Gibbs and Lewis strike an excellent balance between solid backbeat and liquid rubato, but the sense that the band, for all its improvisatory nouse, can slide into super soulful ballad mode is never far away. The gorgeous closer 'Sweet Araminta' is indeed a deeply sensual love song that is like balm to some of the deep burns that precede it. Bolstered by a skillful Scotty Hard mix full of shadow and light, this is an outstanding album from a band that performs the important function of locating and extending the modernism if not timelessness of older forms of black music, producing real novelty in place of any lazy cliché. If only they were seen more often on these



Harris Eisenstadt

shores. Harriet Tubman would make a momentous double bill with Jean-Paul Bourelly's Stone Raiders.

Kevin Le Gendre

Olli Hirvonen New Helsinki

Edition EDN 1087 ★★☆☆

Olli Hirvonen (g), Walter Smith III (ts), Adam O'Farrill (t), Luke Marantz (p, ky), Martin Kenney (b) and Nathan Ellman-Bell (d). Rec. October-December 2016

Helsinki heritage, New York base, Brit label, Hirvonen trails the clouds of glory that come with winning prizes and getting endorsed by no less than John McLaughlin. And you can understand why: Hirvonen plays with a breath-taking technical flair. And with *New Helsinki* he's canny enough to surround himself with bright young things that play with an equal brash confidence. So what's not to like? After all on epic cuts like 'Absolute' Hirvonen lays down ridiculously long lines that build to the inevitable coruscating climax, though it's O'Farrill's trumpet that steals the show, chased hard by Marantz's crunching Rhodes. Likewise, 'Fundamental' comes replete with a lush, Ivo Neame-ish piano intro before morphing into a yomping rocker with Hirvonen as ever smackingly on the beat while Smith and O'Farrill yelp around him. So the bandmembers deserve as much of our ears as Hirvonen does. It's equally cool that he writes all the material, but maybe a little more space and a feel for dynamics could be built in, but that's carping about an undoubted talent. Watch this space. **Andy Robson**