

JAZZ REVIEW



Hank Mobley

Barry Witherden takes
Roll Call with the tenor great

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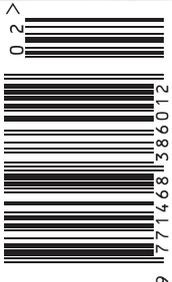
JR in New York

Henry 'Red' Allen

Anders Bergcrantz

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PHILIP CLARK puts his cards on the table and recommends the best of NY's latest crop of musicians.



PETER EVANS

Trumpeter Peter Evans must be fed up being hailed as the future of jazz, but if he persists in the release of projects as mint brilliant as 2006's unaccompanied *More Is More* and his eponymous Peter Evans Quartet date in 2007, no doubt about it, he is going to have to get used to the acclamation.

Evans came to New York City in 2003 after graduating from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music and got people talking pretty quickly. He's now in his mid-twenties and his concept of trumpet playing has been to deconstruct the instrument and re-assemble the debris as imaginatively as he can. Whereas the lion's share of instrumentalists spend years perfecting a particular style or genre of the music, Evans's unique technical mastery penetrates deeper. He's instinctively found connections between the outer reaches of extended technique and the vocalised effects of Tricky Sam Nanton and Rex Stewart. He can play walls of noise, he can swing. Evans has assembled it all into an evolving language that embraces the entire history of his instrument. He's raised the plateau for everyone and boundaries have audibly shifted.

I came across Evans, sight unheard, at the end of 2006 during an extended stay in New York. He was playing unaccompanied at Tonic, the scuzzy downtown club that was a centre of improvised music until escalating East Village rents forced its closure last year. And what happened there happens rarely in life –

from the moment Evans put the trumpet to his mouth I knew that I was in the presence of a very special musician. He began with a microtonal flourish that wasn't haphazard or like a regularly tuned phrase gone awry. It was innately microtonal and, with gob-smacking assurance, came from Evans's inner-self, with a signature shape like a Matisse brushstroke. Evans's improvisation moved fast: the phrase was smashed up by a thousand percussive effects and counter-punching breathy noises. But then I started hearing Henry 'Red' Allen and Louis Armstrong breaking through the fog, not quoted, but enigmatically alluded to in Evans's figurations and gestures.

What's a jazz writer to do when he hears that, but swap e-mail addresses and a few days later I hooked up with Evans. I was immediately struck by his articulate intelligence and the energy of his ideas. Within a few minutes of talking he'd mentioned Satchmo and Michael Finnissy, the hero of British post-Ivesian, post-Cageian composition, an inspiring composer who I've never heard any UK jazz mention. I also appreciated that Evans's opinions didn't follow any jazz party-line but had been pragmatically thought-through. "In the 1920s and 30s, the trumpet fit the music and was idiomatic," Evans told me. "But when bebop came along, I feel it got lost within the style of the music. And that certainly happened in free jazz too. The trumpet actually isn't very loud and if you blow your brains out, it doesn't sound all that good. In the 1960s, apart from a few exceptional players like Bill Dixon and Leo Smith, there weren't many stellar trumpeters."

Then Evans characteristically suggested how traditions can be drawn together: "There's a sound that Dixon does well, where you play with one lip on the mouthpiece so the lip flaps against the metal and creates this low farty sound. I was listening to an old Rex Stewart record and there he is using that exact same effect back in the 1940s." When I met Evans back in '06 he was still having to play piccolo trumpet parts in Bach concerts to pay the rent,

but within 12 months his world has opened up. He's toured Europe, released more CDs and there's a Barack Obama-like buzz about him. Evans is the sort of musician you *have* to tell people about.

LISTENING: *More Is More* (psi, 2006); *The Peter Evans Quartet* (Firehouse 12, 2007) www.myspace.com/peterevanstrumpet



TONY MALABY

Tony Malaby is, at 44, the oldest name on this list. But it seems fair game to include him because his clear identity as a leader is just beginning to materialise after years when it seemed like he was the busiest saxophone sideman in town.

Malaby's tenor saxophone sound – *what* a sound. Highly misterioso, like it is just waking up from a nightmare, obsessive, prodigiously detailed and endlessly intricate, the care and soul-searching that's gone into its development is plain through every note. In terms of historical precedent, all the obvious names play a part but two figures audibly stand out: Wayne Shorter and Sonny Rollins, although it wouldn't surprise me to learn that he's a fan of our own Evan Parker.

Originally from Arizona, Malaby moved to New York City in 1995 and the list of bands he's graced says everything about how valued his playing is on the scene. Not everyone gets to play with Charlie Haden's Liberation Music Orchestra, the Mingus Big Band, Fred Hersch and Paul Motian's Electric Bebop Band. He's also worked with Tim Berne and Marty Ehrlich, but one suspects all along Malaby has been beaver away behind the scenes to create his own identity as a leader and

recording artist.

With the release of his trio record *Tamarindo* at the start of this year, he got there. Featuring Malaby on tenor and soprano with William Parker (bass) and Nasheet Waits (drums), this is an eloquent and thoughtful record. It begins with the musicians plucking notes hither and zither; Parker is in a zone stream of his own and Waits maps out space underneath with cogently positioned ride cymbal strokes. But the ear is unavoidably drawn towards Malaby who puts out feelers with scraps of melodies and implied harmonies that he gradually draws into overarching lines. His feel for time moves from out-of-tempo surges towards a buoyant groove without any especially noticeable tipping point. The final track swings, albeit asymmetrically, with Malaby surfing the rhythm section with his muscular – but never macho – lines. There's a telling moment as he embeds a mood of calm behind one of Parker's more 'out' solos that points back towards his composition. This is the mark of leadership – allowing your musicians to express themselves while keeping your own vision in sight.

A late developer? Perhaps. But Brahms was forty before he finished his first symphony and he didn't fare too badly subsequently.

LISTENING: *Apparitions* (Songlines, 2003); *Tamarindo* (Clean Feed, 2008) www.tonymalaby.com



JESSICA PAVONE

Violinist, violist, composer and native New Yorker Jessica Pavone is just the 'other' side of 30. In one sense she's the outsider in this list, a card-carrying jazz she ain't, but the point of her work is that jazz and improvisation form one panel in a cohabiting set of influences that includes Leonard Cohen, conceptual composer Alvin Lucier and a multitude of others. But in case anyone doubts her jazz creden-

tials, she's a regular member of Anthony Braxton's groups and has recorded with William Parker (his superb *Alphaville Suite*) and Taylor Ho Bynum.

In my *Jazz Review* CDs Of The Year for 2007 (*JR 85*) I included Pavone's new disc with duo partner guitarist Mary Halvorson, *On And Off*, suggesting that she plays "jazz the attitude, not the style" and it's perhaps worth expanding on that thought. Jazz the attitude is simply putting together whatever sources light your fire, tripping up the comfort zone of style and genre, using discernment and taste to guide you, and then dealing with the juxtaposition creatively. Because of Pavone's cultural background and interests, she deals with her material as a composer and as an improviser; is she any less an interesting player because she doesn't 'swing' in that 1940s way, or chooses not to play "Giant Steps"? I don't think so. She didn't spend three years learning her 'Trane licks in all keys at Berklee, preferring to painstakingly assemble her own aesthetic. Consequently we learn things from her music that we didn't already know. And that's jazz...or at least should be.

Pavone's musical language is anchored around an obsession with making the essential building blocks of tonality do things just that little bit differently. Her music amply demonstrates that – to paraphrase Samuel Johnson – complexity can be the last refuge of scoundrels, in that her deceptively simple harmonic patterns oblige her to pin colours to the mast. The free-for-all of derivate free jazz and the slippery grids of post-modal jazz allow lesser musicians to exploit patterns they already know work. Pavone's harmonic openness turns the microscope on herself and she responds with lines of honest clarity, an oblique perspective on the familiar. To hear Jessica at her jazziest check out Braxton's box-set *9 Compositions* (Iridium) 2006, and while you're about it order up *On And Off*. The title track – with a lyric that simply repeats the words 'On And Off' and an oom-pah accompaniment wants to go some place but

can't – is one of the most charming, whimsical and triumphantly absurdist things I ever did hear.

LISTENING: *On And Off* (Skirl Records, 2007); *Quotidian* (Peacock Recordings, 2007) www.jessicapavone.com



LOREN STILLMAN

It can't be easy being Loren Stillman. You're brave enough to emerge on the scene as a near-fully formed saxophonist in your mid-teens and all beastly jazz critics can do is whinge that you sound too much like Lee Konitz.

Well, the debt Stillman owes to Konitz and Warne Marsh is obvious but with every new album Stillman looks deeper within himself to find his own voice. His latest, *Trio Alto Volume 2*, is a masterful statement by any standards, a taut and purposeful set that effortlessly negotiates compositional labyrinths and freely evolving structures. Stillman's sound, too, is broadening its sphere of influence. I'll wager he's been listening to Ornette, and there's a tart, objective dimension to his playing that reminds me of – of all people – Jackie McLean.

Stillman's story is pretty remarkable. The prodigy's prodigy, he was discovered by New York drummer Bob Meyer at the age of 14 in 1994 and two years later recorded his debut album, *Cosmos*, with Meyer, bassist Scott Lee and pianist Russ Lossing. No one would claim it as a great record – there was still much living, loving and losing to be done – but at the very least it documents a player in control of his instrument and with an awareness that there are limitations to be traversed ... even if what those limitations are had yet to be defined.

Flip forward to 2004's *It Could Be Anything* and Stillman makes his first major impres-

sion. His original compositions have a distinctive quality of crisp melodic precision and staccato clarity that his improvisations force to the brink, without entirely jumping off into the precipice. *Trio Alto Volume 1* is a slight retrograde step compositionally – an album of standards was all very well, but Stillman would have been better off refining his own approach to writing. That said his re-harmonisation of Jerome Kern's "Long Ago And Far Away" is damned astute and you've need to be fully on top of matters to play an "All The Things You Are" that's as brazenly freshly baked as this.

Stillman lives in Brooklyn which, certainly since the turn of the millennium, has been the heartland for New York's younger jazz folk. Manhattan has become too darn expensive for gigging musicians to pay the rent. But a glance at Stillman's website suggests he's gigging endlessly. I hope so – he deserves it. He's a musician on the threshold of a major breakthrough.

LISTENING: *It Could Be Anything* (Fresh Sound New Talent, 2004); *Trio Alto Volume 2* (SteepleChase, 2007) www.lorenstillman.com



NASHEET WAITS

Now in his mid-30s, Nasheet comes from a long line of Waits. His father Freddie drummed behind Ella Fitzgerald, Sonny Rollins and McCoy Tyner, and on Motown records by the likes of The Supremes, The Temptations and Marvin Gaye. No surprise perhaps that his son found himself compelled to explore the drums at an age when most kids are still learning their times tables. It didn't harm that a family friend Uncle Max, (yes, you guessed it) took Nasheet under his wing, while other coincidences of history quickly presented themselves as Waits Jr filled a chair in Andrew Hill's band once occupied by his father.

Waits emerged on a New York scene heavily populated by dazzling young drummers – Brian Blade, Terri Lynne Carrington, Lewis Nash, Matt Wilson each of whom would have been a worthy inclusion on this list – but somehow no drummer has given me more pleasure than Waits. Everything in his playing is in perfect control and balance – prodigious all-embracing grooves move against challenging a-rhythmic carpets of sound; an inherent violent streak folds into passages of stark timbral beauty; Wait hugs every last drop of colour from his instruments. His playing floats like a butterfly, stings like a bee.

Browsing through You Tube clips a little while ago I was surprised to find footage of Waits playing a duo with free jazz maestro Peter Brötzmann and matching the German saxophonist's men-from-the-boys provocations note-for-note. New York jazzers traditionally have had little to do with the central European free jazz scene, and it's a litmus test of Waits's unashamedly thirsty ears. It was Uncle Max (Roach) who first hired Waits for his percussion ensemble M'BOOM and he proudly remembers a concert sharing the stage with Ginger Baker and Tony Williams. Waits was subsequently hired by Antonio Hart, before his career moved up a gear as he worked with Andrew Hill and Jason Moran.

Waits has been with Moran nearly every stage of the way, from the brilliantly prescient *Facing Left* in 1999 to the killer live record *Presents The Bandwagon* in 2002. Their partnership could well develop into one of the most significant in jazz, a couple who work well together, their roots in blues and bebop informing their freer moments, as they finish each other's sentences. 2007 saw Waits launching his first group as leader, "Equality". No recording as yet but, like everything to do with Waits, it's just a simple matter of time.

LISTENING: Andrew Hill – *A Beautiful Day* (Palmetto, 2002); Jason Moran – *Presents The Bandwagon* (Blue Note, 2002) www.nasheetwaits.com ■