

Chasing Tales
Stephen Gauci/Kirk Knuffke/Ken Filiano
(Relative Pitch)
by John Sharpe

Although the unusual instrumentation on *Chasing Tales* arose almost by accident, it proved such a fertile combination that an album was inevitable. Saxophonist Stephen Gauci and bassist Ken Filiano share a productive history but the addition of busy cornet-player-about-town Kirk Knuffke completes a trio of quick-witted improvisers, who demonstrate throughout five originals and eight collective pieces that you don't need to go beyond conventional registers to uncover untapped seams of invention.

By way of introduction, Gauci parades his easygoing burly tenor saxophone, blending emphatic motifs amid roller coaster lines in a limber double act with Filiano's nimble-fingered stylings, which fuse melody with rhythmic attack on the opening "Epee". That's followed by a similarly involved pairing of cornet and bass at the outset of "Ghosting", before Gauci joins to inaugurate a spirited three-way interaction. It's immediately obvious that as a group they are fully formed, missing nothing, a feeling confirmed by charts extracting maximum impact from the resources at hand. Gauci's jauntily contrapuntal "Boogaloo" constitutes one of the early highlights with its vibrant interlocking parts.

But even within the tight arrangements there exists ample space for individual expression. Knuffke and Filiano enjoy a special rapport, as evinced by both their mercurial exchange of half-valve splutters and platives and creaky bow work on "Probing For Places" and subsequent reflective dialogue to close "Speaking Of You Gently". However, Filiano's title track is the standout piece, even among a consistently engaging set, and he excels throughout, whether in the dramatic contrast between his startling arco unisons with Gauci's tenor and his full-toned pizzicato or his concluding solo, which splices gravitas, and urgency.

For more information, visit relativepitchrecords.com. Gauci is at *Silvana* Jul. 30th. Knuffke is at *Cornelia Street Café* Jul. 8th. Filiano is at *The Commons* Jul. 3rd, *The Stone* Jul. 9th with Eshran Elisha, 11th with *BBMQ* and *WhyNot Jazz Room* Jul. 13th with *Fay Victor*. See *Calendar*.

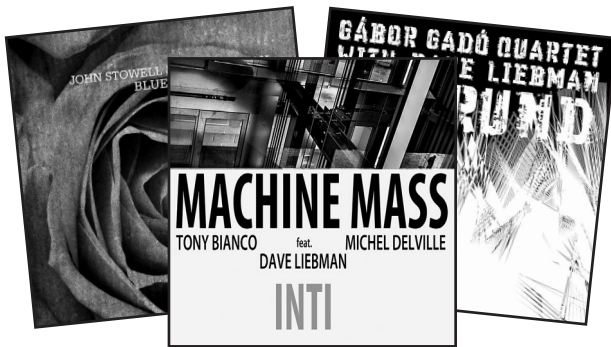
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Blue Rose
John Stowell/Dave Liebman (Origin)
Ungrund
Gábor Gadó Quartet (with Dave Liebman)
(Budapest Music Center)
Inti
Machine Mass (feat. Dave Liebman) (Moonjune)
by Ken Dryden

In 2013 Dave Liebman became the youngest individual ever to be honored as an NEA Jazz Master. There are several reasons: his brilliant work on soprano and tenor saxophones and wood flute; formidable skills as a composer and arranger; plus an incredible drive and diverse musical interests.

Blue Rose is a reunion with nylon string guitarist John Stowell, with whom he made a guest appearance on the 2003 Origin CD *The Banff Sessions*. The chemistry is perfect, as they intuitively interact like they were old friends playing together on a regular basis. The title track is a forgotten gem penned by Duke Ellington for his album with vocalist Rosemary Clooney and the two men soar in their modern setting with Liebman on soprano. Stowell's compelling solo introduction to Billy Strayhorn's "Isfahan" is well-disguised, Liebman's rich tenor saxophone inviting comparison to earlier masters like Ben Webster. Liebman throws in a surprise by playing piano on Bill Evans' haunting ballad "Time Remembered", capturing the essence of its emotion, accompanied by spacious guitar. Liebman returns to soprano for a sauntering, cheerful take of Antonio Carlos Jobim's "Until Paisagem", the perfect complement to Stowell's inspired guitar. Effective use of wood flute and tenor saxophone in Wayne Shorter's "Black Eyes", together with poignant guitar, make it a memorable interpretation. The breadth of music explored by Stowell and Liebman is only exceeded by their fresh takes of these mostly well-known works.

Hungarian guitarist Gábor Gadó added Liebman as a guest with only a single afternoon of rehearsal prior to recording *Ungrund*, full of the leader's tricky compositions. This live session is more avant garde in nature with numerous twists, Liebman playing both soprano and tenor saxophone, along with tenor saxophonist Matthieu Donarier, bassist Sébastien Boisseau and drummer Joe Quitzke. Liebman dominates the opening track, "Friends Play", with his furious, darting soprano, though Donarier does his best to keep pace with his hard-charging tenor. Gadó's reworking of impressionist composer Maurice Ravel's "Pavane pour une infante défunte" (Pavane For a Dead Princess) opens with his extended, abstract solo before Liebman joins on soprano with Donarier's superb harmonic backing. "Sanctus" has an ominous air with angular interaction between guitar and saxophones. "Weltraum" has the flavor of a Baroque piece transformed into 21st Century jazz, though Gadó soon incorporates flamenco and postbop into his modern vision of this centuries-old style in his dazzling solo.

Machine Mass consists of guitarist Michel Delville (who also plays Roland GR09 and incorporates electronics) and drummer/percussionist Tony Bianco, who makes extensive use of loops. Liebman was game to join the duo and had previously recorded with Bianco. The challenge of listening to this session after hearing the other releases is that the music sometimes gets stuck in a rut, particularly when Liebman fades from the foreground and the loops are held in place for

too long. The most effective performance is easily the stunning interpretation of Joe Zawinul's "In a Silent Way", with Liebman's exotic wood flute soaring over the sitar cloud created by Delville, backed by Bianco's intriguing polyrhythms. Vocalist Saba Tewelde is added for "The Secret Place", which has an exotic air but is hampered by its weak lyric. *Inti* is an intense affair that bombards the listener throughout most of the session; it's clear that Liebman enjoyed himself but it won't have as wide an appeal as the other two releases.

For more information, visit originarts.com, info.bmc.hu and moonjune.com. Liebman is at *Smalls* Jul. 6th with Michael Stephans and *Birdland* Jul. 29th-Aug. 2nd. See *Calendar*.

IN PRINT

Softly, with Feeling: Joe Wilder and the Breaking of Barriers in American Music
Edward Berger (Temple University Press)
by Michael Steinman

Trumpeter Joe Wilder (Feb. 22, 1922-May 9, 2014) was admired and loved as musician and man. The new and aptly titled biography by Edward Berger embodies Wilder's deep gentle spirit, unlike many new biographies that document and magnify their subject's flaws. Berger and Wilder met in 1981 and they worked on this book for nearly a decade.

The biography has three intertwining stories. One is Wilder's growth as a musician, from his childhood in Pennsylvania to being one of the most respected trumpet players in the world, working with Lionel Hampton, Gunther Schuller, Louis Armstrong, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Billie Holiday, Benny Goodman, Alec Wilder, Benny Carter, Ernie Kovacs and a hundred more. In his recollections of six decades as a professional musician, we observe jazz changing from a popular dance music played everywhere to a rarefied phenomenon in clubs, parties and festivals.

The second strand is Wilder's unheralded part in the long struggle to have racial equality in the United States. His stories (and Berger's careful research) of discrimination and legalized abuse—personal and institutional—are painful. When we reach 1980 in the book and it is evident that the struggle is coming to a close, it is a relief.

And the third is a sweet chronicle of Wilder himself, a delightful man: genuine, humble, witty, compassionate, "Mr. Social", as one of his daughters calls him. He emerges as a remarkable person, who would have been so if he had never played a note: sensitive to injustice and ready to act against it, a gracious and kind individual.

Berger's writing is worthy of his subject. The biography makes one feel as if Wilder is close at hand, fully realized. Berger's research is superb but never obtrusive; his prose is understated yet effective. The book offers rare photographs (Wilder was also a fine photographer, seen in later decades with at least two cameras when not playing) and a discography full of surprises. Joe Wilder has been wonderfully captured in these pages, a loving, accurate portrait.

For more information, visit temple.edu/tempress