

Open Opus
Søren Kjaergaard/Ben Street/Andrew Cyrille
(ILK Music)
by Ken Waxman

Deepening the partnership established with *Optics* a couple of years ago, pianist Søren Kjaergaard, bassist Ben Street and drummer Andrew Cyrille function as three parts of an interlocking mechanism on this CD.

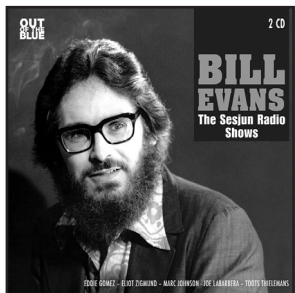
The pianist, who composed all the tracks here except for two group improvs, has an authoritative style that mixes framed single notes with expressive passages that expand into steady chording. The bassist advances a systematic ostinato that steadies the rhythm while Cyrille, best-known for backing pianist Cecil Taylor, colors the tunes with percussive asides.

That strategy signals the finale of "Places Birds Fly From", which otherwise unfolds as Kjaergaard's economic comping accelerates into lightly paced patterning. More than twice and one-third the age of his compatriots, Cyrille, 70, reinforces the beat with a sort of unselfconscious swing. Eventually his rattling patterns on this track make room for tinkling grace notes from the pianist.

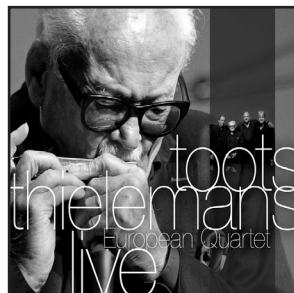
Other Kjaergaard compositional and playing strategies bend mainstream allusions to make new statements. On "Floating World (Ukiyo)", for instance, he languidly caresses a downward running line, keeping it askew by appending allusions to beginner's piano exercises. Meanwhile "Fatha" mixes a magisterial legato intro with a low-frequency detour into what could be "Autumn Leaves". The overall relaxed feel finally leads to gentle keyboard musings.

Throughout the CD, Street's full-out plucks, Cyrille's cantering bops and shaded accents plus Kjaergaard's isolated single notes to swirling classicism and passing chords cement the trio interaction.

For more information, visit ilkmusic.com. Cyrille is at The Stone Aug. 28th with David Virelles. See Calendar.



The Sesjun Radio Shows
Bill Evans
(Out of the Blue)



Live
Toots Thielemans European Quartet
(Challenge)

by Joel Roberts

Any chance to hear previously unreleased material by pianist Bill Evans should be relished and a new two-disc collection of late-period Evans culled from Dutch radio broadcasts is a cause for celebration indeed.

The Sesjun Radio Shows compiles sessions recorded by Evans in a variety of settings between 1973-79. Disc One features the cerebral, yet highly emotional pianist in a duo with one of his most likeminded cohorts, the bassist Eddie Gomez, and a trio with Gomez and drummer Eliot Zigmund. The duos are remarkable for their empathy; they improvise intricate lines around each other on a series of Evans originals and Leonard Bernstein's gorgeous "Some Other Time".

Disc Two, dating from 1979, just a year before

Evans' death, captures the pianist and what would turn out to be his final trio, with Marc Johnson and Joe LaBarbera. Though some recordings from this period show evidence of Evans' deterioration from a longtime drug habit, he's in superb form here, as the trio performs standout renditions of "My Romance" and "Nardis". Harmonica virtuoso Toots Thielemans joins the group for five tracks, which are among the collection's most rewarding, adding some gently swinging runs to Evans' "Blue in Green" and a melancholy touch to a Paul Simon tune, "I Do It For Your Love". Thielemans is especially in sync with Evans on an invigorating take of his own "Bluesette".

Thielemans has been the preeminent performer on his instrument for more than 50 years. No other artist has come close to his mastery of the chromatic harmonica. A new album of live material, *European Quartet Live*, recorded between 2006-08 when Thielemans was in his mid 80s, shows his playing unimpeded by age. The setlist is unsurprising, filled with tasteful, familiar standards and decidedly mainstream arrangements. But Thielemans (joined by Karel Boehlee on piano and synthesizers, Hein Van de Geyn on bass and Hans van Oosterhout on drums) delights with the sheer artistry and beauty of his performance. Gershwin's "Summertime" is given an inventive treatment, with tidbits of "All Blues" and "Footprints" tossed in. "Les Feuilles Mortes" (also known as "Autumn Leaves") showcases Thielemans' warm, passionate side while "On Green Dolphin Street" swings the hardest. But the highlight is an inspired solo harmonica take on "Round Midnight".

For more information, visit t2entertainment.nl and challengerecords.com. Thielemans is at Marcus Garvey Park Aug. 27th as part of the Charlie Parker Jazz Festival. See Calendar.



Standin' on the Rooftop
Madeleine Peyroux (Decca)
by Sean O'Connell

Vocalist Madeleine Peyroux, with her Eleanora Fagan croon and marquee-ready name, is the perfect songstress for quiet rooms and even quieter thoughts. Since her debut 15 years ago Peyroux has built a comfortable niche that peaked in 2004 with the million-selling album *Careless Love*. Peyroux' fifth album, *Standing on the Rooftop*, contains a balance of original songs and covers that should easily satisfy her fanbase and record label, with A-list contributions from guitarist Marc Ribot, drummer Charley Drayton, pianist Allen Toussaint and violinist Jenny Scheinman.

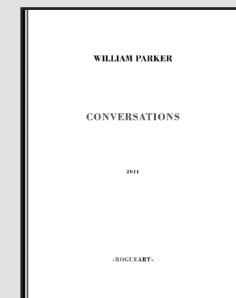
The album opens with a sedate, countrified cover of The Beatles' "Martha My Dear". The only thing missing is the sound of crickets to capture that front-porch feel. Considering that she sold millions of records by singing other people's songs it is curious that the album's sequencing is set up to put the hit first and pray that listeners stick around. Should the listener invest they will be treated to a solid collection of tunes that rarely raises the blood pressure. "Fickle Dove", her first of back-to-back co-writes with Scheinman, finds Peyroux channeling Santo & Johnny while the title song and closer "The Way of All Things" adopt an ethereal boogie that provide the most uptempo moments of the album. Dylan's "I Threw It All Away" gets a choppy reading while the original "Don't Pick a Fight with a Poet" has a nice bouncy refrain with

Peyroux' lilting vibrato carrying the weight.

Looking as barefoot and bemused on the cover of this record as she was on *Careless Love* can't be a mistake. Although she is often referred to as a jazz vocalist, Peyroux rarely swings on this record and the soloing space is fairly limited. She is simply an excellent vocalist who can be a country singer, a cabaret chanteuse or a misty-eyed crooner. It is not a wide range but it is always well done - whether she sells a million records or not.

For more information, visit deccarecords-us.com. Peyroux is at Tompkins Square Park Aug. 28th as part of the Charlie Parker Jazz Festival. See Calendar.

IN PRINT



Conversations
William Parker (Rogue Art)
by Kurt Gottschalk

William Parker is a man of many hats: Bassist, bandleader, composer and if "ambassador" is too grand then we could at least add "interviewer" to the list. At 450 pages, *Conversations* is just what it purports to be - 30+ informal chats with other artists about themselves, other artists, international affairs and living as what he terms "multi-dimensional survivalists". The open nature of the exchanges, and that Parker more often than not is well-acquainted with his subjects, allows for an easy flow of ideas. Milford Graves and Sunny Murray both speak candidly about racial dynamics within the jazz community and Paul Rogers provides an informed viewpoint on arts funding in America and Europe.

In a respect, too, the book becomes a portrait of Parker reflected in a mirror. The people he chooses to include, and what he chooses to ask them, necessarily shows Parker's predilections: Music as a healing and uniting force is a recurring subject, as is the late, great Albert Ayler.

The inadvertent self-portrait continues on a CD included in the weighty tome. With tracks alternating between solos played by Parker and excerpts from his audio recordings of the interviews. It makes for a great listen, the richness of the string bass intermingling with the musings of Fred Anderson, Han Bennink, Cooper-Moore, Charles Gayle and others also included in the text. The audio quality of the spoken segments, seemingly recorded on a handheld cassette recorder, makes the document all the more endearing.

Parker's intimate knowledge of most (if not all) of his subjects allows an incisive focus that leads to insightful discussions with Murray about growing up with Bill Cosby or with Alan Silva about working with Bill Dixon and Cecil Taylor in the '60s. But one hat he doesn't wear is that of a journalist and as a result what is often lacking in the interviews is enough background to help the unfamiliar reader along. It is true, of course, and perhaps sadly so, that few readers would be unfamiliar with Billy Bang, Dave Burrell or Joëlle Léandre, but at the same time the book just misses the opportunity to be a textbook on five decades of free improvisation.

For more information, visit roguart.com