

Six Of One

Serene minimalism permeates pianist Søren Kjaergaard's *Optics* (ILK 140; 56:05) ★★★½. With sympathetic accompaniment from bassist Ben Street and drummer Andrew Cyrille, Kjaergaard paints pictures that suggest a quiet snowfall, such as on the title track. Almost classical in execution, the 29-year-old Dane's compositions vary from track to track as different instruments are featured at different times, as the group dwells upon chords. Lively (still delicate) music surfaces with the impish then jumpy "Dear Mr. Sear," the rhythmic flurries of "Mallets" and "Work Of Art," and tempo driving the repeated patterns of the gradually intense "Cyrille Surreal."

Ordering info: ilkmusic.com

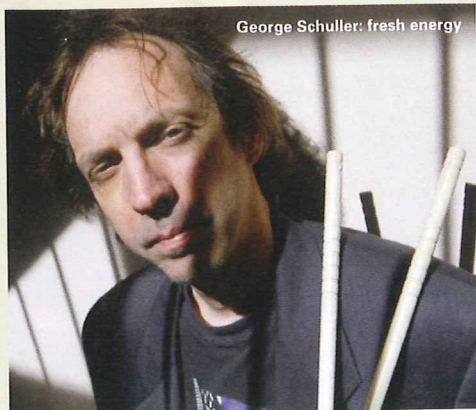
Drummer George Schuller's Circle Wide delivers an ode to the Ornette Coleman-inspired Keith Jarrett American Quartet with *Like Before, Somewhat After* (Playscape 060607; 68:22) ★★★★★. With reed player Donny McCaslin, guitarist Brad Shepik, vibist Tom Beckham, bassist Dave Ambrosio and percussionist Jamey Haddad, Schuller revisits the funky, syncopated gem "Common Mama" with fresh energy, the expressive two-part "Survivor's Suite," a rocking "Rotation" and the easy-going "De Drums" as if originals. Schuller, Beckham, McCaslin and Ambrosio evoke the spirits of Paul Motian, Gary Burton, Dewey Redman and Charlie Haden. Schuller contributes two sympathetic cuts.

Ordering info: playscape-recordings.com

Russ Nolan's *With You In Mind* (Rhinoceros Music; 55:08) ★★★ finds the tenor saxophonist joined by pianist Kenny Werner's trio (bassist Johannes Weidenmueller and drummer Ari Hoenig). While the rock-flavored "Kilson's Groove" and the straight-ahead swing of "Stand Clear Of The Closing Doors" and "Diatonicus" create nice occasions for blowing, the quieter moments offer more, as with "Disheveled Waltz" (Nolan on soprano), the blues blend of forward motion and repose on "Tales From The Head" and the soft-spoken lyrical title track, where Werner's gentle touch is on display.

Ordering info: russnolan.com

On *Landscapes* (Cacophony 512; 65:07) ★★★★★, tenor saxophonist Frank Macchia works closely with the Prague Orchestra. Half of the 12 tracks make up his "Landscapes Suite," while the rest are public domain traditionals like "Down In The



George Schuller: fresh energy

ANGELA JIMINEZ

Valley," "Deep River" and "Avalon." Macchia's arrangements steer the music in dreamy directions, as with "Shenandoah," where his soft yet muscular tenor floats above the familiar melody. Macchia's suite blends seamlessly with the rest of the program, incorporating elements of world music and classical while remaining folksy. At times, however, *Landscapes* threatens to engulf the listener with too much soft-focus, full-bore orchestration. Macchia's own touch is a bit cloying.

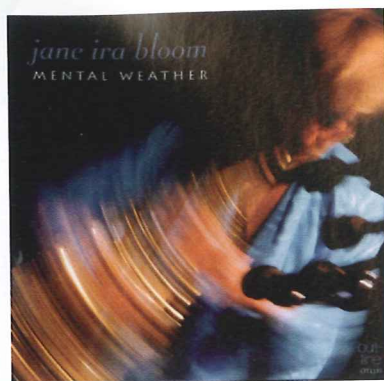
Ordering info: frankmacchia.net

Adam Kolker's *Flag Day* (Sunnyside 1184; 49:29) ★★★★★ is the spitting image of Motian's band with Joe Lovano and Bill Frisell. Tenorist Kolker is to Lovano as guitarist John Abercrombie is to Frisell, and bassist John Hebert is a bonus. The music echoes Motian's frothy, unbalanced style, as Abercrombie sounds coy and fiery ("gNash"). Kolker's assured playing is bouncy, swinging and unpredictable on Thelonious Monk's "Played Twice," and loopy yet stately on bass clarinet (and flute) with the meditative "Ties." Hebert's basslines provide a welcome rhythmic and tuneful complement.

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com

On *Young At Heart* (Sharp Nine 1041; 55:23) ★★★½, tenor saxophonist Grant Stewart most often channels Dexter Gordon, as he brings pianist Tardo Hammer, bassist Peter Washington and drummer Joe Farnsworth on board with seven covers and one original, his upbeat blues tribute "Shades Of Jackie Mac." Stewart's peppy interpretation of the title track, his choice of the rare ballad gem "You're My Thrill," a Latin number with Neal Hefti's "Repetition" and a proverbial swinger like Duke Ellington's "Serenade To Sweden" all harken back to Gordon, but also indicate that Stewart has a fine band on hand to help make it happen. **DB**

Ordering info: sharpnine.com



Jane Ira Bloom

Mental Weather

OUTLINE 139

★★★★

The most painterly of any contemporary soprano saxophonist, Jane Ira Bloom has created her best work when focusing on art (*Chasing Pain*) or light (*Like Silver, Like Song*). In perhaps a natural extension—given the role of the couturier in modern art—her new quartet recording centers on fashion, with a four-part mini-suite called "What To Wear."

Bloom has recruited new hands for this project—bassist Mark Helias, drummer Matt Wilson and the promising young pianist Dawn Clement—and their level of interaction is exceptional. In particular, Helias and Wilson provide bluesy counterpoint to Bloom's swirling flights on the electronics-laced title composition and the multifaceted "Multiple Choice." Together, they kick "Luminous Bridges" into the autobahn-friendly gear that Weather Report often favored, allowing Bloom to soar with full-throated abandon. Ever the inventive sideman, Wilson lights up "Ready For Anything" with an array of rattle-trap percussion that provides a flat, metallic contrast to the saxophonist's bright tone.

The most effective contrast on *Mental Weather* is between these busy, constantly shifting band pieces and the contemplative canvases Bloom creates on the plaintive "Cello On The Inside" and the heavily reverbed solo showcase that combines her composition "First Thoughts" with Rodgers and Hammerstein's "This Nearly Was Mine." As much as her sound can be the sonic equivalent of Jackson Pollock's splashes and drips of color, she can also draw the listener in with the patient intimacy of a lithographer.

As with *Like Silver, Like Song*, *Mental Weather* includes an MP3 file that presents the music as Bloom performs it in concert.

—James Hale

Mental Weather. A More Beautiful Question; Ready For Anything; Multiple Choice; Mental Weather; Luminous Bridges; Electrochemistry; Cello On The Inside; What To Wear: Activewear, Easy Knit, The Reasons For Returns; Clothes That Question; First Thoughts/This Nearly Was Mine. (48:32)

Personnel: Jane Ira Bloom, soprano saxophone, live electronics; Dawn Clement, piano, Fender Rhodes, Mark Helias, bass; Matt Wilson, drums, percussion.

» Ordering info: janeirabloom.com