



Martin Wind, visions of the Sonny Rollins pianoless trio.

OLIFF APPOLO

A New & Independent Era

The days when a few record labels were responsible for nearly all of the significant jazz recordings are long gone — particularly in America, where most of the larger labels neglect jazz altogether, indies headed by creative jazz artists rule.

On **Shawn Maxwell's *Story At Eleven* (Independent Release; 39:50 ★★★★★)**, his 11th album as a leader, the alto saxophonist is joined by keyboardist Collin Clauson, electric bassist Michael Barton and drummer Greg Essig to perform an original four-part suite. In the first three sections, a repetitive phrase played by one of the musicians serves as that movement's foundation. "Appointment With..." features a colorful keyboard solo and a Maxwell improvisation that hints at Kenny Garrett. "Internal Riff" is built off a drum pattern that inspires some wailing alto, while "Near Surrender" includes three themes that explore a variety of fresh ideas. The concluding "Answer & Arrival" may seem the most conventional until one notices the time signatures (evolving from 13/4 to 11/4 and 3/4).

Ordering info: shawnmaxwell.com

Baltimore trumpeter **Erin Connelly** makes her recording debut as a leader on ***Fruitful* (Independent Release; 42:46 ★★★★★)**. Her quartet with tenor and soprano saxophonist Derrick Michaels, bassist Zach Swanson and drummer Tony Martucci perform three free improvisations. Because Connelly, who was inspired early on by Chet Baker, has a laidback and thoughtful approach, the music takes its time to unfold and is often quite lyrical. The first of the three improvs, "Apicity," begins as mostly harmonized long tones by the horns, staying ensemble-oriented as the musicians exchange the lead along the way even though they are uncertain exactly where the music is heading. Most successful is "Lone," which has the trumpeter in the spotlight, setting a mournful mood that conveys loneliness before things cheer up a bit.

Ordering info: erinconnellytrumpet.com

The Le Boeuf Brothers' *Hush* (SoundSpore; 67:15 ★★½) is purposely a quiet affair as the siblings aimed to create a latter-day *Kind Of Blue* program of thoughtful originals. The quintet, consisting of pianist Pascal Le Boeuf (who is often the lead voice), the cool-toned altoist Remy Le Boeuf, tenor saxophonist Dayna Stephens, bassist Linda May Han Oh and drummer Christian Euman performs atmospheric originals that are a bit cinematic, emphasize ensembles and long melody statements, and are occasionally tedious. The lack of mood and tempo variation results in a program that rarely rises above the level of high-quality background music.

Ordering info: leboeufbrothers.com

Aberdeen is a large group (16–17 pieces) that falls into the "beyond" category. On ***Held Together* (Independent Release; 32:38 ★★★★★)**, the orchestra performs its inventive renditions of traditional folk songs from other countries (including Mongolia and Malaysia) plus two songs co-written by Trombone Shorty and three originals from its leader and arranger, Brian Plautz. While there are a few relatively short solos, the emphasis is on dense ensembles that, due to the inclusion of two or three guitarists, are generally rockish.

Ordering info: aberdeens.band

Bassist **Martin Wind's *Gravity* (Laika, 63:48 ★★★★★)** brings back the sound of Sonny Rollins' pianoless trios of the late 1950s, not only in the instrumentation (which includes tenor saxophonist Peter Weniger and drummer Jonas Burgwinkel) but in the melodic approach of Weniger. Their swinging version of Johnny Mandel's "El Cajon" has Weniger sounding as inventive as Rollins of that era, although on other selections his own musical personality shines through. Other bright moments include "Still Friends" (a well disguised "Just Friends"), a ballad version of Beethoven's "Pathétique," the danceable bass lines on "Another Beer, Please" and the relaxed tango feel of "Tuyo."

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Ordering info: martinwind.com



ISAIAH J. THOMPSON

THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT

Isaiah J. Thompson *The Power Of The Spirit*

BLUE ENGINE

★★★★½

Pianist Isaiah J. Thompson is on a roll. He joined the John Pizzerelli Trio for the guitarist's most recent album, *Stage And Screen* (which received a 4.5-star review in the June issue of *DownBeat*), and subsequent tour. He captured top honors in the American Pianists Association's jazz pianist competition in April, which amounts to \$200,000 in cash and prizes. Just a month before, he released *The Power Of The Spirit*, his debut leader recording on Blue Engine Records.

The hype that surrounds Thompson is well-deserved. His musicianship is fleet, powerful and rock-solid. His artistry is soulful. When "The IT Department" kicks off this seven-tune set of originals recorded live at Dizzy's Club in New York, listeners will know exactly where Thompson is coming from — the church. With a quartet that includes Julian Lee on tenor saxophone, Philip Norris on bass, and TJ Reddick and Domo Branch sharing drum duties, and Thompson and company deliver the goods — be it on the medium-tempo groove of "The Soul Messenger," the high-speed chase of "For Phineas" or the quiet jam of "Tales Of The Elephant And Butterfly." Those first four tunes on the recording set up what makes a great live album. When you hear them, you wish you were there. The 26-year-old Thompson has all — the heart, skill and swagger of a budding superstar.

The set closes with "The Power Of The Spirit," and Thompson makes sure the music is befitting the title. It's a tune that surely left listeners wanting more that night at Dizzy's. Luckily, we can all enjoy the set again and again now.

—Frank Alkyer

The Power Of The Spirit: Welcome; The IT Department; For Phineas (Intro); For Phineas; Tales Of The Elephant And Butterfly; Good Intentions (Learn our names and say them right); Thank You Betsy; The Power Of The Spirit. (76:17)

Personnel: Isaiah J. Thompson, piano; Julian Lee, tenor saxophone; Philip Norris, bass; TJ Reddick, drums (2, 3, 9); Domo Branch, drums (5–8).

Ordering info: blueenginerecords.org