

like Wild Card: no frills, funk fuelled fun played with integrity and a passionate, nay, evangelical feel for jazz. And that core trio also have some hot pals: Baptiste lends thumping tenor to the stomp and drive of 'Better Remorse Than Regret', Glasser's classy harmonica lights up the Gallic swing of the gentler tempo of 'Risky Business', while the London Horns, notably Flowers' fine trumpet, crop up everywhere. The band also have a canny eye for a cover, with Mary Pearce's vox illuminating the Stones' 'Paint It Black' in unexpected tones, while a funk-ed up, brass heavy 'Another Brick in the Wall' is a wild card indeed. Flowers' horn flung against Alloway's as ever irresistible drums is among *Life Stories* many highlights. Throw in a climactic mass funk jam on 'Maybe... maybe not' and the world suddenly seems a sunnier place. **Andy Robson**

XPQ – Vasilis Xenopoulos/ Nigel Price Quintet

Sidekicks

Trio TR601 ★★★★★

Vasilis Xenopoulos (ts), Nigel Price (g), Dario Di Lecce (b) and Steve Brown (d). Rec. 21 June 2017

The co-leaders work well together, their respective styles each the ideal match for the other. Price is a supple player, whose unflinching line can recall Wes Montgomery, his ability to unfurl rewardingly coherent improvisations one of the pleasures of the age. VX has a similarly unquenchable desire to play and has chosen his own path, relating more to the likes of Hank Mobley and Dexter Gordon than to Coltrane and other more modish horn-men. The quartet offers a 10-track series of pieces here, the album badged as "our take on some of the famous saxophone/guitar collaborations in jazz". Thus, they open with 'Uh Huh', a Mobley/Grant Green combination, as an ant and out swinger, the repetitive riff underpinned perfectly by Di Lecce and Brown. The sonic combination is just right, Xenopoulos front and centre, Price's bubbling fluency replete with incident. Thereafter, they recall Coltrane with Burrell, Griffin with Montgomery and,

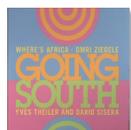
rather pleasingly, Geoff Simkins with Dave Cliff, among others. The voicings throughout are tip-top; the tune choices please and the quartet blend is quite perfect. It's not all jump and run either; there are moments of quiet lyricism too, notably with 'When Joanna Loved Me', evoking Paul Desmond and Jim Hall. Lovely, mellow music. This album walks straight into my top albums of the year. Yes, it's that good. **Peter Vacher**

Omri Ziegele/Yves Theiler/ Dario Sisera Where's Africa?

Going South

Intakt CD284/2017 ★★★★★

Omri Ziegele (as, uzbek f, v), Yves Theiler (ky, v) and Dario Sisera (d). Rec. 2016.



The power of three is well to the four here, mostly because Yves

Theiler's strident keyboard bass and synths summon the sound of a virtual quartet on an offering that stands practically as an update of some of the sophisticated groove territory covered by such as Don Cherry and Okay Temiz back in the 1970s and 1980s. There is a hard-edged attack that draws on anything from funk to African and Caribbean rhythms, thus providing a springboard to Omri Ziegele's alto sax. The reed takes an effective lead on many an occasion and is well supported by Dario Sisera's punchy drumming. Also pleasing are the much more plaintive textures fashioned by Theiler's melodic, which combines with the horn in a sprightly twist of gypsy romance. However, the unfortunate misstep is the use of vocals from the aforementioned, as they don't really enhance the arrangements in any substantial way. Given the strong nucleus created by the trio it would be interesting to hear the result of a collaboration with a much stronger singer or another player. Alternatively, the best of the nine tracks could have been cherry-picked for an EP or 12" single, like we used to buy back in the day. **Kevin Le Gendre**

Trio HLK



Short Cuts// New Releases

Alan Benzie Trio

Little Mysteries Self-released ★★★★★

The standard of Scottish jazzers is generally pretty high and the pianist Alan Benzie, a Berklee alumnus and the first winner of the BBC Young Scottish Jazz Musician of the year back in 2007, is no exception. Releasing only his second CD to date, it's a sonically seductive piano trio recording of soft atmospheric and infectious rhythms.

Oddgeir Berg Trio

Before Dawn Ozella ★★

This Oslo-based piano trio favour the kind of zen-funk grooves, distorted electronic-inspired ambience and less-is-more melodic aesthetic reminiscent of the EST trio, but unfortunately they add little that's really fresh to the mix.

Samuel Blaser Trio

Taktios Zürich 2017 HatHut ★★★★★

The versatile experimental Swiss trombonist Blaser shares writing credits with Tim Berne henchman/French jazz-rock axe Marc Ducret and on this 'live' album achieves effective negotiations between woozy free jazz and leftfield urban beats.

Blicher Hemmer Gadd

Omara C-Nut ★★★★★

Saxophonist Michael Blicher is joined by über-session drummer Steve Gadd and long-time associate Dan Hemmer on organ for a fairly listenable slice of retro B-3 soul-jazz grooving.

Frank Carlberg-Noah Preminger

Whispers and Cries

Red Piano Records ★★

The Brooklyn-based saxophonist Noah Preminger, who at times here is reminiscent of Joshua Redman, gets together with pianist Frank Carlberg for an astute yet oddly unimposing chamber duo set of standards and modernist classics.

Eyolf Dale

Return to Mind Edition ★★★★★

The pianist-composer follows up his fine 2016 Norwegian Grammy-nominated *Wolf Valley* with an octet recording that develops his shapely orchestrations and elegantly refined chamber jazz soundscapes.

Dead Composers Club

Chopin Project

Connection Works ★★★★★

If they could hear this straight non-classical jazz quartet, co-led by saxophonist Noah Preminger and drummer Rob Garcia, certain dead composers might be turning in their graves. Nevertheless, this is a well-worked selection of Chopin pieces, one of the most well-known nocturnes sounding uncannily like it could have been written by Trane.

Laurent De Wilde

New Monk Trio Gazebo ★★

The French-based pianist-keyboardist Laurent De Wilde celebrates Thelonious Monk's 2017 centenary by giving his quirky classics what is a slightly over-polished clubby groove-orientated makeover for acoustic piano trio.

Zoe Francis

Remembering Blossom Dearie

Self-released ★★★★★

Though she has a rather quaint kittenish tone, this jazz vocalist isn't short of character and makes up for what she lacks in terms of sassiness with a charming sensitivity on this tribute to Blossom Dearie, featuring the legendary guitarist Jim Mullen.

HBH Trio with Julian Priester

Signals from the Mind SLAM ★★★★★

Avant-garde pianist David Haney, guitarist David Badja and classically-schooled bassist Jorge Hernaiz are joined by the veteran Chicagoan trombonist Julian Priester for a sometimes stimulating, often abstract improv session.

William Hooker Trio

Remembering Astral Spirits ★★★★★

The veteran percussionist raises a rowdy fire-music kerfuffle in the company of brooding double-bassist Damon Smith and guitarist Ava Mendoza, the latter exhuming her inner-Sharrock all over this mutinous series of freely-improvised brouhaha. This cassette's most untamed moments squirm about like the inner turmoil of a Walter de la Mare phantom face-transplant victim. (S6)

I Hold The Lions Paw

Abstract Playgrounds

Earshift Music ★★

Led by the trumpeter-composer Reuben Lewis, this Melbourne octet's rather chaotic blend of Afro-beat and post-Miles grooves with electronics fails to make much of an impact.

Errol Linton

Packing my Bags Bra\$\$dog ★★★★★

Time seems to stand still for the old Chicago blues-worshipping Brixton-based harmonica player/vocalist Errol Linton, even though his genre classics and originals have an enduring authenticity about them.

Nick Millevoi's Desertion Trio

Midtown Tilt Clean Feed ★★★★★

This Philly-based guitar trio's rocking spirit is infectious, if a little wearing, over a whole CD. Special guest, the idiosyncratic New York organist Jamie Saft, sounds like Ian McLagan, which is no bad thing.

Sara Serpa

Close Up Clean Feed ★★★★★

The wordless latin-jazz inflected Portuguese singer and improviser has a new quality trio (with saxophonist Ingrid Laubrock and cellist Erik Friedlander) that's brimming with a hypnotic collective dialogue.

Slagr

DIRR Hubro ★★★★★

The Norwegian trio Slagr's floaty, ethereal folksy sound evokes the detached tranquillity of desolate Nordic rural landscapes, yet there's a yearning human element perceptible in the instrumental palette, consisting of Hardanger fiddle, cello, vibes and tuned glasses.

Branco Stoysin

Above the Clouds

Sun Recordings ★★★★★

This London-based, Serbian guitarist's mellifluous lyricism draws on Brazilian, jazz and his native folk music, switching through various guitars on a solo album that's surprisingly expressive.

Akira Tana

JAZZaNOVA Vega ★★★★★

A veteran drummer with a SF Bay area band, featuring high-profile guests Branford Marsalis and Arturo Sandoval, explores the classic Brazilian bossa/samba songbook with mostly pleasing results.

Gebhard Ullmann & Alexey Kruglov

Moscow-Berlin Fancy Music ★★★★★

An organic crossover of scored composition and free improvisation of this kind has its challenges, but the duo of experienced German experimental multi-reedsman and his Russian mentor manage to meet them head on.

Selwyn Harris