



Jazz Magazine

**O's PLACE**



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## **O'**pening Notes

As the final notes of another vibrant year in jazz begin to fade, we find ourselves reflecting on the rich list of sounds and stories that have filled our pages this quarter. We've lost some legends, Phil Upchurch (g), Anthony Jackson (b) and Jack DeJohnette (d) to name a few.

We proudly spotlight the global essence of jazz celebrating many international artists who transcend borders, cultures and Ice agents Lol!

You'll read about Venezuelan violinist, Ali Bello, pianists Auran Ortiz & Irving Flores, all playing Cuban rhythms! Jazz is resonating from Korea, Mexico, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Argentina, The Mid-East, and Europe, with the artists telling their stories through music and improvisation.

There are 127 reviews in this issue and we invite you to experience the world through the eyes and ears of these phenomenal artists, many who you may not yet know.

## **O's Place Jazz Magazine**

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---> Sound advice at a nice price!

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# Opening Notes cont.

Check Mar Loi, playing the handpan and soothing your soul with meditation music. Enjoy the music from more familiar names like Nicholas Payton, Eddie Daniels, and Mike Ledonne, or veterans Billy Hart, Johnny O'Neal, and George Coleman...

Here's to a quarter oozing with rhythm and to a new year filled with the spirit of jazz!

Cheers!

O

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## O'S TOP 10 SCORES

1. COLORADO JAZZ REPERTORY ORCHESTRA - [Golden Lady](#)
2. NICHOLAS PAYTON - [Triune](#)
3. ROY HARGROVE - [Live at KNKX](#)
3. Jeremy Pelt - [Christmas Interlude](#)
5. CHET BAKER - [Swimming By Moonlight](#)
5. Latanya Hall - [If Not Now, When...](#)
7. Charlie Rouse - [Cinnamon Flower](#)
8. TOM COHEN - [Embraceable](#)
8. MIKE LEDONNE - [Turn It Up!](#)
8. Heather McKay - [Life Got In The Way](#)

Click on the "ARTIST'S NAME" to go directly to the review

*O's primary listening is done with a Sony XA777ES SACD player, Ayre C5-xe<sup>MP</sup> CD player, Jeff Rowland Consonance preamp, two Jeff Rowland Model 1 amplifiers (balanced mono mode), Classe CA-200 amplifier, Mirage M1 speakers and B&W 800D speakers wired with CardasHex5C speaker wire, Transparent Audio interconnects, vpiHw40 (40th Anniv) turntable with Gimble Tonearm and E.S.P. Essence Reference Power Distribution System.*

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## O's Rating System

O's Place has evolved with our listeners to create a rating system based on three factors: Performance, Sound Quality, and the quality of the Package (including liner notes). The primary criteria is Performance followed by Sound and finally Package.

The ratings (X) have the following weightings and will provide a score from 0-100 with average reviews in the 70 range. Our new ratings are similar to traditional academic ratings.

**Performance: 15x, Sound: 5x, Package: 1x**

## Top Traditional Picks

### O's Notes

ARTIST Title <i>Label Perf/Sound</i>	
<b>LATIN</b> <b>T<sup>L</sup></b> <b>CROSSROADS</b> <b>2</b> <b>79</b> <i>Ovation Records</i>	Latin Crossroads 2 continues the warm spirit of the first take, extending the collection of mixed vocals with Latin undertones. Gino Amato's arrangements of these classic tunes are tasty renovations! We liked "I Only Have Eyes For You" featuring Kandace Springs, "When I Fall In Love", "Tangerine", "No Moon At All" featuring Janis Siegel, "I Love Paris" featuring Veronica Swift, and "Windmills Of Your Mind" featuring Matt Cusson. The blend of harmonized vocals and gentle Latin rhythms have us anxiously awaiting volume 3!
<b>OVELLA NEGRA</b> <b>T<sup>B</sup></b> <u>Va de mescles</u> <i>Microscopi</i> <b>78</b>	Ovella Negra is a powerful trio lead by arranger Joan Fontera Luna (p) with bassist Pablo Di Salvo and Teo Salva on drums. For their latest album <u>Va de mescles</u> , they combine traditional Latin fusion with expressive dance. The dance ensemble is choreographed by Catalina Luna Barcelona (Joan Fontera Luna's mother). While we only had access to the music, it is passionate, expressive and rich across many tempos.
<b>JAMES</b> <b>T<sup>B</sup></b> <b>DANDERFER</b> <u>If Not Now</u> <b>77</b> <i>Cellar Music</i>	Canadian clarinetist, composer James Danderfer leads a septet with Steve Davis (tb), Cory Weeds (t-sax), Atley King (vibes), Miki Yamanaka (p), Tyrone Allen II (b), and Kush Abadey (d) for his latest release <u>If Not Now</u> . Each of these musicians get a chance to state their case and they play it well resulting in a balanced team performance. "Tempest of The Times", "Ponderosa", and "My Brightest Lights" are among the best.
<b>NEAL MINER</b> <b>T<sup>B</sup></b> <u>Invisibility</u> <b>76</b> <i>Cellar Music</i>	Bassist Neal Miner steps into the spotlight leading a trio with Chris Byars (t-sax) and Jason Tiemman (d). <u>Invisibility</u> is a collection of eleven contrafacts, original melodies grafted on top of existing chord progressions. It's a sizable step over standard covers. The trio sounds like a larger ensemble and captures their audience. We liked "Blue View", "Late Night", and "Night Owl" best of the eleven selections.
<b>GOMIDE,</b> <b>T<sup>L</sup></b> <b>RUDOLPH &amp;</b> <b>NOGUEIRA</b> <b>74</b> <u>Amare</u> <i>Challenge</i>	<u>Amare</u> is a Brazilian trio with Enrique Gomide (p), Celine Rudolph (vocals) & Joao Luiz Nogueira (g). The music on their self-titled debut is airy, refreshing, and calm, a mix of obscure standards and originals. "Embaixo da Imsidao", "Itacimirim", "Beijo Partido", and "Avril" are notable.

## O's Rating Scale (X)

0                      65                      80                      95



# O's Place Features

## High Society New Orleans Jazz Band *Live at Birdland*

The name of the band is a strong indicator of what you hear. Instrumentation includes early 1900s instrumentation with Conal Fowkes (p, vocals), Simon Wettenhall (t, vocals), Harvey Tibbs (tb), Tom Abbott (cl), Josh Dunn (g, banjo), Brian Nalepka (b, vocals), and Kevin Dom (d). They open with a traditional funeral song "Flee As A Bird / Oh Didn't He Ramble" before swinging in the Crescent City style led by Wettenhall and Tibbs on "When Leave This World Behind". This is a fun outing!

78 *Dixie 2025*  
*Turtle Bay*

## GRANT STEWART

77  
*Cellar Music*  
*Modern*  
*2025*

### Next Spring

Canadian saxophonist Grant Stewart leads a quartet with Paul Sikivie (b), Tardo Hammer (p), and Phil Stewart (d) on Next Spring, a collection of 9 standards. We liked "Out Of The Past", the swinging "Kiss & Run", "Nefertiti", the fleeting "I Know That You Know" and "There's No You". Stewart's tenor is throaty and warm on the ballads, and he doesn't miss a beat on the burners.

Photo: Grant Stewart



## Atlantic Jazz Collective

The Atlantic Jazz Collective is a Canadian supergroup with Mike Murley (sax), Florian Hoefner (p), Jim Vivian (b), with featured artists Norma Winstone (vocals) and Joe LaBarbera (d). Seascape is their debut release as a collective and it is promising. "Where Do We Go From Here", "Trying to Recall", and "Ratfish" are among the best of nine selections.

75 *Ballads*  
*Alma 2025*

### Seascape

# Big Band Picks

## O's Notes

**ARTIST**  
**Title**  
*Label*      **Rating**

**SOCRATES**  
**GARCIA**  
**Shadows of**  
**Tomorrow**      **T<sup>N</sup>**  
*Summit*      **83**

Dominican pianist, guitarist Socrates Garcia appears here as arranger, composer and conductor of a 20+ piece Latin Jazz Orchestra. Masterful percussion underscores the vibe that makes Shadows of Tomorrow sizzle. It reflects Garcia's musical journey through South America and the Caribbean with a core soul rooted in the Dominican Republic. The horns are crisp and present on numerous lead melodies. We liked the energy on "Sultry Villa Mella Twilights" contrasted with the poise on "Brad's Dreamy Samana Night". The 3-part "Illusions, Delusions... A Glimmer of Hope" suite unveils a musical illustration of today's realities.

**RIN SEO**  
**City Suite**      **T<sup>N</sup>**  
*Cellar Music*      **82**

Rin Seo is a Korean pianist, composer and conductor now based in New York. She leads a 14-piece orchestra on City Suite, a blend of jazz and Korean music that rocks! She opens with a 3-part movement describing New York City. It is funky on "The Big Apple" featuring Steve Wilson (sax), cool on "Cityscape" and relaxing on "Alone But Not Alone". The use of brass and strings works well here. The are reflective tunes like "Desert Flower" featuring Ingrid Jensen (t), Wayne Shorter's "Blues A La Carte", and energetic orchestrations like "Music For Dance No. 2".

**CINCINNATI**      **T<sup>N</sup>**  
**CONTEMPORARY**  
**JAZZ ORCHESTRA**  
**The Nutcracker**  
**Remix**      **80**  
*Cincinnati Jazz*

The Nutcracker Remix is performed by CCJO conducted by Eric Lechlter. They perform a dozen selections of Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker Suite recrafted for a large jazz ensemble. Highlights are "Camel Capery" featuring baritone saxophonist Phil Hilger, and "Everybody Digs Flowers" featuring pianist Matt Harris. Vocalist Mandy Gaines appears on three bonus tracks notably "Merry Christmas Baby". There is a QR code for digital liner notes that are very good.

**FLYING HORSE**  
**BIG BAND**      **T<sup>N</sup>**  
**Unbridled**  
*Flying Horse*      **77**

Jeff Rupert is a well accomplished musician and professor at the University of Central Florida where he directs The Flying Horse Big Band, composed of students. Unbridled is the latest of nine stellar albums under Rupert's direction. Tenor saxophonist, George Garzone is the featured guest on four of the seven selections, and he makes the most of it on "Pharaoh's Daughter" with Rupert (b-cl), and "Impressions". "Chasin' Tail" and "It Gets Better" give us a glimpse of some of the rising talent!

**SHOUT SECTION**  
**BIG BAND**      **T<sup>N</sup>**  
**Tatum's Swingin'**  
**Session**  
*Outside In*      **74**

Chicago-based vocalist Tatum Langley leads the charge on Tatum's Swingin' Session with the Shout Section Big Band directed by Brett Dean. There's a wide variety of tunes ranging from jazzy pop to blues. The brass-heavy band is swinging hard on "Swinging On Nothing", Langley soars on "A Hard Day's Night", and sings the blues on "Deedle's Blues".

# Traditional Selections

ARTIST	Title	Label	X	T
DOODLE CATS	<u>Reinventing The Wheel</u>	<i>Necessary Vice</i>	73	T <sup>B</sup>
ANN KITTREDGE	<u>You Sleigh Me</u>	<i>King Kozmo</i>	73	T <sup>b</sup>
ERIK LEUTHÄUSER	<u>Quality Time In New York</u>	<i>Challenge</i>	73	T <sup>b</sup>
JUDY WHITMORE	<u>Christmas</u>	<i>Arden House</i>	72	T <sup>b</sup>
TIM O'CONNELL	<u>Gems</u>	<i>Tall Man</i>	71	T <sup>b</sup>
QUIET TAKES	<u>Veils</u>	<i>Quiet Takes</i>	71	T <sup>b</sup>
HANNAH GILL	<u>Spooky Jazz Vol. 3</u>	<i>Turtle Bay</i>	71	T <sup>b</sup>
JASON RIGBY	<u>Mayhem</u>	<i>Endectomorph</i>	71	T <sup>A</sup>
JIMMY LAYTON	<u>No Bats, No Tequila</u>	<i>Jazz Apple</i>	66	T <sup>L</sup>
CARME LOPEZ	<u>Vinde Todas</u>	<i>Microscopi</i>	63	T <sup>b</sup>

## Chad LB

81 **Bebop 2025**

## The Shadow of Your Smile

ChadLB is an under-rated **Bandstand Presents** performer, a purveyor of warm, passionate, tenor sax. He leads a quartet with Liya Grigoryan (p), Ben Tiberio (b), and Mike Piolet (d) for The Shadow of Your Smile. They get funky on “Layla”, swing on “Change The World”, and mesmerized us on “Only You”. They add a string quartet arranged by Danny Jonokuchi on “Ave Maria” balancing a fine session.

## Ali Bello

79  
Circle 9  
Latin  
2025

## The Charanga Syndicate

Venezuelan violinist, composer Alí Bello immerses himself into the Cuban charanga tradition on The Charanga Syndicate. Charanga was formed in the 1950s when Haitian immigrants combined Afro-Caribbean beats with Cuban, Spanish rhythms. It was refined as Cubans migrated to New York. That’s where Bello embraced and embellished the artform to arrive at a rich modern interpretation. Among the best selections are “Emiliano” featuring Arturo O’Farrill (keyboards), “Bilongo”, and “Guaripumpé” featuring Jeremy Bosch (vocal) & Eddy Zirvigón (fl).



Photo: Ali Bello

# O's Latin Features

## Salsa de la Bahia *Renegade Queens*



Photo: Amy Tolbert

80  
Latin  
Patois  
2025

*Renegade Queens* is a celebration of the notable contributions of women, Salsa, and Latin Jazz artists in the San Francisco Bay Area. It is the third volume from the band produced by trombonist Wayne Wallace and filmmaker Rita Hargrove. There are nineteen songs over two discs including vocals (in Spanish and English), and instrumentals. Among the best tunes are “Love Walked In”, “Can’t Eat Clout”, “Decca O Amor Florescer” (Let Love Flourish), “La Mensajera”, and “The Peanut Vendor”.

## O's Place Jazz Ruler™

Traditional				Contemporary		
1900	1920	1940	1960	1970	1980	2000
Ragtime T <sup>R</sup> Dixie T <sup>D</sup>	Blues&Ballads T <sup>b</sup> Swing T <sup>S</sup>	Bebop T <sup>B</sup> Big Band T <sup>N</sup>	Latin T <sup>L</sup> Free T <sup>A</sup>	Fusion C <sup>F</sup> R&B+Jazz C <sup>R</sup>	Funk C <sup>f</sup> Pop+Jazz C <sup>P</sup>	Acid C <sup>A</sup>

## Afro-Caribbean Jazz Collective

The Afro-Caribbean Jazz Collective is a nonet Led by guitarist, composer. Jose Guzman. They play Afro-Cuban and Puerto Rican jazz that also have threads of the Chicago jazz scene where Guzman resides. We liked the relaxed “A Sunday Kind of Day”, “Terminal 5” featuring trumpeter Victor Garcia, “Orchard Downs” and “Witches Dance”, all original tunes in a percussion-laden, energetic set.

### *Cortadito*

76  
JGB Music  
Latin  
2025



Photo: ACJC

# O's Latin Features

## Tom Cohen *Embraceable*

84  
Latin  
Versa  
2025

Drummer, arranger & producer Tom Cohen serves up a rich blend of instrumental and vocal Latin jazz that is easily *Embraceable*. Chico Pinheiro (g) shines on “Tarde”, vocalist Barbara Mendes stars on “Brigas Nunca Mais” with Chris Farr (t-sax) & “The Girl From Ipanema” with Larry McKenna (t-sax). We also enjoyed “Adeus America” with Filo Machado (g) jazzing the mic. Other notable selections are “Cafe Com Pio”, “Bebe” featuring Valtinho Anastacio (vocals, perc), and “Aquelas Coisas Todas”.



Photo: Tom Cohen

## Valeria Stewart

Latin 2025  
Antidote 74

## *Raices/Roots*

Argentine singer, songwriter Valeria Stewart makes her debut on *Raices*. Kevin Dudley (g), Eugenio Ibarra (b), Jason Walker (congas, bongos), Juan Megan (Bombo leguero), and Grey Jacks (vocals) provide ample support. Stewart sings of love and loss over seven selections including five originals. We liked “Por Que”, “No Eres Tu”, “El Dia Mas Oscuro”, and “Ensueños”.

## Catina DeLuna & Otmaro Ruiz *Lado B Brazilian Project 2*

Brazilian vocalist Catina DeLuna and Venezuelan pianist Otmaro Ruiz are the headliners (also husband and wife) on *Lado B Brazilian Project 2*. This is a worthy follow-up to the first edition launched 19 years ago. They get support from Larry Koonse (g), Edwin Livingston (b), and Edu Ribeiro (d). They dust off some obscure titles (the B-Sides) written by Brazilian masters and give them new life with heartfelt passion that spills beyond their relationship. We enjoyed the samba infused collection especially “Requebre Que Eu Dou Um Doce” featuring guests Bruno Mangueira (g) and Bob Sheppard (cl), “Aluviao”, and “Choro Das Aguas” with guest vocalist Fabio Cadore and Sheppard on sax.



77  
Sunnyside  
Latin  
2025

Photo: Facebook.com

# O's Latin Features

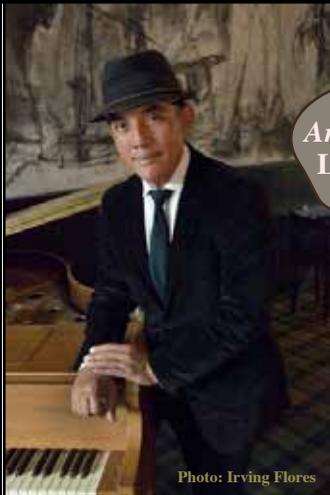


Photo: Irving Flores

79  
*Amor de Flores*  
Latin 2025

## Armando Mi Conga

### IRVING FLORES

Armando Mi Conga is a celebration of Afro-Cuban jazz featuring pianist Irving Flores with John Benitez (b), Giovanni Hidalgo (congas), Horacio “El Negro” Hernandez (d), Brian Lynch (t), and Norbert Stachel (reeds). The live session is upbeat, percussive, and full of life, inspiring listeners to get up and dance! We liked “Dana Point”, “Armando Mi Conga”, “Samba Con Sabor”, “Music E La Calle”, and “With Amanda n Favignana”.

## Antonio Adolfo

2025 AAM  
Latin 75

## Carnival

Brazilian pianist, Antonio Adolfo leads a large ensemble including Lula Galvão (g), Jorge Helder (b), Rafael Barata (d, perc), Jesse Sadoc (t, flugelhorn), Idriss Boudreaux (a-sax), Marcelo Martins (t-sax, fl), Rafael Rocha (tb), and Andre Siqueira (perc). On Carnival Adolfo revisits some of the classic tunes associated with the annual celebration in Brazil, combining jazz and Brazilian music artfully. We liked the festive flow of “As Pastorinhas”, “Agora E Cinza”, and “A Lua E Dos Namorados”.

## ARUÁN ORTIZ

77  
*Intakt 2024*  
Free Latin

## Creole Renaissance

Creole Renaissance is a solo piano effort from Cuban master pianist Aruán Ortiz. The mostly original music (8 of 10 selections), is introspective, deliberate, and thought provoking. The foundation of his works are the roots and traditions of Black experimentation. Ortiz adds spoken word to further his message on “From the Distance of My Freedom”.

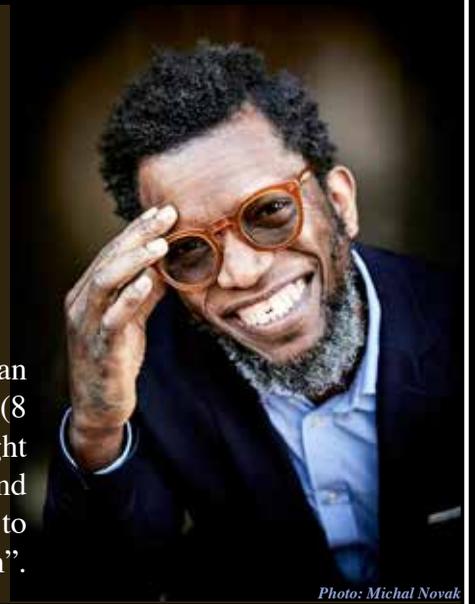


Photo: Michal Novak

# O's Piano Features

## Mike LeDonne

### Turn It Up!

Pianist Mike LeDonne brings his Groover Quartet with tenor saxophonist Eric Alexander, Peter Bernstein (g), and Joe Farnsworth (d). It's tough to miss with this overdose of talent as they celebrate 25 years playing together. The 2-disc set captures then and now. Turn It Up! was recorded in 2024 at The Sidedoor Jazz Club in Connecticut. It's a head-bobber from the start on "Slow Freight". Bernstein speaks on "Mary Lou's Blues", LeDonne dials in on "Who Can I Turn To" and "This Will Be". You'll See takes us back to 2004, Live at Cellar Jazz Club. Eric and Peter are really burning on "11 years". "Lament" is more laid-back featuring Bernstein. Alexander explodes on "Cherokee" with Farnsworth weighing adding a rousing solo, and Ledonne brings it all together on "Delilah".

84

Modern  
Cellar Music  
2025



Photo: Mike LeDonne

## Jon Gold

Pop+Jazz 2025  
Jon Stuart Gold 74

### Chasing Echoes

Pianist, composer Jon Gold, presents a fresh, relaxed set of Brazilian flavored songs on Chasing Echoes, his latest album. There are eleven original pieces. Jon employs a core band with Mauricio Zottarelli (d), Leonardo Cesar (g), and Jackson Lourenço (b). We liked "For Sergio Mendes" and the title track, both featuring vocalist Marina Marchi. Other highlights are "Blues Pé De Serra", "Breaking The Ice" with guest bassist Marc Egan, the relaxing "Athena's Web" featuring Leonard Cesar (g) and the fitting finale, "Friends United" with Arthur Cavalcanti (s-sax).

## Lisa Hilton

### Extended Daydream

76  
Pop+Jazz  
Lisa Hilton  
2025

Pianist/composer Lisa Hilton presents Extended Daydream, a recording that spans a variety of jazz genres from the opening bebop selection "So What" to the peaceful title track. She leads a quintet with bassist Luques Curtis, drummer/percussionist Rudy Royston, saxophonist JD Allen, and Igmarr Thomas on trumpet. We enjoyed, a peaceful ballad and the Latin tinged "Tropical Tuesday" and "It's Just For Now", two of nine original compositions that are fresh, swinging, and bubbly.



Photo: Lisa Hilton

# O's Piano Features

## Noah Haidu

82

*Infinite Distances  
Ballads 2025*

Pianist Noah Haidu is back with a third release of Standards III.

He plays in multiple trio configurations; the primary unit includes Gervis Myles (b) and Charles Gould (d). Buster Williams (b) and Billy Hart (d) join Noah for a few songs notably “Things Aren’t What They Used To Be”. We also enjoyed the relaxing “Alone Together”. The lone quartet selection is a burner, “Slipstream” with Peter Washington (b), Lewis Nash (d) and Steve Wilson (a-sax).



### Standards III

*Photo: Noah Haidu*

### **Billy Lester**

2025 Modern

*Ultra Sound 74*

### High Standards

Seasoned pianist Billy Lester leads a trio with bassist Marcello Testa and Nicola Stranieri on drums. They give us their take on nine covers for High Standards. There is generous soloing around the horn on the opener, “There Will Never Be Another You”, an enticing indication of what follows. We liked the gentle swagger of “What Is This Thing Called Love”, the swinging “I’ll Remember April”, and “Out of Nowhere”. Lester shines throughout the set with personalized phrasing that shows continued evolution even at 79!

76

*Smoke Sessions  
Modern 2025*

## Eric Scott Reed

### Out Late

Pianist Eric Scott Reed bleeds his soul on Out Late, his interpretation of the New York jazz scene after hours. He leads a stellar quintet with Nicholas Payton (t), Eric Alexander (sax), Peter Washington (b), and Joe Farnsworth (d). The songs are all first takes, capturing a truth that reflects the skill of the unit. There are seven songs in the vinyl length 39 minutes. They swing on “All’umfrs”, “Shadowboxing”, “Delightful Daddy”, and warm our spirits on “Glow”.

*Photo: Kevin Scanlon*

# O's Piano Features

## David Kikoski

### Weekend at Smalls

American jazz pianist and co-producer David Kikoski leads a polished quartet with Randy Brecker (t), Joe Martin (b) and Billy Hart (d) in a Weekend at Smalls. They open swinging hard on “Winnie’s Garden”, get creative on “There’s A Mingus A Monk Us”, mellow on “Presage”, and “Moontide” featuring Brecker. We also enjoyed “Straight No Chaser”. This is premium straight-ahead jazz!

82  
Cellar Music  
Bebop  
2025

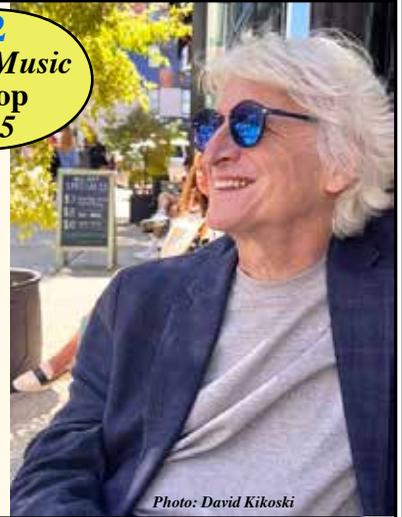


Photo: David Kikoski

## Kelly Green

77 Green Soul  
2025 Ballads

## Corner of My Dreams

Pianist, vocalist, composer Kelly Green is a storyteller who personalizes each selection seeking to fully engage with her audience. Luca Soul Rosenfeld (b) and Evan Hyde (d) round out the rhythm section. The use of strings softens an already warm vocal tone of vocalist Kelly Green, notably on “Nothing At All” in memories of her mother. Corner Of My Dreams is a vinyl-length, 33 minutes with no throwaways.

## Joe Elefante

78  
Jowcol  
Fusion  
2025

### Return of the Light

*The Wheel of Dharma* is pianist, composer Joe Elefante’s quintet with Freddie Hendrix (t), Erena Terakubo (sax), Sameer Shankar (b), and David Heilman (d). Return of the Light is their latest release, and they swing from the opener, “Jazz for Dummies”. There is nice work by Hendrix on “Return of the Light”, “Cromwell”, and “Mudita”. We also enjoyed “Simple Girl”, and the swinging finale “Some Other Blues”.



Photo: Joe Elefante

# O's Piano Features

81

Fusion  
*ArtsForge*  
2025

## Tobin Mueller *Muller's Wheel*

Tobin Mueller teams up with saxophonist Woody Mankowski to give us The History of Jazz starting with early New Orleans beats and swinging into bebop, before moving to a contemporary bent with blues, funk and fusion. The leaders play most instruments with additions by Fran Dagostino (g), Dane Richeson (d), and Jeff Cox (b). "Cliff's Edge" is one of two selections from a 2009 release with Tobin on organ and his nephew Chris Mueller on piano. We liked "Seafood Gumbo" featuring vocalist Angela Hope, the funky "Lost In The West Village", "Saddle Shoe Sally", and the funky "Deconstruction of a Glance".

Photo: Tobin Mueller

## Andrew Carroll

81 A. Carroll  
2025 Modern

## *Speaking of Gravity*

Pianist, composer Andrew Carroll assembles a trio with drummer Jeff Ballard and bassist Danny Ziemann. They play nine original compositions on Speaking of Gravity. The music is peaceful and relaxing. We enjoyed "Fading Fires", "It's All Down Hill From Here", and "Auburn Roots", just a few of many good songs.

78

Ballads  
*Pilars*  
2025

## Chris Rottmayer

## *Playing Favorites*

Chris Rottmayer is an American jazz pianist, composer, and jazz vibraphonist playing behind featured vocalist Kelsey Wallne on 6 of the 11 selections. The rest of the band is bassist Clark Sommers and drummer Matt Enders. Playing Favorites includes a taste of Brazil on "One Note Samba", "Voyage", some classic blues on "I'm Too Sweet", and warm renditions like "Love Dance".

Photo: Facebook

# O's Piano Features

## Armen Donelian

79

**Pop+Jazz**  
*Sunnyside*  
2025

Composer, pianist Armen Donelian leads a trio with bassist Eddie Gomez and Billy Hart on drums. Stargazer is a collection of seven, adventurous highlighting the skills of each of the musicians individually and as a group. It was originally released on vinyl in 1980. This 2025 digital CD is a reissue that brings that coveted 1980s fusion into the present. “Free At Last”, “Straight No Chaser”, “Love’s Endless Spin”, and “Queen Of Light” featuring Gomez, are notable in a strong session.

### Stargazer

Photo: Stephen Donelian

## Eydis Evensen

76 Ballads  
*XXIM 2025*

### Oceanic Mirror

Icelandic composer, pianist Eydis Evensen has a signature that is as beautiful as her country. Oceanic Mirror is a fine example. The mood is picturesque like an aural, cinematic painting. It’s a picture that you can dive into, imagining wandering through a peaceful field or gazing into the sea during the early morning hours with the sea gulls chirping. It’s soothing, suitable for a spa.

Photo: Eydis Evensen



## Margherita Fava

Italian pianist Margherita Fava makes her sophomore release with Murrina featuring a core trio with bassist Brandon Rose and drummer Johnathan Barber. Tenor saxophonist Bob Reynolds joins them for “Keep On”. We also enjoyed her arrangement of Brahms’s “Intermezzo Op. 117 No.1”, the title track, a modern take on “Satin Doll”, and “Alter Ego” featuring pianists Taber Gable & Jeff Babko.

78

**Modern**  
*M. Fava*  
2025

### Murrina

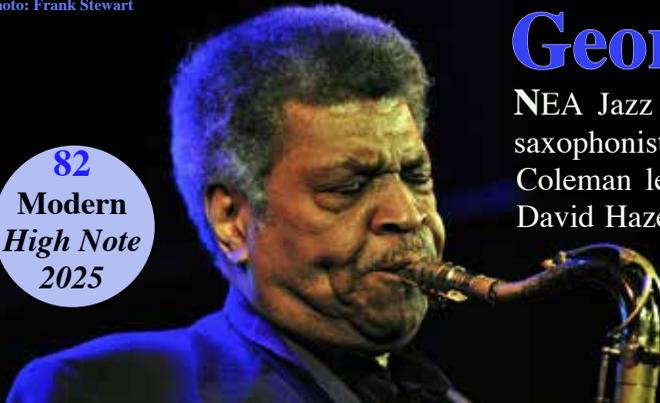
Photo: Margherita Fava



# O's Sax Features

Photo: Frank Stewart

82  
Modern  
High Note  
2025



## George Coleman

NEA Jazz Master, saxophonist George *with Strings*

Coleman leads a quintet with John Webber (b), David Hazeltine (p), Joe Farnsworth (d), Café da Silva (perc), and a lush, 10-piece string orchestra arranged and conducted by Bill Dobbins. These are wonderful new arrangements of jazz classics that never grow old when approached from

this angle. We are greeted by the warmth of Coleman's tenor sax on the opener, "Dedicated to You". He's complemented by strings and a solid rhythm section to make this a warm and inviting session.

Photo: Scott Friedlander

## Patrick Brennan

Alto saxophonist Patrick Brennan embarks on a journey to free spirited improvisation on *K n current*. His accomplices are Cooper-Moore (diddle-ly-bo), On Ka'a Davis (g), and Jason Kao Hwang (electric violin), all bringing free jazz elements from unique perspectives. Together they take listeners to an out of this world experience.

2025 Fusion  
Deep Dish 77

*K n current*



## JD Allen

### *Love Letters*

Tenor saxophonist, composer, producer JD Allen warms our soul with ballads on *Love Letters*, his second take on romance. His accompaniment is bassist Ian Kenselaar, drummer Nic Cacioppo, and pianist Brandon McCune. They dive into eight classics that have been performed by many. Allen manages to present them with his own passionate signature, a worthy representation. "Don't Go To Strangers", "You Are Too Beautiful", "I Love You", and "Tell The Story" resonated with us.



77  
Ballads  
Savant  
2025

Photo: Bart Babinski

# O's Sax Features

## Sam Dillon

### My Ideal

This is a showcase for Sam as he explores all angles of melodies on his saxophone, notably on “My Ideal” and “SD Card”. His accompaniment is David Hazeltine (p), Alexander Claffy (b), and Rodney Green (d). They play mostly covers disguised in a way that introduces the solos before the melodies. It’s a cool reveal of the classics and it freshens the songs. There are also a few originals as Dillon charts his path with solos that have feeling. It’s a good story.

82  
Modern  
Cellar Music  
2025

Photo: Sam Dillon

## Cory Weeds Meets Jerry Weldon

75 Cellar Music  
2025 Modern

Canadian producer, radio host Cory Weeds is also a proven tenor saxophonist. He picks up his horn to duel fellow tenor saxophonist Jerry Weldon on Cory Weeds Meets Jerry Weldon. They perform in front of a solid rhythm section with Miles Black (p), John Lee (b), and Jesse Cahill (d). They waste no time getting down to business swinging on the opener “Hey Lock!” and they never let up. While the headliners handle most of the melodies all the musicians shine. It’s straight-ahead jazz with lots of feeling, mostly standard tunes and one original from Weeds.

## Scott Silbert

### Survival of The Fittest

Dream Dancing features saxophonist Scott Silbert and his band. The quartet is solid with drummer Chuck Redd, bassist Amy Shook, and pianist Robert Redd, with melodies provided by Silbert. There are a few warm ballads that show the rich passion that emanates from Silbert’s tenor and soprano saxophones. The music is a celebration of the centennial birthday of legendary saxophonist Zoot Sims. They play thirteen selections, each swinging as he would. “Louisiana”, “It’s That Old Devil Called Love” and “Low Life” are just a few of the best.

82  
Swing  
S.Silbert  
2025

Photo: Scott Silbert

# O's Saxophone Features

## Jane Ira Bloom

### Once Like A Spark

Master improvisation jazz artists Soprano saxophonist Jane Ira Bloom and percussionist Brian Shankar Adler form a creative team on Drums Like Dancing. Guest artist Ken Filiano adds bass on "Psalm". The openness imparted by the duo lends towards an inviting session. We liked "Watertown" and the vocal improvisation on "Old Orchard" best in the set of 14 songs.

76  
Fusion  
Adhyaropa  
2025



Photo: Ken Hunt

## Rico Jones

Giant Step Arts  
2025 Fusion 76

### Bloodlines

Bloodlines is the debut recording for saxophonist, composer Rico Jones. He leads a quartet with Max Light (g), Joe Martin (b), and Nasheet Waits (d). The opening suite is jazz fusion with spiritual, symphonic, and provocative notes. "Judgement and Absolution" and "Across Time" are notable. Jones is warm and passionate on the closer "The Voice of God Shines Brightly on My Heart".

## Pete Mills

### For The Record

Pete plays sax and fronts an organ trio with drummer Zach Comston, guitarist Tom Davis, and Jon Eshelman on the B3. They bring the sound of the 1960s into the present with a fresh perspective but honoring the past. We liked "Kenny, Ken", "ZIs For Zadio", the mellow tones of "The Visitor" and "Jammy Git" in a set where the spotlight shines equally on all the musicians!

76  
Fusion  
Mighty Ernie  
2025



Photo: Pete Mills

# O's Sax Features

Photo: Danielle Sum Photography

## Jacob Chung

### Live at Frankie's Jazz Club

Tenor saxophonist Jacob Chung is whaling in front of the Tyler Henderson Trio for Live at Frankie's Jazz Club in Vancouver. Jacob, Tyler (p), Caleb Tobocman (b), and Hank Allen Barfield (d) are fresh with energy coming off their Canadian tour. We were engaged by their spirit on "Jeannine", "She", and the swinging "The Touch Of Your Lips" featuring Henderson. Those are just a few of eight energetic selections! They also shine with the reduced velocities of "This Is No Laughing Matter" and "Beautiful Friendship".

82

**Fusion**  
*Cellar Music*  
2025

## Eddie Daniels

Reedman Eddie Daniels celebrates

2025 Latin  
*Resonance* 78

### To Milton With Love

the musical mastery of Milton Nascimento on To Milton With Love. These are warmth symphonic Latin sounds featuring Daniels (cl, fl, s-sax, t-sax) on the melodies. Pianist Josh Nelson also makes his presence known across all eleven selections. Anthony Wilson (g), Kevin Axt (b), and Ray Brinker (d) round out the rhythm section, and the Lyris String Quartet softens the mood. We enjoyed soft refreshing flow of "Morrow Velho" featuring Daniels on flute, "For Milton", and "Cancoa Do Sal" featuring Wilson.

## First Flight George Kontomichalis

81

**Bebop**  
*Challenge*  
2025

First Flight is the debut recording for alto saxophonist, composer George Kontomichalis, and it's a winner! He demonstrates his prowess in many styles, from hard bop to warm ballads. His band is strong with bassist Andreas Lang, pianist Tinto Derado, and Sebastian Merck on drums. Jonathan Enders adds tenor sax on four selections and vocalist Sonya Sytnyk softens the attack on "Means Something To Me" including a fine solo by Lang. We also enjoyed "Rudy Lopez Opening" and the title track.



Photo: Challenge Records

# O's Drummer Features

## Juan Chiavassa

### Fourth Generation

Drummer Juan Chiavassa is from a small town in Argentina where he developed a passion for jazz-fusion. He idolized musicians like guitarist Mike Stern who makes his presence known with a guest appearance on the opener “Moon Germs” and the bonus closer “Jam”. We also liked “Caribbean Fire Dance”, “Hey Open Up”, and the mellow “Penelope” featuring bassist John Patitucci & George Garzone on sax. The second half includes a couple of modern jazz tunes notably “The Other Mingus”.

81  
Fusion  
*Whirlwind*  
2025



Photo: Juan Chiavassa

## Billy Hart

Drummer Billy Hart plays behind

2025 Modern  
77 *Smoke Sessions*

### Multidirectional

many popular jazz artists, but he takes the lead on Multidirectional in a quartet with Mark Turner (sax), Ethan Iverson (p), and Ben Street (b). Hart is celebrating his 85th Birthday on this live set captured at Smoke Jazz Club in NYC. The music is mostly original but includes a unique cover of “Giant Steps”. Our favorites are the warm “Sonnet For Stevie” and “Showdown”.

## Mar Loi

### Arrels

Mar Loi stepped away from her career as a childhood facilitator in 2017 seeking internal peace and harmony. She is a self-taught master of the Handpan. She offers retreats for those seeking inner peace and her music reflects that. It is refreshing spa and/or meditation music with a slight Asian bent. Recommended!

81  
Pop+Jazz  
*Microscopi*  
2025



Photo: Mar Loi

# O's Drummer Features

## Pat Petrillo

Drummer, bandleader Pat Petrillo presents an energizing set of eleven contemporary jazz songs on Contemporaneous, his latest endeavor. He invites a large group of musicians, playing in different configurations. Guitarists Oz Noy, Chieli Minucci & Nile Rogers, and bassist Scott Ambush lead the charge. They span the contemporary side of our Jazz Ruler with a lot of head-bobbers. "Summer In Philly" with Will Donato (sax, fl) reminded us of the late Grover Washington, Jr. We also enjoyed the rocking "On The Regular", "Dirty Jerez", the funky "Sunset Sound Studio 2", and groovin' "Weekend Vibe".

79  
Pop+Jazz-  
Innervision  
2025

## Contemporaneous



Photo: Pat Petrillo

## Gene Shelby

Photo: Gene Shelby



78  
Fusion  
Powderfinger  
2025

## Melton

Australian drummer, composer, producer Gene Shelby now resides in Los Angeles. He assembles a band with musicians from Jakarta Indonesia: Franky Sadikin (b), Yongki Vincent (keyboards), Eghay Synth (keyboards), Aiden Ishmael (g), Ricard Hutapea (sax), and featured artists Mike Stern (g) and Frank Gambale (g). We like the funky beats of "After Jam" featuring Stern and "Gyro Spiral" featuring Gambale. This is a great combination of both racy tunes like "Rhino Funk", and cooler fusion ballads like "Rainy Day".

# O's Vocal Features

## LaTanya Hall

### If Not Now, When...

LaTanya Hall is a polished vocalist who sings across many genres, focused on jazz and blues for her latest release, If Not Now, When... Her primary accompaniment is a trio with Cyrus Chestnut (p), Gerald Cannon (b), and Mark McLean (d). Highlights are “Long As You’re Living” featuring guitarist Marvin Sewell, and “Lullaby Of The Leaves” featuring Eddie Henderson (t). We also enjoyed the blues-based numbers like “Tender As A Rose”, “Let’s Burn Down The Cornfields” with Sewell & Gary Bartz (a-sax), and “Day Dreaming” featuring Gregoire Maret (harmonica).

86  
Ballads  
Blue Canoe  
2025



Photo: Blue Canoe

## Gina Kronstadt

74 Falloff  
2025 Ballads

### Feel Something

Los Angeles-based vocalist, writer, producer Gina Kronstadt also played violin until a botched shoulder surgery left her with nerve damage in 2023. Feel Something is her fourth album as a leader rising in the fall of 2025. Gena lays contemporary vocals on top of spicy club rhythms with a polished band including John Beasley (p), Bob Sheppard (sax, fl), Gary Novak (d), Gabe Davis (b), Felipe Fraga (perc), Lisa Dondlinger (violin), and Stefanie Fife (cello). The themes are friendship and romance. We liked “Favorite”, “You Make Me Feel”, “Shine”, and “Spooky”.

## Kris Adams & Peter Perfido

### Away

77  
Jazzbird  
Ballads  
2025



Photo: Peter Perfido

Boston based vocalist Kris Adams teams up with drummer Peter Perfido to honor the

late guitarist-composer Michael O’Neil on Away. Bob Degen (p), and Andre Buser (b) round out the quartet. 9 of the 13 songs are O’Neil originals. Highlights are “Die Sehnsucht”, a tribute to saxophonist Jan Gabarek, “Asia” with warm vocalese by Adams, “FM” with fine solos from Buster and Degen, and “Blessing”.



Photo: Kris Adams

# O's Vocal Features

## JENNIFER MADSEN

### Reimagine

There are many albums covering standard tunes but Jennifer Madsen's Reimagine features fresh arrangements that bring new life to tied old tunes. Arranger Brent Edstrom (p), Clipper Anderson (b), and Mark Ivester (d) are the supporting rhythm section. Sean Jones (t) makes a guest appearance on "Body and Soul", and Howard Levy (harmonica) steps in on "Beyond the Sea". Jennifer puts her heart into each song, expressing full emotions. "I Can't Give You Anything But Love, Baby", and "Willow Weep For Me" are fine examples.

Photo: Jennifer Madsen



81  
*SingBaby*  
Ballads  
2025

## Maria Corsair

74 Ballads  
*Lola 2025*

### Love Makes The Changes

Vocalist Maria Corsair covers the full circles of romance on Love Makes The Changes. Musical director/arranger Gregory Toroian (p) and his quartet provide support. Skip Ward (b), David Sillman (d), and Mark Feinberg (t-sax, fl) are the balance of a complementary band. We liked "Portrait In Black and White" featuring Ward, "Stolen Moments", "Love Makes The Changes", and "No More Blues".



77  
Ballads  
*Hear Me Roar*  
2025

## Sacha Boutros

### Paris After Dark

French American vocalist Sasha Boutros grew up in America and then blossomed as a musician in Paris. She exemplifies the diffused boundaries between cultures with music. Paris After Dark is a wonderful example featuring Sasha singing in front of a quintet with Stephane Belmondo (t), Franck Amsallem (p), Hugo Lippi (g), Thomas Bramerie (b), and Tony Robeson (d). The lyrics are in both French and English highlighted by "I'm A Fool to Want You", "April in Paris", "Et si tu n'existas pas", "Love in Portofino", and "La Belle Vie".

Photo: Sacha Boutros

# O's Vocal Features

Photo: Deborah Shulman



77  
Ballads  
Summit  
2025

## Deborah Shulman

### We Had A Moment

Deborah Shulman is an expressive singer who personalizes each song on We Had A Moment, dedicated to her husband Rick Cullen. She gets support from a strong team including Jeff Colella (p), Terry Trotter (p), Chris Colangelo (b), Joe LaBarbera (d), Kendall Kay (d), Larry Koonse (g) and Kenny Wild (b). “No Moon At All”, “New York State of Mind/On Broadway”, “Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea”, and “You Must Believe In Spring” are standouts.

## Antonia Bennett

74 Ballads 2025

### Expressions

Some would say Antonia is a hopeless Perseverance romantic, but we say that she sings passionate ballads as a storyteller. Expressions is her latest endeavor backed by a strong band including Christian Jacob (keyboards), Larry Koonse (g), Kevin Axt (b), Kendall Kay (d). The 13 songs are wholesome and romantic. Guests David Thomas sings background on “Wherever You Go” and Randy Brecker adds shadowing trumpet on “Hushabye Mountain”. Other highlights are “Comes Love”, the playful “Right On Time”, and “Ain’t Misbehavin”.

## Heather Ward

77  
Ballads  
Heather Ward  
2025

### Gilded & Silver

Canadian vocalist Heather Ward has rich alto tones and heartfelt lyrics on Gilded and Silver. She follows her debut with a collection of twelve fresh covers with some originals as well. We liked “Midnight At The Oasis”, “Blue Collar”, “He’s A Tramp”, and “I Can’t Give You Anything But Love Baby”.



Photo: John Ulman

# O's Vocal Features



Photo: Wikipedia

76  
R&B+Jazz  
Borderlight  
2025

## Leslie Odom, Jr. An Offering

Leslie Odom, Jr. is an actor, singer and songwriter. He is in his vocal zone on An Offering, a pleasing mix of soulful and popular classics. Odom's rich vocal tones stand out over the jazzy backdrop from his road band: Steven Walker (g), Eric England (b), David Chiverton (d), and Chris Cadenhead (keyboards). All 13 tracks were recorded live at Speakeasy Studios. Among the best are "Tonight, Tonight" and "Wait For It", "Autumn Leaves", "Jesus To A Child", "Sarah", and "The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face".

## Leo Sidran & Leonor Watling

74 Pop Ballads  
Bonsai 2025

## Leo & Leo

We've cited Leo Sidran is having a voice reminiscing in past recordings. Leonor Watling is in the same mode and together there are a vital pair, Leo & Leo. Their vocal styles match, resulting in a laid back, cool set. They're kind of funky on "Tonight Someone Is Me" and add a touch of reggae on "It's Never Too Late". We also enjoyed "Entre Chien Et Loup", "What's Trending", "The Art of Conversation", and "Nobody Kisses Anymore".

## Mark Winkler

Vocalist Mark Winkler combines with his go-to producer Barbara Brighton for a novel approach on his latest release, Hold On. He uses six different pianist/arrangers to underscore his relaxed vocal style, defining an expression of his personal style and affinities. Greg Gordon Smith, John Beasley, Rich Eames, Tamir Hendelman, Eric Reed, and Jamieson Trotter each bring unique characteristics to the party leading to a diversified session. 7 of the 11 songs are originals. We liked "If I Were A Bell", "My Future's Just A Memory", "I Dream Of You Each Night", "The Devil Don't Want A Saint", and "My Electric Car".



75  
Cafe Pacific  
Ballads  
2025

## Hold On

Photo: Mikel Healy

# O's Trumpet Features

## Nicholas Payton *Triune*

Multi-instrumentalist, composer Nicholas Payton leads an all-Star trio with bassist/vocalist Esperanza Spalding and drummer Karriem Riggins on *Triune* (three in one). Payton's primary instrument is trumpet, but he also handles keyboard duties here and invites a few guests to amplify the performance. The groove is solid and the mood is mellow. Nikki Glaspie adds vocals on "Ultraviolet". Guests Ivan Neville (vocals, organ, Clavinet), Erica Falls (vocals), and Otis McDonald (vocals) join for, "#bamisforthechildren", Black American Music (bam). Riggins' funky beats and Spalding's earthy bass work make a strong impression on a very good set.

89  
R&B+Jazz  
*Smoke Session*  
2025



Photo: Nicholas Payton

## Gabriel Alegria

*El Muki* is a mythical figure that rewarded miners who honored it with offerings and punished greedy abusers. The Afro-Peruvian Quartet seeks to honor traditional music made by real people playing real instruments. Peruvian trumpeter and composer Gabriel Alegria leads the band with Laura Andrea Leguía (t-sax), Hugo Alcázar (d), Jocho Velásquez (g), Mario Cuba (b), Freddy "Huevito" Lobatón (perc), and JF Maza (sax). We liked "Mala Señal", "Vista Panorámica", "Luciernagas", Alegria's luscious trumpet on "Panabe", and "Ausencia".

79 Latin 2025  
*Saponegro*

*El Muki*

## Al Muirhead

### *The Canadian*

### *Sessions Volume II*

Canadian trumpeter Al Muirhead remains vibrant and still cookin' at 90! Caity Gyorgy adds vocals on "Dancing On The Ceiling" and "More Than You Know". Hilario Duran stars on "Corcovado", and Jocelyn Gould sings a couple of songs notably "I Thought About You". The Canada Sessions, Volume II prove that Al is still relevant.

77  
Swing  
*Chronograph*  
2025

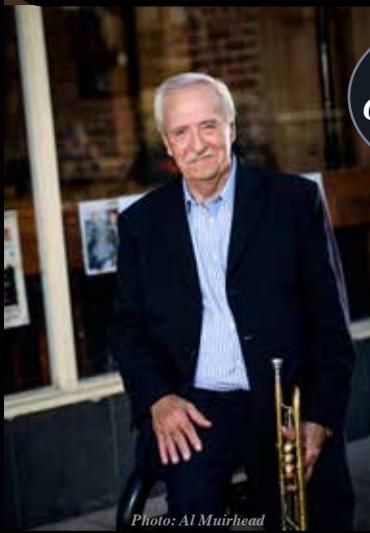


Photo: Al Muirhead

# O's Guitar Features

## Heather McKay

### Life Got In The Way

84  
Pop+Jazz  
H. McKay  
2025

Veteran guitarist Heather McKay mixes contemporary genres with a taste of Latin on Life Got In The Way, Leonardo Luciano (b), Leland Nakamura (d), Campbell Charshee (keyboards), Peter Franzel (sax), and Bruno Luciano (perc) join her in a balanced session. We liked the Latin, fusion vibe on “You Make Me Smile” & “The Playground”, the funky “Boo”, and the syncopated “Eleven Reasons Why” & “Run”. Heather does a fine job injecting solos into the mix and inviting her band mates to do the same.



Photo: Bandcamp

## Rez Abbasi

Pakistani jazz guitarist, composer while leading a band with Bill Ware (d) and Hasan Bakr (perc). This is Abassi's third recording with his working quartet plus Bakr. We found the bulk of the material to be pleasant highlighted by “Meet The Moment”, “You Are”, and “Spin Dream”.

74  
Fusion 2025  
Whirlwind

### Sound Remains

Rez Abbasi reflects on the loss of his mother on Sound Remains. He plays acoustic guitar exclusively here (vibes), Stephan Crump (b), Eric McPherson

## Twentyfour

76  
Ear Music  
Fusion  
2025



Photo: Jeff Libman

## Al Di Meola

Al Di Meola burst onto the music scene as a part of Return To Forever when he was 19 years old. He's now 70, a heart attack survivor, and still one of the most prominent guitarist and composers around! Al's style has always included elements of Spanish flamenco, jazz blended with fusion and this is no exception. His finesse and speed are unparalleled with exact definition and passion. Twentyfour illustrates more of the latter. Our favorite here is an updated take on the classic “Romantic Warrior” that features the entire band. But there is much to enjoy in the 15-song set.

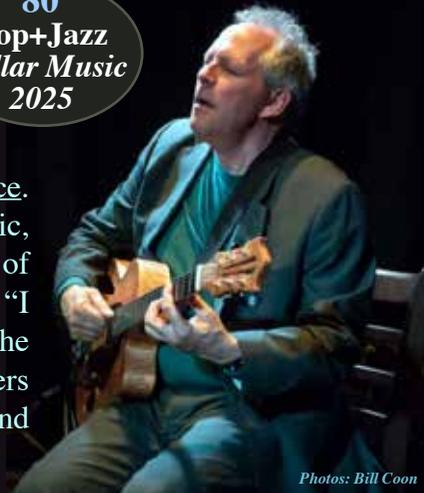
# O's Guitar Features

## Bill Coon

### Standard Elegance

80  
Pop+Jazz  
Cellar Music  
2025

Bill Coon goes solo on this collection of Standard Elegance. He doesn't let pyro techniques get in the way of good music, instead allowing the tones to resonate with good use of dynamics. We were drawn in to tunes like "Yesterdays", "I Cover The Waterfront" and "Nuages" are just a few of the thirteen warm tunes. Guitar lovers will appreciate it and others with relax and enjoy, especially good for fireplace chatter and reflections.



Photos: Bill Coon

## Steve Tintweiss

Live In Tompkins Square

2025 Inky Dot  
Avant Garde 74

Live in Tompkins Square Park

Park is a 70-minute, free-jazz explosion capturing Steve's band, The Purple Why performing in New York's bohemian East Village during 1967, the *Summer of Love*. It sounds like they started recording when they were tuning up on the first couple of selections. Anything goes in such a chaotic approach until they got warmed up on the third track, "Land". 12 of 13 selections are Tintweiss originals with drummer Randy Kaye adding "To Angel With Love". The meat of the performance is spot on for free jazz lovers.

## Thom Rotella

77  
High Note  
Coo Jazz  
2025

### Right Time Left

Guitarist Thom Rotella follows his sizzling Side Hustle with another winner Right Time Left. The band expands to a core quartet with Wil Blades (organ), Lenny Castro (perc), and Charles Ruggiero (d). There are many guest artists as well. We liked "In The Garden", "Benny Thanks" with Ernie Watts (t-sax), Jeremy Pelt (t), & Nick Mancini (vibes), and "Shimmer" featuring Tierney Sutton (vocals), Pelt, Bill Cantos (Rhodes), Mancini, Trey Henry (b), & Tom Ranier (b-cl). We also enjoyed the retro covers of "How Sweet It Is" and "Willow Weep For Me"



Photo: Thom Rotella

<b>ARTIST</b> <b>Title</b> <i>Label</i> <b>Rating</b>	<h2 style="text-align: center;">Top Contemporary Picks</h2> <h3 style="text-align: center;">O's Notes</h3>
<b>THE HAAS COMPANY</b> <u>THIRTEEN</u> <i>Psychiatric</i> <b>C<sup>F</sup></b> <span style="float: right;"><b>78</b></span>	<p>The Haas Company Vol 4. is musical director, composer, producer, keyboardist Pete Drungle, guitarist Samuel Hallkvist, bassist Korean Brown, drummer Steve Haas, and featured artist Jerry Goodman on electric violin. They catch our attention on the opener “Incident At The Country Club” and continue to groove on “Five Seven Loop”, the racy fusion of “Back Door Party”, and “This Thing Ain’t Gonna Suck Itself”. It is one of their best recordings.</p>
<b>OHM!</b> <b>C<sup>F</sup></b> <u>THE ARCHITECTS</u> <i>Shifting Paradigm</i> <b>74</b>	<p>Ohm! is guitarist Dan Bruce’s trio with Jordan McBride (b), and Gabe Jones (d, electronics). They play an eclectic blend of funk, rock, and jazz-fusion. <u>The Architects</u> is their debut album. We liked “Eh”, “Ice”, with vocal shadowing from Nadine Douds, and “Rare Birds” featuring trombonist Reggie Watkins.</p>
<b>XY QUARTET</b> <b>C<sup>F</sup></b> <u>LEXYCON</u> <i>Nusica.org</i> <b>74</b>	<p>The XY Quartet is Nicola Fazzini (a-sax), Alessandro Fedrigo (b), Saverio Tasca (vibes), and Luca Colussi (d). Lexycon paints a view of science fiction, space voyage, socialism and shifting perspectives in the future all illustrated with music. While the songs are open, without boundaries, they have enough structure to be embraced. We liked “Improverso”, “Knom”, and “Oh” best of the eleven selections.</p>

## Everybody Loves

# Johnny O'Neal

Neo-bop, jazz pianist, and vocalist Johnny O'Neal is quite the entertainer. His style incorporates stride, ragtime, and blues, with passionate, earthy vocals. He starred as Art Tatum in the movie “Ray” and delights his own audience equally well on this live release, *Everybody Loves Johnny*. Bassist Luke Sellick and drummer Itay Morchi round out the band. O'Neal rouses the crowd with “Home Boy”, “Come Sunday/Did I Ever Really Live”, and “Chicago”, a few of our favorites in the set of 8 selections.



# O's Place Features

## Colorado Jazz Repertory Orchestra

### Golden Lady

Golden Lady is a great mix of R&B instrumentals and soulful vocals with The Colorado Jazz Repertory Orchestra that explodes on “Red Cedar Road”. We also enjoyed “Golden Lady” & “Metamorphosis” featuring Tatiana LadyMay Mayfield, the grooving “Side Step” featuring guitarist Mike Abbott, “Dreamcatcher” featuring Remy Le Boeuf (fl), and the vocal-instrumental combos like “Living All Alone”.

91  
Colorado Jazz  
R&B+Jazz  
2025



### Janel Leppin

Janel Leppin is a cellist, pianist, **2025 Fusion Cuneiform 74** genre-busting musician who dances to her own tune. Ensemble Volcanic Ash is a sextet with Sarah Hughes (a-sax), Brian Settles (t-sax), Anthony Pirog (g) Luke Stewart (b) and Larry Ferguson (d) coalescing around Leppin. The music on To March Is To Love is free fusion inspired by the current political raucous. There are lots of emotions here as expected. We liked “As Wide As All Outdoors”, “Union Art”, “Casal's Rainbow”, and Part II of the title track.

### To March Is To Love

81

World Jazz  
Levantine  
2025

## WANEES ZAROUR

### Silwan



Photo: Wanees Zarour

Wanees Zarour is an accomplished oud, buzuq, percussion and violin player. He assembles an octet to play seven contemporary Middle Eastern inspired songs that are fused with American jazz. We liked the vibe on “Lifta”, the relaxing “Fig Tree”, “Festival”, and the vibrant title track.

# O's Place Features

## three from **Phil Haynes**

### Liberty Now!

74  
Fusion  
Corner Store  
2025

Drummer, composer Phil Haynes engages his string-jazz band for Liberty Now! The quartet includes Drew Gress (b), Jim Yanda (g), and Hank Roberts (cello). Everyone contributes original compositions and vocals. This is a 26-track effort with Disc 1 containing originals, notably “Corner Store Strut”, “Next of Kin” and “Dawn on the Gladys Marrie”. Disc 2 revisits some American classics like “The Way The West Was Won”, “What a Wonderful World”, “Simple Gifts”, their twist on “Respect”, and “America the Beautiful”.

### Transitions

Drummer, composer Phil Haynes teams up with guitarist Ben Monder for Transitions, one of two releases last summer. It is mostly original free form renderings with Monder using a generous dose of electronics. Highlights are “Openings”, “Ben III”, and “Brief Piece”.

77  
Fusion  
Corner Store  
2025

### Return to Electric

74  
Fusion  
Corner Store  
2025

Drummer, composer Phil Haynes leads a trio with guitarist Steve Salerno and bassist Drew Gress for Return To Electric. It is a project born while enduring COVID, reflecting on 1970s fusion. Haynes combines originals with covers of classics by John McLaughlin, Wayne Shorter and Chick Corea. “Spell”, “Some Sick Slick”, and “Paraphernalia” are a few of the best.

Photo: Phil Haynes



## Contemporary Selections

ARTIST	Title	Label	X	T
WAYNE ALPERN	<u>Alchemy</u>	<i>Henri Elkan</i>	73	C <sup>P</sup>
BILL KING	<u>Mint Julep</u>	<i>7 Arts</i>	73	C <sup>P</sup>
BRAD MEHLDAU	<u>Ride Into The Sun</u>	<i>Warner</i>	73	C <sup>P</sup>
THE REDDISH FETISH	<u>Llegue</u>	<i>Jason Reddish</i>	73	C <sup>F</sup>
KENNY REICHERT	<u>Live In Chicago</u>	<i>Shifting Paradigm</i>	73	C <sup>F</sup>
CARL SCHULTZ	<u>The Road To Trantor</u>	<i>Origin</i>	73	C <sup>F</sup>
ESHAAN SOOD	<u>Dream River</u>	<i>Eshaan Sood</i>	73	C <sup>F</sup>
TONY THOMAS THREE	<u>Get With This!</u>	<i>Memphis Record</i>	73	C <sup>R</sup>
PREMIK RUSSELL TUBBS & MARGEE MINER-TUBBS	<u>The Bells</u>	<i>Margétoile</i>	73	C <sup>P</sup>
YOKO YATES	<u>Eternal Moments</u>	<i>Banka</i>	73	C <sup>P</sup>
LINDA DACHTYL	<u>Full Steam Ahead</u>	<i>Chicken Coup</i>	72	C <sup>F</sup>
BRIAN EATON	<u>Like A Root Out Of Dry Ground</u>	<i>Eatin' Records</i>	72	C <sup>P</sup>
TRIO OF BLOOM	<u>Trio of Bloom</u>	<i>Pyroclastic</i>	72	C <sup>F</sup>
MIKE CLARK	<u>Itai Doshin</u>	<i>Wide Hive</i>	71	C <sup>R</sup>
MAC GOLLEHON	<u>Pistoleros</u>	<i>WFO Music</i>	71	C <sup>A</sup>
CHRISTIAN WIGGS	<u>A Not So Lonely Christmas</u>	<i>Bandstand Presents</i>	71	C <sup>P</sup>
ZACK LOBER	<u>So We Could Live</u>	<i>Zennes</i>	67	C <sup>F</sup>



Photo: Kayla Waters

## KAYLA WATERS

**A New** Kayla Waters is a pianist, composer, producer, and music director of contemporary, urban jazz. **A New** is a refreshing set of original, contemporary jazz, tunes that leave you feeling cleansed and satisfied. “Bountiful”, “Kayla’s Key”, “Obedience”, and “Lofty Chambers” are our favorites. Waters shares her inspirations for each of the songs in the liner notes. It is like Jazz After Dark on late night radio stations.

**75**  
**Ballads**  
***Shanachie***  
**2025**

<b>ARTIST</b> <b>Title</b> <i>Label</i> <b>Rating</b>	<h2 style="text-align: center;">Holiday Picks</h2> <h3 style="text-align: center;">O's Notes</h3>
<b>JEREMY PELT</b> <u>Christmas</u> <u>Interlude</u> <i>High Note</i> <b>T<sup>b</sup></b> <span style="float: right;"><b>88</b></span>	<p>Jazz trumpeter Jeremy Pelt serves up his interpretations of five classics on <u>Christmas Interlude</u> in a quartet. They open with the warmth of “The Christmas Song” followed by a cool take of “We Three Kings”. We also enjoyed “Christmas Time Is Here” with nice work on the Fender Rhodes by Victor Gould and bassist Leighton Harrell. The pace increases on “The Little Drummer Boy” featuring Jared Spears (d). This set of jazzy ballads is easily one of the best new holiday releases of 2025!</p>
<b>WYCKIFFE</b> <b>GORDON</b> <u>Holiday Fun!</u> <b>T<sup>C</sup></b> <i>Arbors</i> <b>82</b>	<p>When trombonist Wycliffe Gordon is in the house you can be sure it will be a festive, good time and such as the case on this holiday collection. He’s joined by vocalist Ashley “AE the Cool” Elim with background voices from several band members. “Do You Hear What I Hear/Little Drummer Boy”, “The Christmas Song”, “Silent Night”, and “Winter Wonderland” are just a sampling of this <u>Holiday Fun!</u></p>
<b>DAVE KOZ &amp;</b> <b>FRIENDS</b> <u>The 25th of</u> <u>December</u> <b>C<sup>P</sup></b> <i>Concord</i> <b>78</b>	<p>Smooth jazz saxophonist Dave Koz shares the Holiday spirit with many of his musician friends. There are many presents including a rendition of “This Christmas” with Eric Benét, “Do You Hear What I Hear” featuring Gloria Estefan, and Heather Hedley singing “My Grown Up Christmas List”. Kenny G joins Koz on “Let It Snow! Let It Snow! Let It Snow! Jonathan Butler sings and plays guitar on “O Holy Night”, and BeBe Winans sings the title track and “All You Need Is Love”.</p>
<b>VARIOUS</b> <b>ARTISTS</b> <b>T<sup>C</sup></b> <u>Swinging In The</u> <u>Holidays</u> <b>75</b> <i>Songbook Inc</i>	<p><u>Swinging In The Holidays</u> is a collection of sixteen classic Christmas tunes performed by some of today’s best artists including Vanessa Para, Champion Fulton Trio, Olivia Chindamo, Anais Reno, and Benny Benack. “Baby It’s Cold Outside”, “Santa Baby”, “Santa Claus Is Coming To Town”, “Happy Holidays”, and “The Christmas Song” are highlights.</p>
<b>AL DI MEOLA</b> <u>Winter Nights</u> <b>C<sup>F</sup></b> <i>Telarc</i> <b>74</b>	<p>Al Di Meola places his Spanish flamenco, jazz fusion style on a dozen Holiday selections. It’s a different take on the usual seasonal classics. “Greensleeves”, “Midwinter Nights”, and “The First Noel” are highlights. <u>Winter Nights</u> is a peaceful experience, illustrating Al’s passionate side.</p>
<b>JAMES JUDSON</b> <span style="float: right;"><b>C<sup>P</sup></b></span> <u>It's Christmas</u> <u>Eve Tonight</u> <b>74</b> <i>Persimmon Road</i>	<p>James Judson began singing at an early age in Colorado where he achieved notable success before pivoting to focus on his family and a construction career in his mid 30s. Three decades later he’s back to music. Judson has two albums in the works. <u>It’s Christmas Eve Tonight</u> is available now, a four song, seasonal special including the original title track. He’s a gentle crooner and there are no signs of rust!</p>

# O's Place Legends

## CHARLIE ROUSE

### Cinnamon Flower

85  
Big Band  
Resonance  
2025

Cinnamon Flower is a reissue of late Charlie Rouse's 1977 release with an addition 30 minutes of previously unreleased takes of the original material along with the first release of Meeting House. There are strong performances by Claudio Roditi (t), Ron Carter (b), and Bernard Purdie (d). The music is still relevant and packed with energy. We like the hints of Brazilian samba notably on "Disenchantment", "Clover and Cinnamon", "Waiting On The Corner", Charlie's warm sax on "Quiet Pictures", and "Backwoods Echo".



Photo: Raymond Ross

**Final Notes** Jazz bassist **Anthony Jackson** died of Parkinson's disease on October 19, 2025. He was 73. Drummer **Jack DeJohnette** died on October 26th. The cause of his death congestive heart failure. He was 83 years old. Jazz guitarist **Phil Upchurch** died on November 23, 2025 at 84 years of age. No cause of death was specified. Guitarist **Steve Cropper** died on December 3rd. The cause of his death undisclosed. He was 84 years old. Jazz violinist **Michael Urbaniak** died on December 20, 2025 at 83 years of age. No cause of death was specified. Trumpeter **Karin Gideon** died suddenly on Christmas Eve at 46. The musical contributions of these fine jazz professionals will remain with us forever.

## DOUG RANEY

### Never Say Yes

83  
Bebop  
Storyville  
2025

We peek into the 1986 with Never Say Yes, music from the late Danish guitarist Doug Raney that is released in 2025 for the first time. The quartet is Ben Besiakov (p), Jesper Lundgaard (b), Jukkis Uotila (d), and Raney. This is a formidable unit that plays sizzling bop that has stood the test of time while hiding for almost 40 years! The melodies are precise with a rich buttery sound. Our favorites are "Softly As In A Morning Sunrise" featuring Lundgaard, "Giant Steps", "I'm Old Fashioned", and the title track.

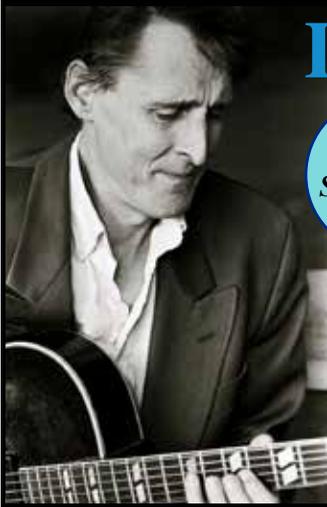


Photo: Lasse Seger

# O's Place Legends

## Jazz Message #2

This is a throwback release of saxophonist Hank Mobley's 1957 release Jazz Message #2. It was recorded in two sessions. The first includes Lee Morgan (t), Hank Jones, Doug Watkins (b), and Art Taylor (d). The second session has Mobley with Donald Byrd (t), Barry Harris (p), Watkins, and Kenny Clarke (d). They swing on "Blues No.2", "Thad's Blues" with a fine piano solo, and "Doug's Minor B'Ok". While this recording captures a young Mobley, he's already strutting his stuff and the accompaniment is pristine.

## HANK MOBLEY

Photo: Blue Note

83  
Bebop  
Craft  
2025



## Roy Hargrove

88 Bebop 2025

*Live at KNKX*

Live at KNKX is an invigorating Roy Hargrove Legacy set at Seattle's Public Radio station during 2009 and 2017. This is previously unreleased material recorded with Roy's working quintet. The late Roy Hargrove is on top of his game and brings it with four rich warm selections not only surfacing himself as a leader on trumpet, but also showcasing Justin Robinson (a-sax), Ameen Saleem (b), Tadataka Unno (p), and Quincy Phillips (d). Montez Coleman plays drums on "Soulful". The other three selections are "Top of My Head", "The Seattle Vibe", and "Angels", and they're all good!

## CHET BAKER

## Swimming By Moolight

86  
Ballads  
Slow Down  
Sounds  
2025

Swimming By Moonlight is another (the 3rd) documentation of trumpeter, vocalist Chet Baker from the 1988 documentary Let's Get Lost. It is previously unreleased material from the final years of Baker's life. This is vintage Baker in full effect. Highlights are "Quiet Nights" with guitarist Ricardo Silveira, "Relaxin'", "Just Friends" with scintillating flute from Nicola Stilo, and "Milestones".



Photo: Film Art Gallery

# O's Place Features

## Conrad Herwig

### Reflections - Facing South

Photo: Conrad Herwig



79  
Latin  
Savant  
2025

New York-based trombonist Conrad Herwig is in his mid 60s and still cooking with gas! Reflections - Facing South is his latest release, in a trio with the late pianist Eddie Palmieri and first call bassist Luques Curtis. This is a seamless unit that made us forget about the absence of drums. Herwig provides rich, vibrant solos on “Que Viva Barry” and “Cuando Se Habla De Amor”. Curtis shines on “Augmented Blues”, and Palmieri stands out on “Listen Lady”. While they are excellent individual performers, the beauty is in the combined trio!

## Victor Bocanegra

Mexican pianist, singer Victor Bocanegra brings us fourteen popular blues songs on Estocastic. He to deliver a compelling session. We the vamp groove of “El Bulls Dels Homes Madura”, “Fill Del 60”, and “La Rialla Del Rebel”.

74  
Latin 2025  
Microscopi

## Estocastic

Bocanegra brings us fourteen popular blues songs on Estocastic. He to deliver a compelling session. We the vamp groove of “El Bulls Dels Homes Madura”, “Fill Del 60”, and “La Rialla Del Rebel”.

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