

Bluiett, Harry Carney, Gerry Mulligan—and devoted ones can readily imagine the sound of others like Nick Brignola, Leo Parker, and Cecil Payne, the instrument has remained largely confined to providing a dramatic bottom for the horn sections of big bands. Yet Adams' career is a vivid demonstration of the bari's utility in small-group formats; his virtuosity catalyzed ensemble dates with ace players like Zoot Sims and Donald Byrd, and his work on Charles Mingus' *Blues & Roots*, especially the testifying introduction to "Moanin'", should be legendary.

Adams passed away far too soon, at the age of 55 in 1986, and perhaps that has prevented



him from gaining renown for bringing bebop complexity and lightning speed to his instrument. He furthered the case with his work in the '70s, often playing with local groups; this two-disc 1972 date, for example, catches him with Canadian pianist Tommy Banks' trio at the University of Alberta in Edmonton.

The show offers a splendid showcase for Adams' formidable technique and originality. He imbues standards like "Oleo" and "Stella by Starlight" with fresh ideas, and his renditions of Thad Jones' "Three and One" and his own "Patrice" are particular highlights of this set. Banks and his trio provide stellar support, pushing Adams on uptempo pieces and framing his slower numbers. The recording comes with lavish notes and interviews,

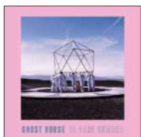
all of which indicate that Adams should be more celebrated, and that his horn deserves a revival.

—MARTIN JOHNSON

GHOST HORSE *Il Bene Comune*

Hora

Dan Kinzelman was born and raised in Ra-



cine, Wisconsin. After he graduated from the University of Miami in 2004, he went to Italy and stayed. He is now a presence on the Italian avant-garde jazz scene, his standing based primarily on his wildly creative collectives. Ghost Horse is a saxophone/bass/drums trio. Ghost is a horn quartet. Ghost Horse, which has now made three albums, combines these two ensemble concepts (although the Ghost faction in Ghost Horse is represented by different personnel and a guitar replaces one horn).

The first impression of *Il Bene Comune* is its extraordinary diversity of sonorities, atmospheres, and intensities. The band is trombonist Filippo Vignato, tuba/trumpet player Glauco Benedetti, baritone guitarist Gabrio Baldacci, bassist Joe Rehmer, and drummer Stefano Tamborino; Kinzelman plays tenor and alto saxophones and bass clarinet.

Ghost Horse is an exceptionally democratic and communal project. There are few individual solos as such. Most tunes establish a dense, looming theme in massed voices and set dark forces in motion, driven inexorably by Rehmer and Tambo-

rrino. Some move quickly ("Fulfillment Center"). Some are slow as dirges ("Q"). On "Idea," the ensemble stays together, plunging forward in a monstrous groove. But on most tunes individual voices are audible within the wall of sound, not exactly as soloists but as momentary elaborators, sources of new perspectives and inspirations. Baldacci's guitar rages on "Q." Kinzelman's alto saxophone cries on "Stand Stan" are more poignant because they must struggle to keep from being submerged in the mix. There is even an ethereal piece like "EBO," a maze of surprisingly quiet counterpoint, and a solemn, strangely majestic incantation like "Warsaw," with the horns in arcane harmony.

Ghost Horse is a band for creative listeners who are sensitive but not faint of heart.

—THOMAS CONRAD

HARISH RAGHAVAN

In Tense

Whirlwind

Like most aspects of American commerce,

jazz marketing has become fixated on branding. Every album needs a backstory, a peg beyond the music. Case in point: bassist Harish Raghavan's pleasurable second album, *In Tense*. The press materials tell us that it was inspired by the pandemic, connecting it to a majority of its six songs. But here in the latter part of 2022, we're fatigued to the point of apathy on that theme.

More relevant,



and resonant, is that Raghavan wrote the tracks especially for this band. The lone holdover from Raghavan's first record, Joel Ross on vibraphone and marimbas, creates a percussive brotherhood with drummer Eric Harland. Both players possess a distinctive touch and rhythmic approach to rapid-fire beats and phrases, and Raghavan uses them in crucial lead and support

situations. They thrive in the sophisticated crosscurrents of "Circus Music" and cast just the right amount of shade on the early buildup of "In Tense" (later stalking the perimeter of the melody while ratcheting up the tempo). And Harland's roving, cantering solo near the end of "Prayer" is like a visit from an old friend.

Raghavan enabled his ace sidemen without cheating himself. His enormous tone is up front in the mix of the lead song, "AMA," and his aggressive, serpentine solo riffs through its deliberate pace, giving the piece ballast and identity. The title track likewise finds the bass setting the tone. Guitarist Charles Altura and Morgan Guerin on tenor, bass clarinet, and "electric wine instrument" also have their moments, especially via a dizzying exchange on "Prayer."

Some albums are better when the program is terse, and the 33 minutes of *In Tense* feel like satisfying efficiency rather than short shrift. Raghavan knows what he wants to say and who he wants to help him say it.

—BRITT ROBBSON

BILLY DRUMMOND & FREEDOM OF IDEAS

Valse Sinistre

Cellar

Valse Sinistre is so good that it almost feels irresponsible. Drummer Billy Drummond and his postbop quartet (saxophonist Dayna Stephens, pianist Micah Thomas, and bassist Dezron Douglas) are not only firing on all cylinders, but venturing into such darened territory that they want to shout, "Are you guys insured?"

This is only slight hyperbole. Starting on Jackie McLean's "Little Melonae," the band is already dancing on a tightrope with their warp-speed run through the complex composition. But then,



Thomas charges out with an astonishing solo that goes everywhere at once—Drummond demonstrates his command simply by keeping pace. That's

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just the opening salvo. The title track showcases another fine Thomas solo, but this one is overshadowed by a dark improvisation from Stephens' soprano. It's an instrument we often think of as letting a bit of light into the proceedings; not this time.

In fact, there's an air of grim determination that suffuses all of *Valse Sinistre*. The standard "Laura" here sounds like the soundtrack to Doomsday, thanks to the funeral pace and Drummond's careful brushwork. Frank Kimbrough's "Clara's Room" offers a glimmer of sweetness, but the gradually intensifying solos by Thomas, Stephens, and—crucially—Douglas feel like reactions against that sweetness.

What's the correlation? Is the grimness a cause or effect of the band's electricity? It certainly does nothing to diminish it. As good as the solos are, the interactions positively stupefy. On "Frankenstein," as Stephens and then Thomas turn improvised cartwheels, Drummond and Douglas show an uncanny ability to simultaneously meander and stay tight-knit. Stephens and Thomas' fills against Drummond's workout on the closing "Laura" fit so perfectly that one wonders if they were written (though Drummond is so clearly improvising that they couldn't be). How could such risky maneuvers turn out so flawless? *Valse Sinistre* dares us to wonder.

—MICHAEL J. WEST

SACHAL VASANDANI/ ROMAIN COLLIN

Still Life

Edition

Vocalist Sachal Vasandani and pianist Romain Collin introduced their neighborly musical partnership on 2021's *Midnight Shel-*

ter, a quiet and often ravishing collection of songs that emerged after the early months of sheltering in place. With several lovely if not always memorable originals mixed in with familiar songs by the likes of Bob Dylan, Nick Drake, and Lennon/McCartney, the album sustained a meditative mood so intimate it felt like listening in on a murmured confession.



The duo casts a wider net songwise on its follow-up, *Still Life*, an evocatively titled project that captures the album's time-suspended feel. Vasandani and Collin offer an original each with the former's opening incantation "No More Tears" and the latter's penultimate "How Could We Be," a naked confession of vulnerability. With just about every piece delivered in the same deliberate tempo and calm emotional tone, the music's impact can be lulling. Vasandani creates drama not with dynamic shifts or inflection but with the slightest pauses in his phrasing. It's an approach that's particularly effective in stripping away expectations from hits like Billie Eilish's "I Love You" and Patti LaBelle's "If Only You Knew." Elizabeth Cotten's folk classic "Freight Train" gets a similar translation, while "I Can't Make You Love Me" hews closely to Bonnie Raitt's blueprint.

An unaffected crooner with a comforting, cool-toned tenor, Vasandani lets the songs sell themselves. Rather than creating arrangements or distinctive harmonic settings, Collin deploys his piano as a strolling confidant, sharing observations

on the passing scene. On his own, he's written and recorded ambitious works while creating music for film and dance. With Vasandani he's relaxed and responsive, less a catalyst or conceptualist than a conversationalist.

The album closes with Peter Gabriel's prayerful "Washing of the Water," a plea for grace that Vasandani infuses with a hint of desperation.

—ANDREW GILBERT

TONY WILLIAMS

Play or Die

M.I.G.

Play or Die is a macabre title for this reissue by Tony Williams (1945-1997), the incredible drummer who rose to fame as a teenager with Miles Davis before forming his celebrated Lifetime band, continuing lengthy solo and session careers, then succumbing to a heart attack after gall bladder surgery at age 51. Recorded in Germany in 1980, *Play or Die* features a 34-year-old Williams still in his prime, yet searching for direction as his European touring band dissolved. Its lone



remaining member, keyboardist Tom Grant, suggested bassist/keyboardist Patrick O'Hearn—between stints with Frank Zappa and future New Wave band Missing Persons—to complete a trio recording that initially saw only 500 vinyl pressings in Germany.

Ever inventive and propulsive, Williams was nonetheless at a crossroads after the disappointing mid-1970s dissolution of his second edition

of Lifetime. Though equally stunning within traditional jazz, he'd become lionized as a fusion icon via his work with that band. His five compositions here are highly synthesized, lacking the interaction with the guitarists (John McLaughlin, Allan Holdsworth) who helped define many of his career peaks. The opening "The Big Man" features impressive solos and punctuation by Grant and Williams, yet within the six-plus-minute foundation of a synth drone; "Beach Ball Tango" is largely an 11-minute showcase for the drummer's militaristic flurries and fondness for surf music.

Things improve on "Jam Tune," featuring Grant's piano stabs and a bridge highlighted by Williams' off-beat ride cymbal; "Para Oriente," with Grant's Fender Rhodes and O'Hearn's warped fretless bass solo; and "There Comes a Time," a shimmering 5/8-time ballad on which the leader capably sings as well as effortlessly swings. But tellingly, the remainder of Williams' life and career, influenced by trumpeter Wynton Marsalis and the "Young Lions" movement, would largely return to acoustic jazz.

—BILL MEREDITH

BASS EXTREMES

S'Low Down

Self-released

Bassists play together well, sometimes on the same stage. Bass Extremes, the long-running group led by four-string virtuoso Victor Wooten and six-string fretless monster Steve Bailey (with Gregg Bissonette on drums), has taken that concept to the, uh, extreme with its first release in nearly two decades. For *S'Low Down*, they relied on their bass-world connec-

tions—Wooten lives in the Nashville area and runs bass and nature camps; Bailey heads the Berklee bass department—to mix and match a roomful of notable players on 10 originals drawing from jazz, fusion, and other genres.

It's largely a blast, starting with the giddy, infectious silly insta-jam of "Ready, Set, Slow," capped by guest funkateer Bootsy Collins saying, "Just like Motown, you gets the low down." Wooten's pal Marcus Miller joins the fun on the funky "Home Bass," as do Ron Carter and John Patitucci. Béla Fleck's rolling banjo plucking underscores Bailey's pretty melody, sometimes doubled by Jeff



Coffin's bass flute, on "The Chrome Addict," and classical double bassist Edgar Meyer lends some artful bowing to the jaunty theme of "Ping Pong," named for the leaders' favorite leisure-time hobby.

S'Low is nothing if not an unusually appealing variety show, a must-hear for bass players. Also on the bill: an overdubbed brass section, via trumpeter Matt White, and guitarist Mike Stern playing six-string bass on "Mess That Up?"; rocker Billy Sheehan's gritty shredding on "Oh Tell Billy," also featuring Oteil Burbridge and Linda Oh; and Patitucci's inspired soloing on "Patchwork," which references a variety of bebop heads and includes call-and-response figures by JP Wooten, and Bailey. "We're not as concerned with technique and chops anymore," Wooten said to explain

the album's title, also the name of the laidback closing waltz. Take that with a grain of salt.

—PHILIP BOOTH

CHICAGO SOUL JAZZ COLLECTIVE

On the Way to Be Free: Chicago Soul Jazz Collective Meets Dee Alexander

J.Marg

The medium-boil funk workout "Nothing Good Ever Goes



Away" is the concluding track on this album; it could easily serve as the mission statement. That mission is clear from the very beginning: The opener, "Mama Are We There Yet?," is set to a funkified Sly/Rufus/Crusaders groove that establishes the throwback mood yet is also fully contemporary, thanks to saxophonist/songwriter John Fournier's lyrics (a vivid blend of topical and existential urgency that characterizes his writing throughout) and the creative panache with which Fournier, vocalist Dee Alexander, and the rest of the Chicago Soul Jazz Collective deliver the goods.

Alexander is among our most fearless and versatile vocal stylists. An obvious point of reference for her here is Randy Crawford, the vocalist featured on the Crusaders' genre-defining 1979 hit "Street Life," but she also brings her full armamentarium of textures, shadings, and improvisational fire to the mix, giving fresh dimensions to even the most familiar conceits. Guitarist Larry Brown Jr. spices the