

STEREOGUM

UGLY BEAUTY: THE MONTH IN JAZZ AUGUST 24, 2022 11:01 AM BY PHIL FREEMAN

Billy Drummond & Freedom Of Ideas

Trombonist Grachan Moncur III died on June 3, on his 85th birthday. He lived in Newark, NJ, 10 minutes from me by train, and I always meant to interview him, but never got around to it. In fact, I emailed the Institute of Jazz Studies (part of Rutgers University's Newark campus) *on June 3* to see if they could help me set up an interview. Oh, well.

I mention all that because Billy Drummond and his band — saxophonist Dayna Stephens, bassist Dezron Douglas, and pianist Micah Thomas — have recorded one of Moncur's best-known compositions, "Frankenstein" (originally performed on Jackie McLean's 1964 album *One Step Beyond*) on *Valse Sinistre*. This is Drummond's first album as a leader since 1996, and it's great. He's an in-demand drummer who's played on well over 200 sessions since making his recorded debut in 1989. Here, he's in an Art Blakey-esque position, leading a group of younger players through bebop chestnuts ("Little Melonae"), a rarely recorded Carla Bley composition (the title piece), and "Frankenstein." On the latter track, Drummond maintains a choppy but constantly moving rhythm as Stephens plays the almost snake-charmer-ish melody and Thomas and Douglas fill in the gaps between them. (From *Valse Sinistre*, out now via Cellar Live.)