



A Lousy Day in Harlem
Ed Palermo Big Band (SkyCat)
by Marco Cangiano

Ed Palermo is universally known as one of the most intelligent interpreters of Frank Zappa's music. As important as this role can be, it somewhat overlooks Palermo's eclectic talent as composer, arranger, soloist and entertainer—his big band's shows are more akin to events than typical concerts thanks to his irreverent sense of humor. This CD is therefore a welcome addition to his growing opus, showcasing his skills as a composer more than in preceding recordings through a number of originals revealing deep knowledge and love for the great jazz tradition. The band is in splendid form, confirming once again it is one of the very best on the New York scene. The musicians share Palermo's eclectic approach and interpret the material with gusto. Most of them, however, fall regrettably under the "underrated" musician category; this CD will hopefully provide the exposure they deserve.

The music is passionate, most enjoyable and full of surprises. Half of the tunes are composed by Palermo himself. Overall, the music may not be as explosive as in Palermo's shows but more subdued and even sophisticated, such as in "The One with the Balloon", possibly dictated by deep respect for the tradition. "Affinity" is another good example of this along with the arrangements of compositions by Gigi Gryce ("Minority") and Duke Ellington ("Brasilliance"). Although none of the compositions are from the Zappa repertoire, that influence is still palpable in some pieces—like the interpretation of Egberto Gismonti's "Sanfona" and Palermo's "Next Year".

The arrangements are superb—Palermo has a particular knack for his reed section—and so are the soloists: from Palermo on alto saxophone to Phil Chester's nimble soprano, Bill Straub and Ben Kono's dueling tenors in "Giant Steps" and John Bailey's very personal reading of "Like Lee Morgan". Although not featured in solo outings, the rhythmic duo of bassist Paul Adamy and drummer Ray Marchica is simply outstanding at driving the band through sudden shifts of moods and tempos while swinging infectiously.

For more information, visit palmobigband.com. Palermo's Big Band is at Iridium May 20th. See Calendar.



Trio Tapestry
Joe Lovano (ECM)
by Robert Bush

Tenor saxophone master Joe Lovano has been making great records for the better part of the last 40 years, since he entered the jazz consciousness as a member of several key Paul Motian groups in the early '80s like *Psalm* with Motian and bassist Ed Schuller (ECM) and *Story of Maryam* with Schuller and saxophonist Jim Pepper (Soul Note). With each passing year, Lovano's post-Coltrane aesthetic grows more confident, mature

and relevant. And now, he has ascended closer to a personal zenith in his development.

Lovano has contributed to many dates on ECM as a sideman, but *Trio Tapestry*, a brooding document with Marilyn Crispell (piano) and long-time Cleveland associate Carmen Castaldi (drums), marks his debut as a leader for the venerable German record label, which celebrates its 50th anniversary later this year.

The disc opens with the dark percussive textures of Castaldi's cymbals and gong work by the leader before Lovano begins to unwind with a hushed and contemplative lament on tenor. Castaldi approaches the drums in much the same manner as Motian, an obvious influence; a premium placed on color and texture and a minimum devoted to any obvious beatmaking. Crispell is nothing short of magnificent on this session. From the very beginning she provides Lovano with a luxuriant and flexible harmonic tapestry, with which he is able to wind colorful threads of daring melodic design. She's a profound listener and when she joins on "Seeds of Change", each phrase becomes a generator for a deeper conversation.

Lovano switches to tarogato for a shimmering duet with mallet-driven drums on "Mystic", which unfolds with an architectural patience reminiscent of Wayne Shorter. Pinpoint ride cymbal articulations elevate and inspire Lovano into a more animated conversation and when Crispell enters at mid-point this trio begins to galvanize. The album is at its best when the music transcends the ruminative into a more agitative state—like the penultimate "Spirit Lake", which seems to imply a malevolent force beneath the surface, and "The Smiling Dog", where the simmer becomes a boil—yielding the album's finest track.

For more information, visit ecmrecords.com. This project is at Village Vanguard May 21st-26th. See Calendar.



ambar
Camila Meza & The Nectar Orchestra
(Sony Music Masterworks)
by Mark Keresman

Singer/guitarist Camila Meza hails from Chile and attended the School of Jazz at The New School, where she studied with Gil Goldstein and Vic Juris, and later worked with Kenny Barron, Paquito D'Rivera, Ryan Keberle and Aaron Goldberg. *ambar* is her first release for a major label and it is a wonder, a seamless fusion of assorted folkloric and popular traditions of South America, the adventurous side of Anglo-American alternative pop/rock and fusion.

Meza has a truly lovely and expressive alto voice, lissome and clear, with formidable range and an unmistakable jazz influence in her phrasing. "Kalifu" begins this opus with cyclic/minimalist figures from strings and sparkling West African-style electric guitar and Meza's voice soars to the skies—later there's a glistening jazz-y guitar solo. There is no translation of the lyrics but her singing is exultant, conveying mystery, joy and hope. One of the few tracks sung in English is the enigmatic David Bowie/Pat Metheny collaboration "This is Not America"—given a near funereal tempo, Meza delivers the somewhat ambiguous lyrics (the song was featured in the Cold War/Reagan-era espionage drama *The Falcon and The Snowman*) with what can best be described as passionate ambivalence as it builds to a stormy, quasi-orchestral climax. Milton Nascimento's "Milagre dos Peixes" is

virtually a suite, going from sultry, atmospheric bossa nova to a panoramic, cinematic mood piece to wistfully romantic, Meza's voice convincing and effortlessly adapting to the emotional changes without ever becoming melodramatic.

The musicianship is excellent. There aren't any lengthy improvisations as this album is the work of an ensemble devoted to serving the songs. There's a dizzying variety of moods throughout, with the unifying factor being Meza's enthralling vocals. For the eclectics out there, this is a veritable treasure trove.

For more information, visit sonymasterworks.com. This project is at Rockwood Music Hall Stage 2 May 22nd. See Calendar.

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