



Jessica Pavone

Nguyễn Lê Overseas

ACT 9874-2 (CD) ★★★

Nguyễn Lê (g, b, elec), Ngô Hồng Quang (v, đàn nhị fiddle, đàn môi jaws harp, đàn bầu monocorde, đàn tính lute), Illya Amar (vibraphone, MalletKAT, Trùng bamboo xylophone), Trung Bao (beatbox), Alex Tran (perc, d), Lê Thi Van Mai (đàn tranh zither), Nguyễn Hoàng Anh (bamboo sáu f), Minh Dân Môi (đàn do bamboo perc), Cuong Vu (t) and Chris Minh Doky (b). Rec. March-November 2018



"I grew up knowing that I was a 'Việt Kiều' – an overseas Vietnamese, born on soil other than that of my parents' homeland, yet harbouring dreams of a country that was very distant," explains guitarist Nguyễn Lê. His new album, made 22 years after *Tales from Việt-Nam* and following what he terms "five other Vietnamese albums", "sets out to reflect upon how cultures migrate, develop and mutate throughout their journey". In fact, *Overseas* was conceived as the soundtrack for the stage show of the same name directed by Tuan Le, the lead choreographer for Cirque du Soleil, and brings together jazz, hip-hop, rock, reggae, electronica and traditional Vietnamese music. As that list of ingredients suggests, it's a remarkable piece of super-saturated global music. Lê is a guitarist of huge musical ambition and accomplishment; other projects include a fine Jimi Hendrix tribute (*Purple*, 2002). As Lê says: "Today I am Vietnamese and a citizen of the world, and my music wants to express this, and to bring out the creativity of the country as it is now. Which is why this album and this show

have been shaped by so many talents." Trung Bao's beatboxing adds another unexpected dimension, including on the centrepiece sequence, the seven-part 'Overseas Suite'.

Robert Shore

Joe McPhee & Paal Nilssen-Love Song For The Big Chief

PNL Records PNL046 (CD) ★★★

Joe McPhee (ts, pkt-t) and Paal Nilssen-Love (d, perc). Rec. December 2017



When Joe McPhee and Paal Nilssen-Love played together on the evening of 9 December 2017 at Cafe OTO, the great drummer Sunny Murray, who had died two days earlier, was very much in their thoughts: *Song For The Big Chief*, its title a hat-tip towards Murray's formidable 1968 album *Big Chief*, is their mournful yet cathartic tribute to a free-jazz pioneer who clearly meant the world to them. The 23-minute long title-track is subtitled 'Old Man River', but this is no straight reading of Jerome Kern's song. McPhee, unaccompanied at first, hints at its melodic outline as he weaves around it a montage of references to other songs of remembrance: I hear 'Come Sunday', 'Going Home' and 'When The Saints Go Marching In', but perhaps there are others too. McPhee migrates from playing with an Ayler-like exaggerated, throbbing vibrato to something more innate; Nilssen-Love enters abruptly, felt-covered timpani sticks racing over tom-toms, and the two men build a slow-moving, heartfelt ritual that occasionally spills over into raw vocalisation. Two shorter tracks, 'Knox' and 'A Fantasy for Lester' – Bowie rather than Young – maintain this tautness of construct and depth of emotion in music dedicated to forefathers never to be forgotten.

Philip Clark

The Ed Palermo Big Band The Adventures of Zodd Zundgren

Cuneiform Records Rune 440 (CD)

★★★★

Ed Palermo (as, g), Cliff Lyons, Phil Chester, Bill Straub, Ben Kono, Barbara Cifelli (reeds), Ronnie Buttacavoli, John Bailey, Steve Jankowski (t), Charley Gordon, Mike Boschen, Matt Ingman (tb), Bob Quaranta (p), Ted Kooshian (syn, sampler), Paul Adamy (b), Ray Marchica (d), Katie Jacoby (vn, v), Bruce McDaniel (g, v) and Napoleon Murphy Brock (v). Rec. 17 July 2016-2 June 2017

A Lousy Day in Harlem

Sky Cat SC181202 (CD) ★★★

Ed Palermo (as), Cliff Lyons (as, ss, cl), Phil Chester (as, ss, f, picc), Bill Straub (ts, cl, f), Ben Kono (ts, f, ob), Barbara Cifelli (bs, bcl, cl), Ronnie Buttacavoli, John Bailey, Steve Jankowski (t), Charley Gordon, Mike Boschen (tb), Matt Ingman (btb), Bob Quaranta (p), Ted Kooshian (keys), Paul Adamy (b) and Ray Marchica (d). Rec. 17 July 2016-2 June 2017



"The thing about this record is, I wanted it to be jazzier," says Ed Palermo of his new disc, *A Lousy Day in Harlem*, which features tunes by Ellington, Monk and

Trane in addition to a slew of originals. Palermo leads one of the best big bands in contemporary music so you would think that jazz – authentic jazz, jazzier jazz, shall we say – would be his stock-in-trade. But no: more typical of his recorded output is last year's *The Adventures of Zodd Zundgren*, a mash-up of the catalogues of Frank Zappa (a constant reference point for Palermo) and Todd Rundgren. Both albums are great examples of the arranger's art, united if not by their compositional sources then by their penchant for

humour. *Zodd Zundgren* is more gag-filled – Zappa liked a musical laugh, so that goes without saying, really – but there's wit and pathos in the cover image to *A Lousy Day*, which has Palermo sitting alone in front of the very same brownstone apartment building on East 126th Street in New York where Art Kane assembled 57 musicians on 12 August 1958 for his famous image *A Great Day in Harlem*. Happily, Palermo's regular band turned up to accompany him on the musical contents within, and it's hard not to warm to the tap-dance solo on 'The One with the Balloon'.

Robert Shore

J. Pavone String Ensemble Brick and Mortar

Birdwatcher Records CDBW012 (CD)

★★★★

Erica Dicker, Angela Morris (vln), Jessica Pavone and Joanna Mattrey (vla). Rec. May 2018



New York-based violist, composer and improviser Jessica Pavone has made a

speciality of writing for string quartet, though Pavone string quartets usually aim to reconfigure the conventional two violin/viola/cello instrumentation. Her 2009 album *Songs of Synastry and Solitude* took away one violin and added a double-bass, while this latest project looks the other way by scoring for two violins and two violas, which strips out the lower octaves. From the duo she shares with guitarist Mary Halvorson to her other composition projects, Pavone has long been fascinated by the tension caused by riding disarmingly direct melodic lines over structural obstacle courses. The five pieces of *Brick and Mortar* run to little over 30 minutes, and not a note is wasted. Her opening piece, 'Hurtle and Hurdle', establishes a chain of simple triadic patterns that gradually fall out of synch – then get reworked into an ornate overlay of lines and curves. Although all

Ed Palermo

