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Why this instrument and not another?

Pictured is the Parker PB51 bass, the "Flying V" of the 21st Century.

July 31, 2009—Rock is dead? Somebody in the music world said that in print and I sort of recoiled as I read it. Dead? For whom? It's not.

The latest Green Day album "21st Century Breakdown" (Reprise-Warner Brothers) has sold many copies. Not a sign of the end of a genre. And why is this group so popular? Part of that is that they capture the mood of "Generation Zero", the children of those "bastards of 1969," as the lyrics state it. On the inner-sleeve page of the CD booklet there is some art, a band photo and the slogan "Class of '13" emblazoned on the bottom. That would make listeners Freshman. In college? High school? I don't know. Listen to the lyrics and you hear expressions of despair, anger, frustration, disgust over the state of their lives. And potentially, of course, Rock always has the freedom (sometimes) to tell the truth about the world around us. Partial truths, maybe. But truths. You don't get that from Idol contestants. I'm not so sure I would want to be 13 years old in 2009. (Like we have a choice?) It was hard enough when I was. "21st Century Breakdown" expresses some of what that's like, ages 13 to 25, say, today, 2009.

On another level, Green Day writes songs that have melodic turns people can remember, and a hard-hitting classic garage Rock thrashing. Songs. What a novel idea!! Seriously though, here's a band that gets plenty of popularity and to my mind they are one of the few things at the top of the charts that have scene-transformative potential. The music is pretty damned good too.

July 30, 2009—Singer, songwriter, guitarist Ike Reilly doesn't like the economy, the President (I'm assuming it was the previous one, given the time lag), the home-coming queen, college, his girlfriend and other bugaboos. At least that's how he sings it on his "Poison the Hit Parade" (Rock Ridge) CD.

Sometimes he sounds like a modern-day Dylan. Certainly he has a rebellious streak in him like the early Mr. D. This is Alt stuff with appealing choruses and a decent foamy head on the whole thing. College kids should like him. He expresses some of the anger and frustrations they must be feeling, perhaps most of us are feeling. Most importantly though, he does it all musically.

July 29, 2009—Keyboardist Erik Norlander of the Rocket Scientists put together a group and wrote and produced the music for them, resulting in the CD up for consideration today. The group is named Roswell Six. What's unusual is that the CD recaptures the story from Kevin J. Anderson's fantasy novel "The Edge of the World." The CD, however, takes on the title "Terra Incognita: Beyond the Horizon" (ProgRock Records), probably because if they named the CD with the book's title, there would be the danger that people would order the book and get the CD instead, or vice versa.

This is Prog with the old-time grand sweep of cosmic epic. It has retro sounding synths and chugging metal guitars and has obviously been influenced by bands like Rush, Renaissance, the Moody Blues, ELP, King Crimson (early), later Genesis. Instrumentally it's interesting enough—but I think you probably will more likely think that if you are an already confirmed Prog fan. Others might find other sounds to their taste. It's not a recording that is likely to convert listeners to Prog music if they aren't already there.

There's a romantic component to this music that will appeal to those inclined. Others will find it a bit sentimental, I fear.

I didn't follow the story line very carefully. You probably need to read the novel before the lyrics give you much to go on. Parts of it remind me of a Sci-Fi Channel Fantasy film soundtrack, other parts remind me of the Trans-Siberian Orchestra folks minus the Christmas lyrics. There are nice moments. The instrumental arrangements are generally quite interesting. This is one of those "if you like this, you'll probably like that" sort of disks. Suit yourself.

July 28, 2009—The outdoor High Sierra Music Festival featured a loosely confederated group of jamming musicians from the various bands playing there in 2007 and 2008. (I don't know about 2009.) They dubbed themselves the Sleep Deprivation Tank. They took over one of the stages between regular sets during the evening of July 6, 2007, playing until first light the next morning. It was captured digitally and you can download it for free at the archive.com Live Music section.

I took a shot in the dark when I downloaded what they played that night, since I really had no idea what it would be. I'm glad I did. There are long, quiet, cosmic sorts of jams with echo bouncing guitars and gentle rhythms, as well as recitations by Sam Flot, who gives out with late-night ruminations. While not being particularly profound, they fit the late-night mood with an interesting vibe.

It's an unusual sound and relaxing in a spacey way. The recording quality is quite decent. It's not designed to blow you out of the water, and it doesn't. It has a musical personality that I can't say I've heard anywhere else. There are other recordings from other nights, both in 2007 and 2008. This one, though, is what I've been listening to and you might find it interesting.

July 27, 2009—When improvising artists align for a group project, it gives each band member a new configuration, a new set of grounds for their music. This can result in a kind of rote recitation of his/her style, or it can give each artist a new impetus to recreate what he/she does in an altered musical world. In the case of Old Dog and their new CD "By Any Other Name" (Porter), it's clear that the combination of players at hand brings out the best in all.

Old Dog includes Louie Belogenis on tenor, Karl Berger on vibes and piano, Michael Bisio on upright bass and Warren Smith on drums. Compositions are by Belogenis and Bisio. It's a substantial program with weighty vehicles and a Postbop-Freebop-Nobop approach. When I first heard Louie Belogenis, I heard a distinct Ayer influence; now I must say I hear him as he is—a deep, full-toned tenor with a fully inventive improvisational stance. He does not resort to licks or clichés and can be counted on to contribute original lines that give significance to any session. Karl Berger, of course, is a legend and deserves all accolades for what he has created in the new music scene. He plays vibes in his own inimitable way, and like his former boss Don Cherry, he is a strong melodist who has songs in his head that nobody else thinks of. On piano he is still himself and adds a brittle dimension fitting with the ensemble and its overall sound. He sounds great on this disk and that is always a happy occasion for me. Bassist Michael Bisio I have said quite a bit about in these pages. Here as elsewhere he is superb ensemble bassist and a soloist of great distinction. Listen to his interaction with Berger on "Constellation" and you get an idea of the unsurpassed linear melodic-rhythmic thrust of his approach. Then there's Warren Smith, a drummer's drummer—someone who I've never heard sound the least bit blasé and a master of time and color.

Put such players together and get them into a relaxed mode and you have one hell of a set. That's what this is. It's a four-way intersection with no need for stop signs. They have internalized the road map and know where they are going. Do not miss this one if you are interested in the contemporary improvisational world today at its best. I hope they do some more sessions soon.

July 24, 2009—The influence of Brazilian Jazz and Pop on the mainstream of improvised music has of course been enormous. So many artists today in the Euroamerican Jazz scene include originals that, while not being outright Bossa Novas, imply the straight-eight rhythm and feel of that music.

So it's only natural that the dialogue should continue to go both ways. Bassist, musical penman and arranger Gabriel Espinosa has kept the cool fires burning on his CD "From Yucatan to Rio" (Zoho). It's a small band affair with the principal solos handled with finesse by Claudio Roditi on trumpet and flugel and alto saxist George Robert. Mention should also

be made of guitarist Romero Lubambo, who takes a couple of very nice solo spots on the nylon string guitar. There are some quite interesting originals in the Bossa-Samba mode by Espinosa and Alison Wedding, who is a coolly plaintive singer in the tradition. There is a group vocal on "Agua de Beber" that is a high point, with some ravishing harmonies and real presence. For better or worse Bossa Nova brought on Smooth Jazz. The sound of classic Bossa has certain tendencies that the smoothies have taken on as formulas. But this is not Smooth Jazz. It's very appealing and a nice addition for anyone who digs the style.

July 23, 2009—Eyal Maoz is not your everyday guitarist. He defies category. To call his music Fusion would be to leave out the open-ended qualities of what he does. Leader of the group Edom and a member of John Zorn's experimental Cobra at one time, he is as unpredictable as the Cobra pieces that Zorn crafted.

There is perhaps no better place to experience that sense of "anything can happen" than on his new duet recording "Elementary Dialogues" (Ayler Download) with drummer Asaf Sirkis. The freedom of a wide-open playing field is made terrific use of for this 50-minute excursion into uncharted territory. Sirkis is a drummer that can go anywhere Maoz chooses. He's one of those musical drummers who can conjure up a groove as well as freely phrase long drum melody dialogues with the guitarist. In turn Eyal can get into Beefheart-like jagged phrasing, or psycho-delicatessen smorgasbord structures that come to the listener soaked in distortion and electronic resonance. Then he'll turn around and conjure a quiet, delicately crafted chordal sequence of real beauty.

When improvising artists began making more intimate duo and solo recordings in the '70s, the initial thought was that there would be fewer constraints on the content of the music, so that ideas could freely flow and sound sculptures could be built with minimal interference from external constraints. Too many artists failed to take advantage of those opportunities. Either the inspiration was flagging or the recording conditions helped block access to the flow of musical thoughts. "Elementary Dialogues" has none of those problems. Maoz is a guitarist of great creativity and he has the perfect colleague in Mr. Sirkis. Together they fulfill the promise of what small group recordings like this were originally supposed to accomplish.

This will absolutely engage you, if you have an open mind for such things. What can I say, it just has IT.

July 22, 2009—Every once in a while a recording comes along that really fits the Duke Ellington notion of "beyond category." Such is Michel Lambert's "Unclouded Day" (Ayler Download Series). It's Avant Improv, sure, but there's something more about it. Basically we have Lambert on freetime drums, a very sensitive component of such a style, and rather quiet in execution, nothing in the way of bombast. Then there's Raoul Bjorkenheim on very electric guitar, playing now in a Avant Psych mode, providing less out-front layers of noting and sounds at other times. (Lambert and Bjorkenheim were fellow Berklee College of Music cohorts decades ago and this is a reunion of sorts.) Next there's the always ear-tweaking, provocative violin of Matt Manieri, who at times sounds like a second electric guitar, at other times he's a team-playing violinist with big musicianship and a sure way with the freely improvised line. Then for three cuts pure-toned singer Jeannette Lambert adds a vocal line, with lyrics based on Emily Bronte's poetry. She gives a whimsical, lyric contrast and balances the entire program in ways that propel the session forward.

That's the lineup. The music itself is intriguing. There's a chemistry in the mix of musicians and styles that makes this recording stand out. It doesn't swing, it doesn't rock, it doesn't give you a typical free honk-out. It goes where it will, to some very interesting places. You want different? Here's different. Ayler.com has more info about it.

July 21, 2009—Tribute albums garner some attention almost automatically, since they are associated with those for whom the tribute is intended. The music underlying the package can range anywhere from a weak set of covers to a heartfelt tribute by some sympathetic music people. In the case of "Rocket 88: A Tribute to Ike Turner" (Zoho Roots), the music is closer to the latter category. The Mr. Groove Band behind this collection are a solid outfit somewhat reminiscent of the Saturday Night Live Band: good, solid musicians playing quite serviceable charts. Bassist Tim Smith and guitarist Roddy Smith play pivotal roles, as does singer Darryl Johnson and a crack horn section. They are joined on several tracks by the lead vocals of two ex-Ikettes, Bonnie Bramlett and Audrey Turner. The numbers cover a spectrum of Ike's career, from the jumping R & B of "Rocket 88" through to the Ike and Tina staples like "Proud Mary." Finally there's a previously unreleased bonus track Ike put together as part of his "Risn' with the Blues" 2007 session.

So, I must say I found it all quite enjoyable. It will function as a handy supplement for the confirmed Ike Turner fan, by virtue of its freshening up of some old war horses. These are big-league performances with spirit and verve.

July 20, 2009—The hype-fueled controversy over Punk versus Progressive Rock in the '70s seems in retrospect to have been an unfortunate moment in the now rather tarnished idea that "everything-that-comes-along-after anything-else-is-better-than-that-anything-

else." We've seen that a number of the new things can be decidedly worse. The unilinear notion of progress has just about shot itself into smithereens. Things that come along after something, we now feel in our bones, can be better, OK, but often are just different than what went before, and sometimes not even that. I speak here musically. Politics are another matter.

Punk was primarily rejuvenating. It did not negate or replace Progressive Rock, just as Hip-Hop did not negate Rock. All these styles coexist today in a music world that cannot and perhaps will not promote one kind of music to the exclusion of all others. If and when it tries that, the internet and the underground of listeners keep alive the other styles in a kind of natural communality of common niche interests. Unlike your local record store, for better or worse, absolutely all styles of music are available in a large selection on the net. Without the limitations of physical space or the marketing-volume demands of radio program directors, there's more music available to the listener, even if there's also the unfortunate pirating that cheats the creators of what royalties are due them. That's just the way it is now. The positive element is the ability of more musical styles to survive and even thrive over time.

Case in point: a Prog Rock group from Europe, Anekdoten, can persist and remain productive from 1991 until now and perhaps have its biggest success with "Chapters" (K-Scope), a new compilation of notable tracks from their first five albums, plus unreleased demos and rarities.

"Chapters" makes plain to new listeners what others have known all along—that there are important Prog Rock bands out there today that are giving the genre a contemporary lift and in a sense reforging the genre anew. Anekdoten certainly is one of them—one of the most important ones. As heard in the compilation, Anekdoten took what it liked about early King Crimson, early Genesis, late Cream, and other such bands, and made something new out of the whole thing. There are sweeping mellotron cosmicities, walls of guitar sound, the long form, strong instrumental arrangements and execution, and vocals that sport lyrics and melodies that allude rather than state directly. The two-CD set is packed with goodies. It will appeal to anyone who either never left off his/her appreciation of good Prog Rock or is coming to it with fresh ears. The nearly two decades in which Anekdoten forged its sound in the fire of numerous castings has paid off for them at last. They are vital Prog Rockers and that now means something again.

July 17, 2009—I t's Jamband time again, and a look at another free Creative Commons download from archive.org (Live Music section). Today it's a band called The Green Light Council live at the dorm of Wilson College on Halloween, 2004. Now every night cannot be a winner, and every band may not be ready for the exposure of a good soundboard recording. Based on the show taped here, I can't say that The Green Light Council has a great deal going for it. Vocals are undistinguished, tunes a little on the mediocre side.

And then there are the jams. . . endless vamps on a few chords waiting for something to happen. Every so often the lead guitarist does get a little solo going, but not often. Sure there's undeniably a Phish/Dead influence, but if a group is going to opt for a trance sort of jam thing, like those above mentioned groups sometimes do, there has to be more interest generated from the figures and the chordal patterns themselves. The rhythms are standard Rock-Funk and that factor doesn't help the jams either.

I t's party night at Wilson College though and perhaps the highlight is that some punk throws a fire alarm and the space has to be cleared for a time. Alas, that's not enough to warrant your time. Maybe the band has sounded better on other nights. I'm sure the audience enjoyed themselves. It just doesn't translate well to tape, in spite of evidence that these musicians aren't at all bad. Such is as it is.

July 16, 2009—When the Beatles, especially George, discovered Ravi Shankar and Indian music in general the Rock (and Jazz) world began a period during which some of South Asian music's vocabulary and outlook entered the music ways of the West. It greatly varied in extent. You might find the casual use of a sitar on a Country Pop tune, or you might find deep rhythmic inroads into the Grateful Dead sound ("Live Dead") and an all-pervasive influence on John McLaughlin's Mahavishnu and Shakti outfits. By 1975, things had died down a little, but today we see various evidences of an Indian-influence resurgence in Jazz and Rock.

One good place to find that is in the group Manooghi Hi and their first CD, which is self-titled (on Manooghihi Records). Mehnaz, a dynamic Indian Pop singer that had a hit over there in 1996, forms a pivotal element in the group's makeup. She/they combine those Indian pop elements with traditional devotional songs, Indian classical influences, and the world of Rock. I t's one thing to do that, it's another to do it convincingly, and it is a third thing to make of that a music that is interesting and innovative. Manooghi Hi succeeds on all three fronts.

July 15, 2009—Ronin Rhythm Records specialize in Minimalism of a particular sort. They tend to present cyclic music that has a Rock-Funk component in the way bass and drums function in the ensemble. Most of the releases feature the music of pianist Nik Baertsch.

The 2008 recording breaks that pattern by concentrating on a group called Sha's Banryu. ("Chessboxing, Volume One"). Sha himself plays reeds and is joined by Isa Wiss on vocals as well as Mik Keusen on piano, Thomas Tavano on electric bass and Julian Sartorius on drums.

The numbers that especially favor Isa's voice tend to be wonderfully feathery, floating, otherworldly. The rest of the pieces deal with odd and shifting meters for the most part. The band sets up long flowing lines that bear the influence of Glass and Reich, but tend to lock into a sort of groove-pulse, thanks especially to the rhythm section's lightly driving, riffing dynamic. It's a trancy sort of program—well crafted and thoroughly enjoyable.

I should mention that Ronin recordings are available as CDs and now downloads as well, for those who prefer the MP3 format.

I cover several additional Ronin Rhythm releases on my other blog: <http://gapplegatemusicreview.blogspot.com>. I eventually will be looking at all of the first seven releases, either here or on that site. Why? Because I think you may find them interesting, as I did.

July 14, 2009—The B_hole Surfers have the capacity to irritate, offend and anger a certain number of people. Perhaps that forms part of their appeal. Live, they are noisy, raucous, and use strong language. If you don't like that, stay away from the live recording I am looking at today. Another of those archive.org Live Music downloads, it consists of a 60 minute FLAC file of the Surfers at the New Ritz in NYC on March 8, 1989. An audience recording captures the set and the sound is acceptable. It delivers the essence of their over-the-top show that night.

Psych-Metal jams of an abrasive nature, some harangues to the audience with digital delay, a song now and then in an atmosphere of general mayhem. . . that is the order of the day. Now this may be a particularly brash set and I can't speak for what others might sound like. (I did download another for comparison and may bring it up later in the year if it seems warranted.) This is a somewhat different animal than what their studio recordings are like. It does have an edge to it, for sure. Some people will like it for that.

July 13, 2009—Francois Carrier assembled an impromptu quartet for a concert in Montreal in May of 2006. The group played a totally extemporaneous set, with Carrier on soprano and alto sax, Reg Schwager on electric guitar, and drummers John Heward and Michel Lambert. The proceedings were captured digitally and have been released on the Ayler Download Only series as "Noh."

Carrier explains in the liner notes how their music is akin to traditional Japanese Noh theater. In Noh two characters appear in stage in costume and proceed to improvise their entire performance. Carrier's quartet does something similar for the date. The point I think is that there were pre-conceived ideas on the part of the players as to what sort of musicians they were that day and how they might play (the "costume"). Then of course the performance itself involved a concrete realization of the music-making experience over time.

Carrier is the sort of player whose improvisations have their own idiomatic structure, a little like Steve Lacy in concept but not in execution. Reg Schwager's guitar interactions feature him in various sound worlds, producing various noise effects and playing lengthy propelled line constructions. Carrier and Schwager form a coherent and interesting team on the melody side of the quartet. Drummers Heward and Lambert play cascades of arrhythmic percussiveness, now quiet, now dense. The total result makes for interesting listening and shows Carrier's art in a very good light. See www.ayler.com for more information on this release.

July 10, 2009—"The more things change, the more they stay the same," a French axiom has it. OUR sameness, though, isn't the same as our grandparents' sameness. Take the group Morglbl, for example. They are a power trio with the incredibly limber Christophe Godin on electric guitar, rough-and-tumble bass fireworks from Ivan Rougny, and the solid drumming of Aurelien Ouzoulias. They are based in France, so perhaps the quote is especially apt. What is the same is that they are in the tradition of Heavy Metal Fusion, with a nod to monster players like Allan Holdsworth and Steve Vai. Now that tradition is not very old, so it is a rather new sameness.

And what is different about Morglbl, as seen in their new fourth CD "Jazz for the Deaf" (The Laser's Edge)? They have their own take on the "tradition." The twelve originals are tightly compacted to the bursting point, filled with arranged routines, great Metal hooks, and some guitar from Mr. Godin that will send many pickers scurrying back to the woodshed. How do you get to playing on that level? Inspiration and hard work, surely.

"Jazz for the Deaf" is one of those albums that starts out pretty strong, but then keeps kicking up the level of the performances and compositions to the point where you find your mouth wide open with a certain astonishment. I readily appreciate those who work hard at their technique and then, most importantly, use it for a musical result. This isn't a madly-running-up-and-down-the-scales to impress sort of record.

But some people don't like such displays of virtuosity. Hey, some people dislike piano or violin concertos, too. There can be the green with envy factor operative with such reactions. The fabled violinist Paganini may have been one of the 19th Century's biggest musical successes, but he was also passionately hated by other would-be virtuosos who couldn't quite get to that level.

The point of course remains that this music is breathing new life into an important niche of the music scene. And that's very healthy for the scene. Anyone who likes a cranking trio that blazes and burns—but not the bridges behind them—will certainly find Morglbl's "Jazz for the Deaf" the best kind of sameness coupled with the best kind of change. Be warned: you may experience moments of uncontrollable air guitar playing. Ask your doctor if you are healthy enough for Morglbl before using. If you experience an elation lasting more than four hours, seek immediate help by playing Kenny G records.

July 9, 2009—I grabbed a few Robyn Hitchcock albums back in the vinyl days, liked them well enough, then promptly stopped thinking about him. So when I was slogging through archive.org and their live music section, and came upon some Robyn, I thought, "Why not try a newer performance and see what he's up to?" He did a live studio date for Japanese radio broadcast on October 6, 2005, apparently to promote a new recording. I downloaded it.

It's just him, his acoustic and electric guitars, a piano, some drumming on certain cuts by a sidekick, and of course his sharply etched vocals. It's the quirkiness of his lyrics that put him over, here and with his band in earlier years. I found myself liking this download. It refreshed my ears as something quite different from the listening I have been doing. It confirms that he hasn't lost his edge. And it's a good earful of his music.

July 8, 2009—In 2006 Theo Travis took over the Soft Machine Legacy's saxophone chair from the late Elton Dean. Theo has had many other fruitful associations with the likes of Gong, Robert Fripp and Palle Mikkelborg. His eighth solo album, "Double Talk" (Voiceprint), delivers seven interesting originals and a surprise version of Pink Floyd's "See Emily Play."

Travis' sax work is well-wrought and his band is very solid, with guitarist Mike Outram and organist Pete Whittaker making especially notable contributions. Do not miss Outram's full-blown guitar solo on "And So It Seemed." Killer sound and killer attack. . .

Travis collaborates with Robert Fripp on several tracks, with the latter crafting some evocative soundscapes that add aural depth, a spacey ambient touch to the program. Like the old Soft Machine, Travis traverses the interstices between Jazz, Progressive Rock and Psychedelia and does it with a very good feel for what such cross pollination can do for the musical palette.

"Double Talk" is a winner! It alternates between cavernous structures and tightly executed cosmic Rock-Jazz grooves. Solos are focused and the music steers well clear of the gratuitous sound slogs of New Age or the mushed-out simplicity of Smooth Jazz. Three cheers for that, and three cheers for Theo Travis!

July 7, 2009—From the heyday of psychedelia in its original incarnation, there was a sort of reaction against it. Whether it was replaced by "down on the farm" acoustic Rock or Disco, mind-melting sounds were on the outs. Pink Floyd survived grandly along with a very few fellow stragglers. Otherwise there wasn't a great deal of it to be had. Sometime in the '80s it began to resurge. Today it is one style among many that manages to carve a niche for itself with listeners. And there is Space Rock too, an offshoot of the style.

Among the outfits currently active in the Psych-Rock arena, perhaps none of them have quite the ubiquity and track record of Japan's Acid Mothers Temple. (OK, there's Ozric Tentacles too, along with a couple of others.) Anyway AMT have been around since 1995 in various configurations and, since they encourage tapers, have a cache of 44 shows currently available for download on archive.org's live music holdings. Since I really have missed out on them until now I picked a show that others seem to like (with 6,562 hits at this date). It's the band prevailing at the Upstage in Philadelphia on November 11, 2000.

Some of my friends tell me that there can be no one representative show from the band, as the configuration and approach is in constant flux. That may be, but this particular show seems to be a good starting point. It's long enough at around 70 minutes to give a feel for what they are about, and the sound is good.

There are synthesized flying-saucer-type space sounds, some vocal anthems and long jams on repeating chord patterns and drones, filled with various layers of space and some guitar work in the outer solar vein. It is nice enough. I will have to listen to some of their later work, I think, to get a fuller picture of the band. More power to them, though. This is a style that deserves further development. Not surprisingly it turns out that psychedelia need not be thought of as mood music for substance users. If Van Gogh's paintings can be appreciated without a glass of absinthe, similar things can be said for AMT, yes?

July 6, 2009—Sonic-Youth gets my vote for the most consistent skronk outfit in the history of the music. They obviously have staying power. Big labels and the ever changing buying habits of the fickle public at large, among other things, can do something to the creative juices of a group if they let such factors discourage them. Not S-Y.

Their new album "The Eternal" finds them back on an indie label, Matador, seemingly a good match. It's a strong effort, filled with well-conceived, loudly executed string sounds, tuneful melodies and some of Kim Gordon's irrepressible vocal purgations. If you don't think you like Sonic-Youth, you probably don't. They are nonetheless important to the scene, as they have been for an awful many years. They've never played it safe. They aren't doing that on the new record either. We need that. I think you'll like it. But suit yourself, eh?

July 2, 2009—What I don't know about Cuban music could fill many books. All I can say is that I am an enthusiast. I have listened with interest to various musics from the island and the diaspora for a pretty long time. So when a three-CD set called "Cuban Essentials" (Escondida) reached me for review, I perked up. There are no notes in this set, merely artists and titles. I believe that this set does not cover the diaspora as much as the indigenous scene over the years. It seems to deal with music from the later '50s through to today, but I cannot be entirely sure about the dates. Artists represented include Company Segundo, Chuco Valdes, Ibrahim Ferrer, and Irakere. A very little of it veers toward Pop influences, but not much and not to any great extent.

Since I am no expert as I say, I don't have a very strong sense of what's missing. All I do know is that this anthology contains a large chunk of musical excellence. As ever, music helps reconcile differences between peoples, and this anthology could go some way in that regard. But history will tell its story and most of us will be witnesses, not actors.

Happy July 4 to all!

July 1, 2009—And now for something. . . no, not completely different. Something worth your attention. A world in itself. I refer to the aural project WD-41 and the really evocative soundscapes that come out of it. WD-41 is electric guitarist Willie Oteri and trumpeter Dave Laczko. Now both of these guys have been around and played with plenty of people, but what matters is the music. And WD-41 has that something that goes far beyond past interactions and influences. They recorded the entire CD using digital delays, laying down spontaneously live sounds direct to two-track.

It's an ethereal sound that comes out of the lineage of soundscapes like Fripp and Eno's "No Pussyfootin'." That is not to say that WD-41 sounds anything like Fripp and Eno. Space and creative invention are paramount to the CD, though, and in that way they are in the same zone. Oteri's guitar has presence; he is in full control of his sound and builds atmospheric sculptures that Laczko complements with sympathetic and aurally keen counter-envelopes of sound. This is one of those CDs that entirely deserves to be heard by anyone who likes to live inside exotically compelling musical environments. It's rather beautiful too. WD-41 can be had at CD Baby.

June 30, 2009—The Katie Pearlman Band presided over the audience at Lee's Campground in Saratoga on June 16th two years ago. Somebody captured them faithfully via a patch into the soundboard. The set can be had for free at archive.org (the Live Music section). These people are not pretentious, not extraordinarily rambunctious. They are one very solid outfit, which is a far better thing than showbiz glitz to my mind.

Katie's vocals have a natural Rock-Soul vibrancy, the originals are fetchingly attractive, the band is good and there are some decent little guitar jams, perhaps a little shorter than usual because they are playing only one set. Also attractive is their organic, down-home quality that indicates an affinity to Dead-oriented bands. But they do not sound derivative. This is the Katie Pearlman Band doing some muy nice music.

June 29, 2009—You do not exist. Copernicus wants you to know that. No, not the Copernicus who lived in the 15th-16th century and argued that the earth revolved around the sun. No, this is the present-day Copernicus, a.k.a. Joseph Smalkowski, self-styled prophet, orator, philosopher, writer and creator of CDs that combine his diatribes with jam-like instrumental backgrounds. His latest CD "disappearance" (NEVERMORE/MOONJUNE) catapults you into his current thoughts on the cosmos with the help of some interesting free Rock-Jazz psycho-mood settings.

There's a histrionic quality to Copernicus' presentation. It's like "The End" by the Doors only the rhetorical oratory has spun further off its rocker, and the music has become more wide-ranging in its attempt to ground its own sound with the mood of Mr. Smalkowski's shtick.

So the message? With the discovery of sub-atomic particles, we should come to understand that we don't really exist. OK. Accept it or not, this is a rather off-the-center sort of thing that could mesmerize you, amuse you, or any spectrum of other possible reactions. My wife liked it. It certainly is different than the usual fare. The effusively

insistent quality of Copernicus's rap may draw you into his strange world. Or it may not. Either way this CD is bound to find a place in somebody's time capsule as a piece of what 2009 represents. An odd piece, but a piece nonetheless.

June 26, 2009—The mysteriously named outfit Talibam! assaults the senses on their newly released "Boogie in the Breeze Blocks" (ESP). Essentially we have Matthew Mottel on keys, Kevin Shea on drums, plus a multitude of guests. Through the course of the 45 minute (give-or-take) playtime, they segue between Free Improv, Electronica, Prog Rock, Metal, R&B/Pop and semi-Thrash with a punky attitude. Genres don't have a flooring here. They give way to something else with a regularity that keeps you guessing. There are vocals, and I'll admit I can't vouch entirely for their content, since they did not transfix my interest. Talibam! are ambitious, they are amusing, they are over the map in ways more woolly than wild. It all certainly makes for interesting listening. It may not be my cup of tea, entirely. I like parts of it very much; other parts seem to miss the target slightly. That's my take. You might feel differently.

June 25, 2009—Mission of Burma live can be enormously loud. The archive.org show from October 16, 2004 (at Cat's Cradle in Carrboro, NC) has that going. It's a one set capture in decent sound. They are totally in your face and fill your speakers or earpods with overflowing energy. I can't say I didn't like listening to it. There's some totally off the wall thrashing guitar and manic vocals. You can feel the sweat dripping from their fingers, faces. . . If you want something that doesn't relent for a minute, this will charge your batteries, truly.

June 24, 2008—Go to <http://gapplegatemusicreview.blogspot.com> for today's review of the Crogmagnon reissue as well as other review postings. Tomorrow I'll be back here with a look at Mission of Burma.

June 23, 2008—A consistently interesting bassist as well as an adept manipulator of the cello and tuba, Tom Abbs combines instrumental savvy with a keen ear for instrumentation and musical space. His recordings as bandleader promise free sojourns that have been carefully thought out, with pacing, and a myriad of sound colors and textures brought about by the ever-shifting roles each band member takes on through the course of the program.

True to form, Tom Abbs & Frequency Response come through again with one of their strongest outings to date, "Lost & Found" (Engine). There are 18 short compositions that make use of free improv in controlled bursts, with the central thrust residing in the compositions themselves. The multifold instrumental variety available to the quartet comes out of the somewhat unusual combination of drums (Chad Taylor), violin (Jean Cook), tenor, soprano and flute (Brian Settles) and Tom on the instruments mentioned above. The compositions feature various permutations: strings versus reeds and drums, for example, or bass, sax and drums both disjointed and sounding in a kind of unison.

Each piece is different, distinct and put together well. This is by no means a typical free date. Chamber-music like interplay alternates with impassioned exertion. Mr. Abbs is a man to watch, or no, a man to LISTEN TO. Do that with this one and you'll be rewarded with a set that never flags. It provokes, soothes, swings, stabs, tickles and ruminates alternately. And it is never dull. Recommended.

June 22, 2008—Once again a look at a Creative Commons download from archive.com's Live Music holdings. The band is Welkin. The particular space-time coordinates center on the Media Club in Vancouver, November 16, 2006. This is a band with a strong affiliation with the style of Neil Young, even down to the vocal approach of the lead singer. It's the folksy acoustic light-electric side of Young that Welkin has adopted and done their building upon. Their originals aren't bad, the recording is a very good soundboard mix and they concentrate on the song presentation. This is not a Jamband, if evidence of this night is an indication. It may be that as caught that night they were in a period of development. They no doubt have a fan following. I was not overwhelmed by what I heard but it might well appeal to some of the Neil Young cognoscenti.

June 19, 2009—Today's listen wasn't something I expected, both in terms of its presence and what was contained within. A couple of weeks ago I received the soundtrack CD of the movie "Jimmy Carter: Man from Plains" (Milan/Ryko). I haven't seen the movie but I have always felt that Carter was a singular figure, a guy with a lot of courage and deserving of a much better reputation than what he got, especially during the Reagan years directly following his term. That isn't strictly relevant to the music described below. Just my two cents.

Anyway, the CD surprised me. Not so much the Dylanesque Folk theme song, which summarizes the movie and/or Carter's life like the theme song to the Beverly Hillbillies did. Seriously though, that's OK. The couple of Hip-Hop tracks are OK too.

What's different about all this are the numerous tracks that combine Rock-Pop-Acoustic-Country-Folk with the instruments and styles of Mid-Eastern music. Now THAT'S something different. The styles mesh closely and of course they reflect the Carter biography as no doubt portrayed in the movie. I think that's all I need to say. I don't

expect people to go out in droves and buy this disk, regardless of what I write here or elsewhere, or any other factor for that matter. There is something uniquely haunting about the music nonetheless. And I think it captures the mood many of us are in right now. World peace and rapprochement is not some liberal pipedream. It could happen. . . So buy a guitar from GappleGate Music. Heh-heh.

June 18, 2009—Those first Metal bands that came out of Cream, Hendrix and Black Sabbath sometimes engaged in ham-headed, ape-like endeavors. I won't mention names, and it wasn't everybody. But the quality of the music wasn't always the best. Over time Metal has evolved into an art form that, in the best hands, shows exceptionally interesting instrumental content and vocal styles that get away from Blues-Rock roots and enter new territories.

The band Sanctity is a case in point. Their debut album "Road to Bloodshed" (Roadrunner) has much going for it. The power guitars-bass-drums configuration really kicks butt. There are all kinds of intricate arrangements and Speed Metal grooves that show the highest levels of musical virtuosity. Vocals are not solely exorcist sorts of things. The lead vocalist shouts himself hoarse, but musically so and the backup vocals give a texture to the tracks too.

So what if Metal sometimes has those larger-than-life qualities of World Federation Wrestling and some videogames. That certainly appeals to adolescents and it's part of the trappings. With Sanctity that aspect is minimalized. These are musicians I am proud to embrace as part of the community of 21st Century Schizoid Men, or no, just people pushing the envelope. Really nice, guys.

June 17, 2009—The band Ours comes out of New Jersey. (Full disclosure: the main force behind the group, Jimmy Gnecco, comes from the town I live in. His grandma was my next-door neighbor for more than ten years before she passed away. A good lady. She turned me on to the group.) Ours have three albums out on DreamWorks and right now Jimmy Gnecco is about to go on tour. A solo release is eminent.

At first, Ours sounded to me a bit like U2, but more listening put me onto their distinct style. It is emotional, despairing at times, angst ridden and very tunefully memorable. And they have an electric wall of sound thing going when they do certain numbers.

On release of their first major-label CD "Distorted Lullabies" they embarked on a long set of gigs. On November 16, 2001 Ours played a night at Schuba's in Chicago. Maybe the post 9-11 vibe is there in the intensity of their performance. It was near the end of the tour. They were well-oiled and at the top of their game. At least part of the night was captured on tape in decent sound, and you can download it from archive.org.

Jimmy Gnecco's amazing voice is on full display. They run through their 2001 "A" set. It's a very good way to check out the band in the earlier years. Moreover it has that indescribable energy a great live recording should have. Ours is a band deserving of a wider following. And I'm not saying that because Mr. Gnecco is a Ridgefield Park guy. Listen to this one. Buy the CDs. Whatever.

June 16, 2009—I've missed Steve Elson's playing and compositions until now. With his "Mott & Broome" (Lips and Fingers), we get a good deal of evidence that he is worth some attention. He plays tenor with authority, sometimes in a Stan-Getz influenced mode, his clarinet work is distinguished, now showing Klezmer influence, now cool and clear, his baritone work is quite interesting, as is his soprano. His compositions are catchy, especially the somewhat quirky vocal numbers showing off the pipes of Jennifer Griffith.

Also notable is the guitar work of Pete Smith, who plays a nine-stringed instrument of the acoustic sort and does well with his Bossa-Latin chording and lining. This is straight ahead music but not vapid radio claptrap. You'll find it quite pleasant, diverting and musicianly, if not some sort of profound spiritual experience. Not everything has to be that to be worth hearing.

June 15, 2009—Stephen Gauci has to be one of the more lively and interesting tenormen active today. He has a number of albums out on Cadence and CIMP that are good, as is his work with Michael Bisio's group, which we've covered in earlier posts.

The Ayler Records Download Series has a recording Stephen made with some interesting European musicians at Stockholm's *Glenn Miller Café*. It begins with *Sonny Rollins's Blues "Sonymoon for Two"* and then travels toward free territory. The group is well attuned to Gauci's preferred playing domains. Trumpeter Magnus Broo has something to say on trumpet and tandems well with Gauci's tenor in collective passages. The rhythm section of Flaten and Rundqvist on bass and drums, respectively, can swing or go to the relatively unpulsed zones of the modern sound with assurance and lucidity. It's a spontaneous sounding club appearance, but there's nothing offhand or haphazard about the results. "Live at the *Glenn Miller Café, Volume 3*" is well worth the price of admission and will provide you with some good music that begins on a high level and stays there. Recommended. Check the specifics at www.ayler.com.

June 12, 2009—And speaking of Organ Trios. . . we jump today into a very groovy new disk of that sort, "East Harlem Skyline" (Zoho) headed by guitarist Greg Skaff. Skaff, Hammond man George Colligen and drummer E.J. Strickland have apparently been kicking around New York as a unit, and they have got it all nailed down. The program of mostly originals and a classic or two has the kind of heat and swinging momentum without which a group of this sort might as well chalk it all up and go do a jingle date (if there are any these days). These guys have the classic organ trio sound DOWN. The vehicles are right, the drums kick the band well and Colligen and Skaff play in the zone with all the taste and fire this music demands. Skaff has learned from all the important cats and applied it to his own playing. There are good lessons from the schools of Benson, Green, Martino, applied to the world at hand and transfigured to Skaff's own personal musical speech patterns. The same kind of thing goes for Colligan.

By the way, the cover is very cool, with a 3-D effect. More importantly the sound is excellent and there is pacing throughout with groovers, burners, funkies and a laid back number or two alternating. Don't miss Skaff's solo take on the classic Strayhorn opus "Lotus Blossom." This is the best Organ Trio album to come out in a long time, as far as what I've heard. Nice shot, guys. Bull's eye.

June 11, 2009—I nimitable guitarist Trey Gunn and ever creative drummer Pat Mastelotto, both of King Crimson fame, team up with the interesting Finnish accordionist Kimmo Pohjonen for the project band KTU. They celebrate their second release "Quiver" (Hoedown/7D Media) this month.

This is an instrumental band (albeit with some wordless vocals here and there), and like some of the other cutting-edge Prog ensembles working today, combine Hard Rock moments of great power with an ever widening journey into sonic territory unfamiliar to their predecessors. Pohjonen gives the music a Northern European folk-cafe flavor and sometimes sounds like something MORE than an accordionist, while Gunn and Mastelotto ensure that every track tells a unique musical story, mixing and matching styles to evoke untraditional yet mellifluous rites of passage that connect to one another with a musical logic that feels right.

This is no sappy New Age dribble; it has teeth and hair and could swipe its paw at you if you aren't weary. But in the end the beast looks to human association. It will inhabit your space and ward off any predators while filling your ears with dynamic music to enliven your life. It's not exactly like King Crimson at any point, but it has a certain intrepid attitude common to that band. . . "go-ahead-and-do-it" and let people accept it on your terms or leave it alone. The risk pays off. People should find this disk quite attractive. And KTU does it all without "playing down" to their potential and existing fans. That is what the scene should be about. With KTU that is what it IS.

June 10, 2009—Prog Rock, Organ Trio Jazz and cigars have resurged in recent years, after a period of relative obscurity. I believe in a world where the progressive and the thrash, the organ and the avant, and the cigar and. . . no, forget the last. Cigars are not relevant this morning. Anyway we live in an age where many styles can thrive and coexist without some threat that any one of them will dominate all of music. That's very healthy.

The health of Prog or Post-Prog is nowhere better gauged than in the latest album by The Aurora Project, "Shadow Border" (The Laser's Edge). It marks the band's 10th anniversary. It does so with a flair. Aurora excel at the long form, the extended piece, the sprawl of sound where words and music join to create insular worlds to live in. The sound is vivid and live, a masterful production. Those responsible for the mixing, engineering and mastering of the end sound have done a great job. The music literally jumps out of your speakers.

It's a dense musical foliage of thickly luxuriating guitar, keys, bass, drums and vocals worthy of the best of the classic practitioners in the style. And yet it goes beyond to create a sound the band most certainly has staked out as personal property. There's nothing retro or derivative. It's all Aurora 2009. Their practice of evolving each song from experimental jamming gives the final result a sort of natural epic flow that appeals to the ears and revives the idea that an album is more than a sequence of cuts that one can select from and chop up. The album is an wholly unified organic entity, and should not be treated as a "find the one or two good songs and skip the rest." It's all very good and it all belongs together. That's both classic and also critically relevant to the music scene right now. Oh yes, I should also mention that electric guitar fans will be treated to some very interesting and aurally satisfying Rock soloing from Remco van den Berg.

I hope Aurora has great success with this one and goes back in the studio again soon. Give this one a hearing, by all means.

June 9, 2009—Either you love Smashing Pumpkins, you don't, or you don't know or care. Our survey of the archive.org free live concert series lands today on a Pumpkins concert from August 5, 2007, at the Pimlico Race Course in Baltimore. The two CDs that can be downloaded from these files may make up your mind about the band, or else you already

know and that's cool too.

This is an audience recording, with an enthusiastic crowd that sings along loudly to their favorites, almost drowning out the lead vocals. It doesn't seriously detract from the sound though. Miraculously, the audience is in pretty good voice! The recording has a nice ambiance, giving you a feel for the sheer power of the band from back in the seats. There is an occasional split second digital dropout that isn't very troublesome. All in all, this provides you with a good sound picture of the band in top form. It isn't a terribly bad way to introduce yourself to the group, or to get a live capsule of them two years ago. This night they show their hard sound, their more intimate sound, and some moments in between. A pretty impressive show.

June 8, 2009—Guitarist Jake Hertzog is a 22 year old newbie just out of Berklee. One of the things that struck me as I looked at his CD ["Chromatosphere" (That's Out Records)] was the shot of him on the back cover playing a solid-body guitar. Last Jazz guitarist I remember doing that was Joe Pass on a Gerald Wilson album in the late '50s. It's been the usual for the Jazz plectrum man to play a "Jazz Box," a rather thick semi-hollow electric. Now I'm sure there have been others to go with the solid, but it does tell you something of how the young man views tradition. He's not a slave to it.

The album makes clear that Hertzog has listened closely to Pat Metheny. His playing and original tune crafting owes something to Metheny's melodic contour shaping. On the other hand Hertzog improvises with a flair, with good technique, a Rock-Blues edge on occasion and a way with tone clusters, sometimes slightly dissonant interval voicings—they are two-note chords (sometimes more) and they fit comfortably into his improvisations as part of his expressive arsenal. He can also weave a line sequence filled with exotic, somewhat harmonically out passages (listen to "Monkey Stuff," for example). These elements seem original to me; they never seem to be gimmicks or added-on showboat elements. You get a strong feeling that his playing is seriously directed toward an honest statement of where he is now, and that's a pretty good place, for sure.

He's a classy guitarist with good control over the sounds he invokes. The tunes run through the spectrum—a nod to tradition on "In Your Own Sweet Way," a Fusion-for-today sound on "California Hills." The trio-quartet setting is conducive to his style and all the players do a fine job fitting in. This is Mr. Hertzog's show pretty much all the way, though, and that's quite understandable.

Here is a guitarist to watch. The CD is a very nice listen and he could be on the way to breakout work. As it is he is one of those players that's good to see coming onto the scene. Check him out.

June 5, 2009—A friend of mine was kind enough to present me with an earlier Tzadik Record that I might have missed. It's from 2003 and features a guitar-bass-drums trio headed by Jon Madof. The title is "Rashanim." Checking the Tzadik site, I see it's the first of several, and that there's a new one coming out. This one made me take notice from the opening strains straight through to the final notes.

The trio comprises some very good musicians, but it's guitarist Madof that brings special distinction to the music. He can play with a straight electric tone or crank it for Fusion-laced edginess. These musicians excel at improvising in the minor mode, and Madof is particularly prolific and brilliant on these cuts. That the minor mode predominates is not surprising given that the music updates, expands upon, and makes contemporary their Jewish heritage. But it is WHAT they do within that tonality that makes this great music.

The music is impressive and always captivating. And Jon Madof is a guitarist with wings, a real presence, an artist of the first order. Beautiful.

June 4, 2009—In the years since Steve Nicks graced the audio tracks of Fleetwood Mac's breakthrough "Rumours" album, and on through her many solo efforts, she has become one of the identifying voices of our age. No vocalist really sounds like her. Her lower range is like a well worn blue velvet waistcoat: soft, beautiful and always comfortable. There's a distinctive quiver and nasal quality to her voice in all its ranges that sets her apart. And she expresses vividly the longing, hope and disappointment in our collective personal lives through her finely evolved instrument. If you were there for these songs, they probably touched a nerve inside of you. They still can.

So there's her compilation "Crystal Visions... The Very Best of Stevie Nicks" (Reprise). Like many of the more ambitious commercial releases these days, there's a CD of music and a DVD documenting live footage, music videos and studio sessions.

I've always been taken with her work with Fleetwood. "Dreams" and "Rhiannon" show up here in remade versions, live or otherwise. Then there are the hits from her solo career. Some do not do her justice. It's as if she could be reshaped as another Madonna, doing dance Pop material long on glitz and short on content. Some of the music videos made to promote that aspect of her work have the generic quality of the MTV fueled work of the age. Stevie and backup singer-dancers, strutting through various sets and 18-thousand

wardrobe changes per square foot of videotape. That's not the Stevie Nicks I know and love. But there are a good portion of songs included here that let her style shine though.

Watch the vocal overdub sessions from the "Belladonna" album and you are brought back to what makes her great. There are some rarer tracks in there too, like a live version of Led Zep's "Rock and Roll." Would you do better to get her first two or three solo albums instead? Maybe. But this compilation lays out the big moments of her career and the half that's quite nice is there with the half that paid the bills. That can be instructive. The good songs are great. The Pop world has been enriched by her presence. She is an icon. That's not an easy thing to be.

June 3, 2009—There aren't that many worthy adherents of the Jazz & Improv cello out there right now. I think of the late Abdul Wadud, David Darling, Peggy Lee and, especially after a close listen to the CD of the day, Tomas Ulrich. This, his recently released "If You Should Go" (Cadence), has an in & out approach: some straight ahead music, some edgy moments. Tomas chose the members of his Cargo Cult ensemble with sensitivity to the total sound. He has Michael Bisio on upright bass, truly a bass player's bass player, a soloist who is always on a musical search, who never lets out with a cliché lick. And there's Rolf Sturm on guitar, who makes a huge contribution to this recording. I won't say he sounds like Jim Hall. He doesn't. Yet he plays a Hall-like role in the ensemble, equally comfortable soloing distinctively, sympathetic to the feeling the group gives to any given number, or adding an almost orchestral accompaniment. All three team up for uniquely excellent ensemble voicings, and all three can take some damn fine solos, which they do. They can bring out the nuances of a ballad in startling ways. (Listen to the ravishing title cut for that.) The pizzicato and bowing sonorities that Ulrich and Bisio create together make for a delightful group sound, particularly when joined to the carefully subtle niceties of Sturm's guitar work.

Oscar Pettiford gets my vote for the hippest cello player of the earlier era. His small group recordings with Duke Ellington have always had a special place in my collection (although come to think of it I had to sell my original LP copy in graduate school and have not replaced it yet, 25 years later. That session has made an indelible aural imprint on my musical consciousness nonetheless.) Well "If You should Go" reminds me of those sides, not in the imitative sense, but in the sense of a consistently high caliber, sensuous chamber Jazz experience. These cats can swing with quiet intensity, can get out there a bit when needed, and can revel in the sheer sonic delight of a Jazz string trio filled with great players. It's a gem that should not be overlooked. I am glad I have it! Click the Cadence link on my back page to get more information or to buy the CD.

June 2, 2009—So what would a survey of Jamband shows available on archive.org be without a Grateful Dead night? The Dead and the Allman Brothers were key founding fathers of the whole scene, of course. The Dead tour again today, and without Garcia, things can only be different. That's another discussion.

With 6,737 Dead shows currently posted on the Archive, there is an embarrassment of riches. What to choose? Well, I barreled my way through the holdings and came up with a November 8, 1970 gig at Passaic, NJ's own Capitol Theater. I chose it because it was a lengthy night (4 CDs), the sound was pretty decent (thanks to two mikes hoisted above the stage and the first generation cassettes as source), and they did a number of songs that were unusual and rare in their repertoire. The night was divided between a long acoustic set, a semi-acoustic set, and a couple of hours of the electric fare.

Highlights include lovely versions of "Rosalie McFall," "Dark Hollow," and "The Streets of Laredo," where they show their take on some roots, a heartfelt version of "Uncle John's Band," one of the best renditions ever, and Jerry holding forth on Dave Dudley's "Six Days on the Road." Pigpen still sounds good on "Operator" but of course he wouldn't be around for much longer. On the electric front, a great version of "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue" reminds us how much Jerry's presence was felt keenly on more than just the guitar jams, but there are those too, with a short "Dark Star" leading into their early Space segment, and "Dancing in the Street" with a decent improvisational interlude. Then Jerry sails forth again nicely on "Not Fade Away."

The recording captures the ambiance of a Dead concert back then and, as if Dead fans don't know this, reminds us that every moment of a show was not inspired by overwhelmingly supercharged master craftsmanship. There were middling stretches, and there were those special moments that made it worth the wait. Deadheads might easily rattle off ten shows from this period that they think are better. I'm sure there are. I like this one, though, warts and all.

June 1, 2009—Alt can be a bit melancholy, at least where certain bands are concerned. The Smiths come to mind. Exquisite torture as a lyric orientation is not unique to alternative bands, of course. Good Country has a long tradition of troubles and travails for thematic content, as does the ballad tradition that prefigures it. Oh duh, we can't forget the Blues and traditional Irish music. Portuguese Fados come to mind too. And Fados performers do it all superbly, by the way. We could go on and on, though. There is the Jewish song tradition, Persian classical and its vocal representation of miseries. That's

enough, though there are many other musical traditions that go for this kind of thing. Why that should be is another discussion.

Trashcan Sinatras fall squarely into the jangling, tuneful, hangdog sort of bag and they do it well. A dip into the archive.org "Live Music" holdings reveals one club set approved by the band for free distribution. It has been downloaded 30,000 times and consists of 75 minutes from The Casbah, San Diego, on May 14, 2005 (so that's four years ago. We have math skills, even though it's 7:43 AM here on Monday morning!). This is a good one. The sound quality is decent, the performance perfectly cool. The band may have passed you by. If so here's a chance to get a good idea of what they do. They have undeniable merit.

May 29, 2009—Boris Savoldelli on his last album "Insanology" made it clear to the music world that a first-class vocal talent was on the scene, capable of working in multi-stylistic territory and fond of creating large musical textures with multitracking and studio resonance. That album had real melodic charm and held together as a worthy artistic achievement. (See the archives of this blog from last year to read the full review.) Savoldelli visited the states not long ago and teamed up with guitarist, multi-instrumentalist, composer and downtown conceptualist Elliott Sharp. Like Savoldelli, Sharp does not limit his musical output to a singular style. He cannot be pigeonholed. And his innovative guitar work puts him at the top of such instrumentalists in the experimental crowd.

The collaboration had a chance to blossom in some Manhattan club work, to culminate for this first extended meeting in a newly released CD co-lead by the two, an interconnected duet dubbed "Protoplasmic" (MoonJune). The finished product makes for one of the more interesting and fruitful experimental forays so far this year. Both manipulate an arsenal of electronics. Savoldelli's wide-ranging vocals with alternating snatches of tonal and speech-derived effects mesh well with Sharp's guitar kinetics. The initial impetus to the music making seems to be a spontaneous going at it, refined and filled with moments of sublime chaos. "Protoplasmic" is quite out there, but not in any predictable sense. There are dense musical events filled with bombardments of pure sound and altered musicality, then there are quieter moments of aural color unveiling interconnectedness and eventful narrative in soundscapes of an outer-space provenance. Surely this is music of a crazier sort than your grandma's Montovani records! No wonder, the musical world is quite a different place today. I hope Savoldelli and Sharp find a chance to continue their dialog, perhaps next time with a rhythm section. Get this one and you are in for an otherworldly exploration of a high caliber.

May 28, 2009—Sampling the archive.org live music contents can be overwhelming. There are so many bands, so many shows. To be fair, I listen closely to a band's entire performance. Sometimes that can be a generous three hours or more, so it consumes a great bit of time. Today's segment looks at a band that probably was not ready to be listened to at that level on March 10, 2007. I refer to the Super American Happy Fun Goodtime Jamband, captured for a long show at the Kinetic Playground in Chicago. They do mostly covers, like "Hey Pockey Way," "Viola Lee Blues," things associated with the Dead, but also things like "Boogie On Reggae Woman."

Their jams that day were OK, not spectacular. Vocals, just OK. What seem to be originals don't exactly overwhelm. I'm sure they were fun to see live, but the evidence of this recording suggests they are not a band that should be ranked especially high in the pantheon of the jammers. Sorry.

May 27, 2009—Guitarist Mark O'Leary has more than one way to create a musical statement. His two releases on Ayler records (which we covered in the last few months) were duets with drummers, flat-out "blowing" sessions, opportunities to lay down a barrage of intense, rapid passage work, to create long, flowing lines that synched with multi-valent percussive tangents. Those two releases were impressive for their consistently high levels of invention.

An earlier session contrasts dramatically the Ayler recordings. "On the Shore" (Cleanfeed) comes out of a 2003 date and has a different, slightly unusual lineup of O'Leary with Alex Cline on drums and the dual trumpet tandem of Jeff Kaiser and John Fumo.

This is music of a more contemplative bent, a more atmospheric, spatially sprawling set with supercharged electric work as well as more fragile sequences where every note cluster is surrounded by a bit of air, an emptiness that sets off the musical substance, as white on an abstract canvas can make the patches of color come forward dramatically.

The ensemble makes good use of the color combinations available to it: muted versus straight horn, electric versus acoustic, propulsion versus quiescence. . . There is much of merit to appreciate on this recording. It's another excellent example of O'Leary the musical artist and shows the more structured side of his conceptual gifts. As Con-Ed advertised many years ago when they were ripping up the streets of New York, "Dig We Must." Well, I must. The music compels me. You have a choice. Clearly Mark O'Leary is fast becoming an important guitarist to dig.

May 26, 2009—Tuesday already? Well, yes, we've had our holiday in the states, and now we're back at it. I used the time to eat a hot dog, visit with a friend, commemorate, read, clean up and organize my piles of music "to be heard" or "just heard" or "not heard enough." Not finished that yet, though. The organizing, that is. With any luck I'll never finish with the "to be heard" piles until I drop or go deaf.

I like baseball. Very much. So when a CD of songs about baseball comes my way, I am naturally receptive. We're talking about "The Baseball Project, Volume 1: Frozen Ropes and Dying Quails" (Yeprock). A song about Satchel Paige? Yes! A quartet handles the music and performance, with the principals being Scott McCaughey (R.E.M.) and Steve Wynn (Dream Syndicate). It's jangling guitar Alt Rock with insider-baseball lyrics and very solid tunesmithing. I don't know how easy it is to get. Get it you should if alt and baseball get you going. It's really worthy. And so a perfect compliment to the boys of summer in action.

May 22, 2009—Part of the *raison d'etre* for this blog has been to review music of note that has crossed my path. Regular readers will have seen that there are CDs that I cover because they happen to be the music I am listening to anyway, whether they are recent or not.

One such CD is another by Steve Swell, who has consistently lead the advance in improvisation from the trombone chair (though he pretty much stands up when playing). He is at the top of the new music pantheon. Jeb Bishop and Jeff Albert are doing great bone work as well. There are others, too, of course.

Today, though, we go back to a 1998 session (wow, eleven years ago now. As Dave Bartholomew sang, "Who Drank My Beer While I was in the Rear?" Where has the time gone?). It's "Atmospheels" (CIMP), a nice trio date with Will Connell on reeds and Lou Grassi on drums.

The somewhat unusual instrumentation allows you to get a bare-bone earful of Steve's approach. He fans, he smears, he feathers, he constructs melodic lines that are pristine, keenly so. It's a good long set of music for the group, with fully functioning idiomatic melody routines and lots of room for solos. If you want to hear where the advanced bone work has been lately, this is an auspicious stop-off point for you. If you are so inclined, check the Cadence click on my Links page for more info on this and the many other Swell albums on CIMP and Cadence.

May 21, 2009—Arthur Rhames was one amazing musician. He died much too young to establish a spot among the legendary masters of music, a queue in the rows of virtual marble busts, dusty but venerated by those who actually give a damn. (Hey, I do.) What he did give us were his recordings (not very many), and a bunch of folks who still speak of him in awe. He played the tenor and soprano sax with a huge command and dexterity, he played piano with passion and a clear concept, and yes, he even played the guitar and he was a mother at it, perhaps the successor to Hendrix had he concentrated on that instrument.

You can get an idea of how good he was by giving an ear to the download-only release "Two in NYC," (Ayler Records) (available at www.ayler.com) recorded informally between 1980 and 1982. He is joined by drummer Charles Telerant, who does a fine job accompanying Rhames' excursions.

What you must keep in mind is that these were personal tapes made without an eye for commercial release. The sound is not exceptional. Two cuts were made on the streets of NYC when they were apparently busking for some cash and you get snatches of street conversations and noise here and there during the performances. The rest, recorded at the club Soundscape, is not as bad. It's all listenable though, certainly. And it is the quality of Rhames playing that we are after. Jazz purists should note that not all of this is stylistically in their camp, strictly speaking. There's a little Blues-Riff-Rock and some R & B Songwriter vocalizing over a segment of Rhames' piano playing on the disk. If you just want the "pure Jazz" version of his musical personality then get "The Dynamic Duo" (Ayler) which joins Arthur with the great drummer Rashied Ali. But that one doesn't include the guitarist version of Rhames. And that's a pity.

I'd say that the CD at hand today is best for confirmed Rhames enthusiasts. I'll stick to that, with the caveat that you really **MUST** hear his guitar playing on this recording if you are at all curious about what he could do with the strings.

May 20, 2009—OK, today a Jamband I really like. Now known as The Breakfast, they were called Psychedelic Breakfast (a tip of the hat to the Pink Floyd number on "Ummagumma?") back when this show was recorded. My notes say that the show took place on August 3, 2003. Archive.com doesn't seem to have that show posted anymore, or I wrote down the date incorrectly, but what the band accomplishes that day should hold true for other shows during that period. Anyway, the three-disk download shows a band with Fusion level chops and a BIG musical imagination. The lead guitarist is killer, as is the drummer. Their originals have sophistication and lots of musical meat, a little like the Mothers, but they are most surely appearing as themselves. The jams can take the route of "space" in the Dead sense, or they can groove along with irresistible force, or both.

Vocals are just fine.

This is what a Jamband can be. Musically smart, hard hitting, making good use of every minute on stage. Hey, bravo. I'll cover a later show after they changed their name to The Breakfast, well, later. . .

May 19, 2009—From the Glass Factory in Columbus, Ohio comes a January 21, 2006 show by one Katz-n-Jammers. They play covers in a Rock n' Soul style popular in the late '60s-early '70s. (This, another band-approved download in the archive.com Live Music holdings.) They have some spirit, are competent, have a horn section and organ prominent in the mix, and do a little jamming consistent with the style and era. I'd say they sound a little like Pacific Gas & Electric, but perhaps no one would know what I mean. (PGE were a similar sounding band from the era mentioned. They had one or two albums on Columbia that did not chart heavily.)

Katz-n-Jammers' guitarist is the best of the soloists—in a bluesy Rock context. Not essential listening but no doubt a good bar-party band to hear. 'Nuff. Tomorrow it's Psychedelic Breakfast, then on to other things.

May 18, 2009—A few weeks ago we looked at an early, mostly unplugged wedding gig by the String Cheese Incident. Today we jump forward to a 3-CD download on archive.org of the band on June 19, 2004, playing a full night at Harmony's Hideout in North Plains, Oregon. The fact that this is only one of 1,103 shows archived at the site means that they have been gigging (duh)! As a Jamband, they hit a nerve with somebody. The fully accoutered Cheese lineup of the recent era still gives audiences the country-flavored two-steps and quasi-fiddle tunes of the earlier period. But of course they are also an electric outfit. There's no denying that the musical level of the band is high. The guitarist can pick! The jams can be interesting and they can also be rather endless exercises over a funk vamp, waiting for someone to really start kicking. Sometimes they do. Sometimes not. Sometimes they get into some interlocking repetitions and sometimes they work. Sometimes they don't.

But the biggest weakness is their original material. It's not always at the top in terms of song form. There are some silly ditties, though not nearly as many as some bands have. And what's with that? Something for the stoners? Sitting patiently in my office with nothing but a cup of coffee to fuel my musical sensitivities, it doesn't always cut it.

All in all I suppose this is one of the better bands out there. Funny though, the Dead didn't become a Jamband because they jammed. First they had strong tunes, then they blew the audience away with jams on and around those numbers. That's not easy. And how many Garcia caliber guitarists and Hart-Kreutzmann quality drum sections can there be? Actually the answer is no less negative than in Jazz, only Jazz has had 50 or more years of a jump on how to stretch out playing and make it work. Comparatively speaking, Jambands are in the early stages of the growth they will need to sustain artistic and commercial success. Here's to them. And to the String Cheese Incident.

May 15, 2009—I don't know much about Sara Watkins. A listen to her self-titled CD (Nonesuch) is enough knowledge for me at the moment. She's a chanteuse in a Country-Folk mode and she makes good use of tradition to forge her own identity. There are influences of Western Swing, pre-Bluegrass, post-Bluegrass and other things besides. The songs have melancholy, regret, some solace in their content. The melodies and her sure execution win me over. These are GOOD songs and her voice is of an angelic lineage. I am reminded just a touch of Edie Brickel, Allison Krauss, and for some reason, Maria Muldaur, though not from the sound of her voice.

John Paul Jones does a fine job in the production booth and sings backup. Instrumentally there are good players in the acoustic mode (fiddle, dobro, mandolin, acoustic guitar) and the arrangements work well. I am a sucker for anybody who can forge something new out of their own inspiration and the "Great Tradition" of whatever musical legacies we should be proud to inherit. She's got that going. The music should have wide appeal, if good music could cut through the walls that have been built around the media control centers (which, dialectically, seem simultaneously to be in decline. It's an interesting world, isn't it?).

Well, shoot. If my blog is anything, it's an impassioned plea for folks to listen to all genres and cross-genres where something worthy is happening. Yes and I guess I have my own ideas about that. . . . Thanks for reading!

By the way my new second blog has recent postings on Khlyst, Jorge Sylvester, and Jack Gold-Molina. If you are so inclined go there and check up on it. I'd appreciate that. It's gappleгатemusicreview.blogspot.com.

May 14, 2009—Guitarist Jade Synstelien leads the Fat Cat Big Band in the second of a trilogy on Smalls—"Angels Praying for Freedom." Like their release reviewed earlier last month (see below), the Fat Cats put together an appealing set of charts covering Nubop and beyond, wonderfully executed. Jade takes a couple of "band" style vocals on some quirky but catchy numbers ("The Thing That We Play To..." Reggae opus stays in the mind

nically), the soloists all acquit themselves with honor and a big band enthusiasast is given a boon to make good use of on the speakers or earphones. "The Fat Cat Theme" is my favorite. It blazes with a Mingus-on-fire thrust and shows you that some of the traditional Jazz forms are not dead by any means. There's new life on these tracks. And though the old forms are invoked a contemporary aura hovers over the set without a doubt.

This is a band that has won the road wars through an extended residence in the city (NYC) and it is quite a pleasure to hear such a well-grooved outfit go through their paces.

May 13, 2009—English space Jamband Ozric Tentacles might be described as Frippertronics with a beat, but that would not exactly nail it. Their style is more like Ozrictronics with a beat. They have been operating at a very high level in this style for many years. And their new studio effort, "The Yum Yum Tree" (Snapper), does not disappoint.

The Ozrics build their sound from the bottom up. Dynamic drumming and solid riffing from the bass form the framework on top of which are layered intricate washes and patterns deftly executed by synthesizers and guitars. The group has played in this way so long and their ears are so keenly attuned to one another that they are able to use space with real interactive prowess. They have become masters of the shifting pattern, the floating motif in motion, and of course the space technology of instrumental sounds guaranteed to zonk out any listener that pays them the mind they deserve. The continual counterpoint of aetherial musical voices puts the Ozrics on a high plane and they stay there.

What the new album lacks in terms of actual surprises it gains in a perfection of form. The Ozrics have entered a classic phase. You are invited to both groove and drift along with them. The trip has many interesting stops, and it has a consistently excellent trajectory. May they reign long in that enchanted place where they journey, track by track.

May 12, 2009—The stature of Frank Zappa as musical pioneer, composer, bandleader and guitarist seems to be on the rise. During his lifetime humor gave him a way of reaching a larger audience but tended to distract from some of the astounding things he and the Mothers were doing musically. The renewed attention to his strictly musical legacy has blossomed in recent years, all for the good. And so we have an example in the case of the offshoot of Belgian Prog Jazz outfit The Wrong Object, namely Frank Zappa Grappa In Varese. We covered their excellent earlier release last year in this blog. Today we look at a their new EP "Play Zappa Live in Waremmes 08" (Fazzul). This time we have the band in an all-Zappa program, captured spontaneously in what would have been a longer set had the recording equipment not gone on the fritz.

It is good to hear the band tackle some of the earlier Zappa repertoire, much of which was not frequently re-performed in later Zappa bands. For example Delville and company's version of an otherwise neglected "Mother People" brings out an important aspect of the Frank band and this recording in particular. By a subtle rearrangement that gives prominence to Delville's guitar and Strauss's sax where vocal lines where originally out front, the innovative harmonic and rhythmic aspects of the piece become heightened. You experience the "aha" moment of recognizing the freshness and musicality of Zappa all over again, which is the case throughout the recording. This record may not alter the motions of the planets, but it gives a loving tribute to the musical genius of Frank, and in the process helps us to hear the boldness of his music anew. Along the way there are some brief but stirring jams as well. A short but fortuitous disk, most worthy of giving your ears a workout.

See today's posting in my other blog for a review of an interesting James Plotkin solo work. gapplegatemusiceview.blogspot.com.

May 11, 2009—Another today from the copious Live Music holdings at archive.org. This isn't a Jamband, but it's a solid outing from Toad the Wet Sprocket at Irving Plaza on March 3, 2003. It is an audience recording and sounds well with good ambiance. Toad has an REM-ish, tuneful sort of bag—good material well executed. They are in excellent form this night. I'll be honest, I never paid much attention to them. After giving the two CD download some focused listening I must say they are a very cool Alt band. This Plaza set is worth checking out. The Archive is great for sampling bands you might be missing and there's nothing more honest than the gig situation to hear what a group is about. Toad the Wet Sprocket come through.

May 8, 2009—The Sun Ra organization had a long time foundation stone to all its musical adventures. That was bassist Ronnie Boykins, perhaps most known for the ostinato he put forward to the Sun Ra opus "Shadow World." In 1975 he recorded a solo record for ESP. It is now reissued.

I dug this one when it first came out and welcome its return. It's a mid-sized ensemble with three reeds, trombone, drums, congas and of course Boykins. He does not spotlight long, frenetic solos or timeless rhythm section churning. It focuses on the appealing compositions and arrangements of Boykins. Each number has its charms and the band swings or gets into an Afro bag in the loose way that the Ra band did when touching on Bop

and Postbop idioms. Ronnie had absolutely assimilated the lessons of his leader and the results are quite memorable. It's a shame Boykins did not follow up with another, to my knowledge. But it's great to have this one available again and I think it will appeal to anyone open to classic New Thing sounds.

May 7, 2009—English guitarist Ray Russell was an early and intense exponent of the left-field electric guitar. Feedback, Rock-Skronky passages, mayhem of all sorts and unconventional musical assaults on the usually cranked amp were the norm for Ray from the late-sixties onward. His was not a helter skelter, blow-it-all-out-to-the-winds approach though. He crafted contrasting written motifs for his groups and thrived on the oppositions of loud/soft, out/in, tonal/free and rhythmic/anarchic. He made an album in 1973 that was prized by aficionados and out of print for a long time. It's back on CD if you can find it. It is the Black Lion release "Secret Asylum" and it is worth searching for. Russell is joined by an English lineup of Beckett on trumpet, Windo on alto, plus bass and drums.

Russell is rather the unsung hero sort. If you like the outer fringes of the electric guitar he is one of the pioneers and a great all-around musician in general. I believe he remains active today.

May 6, 2009—Back in the realm of Jambands, we turn to a group called Jam Samich. I pulled down an archive.org "Live Music" show of theirs from the Magic Stick in Detroit on February 16, 2007. There are two CDs worth of good quality sound. This is a more obscure act, with only 16 or shows posted. But they have a very solid Rock approach. Vocals are quite decent, the rhythm section pops and the principal lead guitarist has taste and consistency, even if he does not exactly blow the windows out of the club. The jams are varied enough to remain interesting and let the guitarists wail a little. Their version of "Good Morning Little School Girl" has some relation to the Dead versions Pig Pen would front, and that's cool. Johnny Cash's "Folsom Prison" gets a new life and a nice jam. Otherwise there's a good mix of numbers, some classic, some seemingly original. Not at all bad. They sound pretty good, with potential to get better, and they were in the mood to play that night.

Go to my other (new) blog at gapplegatemusicreview.blogspot.com for reviews of recent CDs by Steve Swell and The Naked Future.

May 5, 2009—Bassist Michael Bisio's Quartet has emerged as a potent force in the free echelons of improvised music. This has become clear with their previous release on CIMP Records (see earlier post) and now in a new "Live at Vision Fest XII" (Not Two). The same formidable lineup appears: Bisio plus reedmen Fefer and Gauci, and drummer Rosen. Mr. Bisio once again puts together some free yet challenging material with plenty of space for all. Michael has one of the most interesting and accomplished approaches to the free upright today and consistently invents lines of great melodic and rhythmic interest through the two long pieces. Bisio is a fountainhead of inspiration for the group and consistently shoots the musical action forward with a surehanded linear thrust. Rosen is a drumming dynamo with plenty to contribute and the two-reed tandem comes through with some extraordinary interactive double improvisations and solo excursions worthy of the best examples in the genre.

If you are up for what's up today in the new music, this is a great place to start. They don't tread water or waste notes. Every moment ticks by with potently expressive thrust. Give this band your support by getting this latest or the earlier CIMP CD. You'll be rewarded with a musical experience that ages with transformative grace. They get better the more they play, and the more you listen. The best music is like that.

May 4, 2009—I've started a second music blog that will cover other interesting music. Go to gapplegatemusicreview.blogspot.com for the inaugural posting.

We kick off the week with something a little different. The Jamband known as String Cheese Incident has a decided Country tinge to what they do. The guitarist and the mandolin/fiddle player make sure that that aspect is introduced into the unit with definite flair; they are both excellent. Turning again to the www.archive.org holdings of band-sanctioned live performances, note that the band has 1,103 shows currently downloadable there!

For starters though check out a gig they did on September 2, 1995, way back in the early days of the group. This was a private wedding party and the three CDs of the very good soundboard recording show them almost entirely unplugged. It's the whole evening's proceedings and you hear the roots of what they later became. There's a big handful of Jamband Bluegrass two-step, some Reggae and Rock and whatnot but just about always with an acoustic picking jam component. The picking is something to hear. It wouldn't be fair to say that this represents what the band is about today. (We'll look at another show later for that.) What it does give you is a perspective on the Bluegrass influence on the scene in all its pristine quality. Much of the plugged-in jamming of many bands owes something to this way of going about it. In part of course that relates to the Dead over the years and their involvement with a "Jamgrass" style to greater or lesser degrees

through time, beginning with "Workingman's Dead" and "American Beauty" as well as the New Riders connection. But it also applied to Jerry's playing even in its most electric-cosmic phase. Those nice diatonic-chromatic runs owe something to Bluegrass picking. Maybe this is old news to the Dead community. Not everyone reading this is on that train however. Have a good week.

May 1, 2009—I've reviewed CDs by the Necks before. Not "Chemist" (ReR) though, a relatively new one from 2006. Australian mesmerizers in a keys-bass-drums lineup? That's still the case. This one has three longish cuts. The first, "Fatal," sounds a little like a riff from Zappa's "Sleep Dirt" only it's in five. They are still all about minimalist reiterations that layer sound color and soloing on top. The solos aren't meant to stand out dramatically. They form a part of the total matrix. There have been plenty of hypnotic pieces of music out there since LaMonte Young, Riley, Reich and Glass began delving in the form long ago. Nobody does it with a kind of Jazz-Rock framework as well as the Necks though. I must mention an old, presumably long out-of-print record by Terry Riley and John Cale called "Church of Anthrax." It too does something Minimalist in a Rock-Jazz mode and it is excellent. Well OK and of course there's Fripp and Eno, who's superb "No Pussyfooting" has recently been reissued.

"Chemist" has contrast, groove and cosmic depth. Perhaps a little more contrast than is usual for them. The Necks have been doing what they do for quite a while. That they have by no means become tiresome, but gotten even better at it, is a tribute to their powers of conception and execution. They should be more well known than they are. Because they do it all very, very well.

April 30, 2009—I first came across the band Old through a friend of mine. Some time in the late-80s early-'90s he was doing marketing and sales for Earache Records and very kindly hipped me to some releases. Among them was a cassette of Old's second album "Low Flux Tube" and I was astounded. What is this music? They had a metal brassiness but entirely without the riff clichés that some groups rely upon. The vocalist sounded exorcist-like, but it was those walls of sound and the odd song form that got to me. I loaned the tape to an avant composer associate who was doing IT at the company I toiled for. He came back to me after listening, saying "Ahh, that just sounds like Rush!" Rush? Now I didn't really listen to Rush then, so I refrained from comment. Now that I've gotten a little into Rush, I can now say that, no, Old never sounded like Rush, except they plugged in their instruments in the same way. . .

Time went on and I still listened to "Low Flux Tube" and thought it important. My friend left Earache and I got distracted with other things, so I didn't know that Old made around five albums before disbanding.

James Plotkin was an important member of the band and has led a very creative existence with other projects since then. I happened to stumble upon his site www.plotkinworks.com in the course of some search or other. In addition to his new music he offers Old's third (1993?) album "The Musical Dimensions of Sleastak" for sale. He has some copies even though it's out of print.

I immediately placed an order and it arrived shortly thereafter. I put it right in my CD player and, well, this one was a bit DIFFERENT!

For what it's worth I read somewhere on the net that Old falls into the Industrial/Grindcore category. I guess so, although I've thought of them as Death-Metal-without-the-Death (and sometimes without the Metal). Whatever you call it, the third album is quite ambitious, successfully so, not so much in a short song format as an expansive quasi-neo-post-post Psychedilia opus in the form of a long suite. It hangs together as one long structure with episodes or movements within that. They make really creative use of loops and the wall of sound emerges in all its glory. The guitar avalanches have an almost orchestral quality along with an icy sound, a blue icy sound that hits you in the pit of your stomach. This is profoundly interesting music. If you dig the more extreme Art Metal excursions, these guys really will slay you. I'll be covering some of Plotkin's more recent doings in the next couple of weeks.

April 29, 2009—The Indonesian ensemble Simak Dialog plays a fascinating blend of Fusion born out of the combination of two or more hand drummers playing nicely in the Sundanese-Javanese style, plus bass, electric (mostly) guitar and keys. Their fifth outing, "Demi Masa" (MoonJune) shows them settling in with the principal soloing from Riza Arshad on the Fender Rhodes or acoustic piano and Tohpati on electric guitar. This new CD shows a renewed dedication to some longer improvisations and a stylistic consistency that has Arshad in a post-Corea mode and Tohpati playing with Rypdalian spaciness and/or his own brand of contemporary electric Fusion guitar. There are many influences at play but in common to all of this are good compositional sensibilities and a revelatory different end result when Sundanese drums groove along with Jazzy soloing.

It's their best yet and I would recommend it highly to anybody looking for a different approach to the music. I wonder what would happen if they were to add some Gamelan bronzes and/or flute to the mix? In any event this is a significant journey into note

architecture, showing some of the exceptional sense of structure of more traditional Sundanese fare but with a fully fleshed out Jazz concept.

April 28, 2009—For as long as I've listened to music, I've never heard the music of Mongolia—until now. "Introducing Hanggai" (Introducing/World Music Network) is a disk of such things by a group known as, right, Hanggai. They play various bowed and plucked instruments, there's percussion and very occasionally an electric guitar and drum set. It's worthy music in every way. The vocals sometimes have a Popeye-meets-Captain-Beefheart quality. The music doesn't sound Chinese exactly, not Japanese, not Korean, not Southeast Asian. And why should it? It sounds Mongolian, meaning that for me it doesn't sound like anything else, so. . . . It is a real treat. We over here in New Jersey don't have much contact with Mongolia—no immigrants to speak of, nothing much on the news (of course the "news" doesn't have much on it regardless), and so it goes. This group begins to fill that gap. They are instrumentally and vocally very good and the music sparkles from first to last cut.

April 27, 2009—Slim Galliard was a singular force during the '40s, days when Swing and Rhythm began consolidating via the Jump style into something that would eventually spawn Rock. Louis Jordan was at the head of this development, Slim brought up the rear. Common to both was a humorously jive outlook on the world. Slim brought that element into a Dadaist zone, where the ridiculously sublime sometimes lost the latter element and became merely ridiculous. Hey, but his vocals were hip and swinging most of the time. At his best, with bassist Slam Stewart as the Slim & Slam duo and later as a solo act, he could jump like the devil and make you see the world in another light. At his worst, not so much.

With this in mind we turn to "Laughing in Rhythm: The Best of the Verve Years" (Verve), out on CD. There are some of the very best, like the infectious "Hit that Jive Jack" and "Flat Foot Floogie;" and some of his worst, like "Serenade to a Poodle." Missing is Slim & Slam's biggest hit, "Cement Mixer" and that's a pity. Slim played a four string tenor guitar at least part of the time and his chordal and single note breaks had a bluesy quality that still sounds good. (The four-string was a popular guitar with those making the transition that Swing fostered in the 1930s away from the tenor banjo. That's not necessarily why Slim took one up, but accounts for the instrument's popularity during the era.)

You might do better to look for Slim & Slam's Savoy recordings (some with Charlie Parker) and those that eventually found their way onto various Columbia compilations. If you already have those, then this one will help fill out the picture. Otherwise "Laughing" is not really a true "best" for him. He occasionally seems to be trying a little too hard to get something goofy going. Some hip things though.

April 24, 2009—When I first heard a buzz about the group Godspeed You Black Emperor I checked out some audio clips on My Space and elsewhere, but did not find myself especially entranced. In the course of combing through the www.archive.org Live Music holdings (63,356 concerts and counting) I found a bunch of Godspeed Creative Commons shows for download. Based on some of the listener comments I chose one from May 14, 2003, a concert at L'Olympic at Nantes, France. It fills two CDs (the files are compressed in FLAC and must be converted. Software is free and the archive site tells you how to get it. The WAV files that result are of good audio quality.)

Anyway this is SOME concert and gives you a very different picture of the band than clips can do. They play sprawling symphonically proportioned instrumental Rock that has been influenced by the Pink Floyd of the "Meddle" phase, Indonesian Gamelan, Minimalism and much else. What they do is tabula rasa kick butt good. It's just amazing in its own way. The attention to long sprawling forms, the creation of electric landscapes of sound, climaxes and quiet moments, inventive melodic structures, this is MUSIC of a tall order. I don't know about the CDs—I'll check one out eventually. THIS concert must be heard. Take your time though, the music unfolds very slowly. It's not Jamband material as much as very progressive new Rock. The routines seem to be well worked out beforehand. I was quite impressed and perhaps you would be too if you gave it a close hearing.

April 23, 2009—It is New Years Eve, 1964, in New York and the Jazz Composer's Guild is presenting the last of its "Four Days in December" concerts devoted to the New Jazz. Sun Ra's large aggregation is holding forth for a long set. This is what you will hear on the just reissued "Sun Ra Featuring Pharoah Sanders and Black Harold" (ESP). With upwards of around 200 recordings of the band issued at one time or another, the listener who wants a fair hearing of Sun Ra at his best can be overwhelmed with the possibilities. Although Sun Ra had the most innovative free big band going from the early sixties until he passed away, not everything that was recorded was great. This is only to be expected when deftly arranged sequences altered with assigned spontaneity for various combinations of players. Sometimes it didn't quite click. Most of the time Sun Ra was continually rearranging, working with new riffs, reshaping the band from day to day. And masterpieces could not be produced on a daily basis.

I am glad to say that this particular recording is one of the more interesting and most characteristic of what the band was doing in 1964. It originally came out on Sun Ra's

Saturn label, an enterprise that produced a startling number of recordings that mostly went out of print rather quickly. For the reissue here the first 45 minutes of the concert is included for the first time, and it gives you a better feel for the flow of music as originally presented. Sun Ra's band then did not do much in the way of the roots arrangements of old standards and big band pieces that they did toward the end. This was the out band with space ditties, no concessions made to please the crowd. Visually they always drew in the audience, but musically they weren't likely to break into a Beatles medley.

As for Pharoah on tenor and the less known Black Harold on flute, they are there to be sure, and make good contributions. Pharoah sounds like he sometimes did in the Trane period and beyond, hoots and screeching harmonics, raw fire. But this disk is really all about the band as a whole. To me the discipline within freedom, the ensemble arrangements and overall sculpturing of the total sound constitute the strongest aspect of this set and the band in general. Sun Ra fans will certainly appreciate this one. Those new to his music will find much to reward patient and repeated listening. There really was no one out there doing what he did—especially in 1964.

What does all this have to do with selling or playing guitars? It is all interconnected, for the musician as well as the listener. Art and commerce cannot be separated! Stylistic and semantic boundaries are enriched when they can be broken down and reassembled in creative ways.

April 22, 2009—The Western world did not exactly embrace music for percussion ensembles in the 19th Century. It was not a Victorian thing. It was contrary to the spirit of overstuffed furniture, stale living rooms with heavy curtains, cabinets of bric-a-brac and keeping one's emotions in reserve. Drums were OK for the military/marching bands, but the potentially sensual side of such instruments were to be shunned. In the following century, things began to change. By the 1920s Latin American rhythms invaded the middle-class world through various dance crazes spurred on by the celebrity Irene Castle and others. The rumba, mambo and other dances brought out a few of those hand drums for sophisticated night clubbers to enjoy and dance along to.

Then there was the advent of the record industry, documenting "exotic" musics from over the world, which included percussion music from Indonesia, Africa, Indian drumming, etc. All that really started becoming a factor with the coming of long playing records and hi-fi/stereo enthusiasts. The number of quasi-audiophile records marketed for the living rooms of the middle class began to grow, and records featuring percussion, for better or worse, became somewhat commercial—think of Les Baxter, Command Enoch Light's rather sorry concoctions of bongos bouncing from one channel to the other, and a bunch of other records of that sort. At the same time World/Ethnic music releases became more and more available with such labels as Folkways, Lyricord and, eventually, Nonesuch Explorer giving the listener options never before imagined. As all this was going on, the Latin Music scene exploded. Salsa was big, at least in New York City when I was growing up. Congaleros became household names, eventually virtually all households within shouting distance of the media distribution centers anyway.

A little prior to that, however, the percussion ensemble as a fully respectable Western phenomena had begun to make significant inroads via the avant garde music of such composers as John Cage and Edgar Varese and then the minimalists, especially Steve Reich and his "Drumming" composition.

Meanwhile the fifties saw bongos become a bohemian trademark, the cliché being the bongo beating beatniks holding forth at the poetry readings, as seen on the popular '50s sitcom *Dobie Gillis*. When the Dead's Mickey Hart and Indian tabla master Zakir Hussein formed the Diga Rhythm Band, making only one excellent record but scoring a hit among the hip cognoscenti, the drum group became even more of an especially cool item. Of course Hart then went on to form Planet Drum and suddenly fashion favored Drum Circles, in which yuppies could go New Age and bang on a bunch of skins of an afternoon.

Out of all that comes a new CD—"Firedance" by Spirit of the Drum (Demisun). It would appear to be a project spearheaded by new agey dude David Arkenstone, who produced the disk and plays in the ensemble. This is an aggregate of folks on drums played by hand and a few played with sticks, some mallet instruments and a flute tootling overtop part of the time. The rhythms are toe-tappingly appealing, as is the disk, but it doesn't break much ground rhythmically—compared to that Diga Rhythm Band record or Varese's "Ionization." But I don't suppose that was the objective. In any event there is much kinetic energy and plenty to enjoy on the record. Grab a hand drum and play along if you like.

April 21, 2009—Jeffrey Hayden Shurdut. There is that name again. We covered one of his earlier in the month. Here's another one, this time a trio with Shurdut on guitar, Blaise Siwula on alto and Brian Osborne on drums. "The Williamsburg Sessions II" (Ayer Download Series) may not change the face of the planet. Hayden is rather self-effacing on electric guitar, content to supply percussive textures, low volume sound colors and off center rumbles while Siwula and Osborne effusively take it out. It's Siwula's chance to shine and he comes through with lengthy improvisations that show why he is one of the

more interesting free saxes out there today. It's all improv, all the time. Shurdut may not reach out of the speakers and grab you, but he manages to get things happening on these sessions. Sort of like the Free Jazz Eddie Condon, he is more felt than heard, but things seem to gell when he's at the helm. This is not essential, but it's not fluff or filler, either.

April 20, 2009—Today a look at a band from San Francisco, Jambay. I originally heard they broke up in the '90s, but perhaps they have gotten back together again, since I see a 2008 Jambay show listed on the www.archive.org website. I've been listening to a soundboard recording made at a March 19, 1994 gig in San Francisco. The sound is good. There is a full evening of music that fits onto three CDs.

This is a fine Jamband instrumentally, with guitarists (a few guests, plus regulars) and rhythm section meshing together into some effective grooves. The arrangements and originals can be intricate and well executed. There's a female vocalist who is good. Their original material in '94 can be charming and interesting, sometimes whimsical, but nothing exactly typical in terms of Rock-Pop tunes. That's probably good, but not necessarily from a record company standpoint. They have a Progressive/Fusion corner to their work, mostly in terms of some of the complicated instrumental routines.

This is/was a solid band and they deserve more attention, posthumously or otherwise. Go to the Live Music Archive at the Archive site for a free legal download.

April 17, 2009—Where the big bands of today are concerned it's NOT like a box of chocolates. You often DO know what you are going to get. Because there are so few that can remain economically solvent, given the challenges of getting a large group of musicians working regularly, chances are you are familiar with who's out there and what they sound like.

That wasn't the case when I received the first two CDs by the Fat Cat Big Band, two-thirds of a trilogy released on Smalls. Guitarist Jade Synstelién heads the group and plays a hip axe, with chordal and single line solos that are well worth hearing, though that is not the focus of this recording. The tunes and charts are very cool, kind of like what Mingus might be playing if he were still around and fronting such a band. They have had a regular gig at the Fat Cat club in the Village, NYC, for seven years. And they have made good use of that time. They have an organic wholeness that comes out of cats playing together that long. The soloists are very good and the music is just something on a very high level. This has to be one of the best, and one of the hippest big bands out there today. What a surprise. Check out their CD "Meditations on the War for Whose Great God is the Most High" You'll be gassed. I'll be talking about the other CD shortly, and I must say that I also look very much forward to the third. Very cool.

Monday we'll be looking at a Jamband who is gone, but whose music lives on at the Live Music Archives site.

April 16, 2009—The Gapplegate blog covered a Mark O'Leary-Han Bennink duet earlier this year. O'Leary's fleet abstractions on electric guitar return in another duet, this time with drummer Sunny Murray, that father of the free approach to playing. This one is called "Ode to Albert Ayler" and it's another download release from Ayler Records, an interesting label based in Sweden.

Sunny Murray's playing style has evolved over time. He now creates an ever more varied accompaniment, all implying a sense of time without directly stating it. It is wonderful percussing! And he proves to be a most effective catalyst for O'Leary's flights. On this one O'Leary unveils an even wider spectrum of rapidly articulated figures and melodic sequences. He is nothing short of amazing here. It's all outside the regular chord changes, the bar lines of the typical mainstream improvisation and his textural manipulations form a broad matrix that keep you listening and reveling in an exhilarating freedom. I'll be looking at his work in a different setting shortly. Meanwhile this should blow away some guitarists. But any listener with a sense of the infinity of music should give it a hearing. Ayler.com has it in their download listings.

April 15, 2009—Why is it that music can encapsulate a period of time and bring it living into the future like no other medium? Hear some characteristic record of the late 1920s and you feel there's something about the age you can comprehend by listening. I don't have the answer, but ESP Disk's reissue of Erica Pomerance's 1968 "You Used to Think" does that with verve.

This album has a cosmic Folk Rock sort of ambiance. Erica's lyrics speak of such things as "the black light of your soul." She manages to convey a whimsical sincerity combined with a touch of the theater of the absurd that comes out of that period but not quite in the way she does it here. There are flutes tootling, electric sitars buzzing, the requisite tambourine jingles, some ethereal dada recitations, acoustic guitars strumming, bongos beating, a baritone sax grumbling. Erica's vocals have a kind of wobbly outness that are a sort of female counterpart to Dylan's eccentric looseness of attack in those days.

These are only elements. The whole impression ultimately is of a fragile creative stance.

It has a home-grown quality and there is a certain something that transcends a mere time capsule function. That is certainly has, but there's a clumsy charm that endears. I was not familiar with this record when it originally came out. I thoroughly enjoyed it now, so many years later, probably more now than I would have then.

April 14, 2009—Those who know about electric guitarist Terje Rypdal and his music know he is a unique figure. A sound innovator as strong in his own way as John McLaughlin and Alan Holdsworth, his sustains with vibrato give him a tone that crosses violin master Heifetz with a Gypsy fiddle, but also the unmistakable, overtone rich sound of a cranked electric guitar. His choice of notes is unique as well. There's a touch of Romanticism there. And the use of space, in the solar system sense, is well developed. He writes things that can be very haunting and there is a general sound to his bands that is almost orchestral. His second through fourth albums for ECM are probably his best, recorded in the '70s. "What Comes After," "Whenever I Seem to be Far Away" and "Odyssey" are masterpieces in space Fusion. He also later made several albums with Chaser that are excellent.

The last Rypdal album I am familiar with is "Vossabrygg" (ECM), released in 2006. I play it as I write this morning to keep it in mind. It's pretty ambitious in scope, using seven instrumentalists besides Rypdal. That includes old running mates Palle Mikkelborg on trumpet and Jon Christensen on drums. There are some very nice pieces and moments where Rypdal shines forth. The whole thing hangs together as a long suite. It's not his best album though. It's slightly mellow at times, which ECM records have increasingly become and that's fine. But when Rypdal and his cohorts give it all an edge he tends to play more and better guitar. If you haven't heard him yet, try to look up those other albums. Rypdal fans will find this one a welcome addition. I just wish he'd crank a little more again.

April 13, 2009—The European Jazz scene has a vibrant feel to it these days. It seems like there are virtually tons of interesting ensembles, most with multiple releases on various labels. In the Ayler Records download series there are quite a few artists represented, most unfamiliar to most listeners in the states. Many are quite worth the effort to download and experience.

One such group is the Didier Lasserre Trio. Their "Live at l'Atelier Tampon" features Didier on drums, Jean Rougier on bass and Sylvain Guerineau on the alto sax. It's a sort of Free music that could be described at least part of the time as playful. It is often without a steady rhythmic pulse, as is often the case with post-Ayler artists. There are somewhat whimsical moments where Sylvain ranges freely with a sort of subtle humor. This is not an angry sounding session, and there are nods to tradition, such as the extensive quote of the classic song "Lover Man" on the second cut. All in all it's another surprise from a label that thrives on such things. All three players do the right thing, but it is especially Guerineau that comes through with linear inspiration. It's a good listen. Check it at www.ayler.com. Tomorrow we look at a recent disk by Norwegian guitar giant Terje Rypdal.

April 10, 2009—The world of Bluegrass today can be divided into a number of camps, as I understand it. There's the jazzy sort, with Bela Fleck and David Grisman as exemplary proponents; there's Bluegrass extended into mainstream Country, Rock, and Pop, with Alison Krauss a great example; there are the bands that have Grateful Dead/New Riders/Jamband influences, which we'll discuss in future posts; and then there are those that carry on with the traditions first set down by Bill Monroe and his associates.

The artists on today's CD do a great job at the latter. Audie Blaylock and Redline's first self-titled recording (on Rural Rhythm records) captures the core of the music. The vocals are close to the authentic early sound and they almost have that nasal twang down, but not quite. That's rare. Instrumentally they are top notch, with the Scruggs banjo style, good fiddle and mandolin players and a rock solid rhythm guitar and bass anchor. The tunes are beauties, with even a very nice Gospel Bluegrass number. The clocking it at thirty-some-odd minutes goes with the tradition of the old LPs and the twelve short songs format. When the music is good, who can doubt that Bluegrass still has real power to move listeners everywhere?

Today we bounce to another CD that contains music that has long been with me. In 1953 Folkways Records issued a ten-inch LP simply titled "Calypso-Merengues." One side was devoted to each. Now the music may have been recorded even earlier, since I originally dug up the Merengue side as an old 78 RPM EP at a junkshop sometime in the mid-sixties. The Calypso side has much charm and it documents the sound of earlier bands of the '40s-early '50s which had a jazzy element in their use of horns and hot flavored solos in between the vocal strains. It's the Merengue side, though, that has the edge, just because I've never heard anything else quite like it. The band has alto sax, piano, banjo, guitar, etc., and the group gets a raw and very strong groove going. The banjo playing is really something different, as is the entire sound. I'm sure there were other bands like this in Haiti in those days. I just don't know enough about it. The recording (with a total time of around 20 minutes) can be had at the Smithsonian Folkways website. A download is around \$9, CD \$17. If you are looking to expand your "roots" collection, this one will give you a boost into a world you might not be familiar with. What could be better?

Happy Passover, Happy Easter on Sunday, and Happy anything else you might commemorate,

if neither of the first two categories fits your life practices.

April 9, 2009—"Bopstream," a phrase coined by Robert Rusch, refers to the mainstream Jazz played today in the tradition of '50s Bop. It thrives in various ways, but perhaps in no better a way than on altoist Zaid Nasser's second album "Off Minor" (Smalls). Here's a musician who has soaked up the essence of the best altoists of the original generation and proceeded from there. The album is a straightforward quartet outing with six standards and a blues. His bandmates are some of the best from the Smalls coterie of Jazzmen, Sacha Perry, Ari Roland and Phil Stewart on piano, bass and drums, respectively. Zaid shows real poise and facility, along with a wonderfully bright tone. This is music so well done it stands comparison with some of those original masters of the art. It will warm the heart of those who dig that period.

April 8, 2009—Jeff Aug plays an acoustic guitar. He comes out of the lineage of solo artists that include Kottke and Fahey, but doesn't particularly sound like them. He opens for acts like Alan Holdsworth, which says something. He recently broke a world's record for the most concertizing in any 24 hour period. My fingers hurt just to think about that. His fourth album, "Living Room Sessions" (netMusicZone) plays on my computer as I write these lines.

Here is a fellow with plenty of technique and a feel for the sound colors available to him. He makes full use of both in an album that causes one to sit up and take note, then washes one in a bath of primal tones. This is for pickers and their friends. It gives this listener a good deal of pleasure. You'd probably feel the same way.

April 7, 2009—Let me throw a name at you. Jeffrey Hayden Shurdut. If you are a serious follower of Free Jazz, the name will ring a bell. If not, you'll probably ask, "who?" He plays guitar and piano. He has released a number of recordings on his own label. Today however we look at one he did for the Ayler Records download series, "This is the Music of Life," recorded at the Tonic club in Manhattan, 2004. On this one Jeffrey plays guitar, but he is content to play a more or less background role in the proceedings. The group includes some of the best of the Free Jazz saxophone exponents, Marshall Allen and Sabir Mateen, along with several other sympathetic and effective participants.

This is a well paced, old fashioned horn blowout. There is much to like if that's what you like. It's an extended set with contrast and hard charging improvisation. It's perhaps one of the great sleepers of recent years for that sort of music. Ayler.com has it and it won't break your piggy bank to download.

April 6, 2009—What can you say about Skip James? He is a special member of the Country Blues community who made a seminal series of recordings in the early days of the record industry, disappeared like so many and was rediscovered in the mid-sixties. Skip passed on much too soon after re-establishing his artistry in a series of concerts and recordings. Document Records has two concert appearances from the second phase of his career (on "Live Volume 1"), that should still be around if you search. The first from Boston in 1964 marked his re-emergence in fine fashion, the second, from Philadelphia in 1966, finds him apparently ailing but still going strong. There's that wonderful high ranged blues voice, and great accompaniment on guitar as well as piano. It shows that his powers were as strong as before and will be a real treat for anyone with a liking for the music. He had a sense of humor and a delivery that cannot be duplicated. By all means get this one.

April 3, 2009—The music scene in Boston has been a singular one for many years. The great number of college situated there, the presence of Berklee College of Music, Boston Conservatory and the New England Conservatory of Music means that there is a large pool of teachers and students of high caliber gigging in town, and the general heightened cultural climate traditional in Boston creates favorable conditions for music making (at least for the listener, if not the musicians themselves).

One such musician on the scene is pianist Pandelis Karayorgis—and the trio of which he is a member, the mi3. This is a group formed out of a relatively long-standing tenure as the house band at a local club. Because that venue had/has no piano installed, Pandelis resorted to a Fender Rhodes electric as his instrument for the duration. Using that instrument with various effects and forming a solid musical bond with fellow bandmates Nate McBride on bass and Curt Newton on drums have generated a musical entity that extends the scope and depth of the trio date while forging a distinctive bond between sound and sense.

Their first album (I think), "We Will Make A Home for You" (Cleanfeed) consists of loose yet very together musical workouts on pieces by Monk as well as a few Karayorgis originals, an Eric Dolphy number and one by the pianist Hasaan, who recorded an album with Max Roach many years ago.

This is a very strong set with some of the electricity and punch of Rock but thoroughly enveloped in the post-Monkish trio approach that Pandelis and his colleagues pull off so effectively. It's the kind of music that occurs when three very strong players gig regularly and have a chance to work out a sympathetic musical relationship of give and take. It is loose yet fully vetted by an intense inter-familiarity of what the musicians come to expect

from each another. It is one of those disks that you might file away for a bit but find yourself coming back to regularly. The group recorded another session with Karayorgis on acoustic piano which is excellent as well. Search for mi3 on the net and you'll get a complete picture of what's out there. Check this one, though, if you want an intelligent take on how electronics and modern improvisation can form a potent blend that transcends category. It's very good.

April 2, 2009—Misery. Sheer misery. Some classic Country songs addressed the pain of romantic entanglements with unforgettable clarity—love unrequited, de-requited, out of bounds or just plain old dysfunctional. Country when it's very good has a power to pierce through everyday indifference the same way its sister music, the blues, can do. A great song of this sort can capture in very few words and a haunting melody a situation of desperate hopelessness. That some of these songs can do that and be huge commercial successes says something, and at this hour of the morning I am not sure WHAT. Art and popularity aren't always separated by a huge chasm? I guess that.

There's no better place to find these sorts of treasures than on Patty Loveless's CD "Sleepless Nights" (Saguaro Road). Now I don't know a lot about her because Country Music is something I only experience at the periphery in terms of today's incarnations. But she's taken 14 absolute classics of the kind we're talking about and remade them in a way that echoes true. She has a marvelous set of pipes for this kind of music and the vocal harmonies and arrangements are perfect. When I grew up, most of these songs were in the air. No matter who you were you heard them and knew them. They shaped in some inescapable fashion how you looked at the world. "Please Help Me I'm Falling," "There Goes My Everything" . . . they just said it all. Most importantly though, Patty gives them a new life. Such a remaking project can and does often falter. The artist should have total respect for the styles invoked and put herself into it with all there is. She does that. There is a distinct something in the lead vocals and harmonies that goes right down to the essence of Country. She captures it where others today have too frequently failed. She is a hell of a singer. This CD is a knockout.

April 1, 2009—For avant improvisational pianists following in the wake of Cecil Taylor, velocity is an important aspect of the musical panorama. They often thrive when they "get something GOING." The movement of notes from A to B and the nature of that journey are part of what succeeds or fails at any particular moment in the improvisation.

Joel Futterman is one of the handful of supercharged pianists out there right now whose velocity can drive the music down an avant autobahn of the most well-constructed sort. He shows this trait clearly and aesthetically on his Ayler download release "Possibilities." It's not like we are dealing with some musical machine. There's a wholly organic process. To my mind he has been one of the very best practitioners of motoristic barrages and this solo date gives plenty of musical attention to how his playing style develops naturally out of an expression, a line or a mode of attack. There is nothing forced or pretentious in operation here.

The music is as soulful as Ray Charles but captures the spirit of a deep commitment to musical "signifying" in a very different way, going for it in a whirlwind, avalanche, tornado or volcano of sound. Now you pretty much either hate it or love it, I suspect. Your response will come from the same inner life-force that controls his playing. "Possibilities" is one of the best recordings Futterman has produced. Try it. Love it. Hate it. That's your contribution to this music. www.ayler.com is where to find the download.

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