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## Quick Hits

New jazz cd reviews by Brad Walseth

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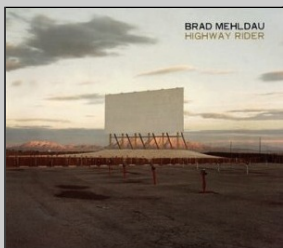
**Joe DeRose and Amici Sounds for the Soul**

**Damian Erskine So To Speak**

**Solitaire Miles Born to be Blue**

**Copernicus Nothing Exists**

*In which the beleaguered reviewer attempts to make some headway into the mounds of CDs seeking reviews accumulating daily by providing quick hits on a few recordings at a time.*



### **Brad Mehldau - "Highway Rider"**

(Nonesuch Records)

Pianist Brad Mehldau has created his best record to date: a stunning double-disk collaboration between jazz trio (or quartet) and a full classical orchestra that manages to create a panoramic travelogue of Americana that sounds somewhat like Bill Frisell meeting Aaron Copland. Jazz/classical mergers often fail, but the now-veteran pianist has honed his

compositional chops to such a high level that the integration of the small jazz combo with the larger group of strings and horns is organic and executed in a seamless manner. Taking the music even further into the stratosphere is saxophonist Joshua Redman - who, along with Mehldau, produces most of the delicious solos. Not as edgy as some of his previous work, Mehldau nonetheless has written in enough surprises to keep the lush harmonies from drifting away into the atmosphere. Like the cover photograph of a drive-in theater outside of Las Vegas, there is a haunting and truly American feel to the music which shifts from solo piano ("At The Tollbooth") to trio (the "drums and bass" title track) to saxophone/piano duet ("Old West") the orchestra alone ("Now You Must Climb Alone," "Always Departing") - along with tracks where Mehldau's usual trio (drummer Jeff Ballard and bassist Larry Grenadier) are joined by Redman, drummer Matt Chamberlain and the orchestra. Meanwhile, the epic "We'll Cross the River Together" - complete with a stunning solo turn by Redman, is the centerpiece of this cruise through

the heartland. A triumph: songs like the folksy "John Boy," bluesy "Don't be Sad," jaunty "The Falcon Will Fly Again," soaring "Walking the Peak," waltzing, Latin-flavored "Capriccio," catchy pop tune "Sky Turning Grey (For Elliott Smith)," frenetic "Into the City," and climactic "Always Returning" will have you dreaming of loading up the old beater and hitting the road this summer to this luminous soundtrack.

[www.bradmehldau.com](http://www.bradmehldau.com)

### Jeremy Pelt - "Men of Honor"

(High Note)

Nothing groundbreaking here, but that's the strength of 33-year-old trumpeter Jeremy Pelt's 7th release as a leader - "Men of Honor." The men in question could refer to '60s jazz artists and bandleaders like Miles Davis, Freddie Hubbard, Wayne Shorter and Art Blakey and their bands, as the compositions (song are contributed by all members of the group) harken back to that treasured era. Legendary engineer Rudy Van Gelder recorded the album, giving it yet another link to the times. But the honorable men could also be applied to these same band members: saxophonist J.D. Allen, pianist Danny Grissett, bassist Dwayne Burno and drummer Gerald Cleaver who prove that a working band does it right when they bring their live energy into the studio. Of course the men could also be for Pelt's young son Milo Hayward - who inspired Pelt's exciting song of the same name. Burno's high-stepping "Backroad" opens the album on a high note and lets the listener in on the fact that this is going to be one solid and pleasing recording. Allen's beautiful ballad, "Brooklyn Bound," Grissett's waltzing "Without You" and drummer Cleaver's wonderful "From a Life of the Same Name" show these musicians are as sure with the quieter material as they are with Pelt's swinging straight-ahead, hard bop compositions like "Danny Mack," "Illusion" and "Us/Them." Great individual playing from all - especially Pelt - who at times sounds like a young Freddie Hubbard, while the band interplay is simply top notch.

[www.peltjazz.com](http://www.peltjazz.com)



### VW Brothers - "Muziek"

(Patois Records)

Dutch-born brothers Paul (drums) and Marc (bass) van Wagenigen have made their living as in-demand sidemen on the West Coast since the 1980s - appearing with people like Wayne Wallace, Tower of Power, George Duke, Gonzalo Rubalcaba and more. On their debut - *Muziek*, the brothers present what they call "Jazz for the New Millennium" - an engaging

mixture of classical, funk, Brazilian and jazz. After a lovely classical opening prelude ("Euro") the band launches into a Latin-flavored fusion number ("Simone") that will have you checking the label to see if this was recorded in the 1970s heyday of fusion. As to be expected from brothers, Marc's Jaco-esque bass and Paul's drums are perfectly in sync. Michael Spiro guests on percussion and the fun continues on a fiery version of "Milestones," which also features some blazing sax work by Joe Cohen. Keyboardist David Matthews adds some gritty organ to the moody "Moon Over Gate 24," while the burning hot Afro-Cuban "Zapatos de Madera" brings Weather Report into the future in an exhilarating manner. Perhaps my favorite number though is the Brazilian ballad "Benito" - which showcases guitarist Marco Pereira and vocalist Claudia Villela in a peaceful stroll through the rain forest. The sizzling Latin burner "El Abogado" is highlighted by call and response vocals and is followed by a funky East Bay R&B number - "You Guys Done Yet" that could have been pulled off a Tower of Power record. Michel Legrand's "What Are You Doing the Rest of Your Life" is given a West Coast treatment with Marc's jittery funk bass keeping the song from getting too smooth, while "Cecilia's Song" is the most straight-ahead jazz piece of the set. Ending with "Euro," the brothers reflect on their European heritage with Toninho Ferragutti providing the accordion on a sadly romantic composition by Marc and Matthews (string arrangement by Nic tenBroek) that wouldn't sound out of place on the *A Man and a Woman* soundtrack. An impressive debut, *Muziek* is beautifully produced, with gorgeous

impressive debut, *Muziek* is beautifully produced, with gorgeous arrangements.

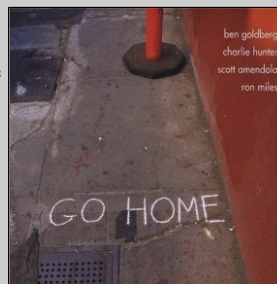
[www.patoisrecords.com](http://www.patoisrecords.com)

### **Ben Goldberg, Charlie Hunter, Scott Amendola, Ron Miles - "Go Home"**

(BAG Production Records)

Clarinetist Ben Goldberg's first release on his new BAG label features his Go Home ensemble - consisting of cornet player Ron Miles, drummer Scott Amendola and Charlie Hunter on 7-string guitar - and it is a smashing start for this new label. Goldberg is well-known for his ground-breaking New Klezmer Trio, as well as work with Myra Melford, Nels Cline and a number of wide-ranging musical releases that have helped him receive several grants and commissions for his original compositions. Here, he displays his masterful reed work in company with young rising star cornet player Miles. It is a nice team who balance each other well and fill the air with complementary colors. Meanwhile, guitar experimenter Hunter provides the basslines, while punctuating the action with his bluesy interjections, and drummer Amendola is perhaps the unsung hero of the project - keeping it all together. The energy level and band communication is high - as noticed immediately on the enjoyable opening number - "TGO" - which sounds like Bourbon Street relocated to Mars. As to be expected with Hunter onboard, the songs at time veer into a rock mode - as in "Wazoo" where Amendola plays a heavy backbeat and Hunter tears through some of his patented riffs. "Lace" and "Head and Tails" take things in a darker, more avant garde, yet no less satisfactory direction - showing the range of these musicians to handle this challenging material. Meanwhile four live tracks, taken from a concert at Mills College, are also included, including the Latin-flavored "Root and Branch," "Ethan's Song" with Hunter's incendiary guitar and bass (simultaneous) solos, the free-flowing "Isosceles" and album ending "Papermaker" (including Amendola's drum solo spotlight) - that must have been some concert! Although Hunter may garner much of the attention, the other players are equal components in , and Goldberg's compositions - including interesting studio tracks "Inevitable" and "Reparation" push the edges and are central to the success of the unique sound of this exciting new group.

<http://www.bagproductionrecords.com>



### **Bill Carrothers - "Joy Spring"**(Pirouet Records)

Eclectic pianist Bill Carrothers emerges every so often from his hideout in Michigan's Upper Peninsula and surprises everyone with his talent, intelligence and creativity, while exploring unusual musical sources such as music from the WWI era or from the '30s and '40s on previous recordings. This time out, he takes on the output of Clifford Brown - the talented young trumpet star who died in a car crash in 1956 at age 25 seemingly just on the pinnacle of achieving greatness. Besides Brown-penned numbers such as the title track, "Gerkin for Perkin," "Daahoud" and "Tiny Capers," Carrothers also interprets Brown-associated tunes like "Delilah" and "Jordu," Benny Golson's "Junior's Arrival," and "I Remember Clifford," as well as several numbers written by Brown associate - pianist Richie Powell (Bud's brother) - who also died, along with his wife Nancy, in that terrible accident. But those expecting the usual faithful tribute album would do well to remember that this Bill Carrothers and he will do things his way. Assisting the pianist in his loving deconstruction is drummer Bill Stewart (who worked with Carrothers on his fine last album - *Home Row* - see our review [here](#)) and bassist Drew Gress - who has worked with pianist Marc Copland in a similar piano trio setting.

The band comes swinging hard out of the gate on "Junior's Arrival," maintaining the exuberance of the original, while updating it in an enjoyable freewheeling fashion. More surprising, Carrothers turns the high-stepping, oft-covered title tune into a solo piano piece (or nearly so - as bass and

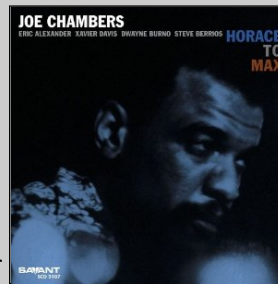
drums enter at the very end) - wringing great and bittersweet beauty out of the tune that I suspect most people never knew existed. Then it's back to the high octane as the band kicks into Powell's "Jacqui." In fact, one of the unexpected side effects from this recording is the rediscovery of "the other Powell" as a neglected artist from the era. Nice bass solo from Gress here as well. "Gerkin" is a steamrolling highlight with the band threatening to run over anyone in their paths as they charge relentlessly onward powerfully. The tango-tinged "Delilah" is slowed down, with Gress still adding the tom-tom fills that made the original so exotic. "Gertude's Bounce" is also slowed slightly in tempo, and love Carrothers insertion of "Surrey with the Fringe on Top." "Jordu" is given an angry and somewhat discordant treatment that is quite fun, while "Daahoud" is a vigorous reminder of Brown's talent as a writer. Powell's "Time" is presented as a lovely piano trio ballad, while the keyboardist's "Powell's Prances" gives Stewart his chance to shine. The strength of this album is that 3/4 of the way through, the songs are still just as strong as at the beginning. "Tiny Capers" and a solo piano version of "I Remember Clifford," end this fine album well. No doubt this recording will bring more attention to Carrothers, as well as the legacy of Brown and Powell.

[www.carrothers.com](http://www.carrothers.com)

### Joe Chambers - "Horace to Max"

(Savant Records)

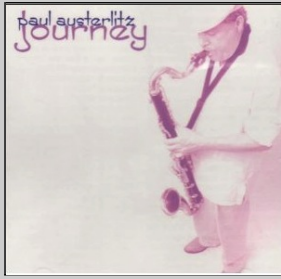
Veteran drummer/vibraphonist Joe Chambers has played with many of the greats in his storied career, including Wayne Shorter, Joe Henderson, Bobby Hutcherson, Andrew Hill, Freddie Hubbard, Charles Mingus and Max Roach (as a member of M'Boom), but has had little opportunity to play the part of leader until recently. On his new recording, *From Horace to Max*, Chambers pays tribute to Horace Silver and his mentor Max Roach, while also covering songs from Monk, Shorter, Marcus Miller ("Water Babies" and "Portia" both recorded by Miles Davis) and Kenny Dorham ("Asiatic Raes" - recorded by Freddie Hubbard and played frequently by the Horace Silver-era Jazz Messengers). Chambers keeps things pretty straight-ahead, but that doesn't diminish the excitement of this well-played music. He is joined by tenor saxophonist Eric Alexander, bassist Dwayne Burno, pianist Xavier Davis and percussionist Steve Berrios.



An intriguing version of "Asiatic Raes" opens things with Oriental-sounding piano over Afro-Cuban rhythms before catapulting into the the walking middle section - with Burno walking like he is on hot coals heated by Chambers' propulsive drumming. Great solos by Alexander, Davis and Burno and a kicking arrangement turn this 1960s' number into a modern classic. Chambers switches over to vibes on Silver's "Ecaroh" - letting his "M'Boom" bandmate Berrios take the drum chair, and proves to be as masterful on the vibraphones as he is on drums. Gentler than Silver's version, but with exciting shifts in tempo, this track features gorgeous work from everyone, especially Chambers and Alexander who sounds somewhat like a '50s era Coltrane. Chambers overdubs his vibes on a stellar new take on Roach's "Man From South Africa, which features nice solos from pianist Davis and Berrios on percussion, " while vocalist Nicole Guiland fills the voice duties (previously done by Abbey Lincoln) on "Mendacity" (both from 1961's *Percussion Bittersweet*) and does a pleasing job, although her voice lacks the weight and grit of Lincoln's. "Portia" is removed from the intense introspection of the Miles version, and given new life with Chambers doubling on marimba and vibes on this pleasant arrangement, as well as on the waltzing "Water Babies." Guiland returns on the entertaining Roach/Lincoln number "Lonesome Lover" - which also features Pittsburgh's finest bass player Richie Goode and Helen Sung on piano. Thelonious Monk's jumpy "Evidence" is punched up with great tight ensemble work, and the album ends on a high note with Chambers' original kalimba-on-marimba-centered "Afreeka." Besides the interesting new arrangements of these classic tunes and the excellent performances, the album truly benefits from the advances in sound engineering to captivate the listener with its crisp yet warm sound.

[www.jazzdepot.com](http://www.jazzdepot.com)





### Paul Austerlitz - "Journey" (INNOVA)

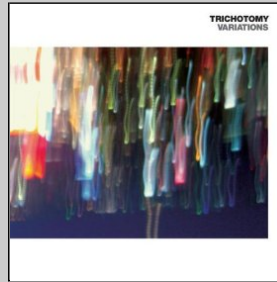
Bass clarinet is not usually the first instrument you think of when you think of jazz, but Finnish-American Paul Austerlitz's *Journey* may very well change your mind. The noted ethnomusicologist and author is especially interested in studying universal musical expression as delivered by African drum rhythms through Afro-Cuban and Dominican/Haitian musical styles, including

meringue and palos ritual drumming, and he combines these influences with bebop jazz, European classicism, Indian ragas, traditional African drumming and even spoken word on this musical journey. The results are stunning. Backed by a number of authentic Caribbean musicians, including percussionists Julio Figueroa and Jose Duluc. Austerlitz wields his instrument like Coltrane on "A Love Supreme" on "One Peace." The rich woody timbre of his instrument are especially appealing and well matched by Barry Olsen's piano work. Meanwhile, the merengue/Bebop version of Bird's "Ornithology" simply must be heard. Divided into sections reflecting his musical explorations, the fourth part offers poetry sung and read to music with singer Renee Cologne sounding a bit like Jackie Cain, and Michael S. Harper reciting his streetwise poetry. In his book, *Jazz Consciousness: Music, Race and Humanity*, Austerlitz says that "while social boundaries are real, there is no boundary to humanity." If only the rest of the world would listen to the truth in the music.

[www.paulausterlitz.org](http://www.paulausterlitz.org)

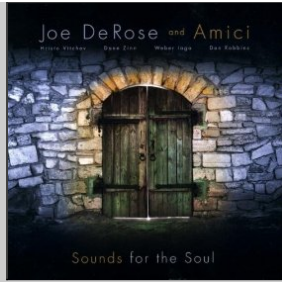
### Trichotomy - "Variations" (Naim Jazz)

From Down Under, this exceptional trio proves that jazz not only exists in Australia, but startles the listener with the creativity and high quality of their unique musical direction. Citing influences like the Bad Plus, Radiohead, Vijay Iyer, Tortoise, Pat Metheny, Brad Mehldau, Stravinsky and fellow Aussie's The Necks, Trichotomy have played together for a decade and have honed their interesting approach - which critics have compared favorably to Euro



jazzers Tord Gustavsen and EST. But comparisons don't do justice to their highly original sound, and hopefully this album - their first worldwide release - will bring them the recognition they deserve. Opening track, "Island in the Sun" bristles with energy - building to an intense climax where bassist Pat Marchisella seems to be strangling his bass. Pianist Sean Foran wrote that piece along with the quietly compelling next tune - "At the Right Moment" and is responsible for half of the tracks, with drummer John Parker adding four and the group is credited with the wonderful improvised "Labyrinth" that closes the album. Despite the offbeat references, many of the songs are surprisingly "jazzy" and melodic in nature, and the addition of several "special guests" only adds to the fun. The contrast between the harmonically adventurous and rhythmically advanced continues with the contrapuntal "Branching Out" (another Foran tune - and his playing is exceptional here). Violin and viola (played by Christa Powell and Bernard Hoey) and alto sax (John Babbage) enhance the classical-influenced "Start," while Peter Knight on breathy trumpet and Lawrence English on electronics take "Ascent" into an incandescent and haunting atmosphere. Meanwhile, Parker's pounding "Variations on a Bad Day" offers Marchisella's effected bowed bass sounding like lead guitar. This nastiness continues on the abruptly shifting "Chunk," but the lovely "Please" shows the band's gentle side. Hopefully we will hear more from this exciting band from the outback in the future.

<http://www.trichotomymusic.com>



### **Joe DeRose and Amici - Sounds for the Soul** (First Orbit Sounds)

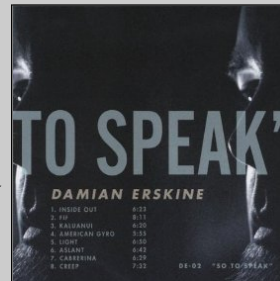
.We've heard from drummer Joe DeRose before as a member of Bulgarian-American guitarist Hristo Vitchev's excellent Bay Area ensemble. On his first album as leader, DeRose utilizes basically the same group, while augmenting the core with saxophonist Dann Zinn. And as to be expected from a drummer - this group takes things in a slightly more combustible direction than the slightly more atmospheric sounds in Vitchev's writing and moves into more of an uptempo fusion direction that is quite exciting. On the opening "Nick's Legacy," (written for his father) everyone gets into the action with outstanding solos from stellar bassist Dan Robbins, Grammy-nominated pianist Weber Iago, Zinn and Vitchev on a fiery electric guitar over explosive drumming by DeRose. DeRose explains that "Amici" means friends in Italian, and many of the songs are dedicated to people (like Louie Bellson on "Drum Angel") who helped him along the way. He also thanks his fellow musicians for their input and it is clear that these musicians truly enjoy working with each other. Most of the songs were cowritten with Vitchev and his keen ear for warm harmonization is a solid presence. Saxophonist Zinn is also a welcome addition - often taking the lead on the themes - freeing Vitchev to and bringing the music into new dimensions sonically. Songs like "The Skies Below," "Bros At Play" and "Ancient Prayer" navigate the area between the melodic and the rhythmic with abandon. There is an urgent undercurrent of energy barely restrained from breaking out at any time and this tension results in some enthralling music. Even the beautiful "Tears from Tokyo" refuses to sink into slumber, while the catchy title track is the "hit" and offers great solos, especially from Robbins. The Iago-cowritten "Miracles" ends this wonderful recording - finally succumbing to take a breath and chill out a bit.

[www.joederosedrums.com](http://www.joederosedrums.com)

### **Damian Erskine - "So To Speak"**

Bassist Damian Erskine's name may sound familiar - he is drummer Peter Erskine's nephew - but he is also forging an identity as a top-notch electric bassist. On his newest recording - *So To Speak*, the Portland, OR-based artist has assembled some of the best Latin jazz musicians from the area to produce a hearty disk of funky Latin-flavored jazz fusion. Erskine's sound is somewhat Jaco-esque, but with his own zest, and he plays several prodigious solos as well as propelling the songs with his acute sense of rhythm. However, despite his incredible technique, he never overplays and instead stays within service to the songs. Erskine is joined by drummer/percussionist Reinhardt Melz and percussionist Rafael Trujillo to create a monster rhythm bed that pianist Ramsey Embick and guitarist Chris Mosely are free to float over. Guests appear on tenor and soprano sax, trumpet and additional percussion on some of the songs. Everything is tasteful and melodic and compelling, with the delicious "Kaluanui" - driven by Erskine's funky bass chords nearly reaching contemporary jazz "hit" status. Erskine has played with people like Gino Vanelli, Les McCann, Jeff Lorber and, of course, his uncle - who he says instilled a love of rhythm in him. Most of the songs such as "Inside Out," "FIF," "American Gyro" "Aslant," "Caberina" and the album-ending "Creep" are mid-to-up-tempo with a funk fusion and Latin factor, but the tune "Light" lives up to it's title and showcases Embick and Erskine nicely on a balladic tempo. I suspect with the talent he shows here, we will be hearing much more from this player/composer.

<http://www.damianerskine.com>



DAMIAN ERSKINE		
1. INSIDE OUT	5:12	
2. FIF	5:11	
3. KALUANUI	5:05	
4. AMERICAN GYRO	5:15	
5. LIGHT	5:05	
6. ASLANT	4:45	
7. CABERINA	5:05	
8. CREEP	5:05	



### Solitaire Miles - "Born to be Blue"

(Seraphic Records)

Listening to singer Solitaire Miles is like stepping into a time machine and going back to a bygone era of great female jazz singers. With a clear, clean voice and keen sense of phrasing, Miles belongs to another period in time before screeching and electronic pitch correction came into popularity. On her third album, *Born to Be Blue*, Miles has assembled an exceptional crew of some of Chicago's finest old and new talents, including: Pianists Willie Pickens and Joe Vito (also on accordion), guitarist Neal Alger, bassists Larry Kohut and Marlene Rosenberg, drummers Robert Shy, Phil Gratteau and Eric Montzka, with guitarist Andy Brown and bassist Joe Policastro also appearing on one track. The talented Jim Gailloro adds wonderful saxophone on three tunes, while the underrated trumpeter Art Davis is a true knockout - shining impressively on many of the tracks. Miles revisits familiar standards like "Too Close for Comfort" (with great guitar work by Alger) and "Detour Ahead" (in honor of her mentor Johnny Frigo), but she also takes pleasure in unearthing some of the buried treasures of the era - like the title track, Hoagy Carmichael's "Baltimore Oriole," "You Gotta Crawl Before You Walk," "Moon Ray," "Make With the Kisses," "Me and the Moon" and "I'll Never Be the Same." The arrangements, by Miles, Pickens and Kohut, are all respectful and pleasing to the ear. A first rate presentation of classic tunes benefitting from the warm recording at the Sound Bank and Steve Yates Recording. Of course the star of it all is Miles herself, with a honey-smooth voice and confident annunciation - she truly knows these songs inside and out. Nicely done!

[www.solitairemiles.com](http://www.solitairemiles.com)

### Copernicus - "Nothing Exists"

(MoonJune)

Moon June has released a remastered version of spoken word artist Copernicus' first album - *Nothing Exists* - originally recorded in 1984. Along with keyboardist Pierce Turner and guitarist Larry Kirwin, Copernicus was appearing live at the time at CBGBs, Mudd Club and Max's Kansas City and there is a punk rock attitude intermingled with the free form improvised music and poetry. His preoccupation with the belief that everyday life is all an illusion and that reality only exists on the subatomic level - the main thrust of his later expositions - was just coming into being - and in fact the first song - "I Won't Hurt You" - is basically a love song with some twists. But this reissue is a fascinating document that contains many powerful moments. Turner and Kirwan are joined by numerous other musicians playing violins, flutes, bodhran, guitars, pianos, effected trombone - with Steve Menasche on marimba and Fionnghuala on vocals and flute standing out. Certainly not for everyone, but songs like "Blood," epic "Let Me Rest," the throbbing "Nagasaki" and "Atomic Nevermore" are quite interesting sonic and philosophical experiments.

<http://www.moonjune.com>

