

Trios, the Fulcrum of Sound

Traditionally, but with clear exceptions, the success of a jazz performance depends on the three musicians at the fulcrum of the sound—the pianist, bassist and drummer. Whether as a standalone group or a rhythm section for a larger band, this unit conveys the values that the composing mind holds dear.

Nowhere are these values more starkly apparent than in a discrete, three-person ensemble. Through his eponymous trio, for instance, pianist Ahmad Jamal introduced the notion of sound quality over quantity, turning away from the speedy, complex bebop riffing of his day. Later, Bill Evans refined the trio sound, setting a new standard for small jazz ensembles. And today, contemporary groups like The Bad Plus push the tradition one step further with its use of modern jazz idioms and popular music sources.

Drawing inspiration and ideas from precedents like these, several jazz trios have released albums that add new dimensions to the format. Each of these groups—all piano-based, though not necessarily piano-led—speaks with a unique, commanding voice.

On drummer **Jeff Williams'** fifth record for Whirlwind, *Bloom* (4737; 60:28 ★★ ★½), he joins with bassist Michael Formanek (a longtime colleague) and pianist Carmen Staaf to turn out 10 originals and one standards redux. On the record, the group crackles with energy, thanks to Williams' flinty playing, Staaf's inventive chord changes and Formanek's deep feeling. To hear how assertively the trio tackles a groove, listen to Williams' "Scrunge/Search Me" with its insistent 7/8 pulse. For straight-up improvisation and melodicism, check out Staaf's blues tune, "New York Landing." Then chase all of this down with Formanek's "Ballad Of The Weak," the most contemplative piece of the lot.

Ordering info: whirlwindrecordings.com

The Tel Aviv group **Shalosh**—which means "three" in Hebrew—works as a collective, sans leader. Its latest album, *Onwards And Upwards* (ACT 9885; 66:20 ★★ ★½), displays a similarly inclusive attitude toward style—its repertoire draws on diverse sources from the worlds of rock, classical and world music. This eclecticism plays out intriguingly in their work. Pianist Gadi Stern, bassist David Michaeli and drummer Matan Assayag give as much attention to form and building tension as their rock and classical brethren, but don't sacrifice improvisatory ethos.

Ordering info: actmusic.com

As the translation of its title implies, **Guillaume Cherpitel Trio's** *Choc* (Self Release; 52:39 ★★ ★) is about disrupting



the complacent. On *Choc* ("shock" in English), French pianist Cherpitel and his modern jazz trio barely pause for breath as they cycle through a decade's worth of original compositions.

Throughout the album, Cherpitel impels his trio in relentless movement—sometimes electric, sometimes rolling, but always forward. While he revels in stunningly symmetrical comping, drummer Alexandre Ambroziak and bassist Jean-Luc Déat provide some syncopated contrast.

Ordering information: guillaume-cherpitel.com

The aptly named **Briotrio** (drummer Arne Skorpe Sjøen, pianist Ingrid Øygard Steinkopf and bassist Thomas Linde Lossius) positively sparkles on its debut release, *Briotrio* (AMP 36; 46:55 ★★ ★). The recently formed acoustic group, based in Bergen, Norway, gravitates toward light, cool swing and amusing stories—this record contains not one somber moment.

The upbeat, simply stated "Første Vals" pokes fun in 3/4 time; "Kor E Du?" bounces with a Latin vibe; and the unexplained "???" shows off the players' well-honed ensemble skills. In a word: charming.

Ordering info: ampmusicrecords.com

At 150 recordings strong, pianist **Bill Mays** had no shortage of material for last year's Celebration of the Arts festival in Delaware Water Gap, Pennsylvania. The live recording from that gig, *Live At COTA (No Blooze 3; 55:45 ★★ ★★)*, reunites Mays with bassist Martin Wind and drummer Matt Wilson for their first trio release in a decade.

As hard-swinging as ever, the three players can displace atoms with their combined fire. They made room for some poignant homages, though: "Goodbye, Mr. Evans," for Bill Evans; "Sun Of The East" for pianist/composer Lennie Tristano; and "Nothing Like You" for pianist/composer Bob Dorough. **DB**

Ordering info: billmays.net



Masha Art & LRK Trio *Anesthesia*

LOSEN 217

★★★★

The last song on Masha Art & LRK Trio's *Anesthesia* carries the title "Into The Sea (RIP My Sister Anya)." Those mourners among us, forever marked by some private tragedy, might recognize in the song's denouement the language of disconsolate grief. Above a wash of rolling percussion and listing bass, pianist Evgeny Lebedev interlaces a soaring major-scale harmony with its inverse. For a brief moment, bright hopeful chords clash against discordant chaos until the album closes with the low hum of abandoned strings vacantly vibrating.

It's a dramatic moment on the group's third release, its first widely available outside Russia. The album, for the most part, offers listeners the opportunity to hear a tightknit group nail saxophonist and bandleader Masha Art's compelling compositions. However, Lebedev's contributions stand out. Like "Into the Sea," "Painless" displays his uncanny ability to render emotions that, on impact, feel almost painfully personal. It opens with a slow, staccato refrain. Art goes first, articulating notes purposefully, letting them resonate. Her solo luxuriates in the song's melancholy. Lebedev follows and opens with a few expansive chords before charting a simple melody that unfolds with the logic of a folksong or a lullaby. Then, as Ignat Kravstov's percussion tightens around him, he reveals these grey-washed, pastoral chords. They arrive like the previous melody's solemn shadow.

The writing and performances on *Anesthesia* make it worth a listen, but Lebedev's contributions make it an even rarer find. It's an album with a lot to say, but even more to show.

—Andrew Jones

Anesthesia: Flow, Lavanda's Dream (Dedicated To My Dog), 8th Of November, Inese Spooch, Painless, Take Him, Into The Sea (RIP My Sister Anya), 06:00

Personnel: Masha Art, alto saxophone; Evgeny Lebedev, piano; Anton Rovnyuk, bass; Ignat Kravstov, drums, metalophone; Maria Kulakova, harp (1, 2, 5-7).

Ordering info: losenrecords.no