



Breaking The Ice
Eric Divito (Pioneer Jazz Collective)
by Sharon Mizrahi

Guitarist Eric DiVito proves that ice was made to be broken both in the studio and in concert last month at the chic Jazz at Kitano. The title track ripples open in a few sparse yet evocative guitar chords, setting the scene for this sublime album. Electric bassist Motohito Fukushima tightly follows DiVito's lead, hovering with a buzz that saturates the track in immense depth. Corcoran Holt's appearance on upright bass is also intriguing. He doesn't trail DiVito's footsteps so much as subtly guides his own way without departing from the pack. As the piece continues, the initial guitar chord sequence emerges as the backbone for all that follows. Drummer Nadav Snir-Zelniker provides momentum for the affair, expressing the breadth of his creative versatility. "Shoot the Messenger" further features the drummer at the top of his inventive craft.

Tenor saxist Jake Saslow's brazen gregariousness - a bit subdued on the album - shone brightly live. He rarely stopped to take a breath, emerging as a powerhouse of intense energy. Yet amid such a distinct set of artists, DiVito manages to embody the frontman role effortlessly. The guitarist vividly illustrated his understated leadership on stage, serenely closing his eyes for the breezy melody in "For Maria". Fukushima's bass didn't leave DiVito's side for a moment in the impeccably synchronized piece. On disc, Saslow and Snir-Zelniker add a sultrier layer to the slow tune, taking the guitar-bass duo's place in the front lines.

The slower and more sensual "Tango" takes on darker undertones as DiVito passionately trickles up and down his guitar. Saslow echoes the sentiment in yet another gripping slur of tenor sax that seems to last from the first to final second of the track. As the piece simmered to a smooth close on the Kitano bandstand, a concertgoer enthusiastically whispered praise for the romantic vibe left lingering in the air.

For more information, visit pjrecords.ca. DiVito is at The Flatiron Room Thursdays. See Regular Engagements.



Hudson City Suite
Scott Healy Ensemble (Hudson City)
by George Kanzler

Longtime member of the Basic Cable Band on the Conan O'Brien late night TV show and keyboardist with an array of rock-pop musicians over the years, Scott Healy takes a surprising yet assured step into the realm of Duke Ellington, Gil Evans and thoroughly modern and personal jazz composing-arranging on *Hudson City Suite*. Originally inspired by Ellington's suites, the album is nine somewhat thematically related pieces by a tentet featuring four brass, three reeds and piano, bass and drums. Personnel vary and trumpeter Tim Hagans is added as a soloist on some tracks.

Healy favors inventive, through-composed pieces

rather than repeating themes and forms like AABA 32-bars. "Summit Avenue Conversation" may be described in the notes as "a pure, unadulterated old school burner in the tradition of Count Basie and Jimmie Lunceford big bands", but that's selling it short. Before it picks up a head of hard-riffing steam, shout choruses and a swinging, swaggering tenor sax solo over roaring horns, it begins with a sly appropriation, in sax phrases over piano, of Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*. Probably more 'old school' is "Franklin Steps", reminiscent of Ellington's many locomotive train pieces, with Kim Richmond's alto sax channeling Johnny Hodges and bluesy piano from the leader. Other Ellington flourishes include voicings nodding to "Mood Indigo" reed/brass mixing and generous use of brass mutes. Closing track "Prelude" is Ellingtonian in its sumptuous weaving of tonal colors in the horns.

There's an impressionistic, almost cinematic scope to the suite - dedicated to a 19th Century community subsumed into modern day Jersey City - as Healy deploys a wide range of colors and timbres, making especially creative use of drummers Kendall Kay and Bill Wysaske. Two pieces lean alluringly toward art music: "Princess Tonga" has horns wafting over shifting, drifting rhythms exotically toward a final ensemble mélange featuring tandem clarinet and soprano sax while "Koko on the Boulevard" features a descending baritone sax-led line expanding into passages incorporating brief time shifts (4/4 to 3/4 to 6/8) and accelerating tempo. Healy has conjured up a captivating, amazingly varied and colorful range of sounds and moods with just a tentet here, showing that less can be more in jazz ensembles.

For more information, visit hudsoncityrecords.com



Hammered
Ches Smith and These Arches (Clean Feed)
by Kurt Gottschalk

One might on occasion be given to pause and consider the future of music in the hands of people who have grown up with the history of recorded music just a YouTube search away, in a world we might conceive of as (or even hope will be) post-genre. That generation might well already be looking at such players as drummer Ches Smith to mark the way. Smith has been largely a rock drummer who has booked time with such familiar-to-these-pages personalities as Trevor Dunn, Fred Frith, Ben Goldberg and Marc Ribot.

More central (perhaps) to Smith's own field of vision are his oddly fascinating duo Good for Cows (with former Deerhoof bassist Devin Hoff), his equally offbeat solo project Congs for Brums and These Arches, a group he leads with the stellar lineup of saxophonists Tim Berne and Tony Malaby, guitarist Mary Halvorson and Andrea Parkins on accordion and electronics. What perhaps holds his contributions to all of these projects together is a fluidity with rhythm - contrasting, overlaid and sliced with the ease of a hip-hop DJ.

Such characterization might be unexpected for a record given the name *Hammered*, but Smith is as solid as he is nuanced behind the kit and this, the second outing for These Arches, is a rewarding, exciting listen. The band does hammer away at times and in fact several of the compositions - according to Smith - were originally written with a rock band in mind, but they are still roomy enough for healthy improvisation, namechecking in its titles such departed influences as

Chicago drummer Phillip Wilson and Haitian Vodou drummer Frisner Augustin, suggesting a couple more touchpoints informing Smith's work.

With the addition of Berne to the band's original lineup, the group's sound is now thick with, well, sound. They've crossed that nebulous line between sounding like some people in a room and becoming a blur of groupthink. In very different ways, Berne and Parkins have traipsed that territory for decades and here in fine company they are continuing to hammer away at blurry lines.

For more information, visit cleanfeed-records.com. This group is at ShapeShifter Lab Feb. 26th. See Calendar.

IN PRINT

Born To Play: The Ruby Braff Discography and Directory of Performances
Thomas P. Hustad (Scarecrow Press)
by Ken Dryden

Ruby Braff was a gifted cornetist and trumpeter who focused on playing only great melodies that inspired his rich, logical improvisations. A devoted fan of Louis Armstrong who managed to find his own voice on his horn early in his career, Braff's interest in swing set him apart from many members of his generation. Braff had a phenomenal career that spanned 54 years as a recording artist and performer and he continued to work even as ailments made touring difficult, finally retiring not long before his death ten years ago this month.

Thomas P. Hustad's exhaustive book attempts to document not only every known record date, but also every broadcast, private recording, performance and interview, a seemingly impossible task. The author also collected and reviewed many of the unissued performances. Hustad's research includes interview transcriptions, excerpts of previously published reviews and articles, along with period advertisements for bookings, all meticulously footnoted. The result is a comprehensive, critical look at Braff's career.

There are a number of surprising chapters in Braff's career. The young trumpeter sat in with an amused Fats Waller, not knowing who the pianist was. During the '50s, Braff had a non-speaking role as a trumpeter in a Rodgers-Hammerstein musical that ran for six months. He recorded a soundtrack for a softcore porn film, a session he regretted.

There is no doubt that Braff set high standards for himself and he expected everyone else to measure up to the same expectations. Braff would rather turn down a job if he didn't approve of the musicians for the date or was not allowed to choose the songs. He thought the failure to preplan a set for a concert to be unprofessional, reasoning that audiences shouldn't be subjected to musicians discussing what to play next.

Hustad's book is not a fast read, but one that serious Ruby Braff fans will savor as they learn new facets of his career and seek out additional LPs, CDs and broadcasts featuring him that circulate among collectors.

For more information, visit rowman.com/Scarecrow