

Forever Young

Listeners searching for a gateway into jazz with no age boundary would do well to start with *Jazz For Kids Of All Ages* (Golden Stars, a three-album set). Tunes by Ella Fitzgerald, Slim Gaillard, Louis Jordan and many others still retain their lighthearted allure. Another recommended entry is New York saxophonist Hayes Greenfield's *Jazz-A-Ma-Tazz* (Baby Music Boom), with singers Miles Griffith, Lisa Michel and Richie Havens. Expected for re-issue in the digital format later this year, the album comes down in favor of real jazz over kiddie stuff.

There are at least six new albums of interest to discerning adults and curious young people. Try **Diana Panton's *I Believe In Little Things* (eOne 5879; 54:49 ★★★★★)**. In her approach to *Willie Wonka's* "Pure Imagination" and 13 other dreamy tunes, the Canadian singer defines tonal sweetness and purity of expression. Whether singing in English or French, Panton's voice glides ever so soothingly. Torontonians Reg Schwager on guitar and Don Thompson on vibes, bass and piano, and Coenraad Bloemendal on cello are quietly authoritative musicians.

Ordering info: dianapanton.com

The contagious delight that German quartet **Echoes of Swing**—trumpeter Colin T. Dawson, alto saxophonist Chris Hopkins, pianist Bernd Lhotzky and drummer Oliver Mewes—takes in recognizing American ragtime and pre-Pearl Harbor jazz is evident throughout its second album, ***Dancing* (ACT 9103; 61:45 ★★★★★)**. There's little tarnish on old treasures like Sidney Bechet's "Premier Bal" and James P. Johnson's "Charleston." All that's missing, really, is Fred Astaire in top hat, white tie and tails. Dawson, sounding like a "good-time jazz" Chet Baker, sings on three numbers.

Ordering info: actmusic.com

Hawaii-based **Pacific Harp Project's** eponymous album (**Self Release; 57:16 ★★★★★**) has in its central role Megan Bledsoe Ward's plucked or strummed harp. Using her sharp musical intelligence, she encourages vibraphonist Noel Okimoto and the rhythm section into helping her transform pieces by Debussy, Liszt and Ravel into engaging jazz. Ward's original material is largely mesmeric with scintillating plays of light and subtle colors.

Ordering info: pacificharpproject.com

David Broza & The Andalusian Orchestra's *Ashkelon* (Magenta; 63:39 ★★★★★) has the Israeli singer-guitarist at the top of his form in collaboration with Tom Cohen's juggernaut. What might have

Diana Panton



been a sprawling jumble with 35 musicians from diverse backgrounds is instead an appealing interfusion of Algerian, Sephardic Jewish, Middle Eastern and flamenco music. Cohen has thrown himself with great thoroughness into every detail of arrangements. Ravishing musical beauty exists for most of an hour-plus.

Ordering info: magentalabelgroup.com

Ed Palermo again revels in the fixation he developed back in high school for the far-ranging music of Frank Zappa. **The Ed Palermo Big Band's** fifth FZ love-fest, ***One Child Left Behind* (Cuneiform Rune 420; 67:34 ★★★★★)** swarms with excellent musicianship bundled with seriously zany creativity. All parts of this 17-piece ensemble are fully integrated into songs from 1970s LPs such as *Waka/Jawaka—Hot Rats* and *One Size Fits All*. Songs from Neil Young, Los Lobos and *Scarface's* soundtrack sneak in the back door. Among the screwball vocalists are Zappa alumni Napoleon Murphy Brock and Zappa's sister Candy.

Ordering info: cuneiformrecords.com

Gary Lucas, a one-of-a-kind guitarist once deputized by Captain Beefheart, loves Max Fleischer's old cartoons and soundtrack music, especially when Olive Oyl and Betty Boop are part of the hijinks. ***Fleischerei* (Cuneiform Rune 405; 43:22 ★★★★★)** attests that music theater singer Sarah Stiles is the perfect person to emulate squeaky-voiced Oyl and Boop. Along with trombonist-arranger Joe Fiedler and three more kindred spirits, Lucas and Stiles bring out the merry *mishegas* or tenderness of a dozen 'toons tunes. **DB**

Ordering info: cuneiformrecords.com



Christopher Zuar Orchestra *Musings*

SUNNYSIDE 1434

★★★★★

Recorded in September 2014 when he was 27 years old, composer/arranger Christopher Zuar's *Musings* is an impressively accomplished debut. Playing the 17-piece orchestra as his instrument, the Long Island native conducts these studio-assembled musicians to sound as if they were part of a working band that had fortified its concept through countless gigs.

With an undergraduate degree from the New England Conservatory and a master's from the Manhattan School of Music in composition, Zuar presents seven of his works plus an expansive and spirited arrangement of Egberto Gismonti's "7 Anéis," sequenced at the end perhaps as an unofficial encore.

It's always rewarding when a big band gets to express the personality and humor of its leader's writings. "Ha! (Joke's On You)" is an appropriately grin-inducing funky electro-acoustic romp that features Fred Carlberg switching to Fender Rhodes, Pete McCann on electric guitar and some fierce soloing by trumpeter Mat Jodrell. (Since trumpet is Zuar's core instrument, one wonders if Jodrell may be the composer's surrogate here.)

The orchestra's not-so-secret weapon is vocalist Jo Lawry. On the uptempo "Vulnerable States," her vocal floats calmly atop dramatic instrumental passages, while on the reflective "So Close, Yet So Far Away" her voice is a blended part of the accompaniment. She also gets the final solo on the majestic "Anthem," and her soaring soprano is compellingly weaved throughout "7 Anéis."

—Yoshi Kato

Musings: Remembrance; Chaconne; Vulnerable States; Ha! (Joke's On You); So Close, Yet So Far; Anthem; Lonely Road; 7 Anéis. (55:17)

Personnel: Christopher Zuar, composer, arranger, conductor; Dave Pietro, Ben Kono, Jason Rigby, Lucas Pino, Brian Landrus, woodwinds; Tony Kadleck, Jon Owens, Mat Jodrell, Matt Holman, trumpets; Tim Albright, Matt McDonald, Alan Ferber, Max Seigel, trombones; Pete McCann, guitar; Fred Carlberg, piano; Fender Rhodes; John Hébert, bass; Mark Ferber, drums; Rogerio Boccato, percussion (4, 6, 8); Jo Lawry, voice (3, 5, 6, 8).

Ordering info: sunnysidezone.com