

## Gilad Hekselman Far Star

Edition Records EDM1201 (CD, LP, DL)

★★★

Gilad Hekselman (g, ky, b, v, perc, whistle), Shai Maestro, Nomok (ky), Nathan Shram (vla, vn), Oren Hardy (b), Eric Harland, Ziv Ravitz, Amir Bresler and Alon Benjamini (d, perc). Rec. March 2020-June 2021



Considering the astonishing fluency of his improvising, pure tone, Pat

Metheny-inflected composing muse and partnerships with a raft of New York jazz aristocrats (including Chris Potter, Mark Turner, Esperanza Spalding and Ari Hoenig), it's perhaps surprising that the Israeli-born guitarist Gilad Hekselman's international reputation isn't bigger. *Far Star*, his all-original lockdown project and his debut for Edition Records, might change that, though not necessarily for a core jazz audience.

At the start of 2020, following a prolific period of composition, the guitarist had a raft of new material, and was ready to assemble a lineup to play it – but the pandemic arrived. So that music became this freewheeling home-studio adventure instead, with Hekselman's multi-instrumentalism creating the building blocks, subsequently embroidered by Israeli jazz stars Shai Maestro and Ziv Ravitz, American drummer Eric Harland, and more. A cinematic quality is immediately established in the opening 'Long Way From Home', referencing both Morricone and Metheny territory in its casually-whistled theme, and seductively rolling, open-spaces melody.

'Fast-moving Century' is a bustling clamour of piano hooks, percussion and synths; the title track is a wistfully lyrical dreamwalk, while 'Magic Chord' and the lilting 'Cycles' show how elegantly the leader balances guitar virtuosity and songwriting shapeliness. The clappy, cannily grooving 'The Headrocker' has a DJ's feel for earworm grooves, as Israeli drummer/producers Nomok – aka Noam Havkin – and Amir Bresler join the mix.

A smooth-jazz vibe sometimes purrs in, but there's more than enough variety in *Far Star* to confirm that Gilad Hekselman's musicianship runs much wider than his remarkable guitar talents alone. **John Fordham**

## High Pulp Pursuit of Ends

Anti-Records 7568 (CD, LP, DL) ★★★

Antoine Martel, Rob Homan (ky, syn), Trevor Eulau (g), Kaelie Earle (b), Andrew Morrill, Jaleel Shaw (as), Bobby Granfelt (d, perc), Victory Nguyen (s, f, t), Alex Dugdale (bcl, ts), Scott Rixon (el b, el g), Greg Uhles (g), Brandee Younger (hp), Jacob Mann (syn), Jerome Smith (tb, tba), Isaac Poole, Greg Kramer (tb) and Theo Croker (t). Rec. date not stated



Synths, synths and more synths – and 1970s synths too... I'm liking this!

Those were my first thoughts when listening to Seattle-based experimental collective High Pulp's latest album, *Pursuit Of Ends*. But repeated listens reveal something than just 1970s retro jazz-rock Moog-iness: High Pulp draw on everything from bebop to hip-hop, punk to indie shoegaze, alt to electro and all points inbetween.

Beginning with 'Ceremony', a synth-led instrumental, the band moves through a complex horn-section arrangement before sax solos appear over the swirling electronic background. 'Blaming Mercury', meanwhile, begins with electric guitar, and opens up into a lush, widescreen cinematic soundscape, with overlapping horn melodies and a laid-back but complex drum groove. It reminds me of a kind of vintage futurism, melding Miles' 1970s fusion experiments with rich Ellingtonian orchestrated majesty and non-jazz elements taken from the likes of Aphex Twin and My Bloody Valentine. *Pursuit of Ends*

balances carefully worked out composition with spontaneity and virtuoso musicianship and makes judicious use of a network of star collaborators such as sax star Jaleel Shaw (Roy Haynes, Mingus Big Band), harpist Brandee Younger (Ravi Coltrane, The Roots). Simultaneously lush and raw, it's a keeper. **Kevin Whitlock**

## Nicole Johäntngen Solo II

Selmabird Records (CD) ★★★

Nicole Johäntngen (s). Rec. 11 August 2021.



Last year, hard-working and just as hard-to-pigeonhole Swiss

saxophonist Nicole Johäntngen released *Henry III*, the third instalment of her New Orleans-inspired project recorded live with her quartet at the Domicile Jazzclub in Pforzheim in Germany. Among the energetic setlist is the funky 'Discoland'.

And now Johäntngen is back with *Solo II*, recorded (as the title suggests) on her own at an altitude of 2,100 metres in a chapel high in the Gotthard Pass in Switzerland. A long way in spirit from disco, then. It's an immersive, introspective, deeply meditative recording, made on a light-filled morning high in the mountains, and where Johäntngen, variously on soprano, alto and baritone sax, spars with the elemental, reverberative acoustic of the tiny Cappella di San Gottardo on the likes of 'Echo of the Mountains' and 'Gotthard Momentum'. On the final track, 'The Unknown', she begins to sing too. 'When I stepped out of the chapel into the glistening midday sun after an hour and a half of concentrated playing, I felt incredibly light,' she says. Listeners are likely to experience a similar freeing of the spirit. **Robert Shore**

## Yessai Karapetian Yessai

Kyudo KR-2616 (CD) ★★★

Yessai Karapetian (p), Mounir Sefsouf (as, ss), Gabriel Gosse (g), Marc Karapetian (b) and Théo Moutou (d). Rec. 16-20 May 2021



Born in Armenia but raised in Marseilles, 28-year-old Karapetian for

some years has been based in Paris, where he studied alongside several of his colleagues here. Subsequently the recipient of a one-year scholarship to Berklee, completed shortly before the pandemic struck, he's also been a member of the trio Onefoot, along with his bassist brother Marc.

That said, the intellectual interest and insistent intensity of what he does at the keys is, for this listener at least, mirrored by a certain lack of sensitivity. Though there are obvious hooks on some of the nine tracks, and there are brief solos here and there from Gosse and Sefsouf, the focus does seem very much on the pianist. The feel of the whole 39 minutes suggests a scenario of 'progressive rock meets post-fusion jazz, and wins'. You can imagine a stadium cheering this music, and afterwards wondering what it was all about. **Brian Priestley**

## Ralph Lalama Staycation

Steeplechase SCCD 31925 (CD) ★★★

Ralph Lalama (ts, Joe Magnarelli (t), Akiko Tsuruga (org), Clifford Bararo (d) and Nicole Pasternak Lalama (v). Rec. 2021.



This is sub-titled 'a family affair' and so it is. Ms Pasternak (heard on three tracks)

is Mrs Ralph Lalama and Tsuruga is Mrs Magnarelli; and to top it all, three of the nine pieces recorded were composed by pianist Dave Lalama, the leader's younger brother, and like him an alumnus of the Woody Herman and Buddy Rich bands. **Phew!**

Brother Ralph (born 1951) has been a long-time presence on the New York scene, known for playing in the celebrated Vanguard Jazz Orchestra. Broadly following the Rollins-Mobley template, he unwinds decently muscular solos on these varied pieces, those by his brother offering the kind of shapes that encourage adventurous blowing. Magnarelli, another seasoned player, is on form here; other recordings and my one live exposure to him may have been disappointing but his clean-cut tone and brisk attack score throughout, his better half chording perfectly behind the



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