



Improvising violinist Jessica Pavone

Orchestral Manoeuvres

Despite a long history of legendary jazz vocalists and instrumentalists pairing with orchestras and string ensembles, most string instruments other than upright bass aren't commonly associated with jazz. But then, on **Retreat To Beauty (Cellar Live; ★★★★★ 52:33)**, trumpeter **Antoine Drye** launches into the Billy Strayhorn classic "Isafahan," orchestrated by the esteemed Isaac Raz for a transcendent ensemble of more than 20 musicians, and you remember the enrapturing, emotive power of strings — in any context. A strong rhythm section comprising pianist Sullivan Fortner, bassist Ben Wolfe and drummer Donald Edwards holds down the fort as Drye's buttery sound floats above, accented by shimmering strings and woodwinds. As the ensemble tackles standards like "Send In The Clowns" and originals like Drye's mellow ballad "Friend," *Retreat To Beauty* is both reminiscent and modern, and a blissful listen all the way through.

Ordering info: cellarlive.com

Award-winning saxophonist/composer **Quinsin Nachoff's** work has highlighted the largely untapped potential of string quartets within a jazz context. Alongside his collaborators in the Ethereal Trio, bassist Mark Helias and drummer Dan Weiss, and joined by two New York string quartets, Bergamot Quartet and The Rhythm Method, Nachoff's **Stars And Constellations (Adyhâropa; ★★ 53:06)** returns to a jazz trio-meets-string quartet instrumentation. Nachoff creates three tracks, featuring conversations between strings and a jazz-based improviser, to realize his sonic exploration of the mystery, mythology and science of the cosmos. Unfortunately, it's a bit of an arduous listen. While the ambition is laudable, the three tracks are each quite long and meandering, and, while *Stars And Constellations* features some innovative musical ideas and moments of thrilling interplay between string quartet and jazz combo, listeners may be left searching for cohesion and payoff in all the chaos.

Ordering info: quinsin.com

On **Ephemeral (Thelonious; ★★★ 79:00)**, New Zealand-based tenor saxophonist/bass clarinetist/composer **Dave Wilson** tackles the weighty theme of impermanence, leveraging a string quartet with members of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra as well as his own sextet. Using layered grooves and textures, the nine-track album takes listeners on a journey of nostalgia, gratitude and daring. With the record's swirling, suspenseful opening track, "speak to me of yesterday and tomorrow (elusive as the dead)," Wilson explores his interconnectedness with the world around him. Meanwhile, the melancholic, drone-based "For Olivia" and "Liv's Theme" capture the bittersweetness of time's passage and of growing up. The record goes on in this manner, creating distinct sonic worlds that explore transience from several angles.

Ordering info: theloniousrecords.co.nz

In 2021, composer-violinist **Jessica Pavone** came across some history that stuck with her: In the 17th century, Korean women invented the standing see-saw so they could peek over the walls of their property, into the wild they were forbidden from roaming. This inspired Pavone to search for other women-made inventions throughout time that were developed to help women get around oppressive societal norms. **Clamor (Out of Your Head; ★★★ 45:00)** is the record that resulted from that exploration. The music, written for a six-person ensemble and bassoon soloist Katherine Young, first premiered in fall 2022. It explores the neolttwigi, or the 17th-century see-saw; Nu Shu, a secret language created by Chinese women forbidden from going to school; and bloomers, created during the Victorian dress reform by Amelia Bloomer. *Clamor* oscillates between intense collective drones and transcendent moments of individual expression using time-based scoring. Often tense, *Clamor* captures the melancholy and suffocation felt by women throughout history, as well as the triumph found in subverting oppression through ingenuity. **DB**

Ordering info: outofyourheadrecords.bandcamp.com



Anthony Pirog *The Nepenthe Series Vol. 1*

OTHERLY LOVE

★★

The definition of the musical term "ambient," according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, is "music intended to serve as an unobtrusive accompaniment to other activities and characterized especially by quiet and repetitive instrumental melodies." "Nepenthe" means a drug or a drink that has the power to make one forget sorrow or trouble.

Guitarist Anthony Pirog asked a variety of guitarists to send him a four- to five-minute track of an original that they would consider ambient so he could use it for some remote interplay as part of his *Nepenthe* series. The results, which are outside of jazz, fulfill the ambient definition (although whether the word nepenthe fits will be up to the individual listener).

The set of duets (with Pirog taking "Bernal Heights" as a solo piece) features electronic ensembles that develop very slowly if at all. Most of the selections (such as "Ripples Of Light" with Nels Cline, John Frusciante's "Aurora" and "Cirrus" with Brandon Ross) are dense soundscapes with the two guitarists sounding as if they are floating through space. Luke Stewart achieves a variety of sounds on "Dense Blazing Star" by tapping his bass while Andy Summers' rockish ballad "Inflorescence" is the only original that would be considered a song.

The performances would work well as background sounds for meditation, so they fit the ambient definition. But for close listening, the results are pretty tedious and uneventful, similar to an endless outer-space trip to an unknown destination that one never reaches.

—Scott Yanow

The Nepenthe Series Vol. 1: Ripples Of Light; Aurora; Dense Blazing Star; Inflorescence; Glowing Gesture; Bernal Heights; Cirrus; Night Winds; The Eternal River. (40:12)

Personnel: Anthony Pirog, guitar, synth; Nels Cline, John Frusciante, Andy Summers, Brandon Ross, Wendy Eisenberg, Ryan Ferreira; guitar, Janet Leppin, pedal steel guitar; Luke Stewart, bass.

Ordering info: anthony-pirog.bandcamp.com