

work frequently together as musicians.

Imagination (RUPE Media – 111016) is a wonderful example of duo jazz performance. Rupert has a lovely, mellow tone that is well suited to the slow to medium tempo, contemplative approach that marks this album. Drexler is empathetically supportive of Rupert's gentle musings, and masterful when put in the solo spotlight. The tunes are "Without a Song," "I Can't Help It," "Snowfall," Dave Brubeck's "Strange Meadowlark," "Imagination," "A Felicidade," Rupert's "My Mistress' Eyes" and "Soul Eyes." This is wonderful disc for pure listening pleasure, and equally suited as background music, especially for an intimate setting. Duo playing is demanding, and these two musicians answer those demands artfully. (www.cdbaby.com)

■ The music on **East of the Village** (Capri – 74145) by tenor saxophonist **KEITH OXMAN** and his trio partners, Jeff Jenkins on Hammond B3 organ and Todd Reid on drums are all based in the Denver area where they not only play gigs, but also are involved in jazz education. Tenor sax/organ/drum combos are often thought of as primarily being proponents of groove-oriented playing, but these cats have more of a swing to hard bop feeling to their music. Their tune selection is interesting, mixing standards like "Bye Bye Baby" "Deep in a Dream," "Walkin' My Baby Back Home," "Lucky to Be Me" and "(I've Got) Beginner's Luck" with a jazz tune, Hank Mobley's "East of the Village," an original by each of the players, and an old song from the days of vaudeville "Breeze (Blow My Baby back to Me)." Oxman has a robust approach to his playing, Jenkins also takes an aggressive tack, and Reid complements them with great time and just the right accents. This is fun music that seems to have been played with a smile, and should bring about a similar grin to a listener. (www.caprirecords.com)

■ If you ever saw vocalist **MARK MURPHY** in a live performance, you know that you could always expect the unexpected. If anyone deserved to be called a jazz singer, it was Murphy. He combined an exceptionally flexible baritone voice with an unmatched imagination and musical genius that made each performance unique and memorable. Admittedly, he was not everyone's cup o' tea, but if you "got" him, you were forever hooked. This is a roundabout way of saying that the release on **Wild and Free: Live at the Keystone Korner** (HighNote – 7310) is a must have for Murphy enthusiasts. For one hour you can be transported back to those times when you caught Murphy in a club. If you missed that scene, then here is your chance

to catch up. Keystone Korner was THE jazz club in San Francisco when this performance was captured in June, 1980. Murphy had pianist Paul Potyten, bassist Peter Barshay, drummer Jack Gobetti and percussionist Babatunde Lea on percussion as his support group. There are sixteen songs covered on the 14 tracks, each of them sung like you have never heard them before, as Murphy seemed incapable of singing any song the same way twice. This is vintage Mark Murphy, and that is like happening upon a bottle of desirable vintage wine. Let your ears drink up the sounds created by this unique and special singer. (www.jazzdepot.com)

■ Mention the name **DONNY MOST** to someone, and they will probably say something like "you mean the guy who played Ralph Malph on Happy Days." Then tell them that he has just released an album of standards called **Mostly Swinging** (Summit – 690), and they might look at you like you must be kidding. Well, Most has done just that, and the man can sing and swing! Producer and arranger Willie Murillo gathered together a cast of A-list Los Angeles musicians for the dynamic big band backing Most as he does indeed swing his way through a program of 13 standards like "Lover Come Back," "Let's Fall in Love," "I Got It Bad (and That Ain't Good)," "After You've Gone" and "One for My Baby." The influences are surely there, Frank, Dino and Bobby D, but there is no imitation going on here, just a man who loves the songs, and loves to sing them. He breaks no new ground, but has a supple voice, and sounds at home singing along to Murillo's sparkling charts. *Mostly Swinging* is a pleasant surprise from an unexpected source. Welcome to the world of good music, Donny Most! (www.summitrecords.com)

■ **Hearing This and That (Arbors – 19455)** by vocalist **REBECCA KILGORE** and pianist **BERND LHOTZKY** recalls the words in an old public service announcement promoting New Jersey, perfect together. Kilgore has established herself as one of today's finest vocalists, and this recording only enhances that reality. Lhotzky resides in Germany, has long been among the top mainstream jazz pianists on the Continent, and is a member of the heralded quartet Echoes of Spring. These two superb artists recorded this 15-tune collection in Munich, and it is indeed a treasure. Among the selections are "I'm Shooting High," "Baltimore Oriole," "Flying Down to Rio," "By Strauss," "The Best Thing for You" and "You Can't Lose a Broken Heart." Particularly appealing are four songs by Billy Strayhorn, "Lotus Blossom," with lovely lyrics by Roger Schore, "A Flower Is a Lovable Thing," "Grievin'," and "Star-Crossed Lovers," the latter two co-written with Duke Ellington. Lhotzky's

accompaniment is a perfect compliment to Kilgore's smooth, yet hip vocalizing. It is amazing how this music can bring together two musicians from widely different places, and allow them to sound like they work together regularly. That is the magic of jazz, and This and That is surely magical. (www.arborsrecords.com)

■ While she has lived in this country for over 35 years, singer/pianist **ELIANE ELIAS** returned to her native Brazil two years ago to record there for the first time since she emigrated here. The resulting album, *Made in Brazil*, won a Grammy for Best Latin Jazz Album. Following up on this success, she has returned to Brazil for her next album, the recently released **Dance of Time (Concord Jazz -00027)**. This time joining Elias are several guests, including pianist Amilton Godoy, one of her early mentors, Brazilian singer/songwriter/guitarists João Bosco and Toquinho, vibraphonist Mike Mainieri, trumpeter Randy Brecker, and vocalist Mark Kibble, as well as a rhythm section of bassist Marcelo Mariano, guitarist Marcus Teixeira, drummer Edu Ribeiro, and percussionists Marivaldo dos Santos and Gustavo di Dalva. There is an emphasis on samba rhythms, but there are also other Brazilian musical styles employed. Elias is a marvelous pianist who self-accompanies her vocals, ones that are joyous at times and seductive at others. Most of the selections are Brazilian tunes, but there are also two American standards on the program, "You're Getting to Be a Habit with Me" and "Speak Low." Elias has been a significant presence on the jazz and Latin jazz scene since she arrived in New York City in 1981. This album is a winning addition to her catalog of outstanding recordings. (www.concordmusicgroup.com)

This month there are several tribute Cds by vocalists, three dedicated to songwriters and one magical pairing of Ella Fitzgerald and Joe Pass.

■ Vocalist **NANCY VALENTINE** is a staunch advocate for the songs of Billy Strayhorn, and her enthusiasm has led to the release of **Lovesome: Nancy Valentine Sings the Music of Billy Strayhorn (Jazz Garden Records)**. Pianist John di Martino encouraged her to record this CD. Over several sessions, a cadre of musicians, including saxophonists Harry Allen, Dick Oatts and Gary Smulyan; trumpeters Joe Magnarelli and Dominick Farinacci, cornetist Warren Vaché, pianists di Martino and Tamir Hendelman, bassists Boris Koslov, Jay Leonhart and Marco Panascia, and drummers Victor Jones, Tony Jefferson and Kenneth Washington played on the recording. The program covered twelve selections. Two are among the most popular Strayhorn pieces, "A Flower Is a Lovable Thing" and "Something to Live For. Two

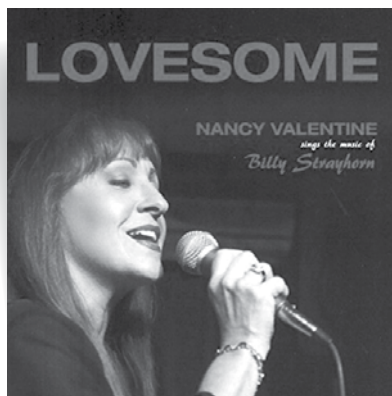
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are well known as instrumental pieces, "Blood Count," and "Lotus Blossom," but the first became "My Flame Burns Blue" when lyrics were added by Elvis Costello, and the latter "Thank You for Everything" with the words provided by Edmund Anderson. Another, "U.M.M.G" or "Upper Manhattan Medical Group" is performed with a wordless vocal by Valentine. The other songs, "You Better Know It," "So This Is Love," "Oo! You Make Me Tingle," "You're the One," "Wounded Love," "Maybe" and "Pretty Girl" are more obscure. Valentine performs each of them with warmth and sensitivity. She reads lyrics with understanding and emotion, occasionally adding scat. The musicians handle the charts by di Martino and Hendelman with aplomb, soloing wonderfully. While Strayhorn has become far more recognized for his genius after his too early demise, with only occasional exceptions most of the attention that he has received centers on his most well known pieces. Thanks to Valentine, some of his less frequently performed works are seeing the light of day on this highly listenable visit to his musical world. Billy Strayhorn's Centennial has drawn to a close, but he'll continue to be honored as May 31 will be the 50th anniversary of his death. *Lovesome* is currently available as a download only. (www.cdbaby.com)

■ Several years ago, vocalist **SHARON PAIGE** and pianist **KEITH INGHAM** released an album devoted to the songs of lyricist Ned Washington, *Love Is the Thing*. Now the same duo has turned their attention to another noted American lyricist, Johnny Burke, on ***Burke Beautiful!*** (Harbinger Records – 3215). Burke is most remembered for his partnership with composer Jimmy Van Heusen with whom he wrote many of the songs popularized in the films of Bing Crosby. Twelve of the sixteen tunes on this album are the work of this pair, including "Aren't You Glad You're You," "But Beautiful," "It Could Happen to You," "Swinging on a Star," "Suddenly It's Spring" and "Like Someone in Love." Two others by this pair that deserve wider recognition are "Sleighride in July" and "Humpty Dumpty Heart," both of which are on the album. Burke also set lyrics to an instrumental number written by Bob Haggart to feature trumpeter Billy Butterfield on the Bob Crosby Orchestra, "I'm Free," and it became a major standard retitled "What's New" when Burke added lyrics. Paige is a straight-ahead vocalist with a pleasing voice, and a nice feel for the lyrics. Ingham, who also wrote the arrangements, is among the most accomplished accompanists on the scene, and is also a superior jazz player. Put all of this together, and the result is a fitting tribute to a gentleman who helped to create some of the most memorable standards in the



Great American Songbook. (HarbingerRecords.com)

■ Last August vocalist **CAROL WOODS** performed a program of songs composed by Richard Whiting at the Metropolitan Room in New York City. The show was enthusiastically received, and subsequently was recorded at that venue on November 12, 2016. Now the music can be enjoyed by a wider audience on ***Ain't We Got Fun: The Richard Whiting Songbook*** (**My Ideal Music – 010**). Woods had the fine supporting team of musical director/ arranger/ pianist Tex Arnold, the longtime accompanist for Whiting's daughter, the legendary Margaret Whiting, bassist Saadi Zahn and drummer Steve Singer. During her one hour show, Woods sang 15 Whiting tunes, many of them familiar standards like "One Hour With You," "Breezin' Along With the Breeze," "My Ideal," "Too Marvelous for Words," "Beyond the Blue Horizon," "She's Funny That Way," "When Did You Leave Heaven" and "Ain't We Got Fun." Others such as "Got No Time," "Sittin' on the Curbstone," "A Day Away From Town" and "Gasoline Gypsies" have remained under the radar. Woods is a consummate performer, with an earthy voice that is robustly expressive. The recording captures the excitement that the show generated, and is the next best thing to having been in the audience. (www.amazon.com)

■ With 2017 being the centennial year of the birth of Ella Fitzgerald, there are likely to be many albums paying tribute to the First Lady of Song. Vocalist **PATRICE WILLIAMSON** and guitarist **JON WHEATLEY** have chosen to address a specific musical relationship in Fitzgerald's career on ***Comes Love: A Tribute to Ella Fitzgerald and Joe Pass*** (Riverlily Records – 003). Fitzgerald and Pass recorded seven albums together. Williamson and Wheatley have chosen a dozen of the tunes from these recordings for their program. It is an impressive list that includes "Bluesette," "'Tis Autumn," "Take Love Easy," "I Want to Talk About You," "Lush Life" and "By Myself." They do not attempt to channel Fitzgerald and Pass. Who could? They are fine artists on their own, both also being on staff at the Berklee College of Music, and have created an impressive recording. Williamson and Wheatley are both lean toward understatement, allowing the songs to be the center of attention. Williamson respects lyrics, and gives each of them a sensitive reading. She is perfectly supported by Wheatley's gentle guitar accompaniment. After listening to *Comes Love* a few times, it became obvious that another volume by this duo would be welcome indeed. (patricewilliamson.com)

