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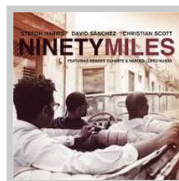
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## Editors' Picks

AUGUST 2011

BY FRANK ALKYER

### Stefon Harris, David Sánchez and Christian Scott, *Ninety Miles* (Concord Picante)

*Ninety Miles* is the most ambitious recording project to come through the DownBeat offices this year. With the Obama administration's more relaxed restrictions on travel to Cuba, a trio of artists who had never played together—trumpeter Christian Scott, vibes master Stefon Harris and saxophonist David Sánchez—traveled the 90 miles from Florida to Cuba, spending a week in Havana to meet and record

with some of the island's top improvisers. The results are stunning. Scott, Harris and Sánchez are joined by pianists Rember Duharte and Harold López-Nussa, bassists Osmar Salazar and Yandy Martínez González, drummers Eduardo Barroetaña and Ruy Adrián López-Nussa, and percussionists Jean Roberto San Miguel and Edgar Martínez Ochoa. If these men were not in Cuba, their names would be much better known in the United States. They are flat-out brilliant musicians. This entire endeavor was fraught with obstacles and opportunities for things to go wrong—from travel challenges to cultural differences to simply learning, rehearsing and playing the material in seven days—and that's part of what makes *Ninety Miles* such a compelling project. There is an immediacy, urgency and beauty to the music. It is simultaneously primal and sophisticated, simple and complex. Take, for example, the opening track, "Ñengueleru," composed by Duharte, which begins with the pianist creating a rapid-fire vamp. He is joined by a Cuban rhythm section with Harris setting up a spicy, clave-infused broth for the horn line to join, and for some soulful solo work by Sánchez. It has you tapping your toes and pondering the intricacies of the multilayered percussion. The CD/DVD package includes scenes from director Devin DeHaven's documentary about the making of the record. This footage gives the listener a deeper understanding of the radiance of this music and a greater appreciation of these artists. *Ninety Miles* is an important artistic and cultural milestone.

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BY FRANK ALKYER

### Sir Roland Hanna, *Colors From A Giant's Kit* (IPO)

Sir Roland Hanna was a pianist's pianist. He created one of the most impressive bodies of work in jazz before his death in 2002, whether as a leader or holding down the piano chair in the Thad Jones–Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra, with Coleman Hawkins, Benny Carter or so many others. On *Colors From A Giant's Kit* we have Sir Roland solo

at the piano with a collection of tunes that serves as lovely companion to *Everything I Love*, his solo piano recording from 2002 that received five stars from DownBeat. Every song on this recording travels at its own feel, pace and beauty, and Hanna's originals are especially powerful. For example, the title track serves as a welcoming, uptempo romp that sets the stage for the artistry to follow. It gives way to "Natalie Rosanne," a majestic prayer of a ballad. "A Story, Often Told But Seldom Heard" is cinematic, bold and moving. But Sir Roland also knows his way around the Great American Songbook. The song "Robbin's Nest" bounces along with his beautiful, left-hand chord work comping for his melodic right. "My Romance" is as quaint and playful as you will ever hear it. "Lush Life" is just that. There are 14 tracks on this recording, and each one delivers a shiver of beauty. Sir Roland had a lovely, rich mind as a pianist and artist. We are fortunate to have one more reminder.

**BUY IT NOW** [IPO Recordings](#)



BY FRANK ALKYER

### Warren Wolf, *Warren Wolf* (Mack Avenue)

In last month's Editors' Picks column, I raved about the number of



great vibes players on the scene right now in reviewing the CD *Common Ground* from The New Gary Burton Quartet. Please, add Warren Wolf to that list. The mallet genius of Wolf came to our attention as a member of Christian McBride's Inside Straight, and now, with his eponymous debut, the 31-year-old is McBride's label mate on Mack Avenue Records. This album offers a wonderful set of original music written by Wolf and his bandmates, who include Tim Green on saxes, Jeremy Pelt on trumpet, Peter Martin on keyboards, Christian McBride holding down the bass and Gregory Hutchinson driving the drums. Blues are at the core of Wolf's own music. On "427 Mass Ave.," he pays tribute to Wally's, the Cambridge, Mass., bar where many Boston-area jazz musicians have cut their teeth on the bandstand. "Katrina" comes in as a powerful blues that acknowledges the suffering caused by the 2005 hurricane that devastated New Orleans. And "One For Lenny" is a burner in honor of Boston drummer Lenny Nelson. There are also two well-placed standards, the Johnny Mandel chestnut "Emily" and Chick Corea's "Señor Mouse," on which Wolf plays solo, full of swirling percussion, reverb, nuance and chops. Corea and Gary Burton played the tune as a duet on the album *Crystal Silence*, but Wolf overdubs vibraphone over marimba here. The result is hypnotic. The tune tells you exactly who Warren Wolf is—an artist of immense ability and taste.

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BY AARON COHEN

**Maraca & His Latin Jazz All Stars,**  
**Reencuentros** (Descarga Sarl)

In a sign that the door to Cuban artists may be opening a crack in the United States, the terrific flutist Orlando "Maraca" Valle has been able to return and tour these shores after a too-lengthy absence. A performance earlier this summer at Chicago's Old Town School of Folk Music's Folk & Roots Festival was a fired-up descarga jam session, but this new CD/DVD package shows that his concepts go beyond winning over dancers. *Reencuentros*, recorded live at Havana's Grand Theater in January 2010, presents his collaboration with the Havana Chamber Orchestra. This classical-meets-Latin dance-meets-jazz blend also includes contributions from Japanese violin virtuoso Sayaka, saxophonist David Sánchez and drummer Horacio "El Negro" Hernández. And Maraca is not content to have lush strings and strong percussion serve as the background to his improvisational flights on such standards as "Manteca." His skills as a composer and arranger keep the music constantly shifting in surprising directions, like on "Danzón Siglo XXI." While the DVD provides additional tracks and a visual dimension to how this all worked, it would be far better for more Americans to get the chance to see these visionary, large-scale performances in Havana.

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BY BOBBY REED

**Herb Alpert & Lani Hall,**  
**I Feel You** (Concord Jazz)

At a Chicago concert in June, Lani Hall told the audience that she vividly remembers seeing the handsome Herb Alpert on TV playing "The Lonely Bull" in 1962. Hall then met him in 1966 when she was a vocalist in Sergio Mendes' band, who were signed to A&M (the label Alpert co-founded). About seven years after that, Hall and Alpert wed in 1973. After four decades together, they certainly know each other's taste in musical arrangements, and Alpert is masterful when it comes to interweaving his trademark, muted trumpet lines with a singer's measured delivery. Following a live disc in 2009 titled *Anything Goes* (Concord Jazz), the husband and wife teamed up for this new studio album. It opens with an ultra-cool rendition of Van Morrison's "Moondance" and includes two imaginative arrangements of Beatles tunes. Percussionist Michael Shapiro's rapid-fire brushwork creates an intriguing tension with Hall's deliberate vocals on "Here Comes The Sun." Hall is a sophisticated vocalist who can make delightfully unpredictable turns, shifting into her lower register right at the moment when you think she'll ascend, as she does on "Blackbird." A light, sly version of "Til There Was You" is reminiscent of the magical combination of virtuosity and jocularly that made Herb Alpert & The Tijuana Brass globetrotting superstars in the '60s. Hussain Jiffry's bass playing is superb throughout the album, particularly on "Club Esquina," which is the aural equivalent of sitting in front of an open window in a coastal cottage, sipping wine while an ocean breeze drifts in at the conclusion of a satisfying day.

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BY BOBBY REED

**James Farm, James Farm** (Nonesuch)

Buzz has been building, but in case you've not heard, the members of the jazz quartet James Farm are saxophonist Joshua Redman,

pianist Aaron Parks, bassist Matt Penman and drummer Eric Harland. The band's self-titled debut is a generous offering—10 tracks, 69 minutes, all originals. Each of the four members individually composed material for the album. Three cuts here linger past the 8-minute mark, the most infectious of which is “Polliwog,” a danceable number with a slinky groove, over top of which Redman weaves a compelling narrative line on tenor before Parks somersaults in with an exciting solo that nearly comes unhinged yet stays intriguingly intact. I first noticed Parks' compositional skills with “Ashé,” a powerful track on Terence Blanchard's 2007 album *A Tale Of God's Will (A Requiem For Katrina)*. Parks has a remarkable gift for melody, and “Bijou” is another gem. Astoundingly, the first time the band ever played it was in the recording studio, and the first take wound up becoming track 3 on the album. Harland's drum solo on the Parks composition “Chronos” illustrates his ability to make a statement without grandstanding, all the while buttressing the overall arc of a song. “1981” is a piece that Penman has said was partially inspired by pop band The Police, and one could imagine a Sting fan happily loading this tune into an iPod. James Farm has the potential to become an “umbrella” act that traditional jazz fans, fusion buffs and rock listeners will all embrace. The tour itinerary on the band's [website](#) includes dates at the Monterey Jazz Festival (Sept. 17), at Boston's Berklee Performance Center (Sept. 23) and at Anthology in San Diego (Oct. 2).



BY AARON COHEN

**Deep Blue Organ Trio, *Wonderful!*** (Origin)

In the not-too-distant future, Stevie Wonder's compositions will become standard repertoire for jazz musicians. When that day comes, the Deep Blue Organ Trio's *Wonderful!* will serve as the example for how his tunes should be interpreted. The group fully knows Wonder's catalog, going deeper than the obvious hits. And they know each other even better, which comes from playing together every Tuesday at Chicago's Green Mill club. Chris Foreman's masterful organ lines veer from intensive minor-key shimmering on “Golden Lady” to the deeply funky drive of “Tell Me Something Good.” But he's just as sharp in how he builds an elaborate frame around guitarist (and the disc's producer) Bobby Broom's low-key melodic beauty on “My Cherie Amour.” Drummer Greg Rockingham dives into the pocket on “Tell Me Something Good” and creates the right amount of spaces for Foreman and Broom on “As” and “It Ain't No Use.” Most important: Wonder's energetic spirit is always palpable.



BY AARON COHEN

**Lucas Santtana, *Sem Nostalgia*** (Mais Um Discos)

International mashups are nothing new to Brazilian musicians. But while North American and European audiences began to appreciate the country's Tropicalia innovators—30 years after that genre's creation—subsequent generations of composers in Rio De Janeiro and São Paulo never ceased creating individual, and often very funny, statements from their own and other countries' traditions. For the past dozen years, songwriter/producer Lucas Santtana has been one of the leaders in this ongoing movement. His new disc, *Sem Nostalgia*, is less than 40 minutes long, but it ideally crystallizes his concepts. Alongside Brazilophile American producer Arto Lindsay, Santtana blends the hushed “voz e violão” (voice and guitar) approach that João Gilberto pioneered with the sound of the indigenous stringed berimbau and mixes it with shimmering, sparse electronic effects. Santtana and Lindsay clearly know and appreciate all these genres so well that they can twist them to their own ends. Usually, this sort of thing is called a mashup (and, indeed, the leadoff track is called “Super Violão Mashup”), but that aggressive term seems inadequate for music this quietly compelling.



BY BOBBY REED

**Various Artists,**

***Jazz Roots: The Music Of The Americas*** (Sony Masterworks Jazz)

Looking for a double-CD primer that surveys nearly the entire history of jazz? One ambitious and easily accessible option is *Jazz Roots: The Music Of The Americas*. It includes 36 tracks covering the vast period of 1916–2008. Listening to the entire 147 minutes of music in one sitting is a wild ride, with a few abrupt bumps, but then again, it would be impossible to devise a perfectly cohesive mixtape that summarizes nearly a century. As an addition to an individual's music library, however, it's hard to argue with the merits of any collection that offers Scott Joplin's “Maple Leaf Rag,” Louis Armstrong and His Hot Five's “West End Blues,” Billie Holiday's “God Bless The Child,” Duke Ellington's “Take The ‘A’ Train,” and Miles Davis' “So What,” plus cuts from Frank Sinatra, Sarah Vaughan, Thelonius Monk, Dizzy Gillespie, Antonio Carlos Jobim and Weather Report. The proceedings get extremely too smooth for my taste toward the end of disc 2 (where both Kenny G and Chris Botti pop up), but no act is represented by more than one song, so it's easy enough to skip around the tracks. This package is the result of a collaboration between

the Quincy Jones Musiq Consortium and Larry Rosen, who created and produced the concert/educational series called *Jazz Roots*. Kudos to Rosen for educating fans about Afro-Cuban sounds by highlighting Machito, Tito Puente and Tiempo Libre. Also, any youngsters who've never heard Benny Goodman's "Sing, Sing, Sing" (recorded at Carnegie Hall in 1938) might be forever transformed by its titanic infectiousness.

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