

Ben Wendel *What We Bring*

MOTÉMA

★★★★

Kneebody collaborator and soulful saxophonist Ben Wendel continues to build on the steam generated from his previous solo releases. What's particularly striking about the Vancouver-born Wendel's third release, as much as his riveting compositions, is the mighty solidity of the assembled quintet.

Wendel is far from a purist: He's worked with Snoop Dog, producer Daedelus, the daKAH Hip-Hop Orchestra and pop star Jason Mraz. The saxophonist's genre-hopping career has prepared him to become a generous and encouraging leader, and on *What We Bring*, Wendel brings together some of the finest players in New York City, including pianist Gerald Clayton, drummer Henry Cole and bassist Joe Sanders. More than perform Wendel's music, they imbibe and devour it.

The band's complete absorption of the music is evident on every dreamlike track, from floating opener "Amian" to the half-time high-stepper "Song Song." Cole and Sanders are perhaps the main initiators of Wendel's objectives, their tapestry of tones and rhythmic flow permeating every track. Wendel's sinewy, coyote-like timbre holds everything together and drives the music's energy, as ethereal as it is gritty.

—Ken Micallef

What We Bring: Amian; Fall; Spring; Doubt; Song Song; Soli; Austin; Solar. (46:26)

Personnel: Ben Wendel, tenor saxophone, bassoon; Gerald Clayton, piano; Joe Sanders, bass; Henry Cole, drums.

Ordering info: motema.com



Jim Snidero *MD66*

SAVANT 2156

★★★★½

Alto saxophonist Jim Snidero's *MD66* is an album that starts out bursting at the seams. Caught between form and pure expression, Snidero's horn is on fire for most of these eight tunes, which include seven originals (one from pianist Andy LaVerne) and the Miles Davis/Bill Evans standard "Blue In Green."

The album begins with the swinging title track, and the rhythm section of LaVerne, bassist Ugonna Okegwo and drummer Rudy Royston lays the groundwork for the front line of Snidero and trumpeter Alex Sipiagin. Royston is all over his drums, supporting every soloist on tunes that swerve between swing and loose-limbed funk.

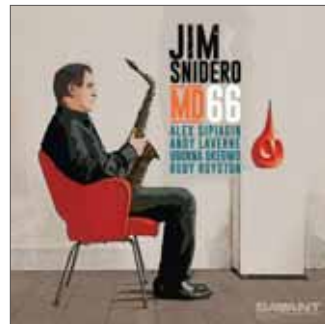
"Recursion" falls squarely in line with an old-school Blue Note sensibility. It's a waltzing swing, and Snidero's production makes each instrument sound as if it was playing in your living room. "Free Beauty" veers toward more open territory, eschewing a steady pulse in favor of eddies of expression, while the modest "Unified" offers unison lines, delicate playing and a funky drive. "Purge" ends where *MD66* began: in the territory of swinging, blazing fury.

—John Ephland

MD66: MD66; Recursion; Free Beauty; Unified; Who We've Known; Un4Scene; Blue In Green; Purge. (52:40)

Personnel: Jim Snidero, alto saxophone; Alex Sipiagin, trumpet; Andy LaVerne, piano; Ugonna Okegwo, bass; Rudy Royston, drums.

Ordering info: jazzdepot.com



Jeff Denson Quartet *Concentric Circles*

RIDGEWAY RECORDS

★★★★

Jeff Denson presents a strong and progressive program for his fifth album. Nine originals showcase his virtuosic upright bass skills and turn-on-a-dime charts for a band that executes the tricky themes with aplomb.

Beyond Denson's compositional imagination, fingering fleetness and soft, sure tone, bassoonist Paul Hanson is the album's star. Despite the intrinsic challenges of his double-reed instrument, Hanson is impressively able to deliver complex yet clear improvisations that would make a bebop master saxophonist proud. His high pitches can be trumpet-like, his lows full as a tuba, and he doesn't go out of tune.

Pianist Dan Zelman shadows and supports the lead lines, stretches gracefully and adds warmth that bonds the ensemble. Drummer Alan Hall is emphatic or subtle, as appropriate—switching midway through "A Thought That Lingers" to clap his sticks together, laying out when Denson bows. The bassist sings his own lyrics on "Wishing Well" and wordless syllables like Milton Nascimento on "Once The Door Opens"—not the album's best moments. But the finale, a solo arco rendition of Ellington's "I Got It Bad," is a nice touch.

—Howard Mandel

Concentric Circles: City Life On Trains; Anticipation; A Thought That Lingers; Wishing Well; Look Before You Leap; Time Waits For No One; 21st Century Blues; Once The Door Opens; Circle; I Got It Bad. (48:09)

Personnel: Jeff Denson, bass, vocals; Paul Hanson, bassoon; Dan Zelman, piano; Alan Hall, drums.

Ordering info: ridgewayrecords.net



Fred Frith Trio *Another Day In Fucking Paradise*

INTAKT 267

★★★★½

Improviser and multi-instrumentalist Fred Frith has released music nearly every year since the early '70s. Through countless collaborations, solo albums, soundtracks and more, he has continually kept his listeners, and fellow musicians, at the edges of their seats. His new album, *Another Day In Fucking Paradise*, is no exception.

Each member of this trio—Frith on guitar, Jason Hoopes on bass and Jordan Glenn on drums—adds sounds, layers and textures to the often-dense improvisational soundscapes. But the sound design is so clear and vivid that listeners will be able to easily distinguish individual voices. Though complex and multifaceted, the music never veers toward excess. Listeners will have no trouble staying grounded in the sonic mix.

But this album is no easy listening. Musically, there's a lot going on. The way it pushes the listener toward the brink of sensory overload is exciting—the ears learn to adapt and function in an uncommon way. Not for the faint of heart, *Another Day In Fucking Paradise* will leave its listeners tripped out and travel-weary, but ultimately in a better place.

—Izzy Yellen

Another Day In Fucking Paradise: The Origin Of Marvels; Dance Of Delusion; Poor Folly; La Tempeta; Glimmers Of Goodbyes; Yard With Lunatics; Only Light And Shadow; The Sleep Of Reason; Straw Men; The Deserted Garden; Schlechtes Gewissen; Phantoms Of Progress; The Ride Home. (48:56)

Personnel: Fred Frith, electric guitar, voice; Jason Hoopes, electric bass, double bass; Jordan Glenn, drums, percussion.

Ordering info: intaktrec.ch

