

Reverse Blue
Mary Halvorson (Relative Pitch)
 by Stuart Broomer

Mary Halvorson has worked in numerous bands in recent years and is able to assert her musical personality across a welter of styles while still enhancing each context. *Reverse Blue* has yet another identity. The quartet with tenor saxophonist/clarinetist Chris Speed, bassist Eivind Opsvik and drummer Tomas Fujiwara first came together in 2011, assembled for one of Search and Restore's "Spontaneous Constructions" at the Blue Note. From those improvised beginnings has come a band with a remarkably distinct personality and a strong orientation to composition and form.

The group's originality is apparent from the opening "Torturer's Reverse Delight", which begins with an almost medieval lightness and regularity of line. Speed's tenor tone is so dry that one might keep looking for a bassoon credit, as if all the treble has been rolled off, while Halvorson's tone is acoustic to the point of suggesting a harpsichord. The melodic pattern persists but the music shifts, with Opsvik and Fujiwara soon supplying big-beat rock drama that lends a Zappa-esque cast. Chamber music textures are frequent here, with both a keen sense of sound and significant room for every voice. There's an uncanny sense of matched timbres, guitar and clarinet seeming to cross into one another's terrain, even exchanging identities. On "Ordered Thoughts Ceased", Opsvik's solo arises directly out of the theme, his lines crossing Speed and Halvorson's wisps of melody. There's often a sense of form and tumult existing simultaneously, as on "Old Blue" where Speed maintains order while Halvorson and Fujiwara play freely.

The result is a pleasantly doubled sense to the listening experience, as if form is both maintained and created. Six of the compositions are Halvorson's, but everyone in the band contributes at least one, including Opsvik's resonant "Resting on Laurels". Halvorson may be the outstanding improvising guitarist of her generation, but it's not just about the solos. Her playing here has a conceptual and orchestral depth that's matched by every member on *Reverse Blue*.

For more information, visit relativepitchrecords.com. This group is at *Cornelia Street Café* Oct. 2nd-3rd. See Calendar.



Gone, but not Forgotten
Johnathan Blake (Criss Cross)
 by George Kanzler

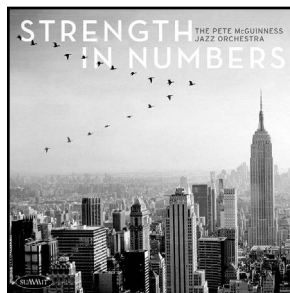
Drummer Johnathan Blake delivers two distinct concepts on his Criss Cross debut as a leader: a program of dedications to recently deceased musicians, mostly employing their own compositions although the mood is more celebratory than elegiac, and a quartet featuring two tenor saxophonists, Chris Potter and Mark Turner, plus bassist Ben Street.

Blake grew up in Philadelphia, the son of the

recently passed jazz violinist John Blake Jr., and some of the musicians honored here were local jazz luminaries he grew up listening to, like organist Trudy Pitts, whose stately ballad "Anysha" is given a trio reading with Turner; pianist Sid Simmons, whose Latin-tinged "Maracas Beach" features Potter's only foray on alto flute; and bassist Charles Fambrough, whose uptempo "Broski" invokes classic tenor duels over bashing drums. Blake's two originals (of 11 tracks) are "The Shadower", a drum feature dedicated to the late bassist Dwayne Burno, and "Born Yesterday", a flowing 6/4 piece interweaving Turner's soprano with Potter's tenor, dedicated to saxophonist Jimmy Greene's daughter, Ana, killed in the Newtown school massacre.

For a band with no chordal instrument and two tenors on eight tracks, Blake has fashioned an admirable variety of musical scenarios. The tenors emulate the electric wail of Eddie Harris' sax on his "Cryin' Blues"; weave in extended tandem coda solos to conclude a sophisticated take of Cedar Walton's "Firm Roots"; and trade off between soloing and carrying a fugue-like riff on Paul Motian's "Circle Dance". The two tenors also show a fine empathy in exchanging lead and obbligato roles on the lovely Jim Hall ballad "All Across the City", Blake proving his sensitivity with brushes. And the two horns prove equally adept at bop soloing on Mulgrew Miller's rhythm changes "New Wheels" and straightahead swing for Neal Hefti's "Two for the Blues", written as a feature for dueling Basie tenors Franks Foster and Wess.

For more information, visit crisscrossjazz.com. Blake is at *Village Vanguard* Oct. 1st-5th with Ravi Coltrane and 7th-12th with Tom Harrell. See Calendar.



Strength in Numbers
Pete McGuinness Jazz Orchestra (Summit)
 by Donald Elfman

Pete McGuinness has been leading his Jazz Orchestra for over seven years and continues to offer inventive writing geared towards his special family of musicians. *Strength in Numbers* is aptly titled both for its tunes and the extraordinary musicians the leader has gathered.

Surprises abound in this fine new recording right from the outset. "The Send-Off" is McGuinness' dedication to Bob Brookmeyer, particularly in the way small elements serve as the foundation for a larger structure. One of those phrases, buoyed by the always-right drumming of Scott Neumann, ultimately gathers in the whole band and serves as a launching pad for tenor saxophonist Tom Christensen. He burns through several choruses, the knockout rhythm section of pianist Mike Holober, bassist Andy Eulau and Neumann providing power ballast. Christensen is soon in the midst of a ferocious cadenza with Neumann, wailing mightily. Suddenly the music stops and every section is given a workout and things get fierce, only to get quiet down as Holober opens the very brief final few bars.

Then comes another unexpected pleasure. McGuinness' take on Michel Legrand's "What Are You Doing The Rest Of Your Life" is reimagined as a waltz where the melody and harmony also get reworked. Even in its new form the tune retains what the leader calls Legrand's "sense of romance and melancholy". And out of a beautiful nowhere comes McGuinness singing the tune in a voice and manner that feels both crafted and completely spontaneous. It's a lovely

performance. The leader is also a fine trombonist, as evident in his intimate and personal playing on "Trixie's Little Girl", a tribute to his mother. Yet another surprise is the band's wonderful samba take on Stephen Foster's "Beautiful Dreamer" featuring alto saxophonist Dave Pietro and Holober.

This orchestra can go from sounding like a wailing Basie-like unit to an adventurous, subtly and deftly arranged ensemble. *Strength in Numbers* presents the vast palette of colors and textures at McGuinness and his group of great musicians' command.

For more information, visit summitrecords.com. McGuinness is at *Tomi Jazz Oct. 1st* with Craig Yaremkó. See Calendar.

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- Sylvain Rifflet/Jon Irabagon — *Perpetual Motion: A Celebration of MoonDog* (Jazz Village)
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