



The Unheard Artie Shaw
The New York All-Star Big Band
(featuring Dan Levinson) (Hep)

by Alex Henderson

Iconic clarinetist Artie Shaw (who died in 2004 at 94) is best remembered as among the most famous of the Swing Era bandleaders and that outfit's lesser-known arrangements are the focus of this album. The title is somewhat misleading because some of these arrangements from Jerry Gray, Eddie Durham and others were, in fact, heard on Shaw's live radio broadcasts of the '30s so the New York All-Star Big Band (with James Langton conducting and Dan Levinson featured extensively as lead clarinet) is, in effect, paying tribute to Shaw's live performances.

Appropriately, the CD opens with the ominous "Nightmare", which was used as Shaw's theme during his '30s broadcasts from the Blue Room in midtown Manhattan's Hotel Lincoln. The band goes on to recreate the spirit of Shaw's live broadcasts with instrumental performances of "I've Got the World on a String", "In the Mood", "Diga Diga Doo" and other standards part of his repertoire during that era.

Soloists include trumpeter Jon-Erik Kellso, tenor saxophonist Mark Lopeman and trombonists Harvey Tibbs and Jim Fryer. Levinson is the main lead and draws on the Shaw/Benny Goodman style whether playing Clarence Williams/Spencer Williams' "Royal Garden Blues", Irving Berlin's "How Deep Is the Ocean" or Cole Porter's "Begin the Beguine" (one of Shaw's biggest hits). On his hit 1940 recording of "Stardust", Shaw performed the Hoagy Carmichael standard as a slow ballad with lush strings; the Gray arrangement here is delivered at midtempo and will be familiar to collectors who have heard Hindsight Records' CDs of Shaw's Blue Room broadcasts.

There are six vocal performances: four with Moanin' Mary ("Them There Eyes", "You Go to My Head", "Trav'lin Alone" and "The Moon Looks Down and Laughs") and two by Molly Ryan ("And the Angels Sing" and "Stairway to the Stars"). The latter is clearly paying homage to Shaw vocalist Helen Forrest while the former is more a combination of Billie Holiday (who appeared on some of Shaw's live dates) and Peggy Lee.

Those who have only heard Shaw's studio hits for RCA Victor are overlooking an important part of his history: the live broadcasts, many of which, thankfully, have been reissued on CD. *The Unheard Artie Shaw* is an enjoyable salute to that part of his legacy.

For more information, visit hepjazz.com. Levinson is at St. Michael's Cemetery May 19th and Mezzrow May 30th. See Calendar.



Fullmoon
Stephanie Richards (Relative Pitch)
by Robert Bush

Trumpeter Stephanie Richards' days of flying under the radar of the creative music consciousness may be

coming to a welcome end, thanks to recent high-profile assignments with Anthony Braxton and Henry Threadgill. Richards studied conduction under the late Butch Morris and, after years in Brooklyn, migrated out west to teach at UC-San Diego.

Fullmoon is a superb introduction to her music, which will please fans of masters like Lester Bowie and Bill Dixon. Recorded "live" in a room in tandem with the sampling of Dino J.A. Deane, Richards explores the timbral possibilities of her trumpet engaging and interacting with other resonating bodies to create a singular textural experience.

Richards and Deane open "New Moon" with warbled sputtering and a variety of organic and inorganic samples. Right away, her mastery of tonal manipulation becomes apparent. She places the bell of her horn at various distances and angles to "Snare", achieving a remarkable variety of textures supported by Deane's library of martial cadences. It is worth noting this album, without benefit of multi-tracking, ascends to a beautifully orchestral feeling.

On "Piano", Richards placed a brick on the sustain pedal and blew into the instrument, enjoying the long decay and the manipulation of specific overtones while Deane hovers in the background with sympathetic swells of eerie textures. On "Gong Pt. I", Richards sat on the floor, pointing the bell of her horn up to a large gong hanging a few inches above her head. Certain tones activated sympathetic overtones, creating new combinations. "Gong Pt. II" was made possible by Richards playing her flugelhorn without a mouthpiece, utilizing her diaphragm for a specific type of vibrato reminiscent of bagpipes or shakuhachi. Placing her horn just above or coming into actual contact with the surface of "Timpani" creates a wonderfully weird distortion and at times the blend of her instrument and that of Deane becomes nearly impossible to differentiate.

On "Full Moon I", electronic drones underpin a keening high-end yearning evoking Kenny Wheeler and on "Full Moon II", Richards spits air out of the horn while Deane feeds her output back into the room, manipulating the content to make a dizzying swirl of sounds. This is a very impressive debut as a leader from Richards, who won't be under anyone's radar for much longer.

For more information, visit relativepitchrecords.com. This project is at National Sawdust May 19th. See Calendar.



Plays Monk
Duck Baker (Triple Point)
by Clifford Allen

In looking through discographies of various early-modern jazz guitarists, the music of Thelonious Monk enters playbooks only sporadically. Kenny Burrell didn't record Monk until 1963; Wes Montgomery chewed on these pieces a bit earlier, primarily in live settings. René Thomas' 1960 *Guitar Groove* LP includes "Ruby, My Dear" and that in itself is a treat (duskily interweaving guitar and tenor over soft rhythmic footfalls). It's also easy to forget, as canonized as Monk is, how little his music was covered by others during his floruit—soprano saxophonist Steve Lacy being a rare exception. Monk was considered the "high priest of bebop" and his tunes a heady challenge to play, but the pianist, born just over a century ago on the coastal plains of North Carolina and raised in New York,

imbued his music with the blues. It's not hard to trace the lineage of his craggy tunes and their wry intervals to ragtime and folk-blues songsters, many of whom plied their trade on the six-string.

Fingerstyle guitarist Duck Baker is the kind of musician for whom a project like the recording of nine unaccompanied Monk compositions is a natural fit. His work has often favored soli and small chamber ensembles absent piano or drums, focusing on standard repertoire with a deceptively loose, easy swing that allows lines to unfurl in surprising directions (vis-a-vis Lacy). *Plays Monk* is, in a way, a follow up to *Spinning Song*, a recording Baker made of Herbie Nichols' music for John Zorn's Avant label in 1996, but these tunes open up into different spaces, not to mention adding two decades' worth of lived artistry.

The set starts with "Blue Monk", which was the first Monk piece Baker learned (and features in one of his jazz fingerstyle instructional videos), puckish harmonics and spindly elisions tapping in the direction of song before emerging in twangy pirouettes; furious runs gallop and almost obscure the fact that one is listening to an acoustic guitarist. It takes a certain kind of solo player to embody an orchestral concept where a pianist or saxophonist might be 'hearable' whether or not they are present. That said, solo study and the shape of a tune — a pearl or a jewel in this case — is paramount and Baker imbues a chestnut like "Round Midnight" with winsome parlor snap and "Bemsha Swing" with crisp, raggy jounce. Putting bebop, written craft and improvisation through their paces, *Plays Monk* is a masterful recording of creative solo fingerstyle.

For more information, visit triplepointrecords.com. Baker is at Wonders of Nature May 20th. See Calendar.

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