

Outside
Duck Baker (Emanem)
Deja Vouty
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Shades of Blue
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 by Clifford Allen

Fingerstyle guitarist Duck Baker has been active in recording, teaching and writing since the '70s, first out of San Francisco and now in England. Three new discs feature his jazz bona fides, both solo and in ensemble, in a balance between openness and hewed concision.

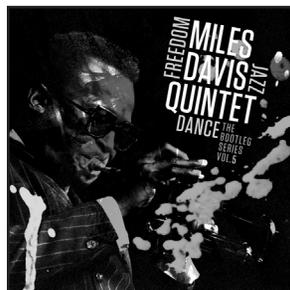
Outside is a hefty collection of solos and two duets with guitarist Eugene Chadbourne recorded between 1977-83, often utilizing extended techniques and a phraseology owing as much to Jimmy Giuffre and Steve Lacy as modern guitar technicians. Baker had been recording for ED Denson and Stefan Grossman's Kicking Mule label during this period, though all of the cuts here are previously unissued. Across two sessions recorded in Turin and London, Baker covers Ornette Coleman's "Peace", the standard "You Are My Sunshine" and performs gorgeous renditions of the slowly unfurling originals "Southern Cross" and "Like Flies". Running through the entire set is Baker's youthful, effusive bluster and penchant for crisp ferocity, emblemized by the furious jigger of "Breakdown Lane", "No Family Planning" and "Klee", the latter utilizing percussive knocks and rugged hollow-body scrape in addition to muted, worried string filaments. The earliest recordings here are from Calgary in 1977 and consist of two short soli and two rare compositions from the Chadbourne book; the closer, "Things Sure Must Be Hoppin' Tonight on Castro Street", is a dedication to saxophonist Bruce Ackley, harboring lo-fi burble and ghostly insectile movement.

The bulk of Baker's current musical activity is focused on trios, generally with clarinetist Alex Ward and bassist John Edwards (replacing Joe Williamson) and follows in the footsteps of Giuffre's chamber trios and their few brethren in blending a soft-shoed, meaty swing with modern harmonic concepts. *Deja Vouty* sports a program of originals, loping singsong melodies and parlor grace supporting Ward's squirrely false-fingered huffs and the guitarist's penchant for alternating definitive chunks and ambiguous eddies. The latter are in full view on "Twelve Gates", circular paths sparking gentle dissonance against an elegant pizzicato bulwark, Ward's puffed and throaty declamations skating across the top. "The Blues Is The Blues Is The Blues Is" evokes and quotes Coltrane's "Mr. Syms" at the beginning, supplely tangled in a booming walk and reedy pirouettes. While never having met composers like Herbie Nichols or Thelonious Monk, their strategies, as distilled through Lacy and trombonist Roswell Rudd, are evident in Baker's music.

Shades of Blue is an excellent companion to the above, including both variants of the clarinet trio—Williamson and Edwards in the bass chair—along with an otherwise undocumented outfit of Baker, clarinetist Ben Goldberg and violinist Carla Kihlstedt. There are also stirring duets with Rudd, reed player Michael Moore and Hawaiian guitarist Ken Emerson on this sampler of small-group configurations recorded over the last 15 years. The set consists of five tunes from the guitarist's pen as well as the aforementioned "Mr. Syms" and renditions of Nichols' "Lady Sings the Blues" and "The Happenings" as well as "Buddy Bolden's Blues" (abstracted into "A Buddy Uptown" on *Deja Vouty*). Fluty curls embody Moore's delicate alto on the saxophonist's "Families Be So Mean", a curious pairing with Baker's twangy grace caught at

the Bimhuis in 2008, while Rudd steals the show on a rendition of "Lady Sings the Blues", based on the trombonist's arrangement of the tune on Archie Shepp's 1966 LP *Live in San Francisco*. The trio with Kihlstedt and Goldberg slides through Nichols' "The Happenings" in a bouncy, weird and grainy swing and provides an interesting complement to the snap of the bass-driven unit.

For more information, visit emanemdisc.com and duckbaker.com. Baker plays solo at The Stone Oct. 3rd. See Calendar.



Freedom Jazz Dance: The Bootleg Series, Vol. 5
Miles Davis Quintet (Columbia-Legacy)
 by Anders Griffen

The fifth volume in the Miles Davis Bootleg Series celebrates the 50th anniversary of *Miles Smiles*. The liner notes state, "it includes every recorded second of the sessions", which took place 50 years ago on Oct. 24th-25th. The set also collects session reels and master takes of "Fall" and title tracks from *Nefertiti* and *Water Babies*. Besides the master takes, all performances are previously unreleased and contributed to five albums: *Miles Smiles*, *Sorcerer*, *Nefertiti*, *Miles in the Sky* and *Water Babies*. The producers have curated a program, not all-inclusive or chronological, but an engaging musical progression like an album.

Davis' "second great quintet" of Wayne Shorter (tenor saxophone), Herbie Hancock (piano), Ron Carter (bass) and Tony Williams (drums) was the longest lasting unit led by Davis—the rhythm section had been in place since spring of 1963, Shorter the final piece of the puzzle, joining by fall of 1964, and they stayed together into 1968. This is the second of the five sets in *Bootleg Series* to deal exclusively with this group.

The studio banter and rehearsals are illuminating. It's amazing to hear Davis, Carter and Williams each say they can't do it and just persevere and figure it out. This band has been immortalized and while this virtual studio access humanizes them, it doesn't take away any of the magic. On the contrary, it is astounding that they put this together on the spot the way they did. Davis is clearly the leader but relies on input from every member and his leadership empowers them. The listener witnesses this unfold with these session reels.

The liner notes by Ashley Kahn basically do the job, but could have been more insightful. He claims "Freedom Jazz Dance" is noteworthy for the manner in which Miles slowed down the tempo from Harris' original. While there are several things "noteworthy" about this performance, that is not one of them, because it's not even true! At 23 minutes, this is the longest session reel. Even though the listener can hear "every recorded second", the tape starts and stops and when the tape is rolling again the quintet has already listened to a playback, had a conversation and the music is different. Over the course you can hear the arrangement come together. Davis splits up the melody to leave more space, mostly so he can actually play it, extending Harris' 10-bar form to 16-bars: it's pretty much 2 bars of melody + 2 bars of rhythm until the turnaround. After Davis gets his part together, he shifts his focus back to the drums and asks for triplets.

It's astonishing to hear "Nefertiti" come together in the studio. They play a little under five minutes, repeating the head over and over before Davis stops them saying, "why don't we make a tune...with just playin' the melody?" Apparently there was an earlier

rehearsal take that wasn't recorded, so we don't get to hear what precipitated repeating the melody like that. Many of the session reels reveal similar moments of resolution, but some tunes required more work than others. "Masqualero" is an incredible, complete performance; it's surprising that it went unreleased until now. Davis came to the studio with lead sheets and ideas, but the band didn't have arrangements. What they did have was a tremendous rapport and this set provides new insight into this seminal ensemble.

For more information, visit legacyrecordings.com. A Miles Davis tribute led by Chick Corea is at Blue Note Oct. 26th-30th. See Calendar.

UNEARTHED GEM

Johnny Come Lately (Live in Groningen 1973)
 Ben Webster Meets Piet Noordijk
 (Nederlands Jazz Archief)
 by Matthew Kassel

Ben Webster spent his final decade as a kind of troubled troubadour of the tenor saxophone. He was a lonely peripatetic zigzagging his way through Europe, getting drunk and gaining weight, his days as a featured soloist in Duke Ellington's orchestra well behind him. The year he died, in 1973 at age 64, he needed a cane and the muscular energy he'd brought to his instrument had dissipated. Webster's famously virile blues phrases were lumbering and disjointed and his breathy vibrato on ballads was reduced to a narcotized wheeze.

That's the standard narrative, anyway. But *Johnny Come Lately*, a recently unearthed live recording from the Groningen jazz club De Koffer, may give listeners a deeper, more complicated portrait of Webster at the end of his life. It is a record crackling with energy, though it very well could have been a throwaway. "Expectations were low on Friday, February 2, 1973," Webster biographer Jeroen de Valk writes in the informative liner notes. Webster showed up too late for the soundcheck and he was tired and drunk, beginning his set slouched in a chair, accompanied by pianist Irv Rochlin, bassist Rob Langereis and drummer Tony Inzalaco.

It wasn't until alto saxophonist Piet Noordijk, who died five years ago this month at 79, showed up that things got interesting and the album pulls seven tracks from the encounter. Noordijk, in fact, arrived drunk and forced his way into the crowded club. As the liner notes reveal, Webster initially looked at Noordijk askance. But the Dutch saxophonist's brisk sense of rhythm and flashy tone must have given the elder musician a sense of urgency. Webster's playing on "Old Folks" and "Sophisticated Lady", both ballads, is as lovely as anything he recorded. He smears his way through some solos—"Sweet Georgia Brown", for instance, is a bit too fast for his laconic phrasing—and strains to elongate a note here and there. But the architecture of Webster's beautiful improvisational style is largely intact.

This is one of Webster's last statements, an artifact of his sweet, longing sound, proving he still had it in him just seven months before he died.

For more information, visit jazzarchief.nl