

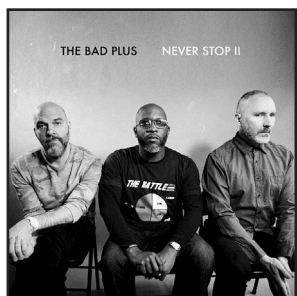
**One Mind**  
Peter Zak Quartet (featuring Marcos Varela)  
(Fresh Sound)  
by Ken Dryden

Pianist Peter Zak has gathered critical acclaim for his output over the past decade as a leader or co-leader of varied small-group sessions. His new quartet features bassist Marcos Varela, with whom he played numerous gigs over a several-year period, in addition to another old friend, drummer Billy Drummond. The fourth player, veteran tenor saxophonist Seamus Blake is both an accomplished leader and valued sideman.

This session mixes a compelling set of originals and interpretations of familiar works. Zak is generous with the solo spotlight, putting much of the focus on Blake and Varela. The leader's catchy "For Sonny" is a potent postbop showcase for robust tenor. "George Washington" is built from a soulful repeated line that blossoms into a furious workout. The pianist's "I Wished I Lived in LA" has a bit of a wistful air due to Blake's melancholy solo, but could just as easily conjure the memory of a beautiful spring day, especially during Varela's intimate, conversational solo. The bassist contributed the haunting "Moonlight Over Saturnvelen", a spacious ballad that almost seems to whisper, accented by understated brushwork.

The choice of Herbie Hancock's "Textures" is a bit of a twist, since the original recording was an '80s jazz-fusion piece with the composer overdubbing keyboards. Zak transforms it into a hip straightahead setting for the rhythm section. The sole standard of the date is Cole Porter's "So In Love", though Zak's fresh rhythmic approach and alternate voicings break new ground. To wrap the date, Zak chose Thelonious Monk's "Reflections", performed as a softly spoken duet with Varela, a perfect conclusion to a rewarding release.

For more information, visit [freshsoundrecords.com](http://freshsoundrecords.com). Zak is at Fat Cat Nov. 2nd, Smalls Nov. 7th with Sam Dillon, Nov. 21st with Marshall McDonald and Nov. 22nd with Carlos Abadie and The 75 Club Nov. 30th-Dec. 1st with Peter Leitch. See Calendar.



**Never Stop II**  
The Bad Plus (Legbreaker)  
by Phil Freeman

The Bad Plus' first album with new pianist Orrin Evans is comprised of all original material. They could have taken the opposite approach and eased Evans into the group (and listeners' hearts) with a set of rock and pop covers, like 2016's *It's Hard*, but the group has always been about charging forward at full steam, so instead they've made an explicit sequel to their 2010 album *Never Stop*, their first all-original set. In the process, they've revealed their new voice to be a lot like their old voice. Four of the eight tunes on the new LP (and both the bonus tracks on the CD/download) are written by bassist Reid Anderson; King contributes two, as does Evans.

The album begins with "Hurricane Birds", a jazz trio-does-Radiohead number that seems somewhat clichéd until you remember that The Bad Plus were more or less the inventors of that sound. In any case, Evans takes the heavy chords and ostinato-ish pattern and transforms them into a bouncing, chopped-up cross between Vince Guaraldi and Thelonious Monk, something that shouldn't work but does.

For Evans' first contribution to the band as a writer, "Boffadem", he starts out on a toy piano, pinging out tiny notes over a bouncing bassline, like a synth patch on a Björk album. He switches back and forth repeatedly between the toy and full-sized instrument, allowing the latter to serve as a kind of emphatic sonic punctuation. Behind him, King's rock-solid, heavy beat provides the perfect support.

"Commitment", Evans' second piece, is the penultimate track on the LP and seems to be his way of welcoming the other two into his world, rather than vice versa. He opens it up for a King solo early on and the drummer dominates the later passages too, driving hard as the pianist spins through rapid, seemingly disjointed phrases. Then it all stops dead and the final minute-plus is an ultra-gentle ballad. Throughout the album, Evans proves to be a lighter and more conventionally swinging pianist than his predecessor, but this isn't his band and he adapts to the new environment very well.

For more information, visit [thebadplus.com](http://thebadplus.com). This band is at Village Vanguard Nov. 6th-11th. See Calendar.



**The Other Side of Air**  
Myra Melford's Snowy Egret (Firehouse 12)  
by Anders Griffen

This is the anticipated followup to pianist Myra Melford's *Snowy Egret's* 2015 recording debut with the same personnel: Ron Miles (cornet), Liberty Ellman (guitar), Stomu Takeishi (acoustic bass guitar) and Tyshawn Sorey (drums). The arrangements tend to consist of multiple, distinct sections and the ensemble is treated something like a chamber group—every voice takes the lead at some point as the counterpoint changes the role of an instrument from one phrase to the next; this also occurs during group improvisation, which is more prevalent here than traditional soloist-accompaniment roles. The orchestration achieves rich timbral blends and sometimes guitar is like another horn, as is piano. The clean recording has a large enough dynamic range to accommodate the nuance of Melford's touch.

In *John Zorn's Arcana: Musicians on Music*, Melford talks about the influence of growing up in a house designed and built by Frank Lloyd Wright. "This idea of working within a free form," she shares, "guided by one's sense of proportion, not being able to tell how the form was created, as well as allowing for a free flow between inside and outside, made sense to me metaphorically as I started to develop my musical and compositional vocabulary." Those ideas continue to play out here as the musicians blur the lines between composition and improvisation. An unfolding piece may feel spacious and dense at the same time. There is pronounced direction and intent, even in moments of relative calm.

The music may be deceptively simple or complex— to start dissecting parts may be more intricate than its first impression implies; on the other hand, it's easy to

listen and be carried away by the story, especially after repeated listens. Familiarity with this particular musical territory will make subtle discoveries possible. This could be a challenging record for some, but exciting for listeners who enjoy state-of-the-art contemporary jazz. These are sophisticated compositions, but ultimately their intellectual rigor is outweighed by the collective's humanity. To quote the *Audubon Guide to North American Birds* on the Snowy Egret, "Its contrasting yellow feet could be said to dance in the shallows on golden slippers."

For more information, visit [firehouse12.com/label](http://firehouse12.com/label). This project is at Dizzy's Club Nov. 7th-8th. See Calendar.

UNEARTHED GEM

**Let Yourself Go**  
Jazz Rock Experience (Sonorama)  
by Anna Steegmann

If you collect rare recordings, enjoy electrified European jazz and treasure fleeting moments in music history, *Let Yourself Go* is for you. Swiss ensemble Jazz Rock Experience (JRE) existed briefly from 1969-70 and Sonorama, deeming their eponymous Deram Nova debut (their only LP) too tame, has published previously unreleased recordings from clubs, festivals and studio sessions, a terrific blend of acoustic and electric jazz from musicians open to experimentation. It's modern jazz that respects tradition and skillfully integrates R&B, funk, blues and folk elements.

JRE was Bruno Spoerri (tenor and soprano saxophone), Hans Kennel (trumpet), Freddy Meier (tenor saxophone), Dave Lee (electric piano, clavinet and vibraphone), Raffael Waeber (guitar), Jonas Haefeli (flute and percussion), Hans Foletti (bass) and Kenny Schmidt (drums). Subs include Nick Bertschinger and Irène Schweizer (piano), Christy Doran (guitar) and Fredy Studer (drums).

Spoerri and Kennel composed or arranged the music. Fundamental to their aesthetic is electronic distortion of their instruments. The opener, Leadbelly's "If It Wasn't For Dicky", shows great chemistry, exciting call and response between bass and electric piano and trumpet leading the way—a rich tapestry of sound, at times fragile and tender, then muscular and strong. In the second track, "Krivo Sadovsko Choro", a Slavic folk song, Kennel shows off his skills as an arranger, deconstructing the tune and jazzing it up. His own "Blues No Blues", the longest track at almost nine minutes, is captivating with its layering and masterful improvisations. Listening to the other tracks, whether originals or arrangements of James Brown (the title track), Herbie Hancock ("Blind Man") and Eddie Harris ("Listen Here"), will make you wish you'd been at the Zürich Jazz Festival or the Club Rössli in 1969.

Spoerri and Kennel had success at festivals, but also had to hold full-time jobs. This made life difficult, led to frequent subbing of musicians and finally the breakup of JRE. Kudos to Sonorama for allowing us to experience obscure Swiss jazz history in these outstanding recordings.

For more information, visit [sonorama.de](http://sonorama.de)