



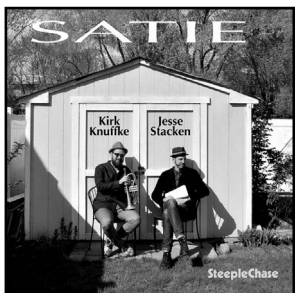
My Scandinavian Blues: A Tribute to Horace Parlan
US4 (Stunt)
 by Ken Dryden

US4 is a band specifically assembled to record the music of Horace Parlan, the American pianist from Pittsburgh who moved to Europe in the early '70s and flourished there until a major stroke paralyzed and blinded him. Although Parlan, who turns 86 this month, is now living in a nursing home, he financed this CD with his savings and chose the songs from his extensive list of original compositions. The band is made up of two veteran Danish musicians: pianist Thomas Clausen (who also wrote the arrangements) and bassist Jimmy Roger Pedersen (Parlan's longtime duo partner) plus Swedish tenor saxophonist Tomas Franck and American drummer Adam Nussbaum, with Danish vocalist Sinne Eeg appearing on two songs.

Parlan overcame the damage polio inflicted on the fingers of his right hand to create a unique sound. The bluesy themes draw from several decades, beginning with the peppy treatment of "Us Three" highlighted by Clausen's superb blend of hardbop with a touch of funk. "Norma" was written for Parlan's wife and Eeg delivers upbeat, heartfelt interpretations of Susie Scairg's lyrics while her playful side is displayed in the equally enjoyable "Little Esther". The quartet is at their peak for "In the Spur of the Moment", as if they are wrapping an invigorating set in a Copenhagen club. The AfroCuban-flavored "Arrival" is a miniature masterpiece focusing more on the group than individual soloists. "Broken Promises" is a brooding, late-night blues that comes to life through Franck's searing tenor, Clausen's brooding chorus and Pedersen's dissonant, effective solo.

The accompanying DVD features six of the studio tracks, with images of the musicians in performance, augmented by visuals of the Danish countryside and Parlan album covers, along with a Parlan interview excerpt that explains the meaning behind his song title "Broken Promises" while Clausen's commentary is shown on the screen rather than dubbed over the music. This is a powerful tribute to a great pianist and composer who overcame multiple challenges not only to have a successful career but add to his legacy after it was over.

For more information, visit sundance.dk.



Satie
Kirk Knuffke/Jesse Stacken (SteepleChase)
 by Mark Keresman

Erik Satie (1866-1925), pianist and composer, was the Thelonious Monk of the French classical sphere. Like Monk, Satie left space(s) between notes, letting the silences count as much as what was heard; both were mavericks with a puckish sense of humor (Satie titled a work "True Flabby Preludes") and neither would unleash a deluge of notes when one or two well-placed

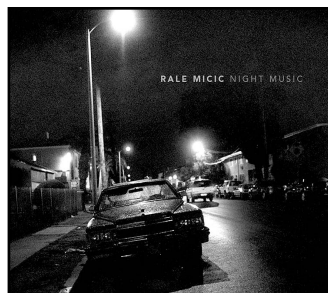
ones could transport a listener into a new sonic world. Satie was also one of the first European composers to incorporate elements of ragtime and jazz.

Cornet player Kirk Knuffke and pianist Jesse Stacken have at it on an all-Satie program. Yes, as many listeners might expect, it's an introspective affair but these lads bring lots to the table, presenting and extending Satie's iconic compositions in unique ways. "Petite Overture A Danser" is bright and leisurely as a sunny walk beside the Seine but Knuffke has hints of the wide-toned New Orleans yearning of Louis Armstrong and King Oliver while Stacken contributes some shades of gospel. "Bonjour, Biqui, Bonjour!" has a bereaved cast not unlike Billie Holiday's "Gloomy Sunday", the duo condensing as much restless resignation as they can muster, Knuffke occasionally evoking Chet Baker at his most let's-get-lost forlorn.

The thornier side of Satie can be gleaned in the "Vexations" miniatures—quirky, angular, mocking, pointed, a touch of stuttering, staccato rhythm. (Add some swingin' bass and drums to "Vexations 2" and it could be mistaken for Monk.) "Trois Gymnopedies No. 1" features magnificent ballad playing, Stacken evoking Satie's spare, minimalistic placement of notes, Knuffke touching on the high-on-a-hill panoramic quality of Miles Davis' *Sketches of Spain*. The duo imparts some elegant hints of swing to "Pieces Froides".

All in all, a dandy introduction/tribute to Satie and a good set for when you need to inject some drollery into your evening brooding sessions.

For more information, visit steeplechase.dk. Knuffke is at *Clemente Soto Velez Cultural Center Jan. 21st*, *Silvana Jan. 21st* and *Greenwich House Music School Jan. 27th* with Frank Kimbrough. See *Calendar*.



Night Music
Rale Micic (Whaling City Sound)
 by Phil Freeman

3 of the 11 tracks on this disc are by Hungarian composer Béla Bartók ("Melody in a Mist" and two versions of "Nocturne"). This isn't some classical-inspired chamber-jazz record though; those three pieces add up to less than 5 of the disc's 54 minutes. The rest of the music is by guitarist Rale Micic and most of it has the nocturnal feel implied by its title. The opening piece, "Hotel Insomnia", prominently features Danny Grissett on Fender Rhodes, with Johnathan Blake rattling out twitchy, drum 'n' bass rhythms and Corcoran Holt's bass booming mournfully. The leader's ultra-clean, drawn-out single notes only rarely poke through the bluish mood created by the others—the track sounds more like the work of DJ Shadow than a jazz ensemble.

The two versions of "Nocturne" are used as brackets surrounding the album's title track. The first is a guitar-piano duet, the second guitar-organ and while each is beautiful in a meditative way, they feel like exercises. In between, "Night Music" is a roiling, seven-minute eruption that initially seems to be adopting a structural conceit similar to the Wayne Shorter composition "Nefertiti"—the melody is repeated over and over on guitar and piano, as Blake whips the drums into a frenzy. Eventually though, conventional solos begin. Micic's is almost modal while Grissett unleashes one insanely fast piano run after another, practically screeching to a halt when it's time to revert to the almost ballad tempo of the head.

Night Music's titles imply a narrative arc; we begin with "Hotel Insomnia", pass through "Late Call", "Night Music" and "Afterparty" and end with "Sunrise" and "Color of the Sun". As the album progresses, it transitions from indigo-tinted jazz-funk to more abstract explorations, winding up in a shimmering, bright-lit place. But as seamlessly as everything fits together, each track stands on its own, reflecting the work of an ensemble consisting of individuals with powerful statements to make—Blake and Grissett in particular.

For more information, visit whalingcitysound.com. Micic is at *Smalls Jan. 23rd*. See *Calendar*.

IN PRINT



Gender and Identity in Jazz: Darmstadt Studies in Jazz Research
 Edited by Wolfram Knauer
 (Jazzinstitut Darmstadt / Wolke Verlag Publishing)
 by Ken Waxman

Only during the past 20 years has serious scholarship examined the effect of gender inequality and sexual preference on jazz. With different identities the subject of 2015's Darmstadt Jazzforum, the 17 essays collected here offer a thoughtful overview of the subjects. Written mostly in English, with summaries provided for German entries, the most valuable pieces are based on primary research. An important distinction is also made between the two concepts. While a woman playing jazz has been accepted—although downgraded as not being as profound as jazz from males—the idea that homosexuals were involved in the music seems to have been a non-starter for many practitioners.

Jenna Bailey's piece on Ivy Benson's British All-Girl band, which lasted from 1940-81, is instructive. While Benson provided training and exposure for hundreds of women instrumentalists, she was fixated on her musicians' looks. As illuminating are the conclusions of Yoko Suzuki, after discussion with other female reed players, about how perceived timidity in their playing is a legitimate way of utilizing the horn. Probably the most noteworthy thesis is Iлона Haberkamp's examination of pianist Jutta Hipp. Besides shyness and an alcohol problem, Hipp's alienation was due to the combination of being a white foreign female when jazz was dominated by black American men. Her initial exoticism also worked against her. In the U.S., her playing was influenced by hardbop, causing early champions to charge that she had abandoned her cool-inflected style to sound like every other pianist.

Homosexuality is another matter. Despite Christian Broecking's sympathetic review of the career of Swiss pianist Irène Schweizer, a self-proclaimed "authentic" lesbian, European attitudes towards homosexual identification of jazz musicians has been more accepting than in the U.S. Meanwhile, Christopher Dennison's piece on homophobia is more detailed if inconclusive. Citing well-known jazzers who are gay, he is content to let their achievements refute those who insist gay people can't play "true" jazz without actually analyzing their achievements.

For more information, visit jazzinstitut.de