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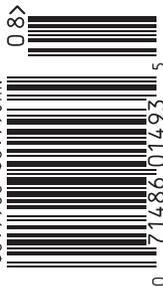
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John Scofield *Swallow Tales*

ECM 2679

★★★★

Guitarist John Scofield's new album reflects on a partnership and musical source that stretches back decades, while his trio performs with the spirit of a new beginning. The title refers to bassist Steve Swallow's compositions, which serve as the source material here. Some of these tunes originated in the late 1970s, when an upstart Scofield was the bassist's protege. Time has served these pieces exceptionally well, and so does the group's energy throughout *Swallow Tales*. That spirit comes across from the first notes of "She Was Young." Scofield's relaxed vibe includes an array of low-key effects that quietly embellish his approach to the melody, while Swallow's lines become intertwined with all of the guitarist's turns. Drummer Bill Stewart's seemingly light touch becomes the ideal complement. Swallow and Scofield also swap leads on "Falling Grace," both solos sounding more pointed atop Stewart's roll. Throughout, Scofield's vibrato remains consistently inventive, especially through his deeply lyrical delivery of the ballad "Hullo Bolinas."

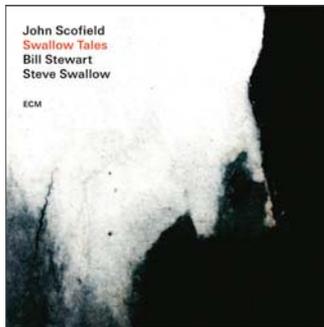
Swallow Tales is Scofield's debut leader date on ECM, and he makes the most of the label's undefinable airy sound on the lyrical "Away." As he lays back, he knows that this kind of tribute is as much about highlighting great tunes as it is about their interpreters.

—Aaron Cohen

Swallow Tales: She Was Young; Falling Grace; Portsmouth Figurations; Awful Coffee; Eiderdown; Hullo Bolinas; Away; In F; Radio. (53:24)

Personnel: John Scofield, guitar; Steve Swallow, bass; Bill Stewart, drums.

Ordering info: ecmrecords.com



Alexa Tarantino *Clarity*

POSI-TONE 8211

★★★★½

Half the tunes on Alexa Tarantino's *Clarity*, her second leader date, are compositions she penned, but all of them are delivered in a calm, swinging groove. And her riffs sometimes settle to the bottom of the horn, where they merge gleefully with Rudy Royston's tom-toms—check out "A Unified Front."

Tarantino brackets the album with her fabulous flute, opening with a flourish on "Through," where she more than heeds pianist Steven Feifke's gentle guidance, and closes with the rich resonance of her alto flute on "My Ship." The alto saxophone is Tarantino's principal instrument, but she's more than adequate on soprano, and her treatment of Horace Silver's "Gregory Is Here" proves it. Even so, on "A Race Against Yourself," her bebop fluency on alto holds sway, and again comes into play on "La Puerta." The cadenza on this ballad is an opportunity to hear Tarantino unadorned and full of, let's say, clarity. The wait for Royston to break out with one of his rousing solos ends on "Karma," and that rumble of complexity is modified and modulated throughout to meet the variety of Tarantino's musical tendencies.

There's no sophomore jinx with this second disc from Tarantino, and it's a good bet that the third will be even more charmed.

—Herb Boyd

Clarity: Through; A Race Against Yourself; La Puerta; A Unified Front; Gregory Is Here; Karma; Breaking Cycles; Thank You For Your Silence; My Ship. (46:27)

Personnel: Alexa Tarantino, alto saxophone, soprano saxophone, flute, alto flute; Steven Feifke, piano; Joe Martin, bass; Rudy Royston, drums.

Ordering info: posi-tone.com



Jason Marsalis *Jason Marsalis Live*

BASIN STREET 0306

★★★★

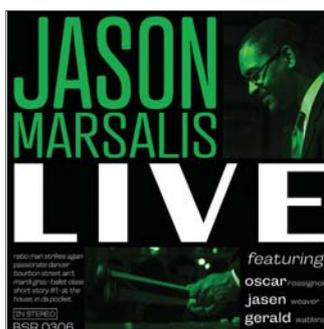
By their very choice of instrument, vibraphonists are adventurers, going where few musicians go. Even by that standard, Jason Marsalis has developed into an irrepressible force since taking up vibes, shifting his focus from drums about 20 years ago. *Jason Marsalis Live* might include previously recorded songs, all of them originals, but the album bristles with clever surprises, riding the rim of our expectations. From the Monkish jabs on "Ratio Man" to the strutting, high-stepping Crescent City classicism of "At The House, In Da Pocket," *Live*—recorded at New Orleans' storied Little Gems Saloon as part of celebration of Basin Street Records' 20th anniversary in 2017—never lets up. Virtuoso pianist Oscar Rossignoli runs cascading figures with his right hand while providing lagging counterpoint with his left on "Bourbon Street Ain't Mardi Gras." Alternating between ringing and muted tones, Marsalis creates joyous 3D effects with his four-mallet mastery. Perhaps inspired by Lionel Hampton, he's after a bigger and harder-edged, but still fluid, sound. While the bandleader's playing and composing reflects a deep knowledge of jazz history, they hop and skip past familiar solutions. There's something genuinely new going on here.

—Lloyd Sachs

Jason Marsalis Live: Ratio Man Strikes Again; Passionate Dancer; Bourbon Street Ain't Mardi Gras; Ballet Class; Short Story #1; At The House, In Da Pocket. (37:15)

Personnel: Jason Marsalis, vibraphone; Oscar Rossignoli, piano; Jasen Weaver, bass; Gerald Watkins, drums.

Ordering info: basinstreetrecords.com



Marcin Wasilewski Trio/Joe Lovano

Arctic Riff

ECM 2678

★★★★

The Marcin Wasilewski Trio, a Polish ensemble that initially came together during the '90s, specializes in controlled blasts—little bursts of freeform creation like the nine-minute "Cadenza" that builds off a tumbling piano line and agitated bass work from Slawomir Kurkiewicz.

Adding fuel to this collective fire is saxophonist Joe Lovano. He appears on all 11 tracks on *Arctic Riff* and handles the gig with a remarkable amount of restraint. Lovano carefully picks his moments to draw focus away from the collective, as through his dancing, halting solo on Wasilewski's "L'amour Fou." Or his eventual appearance on his own composition, "On The Other Side." Lovano waits until the song is in its final minutes before sneaking in to add some punctuation to what was shaping up to be a complete statement by the trio. Label boss Manfred Eicher's devotion to atmosphere also is responsible for allowing the finer details of *Arctic Riff* to emerge. The creak of Kurkiewicz's bass sneaks into the mix, as does Wasilewski's voice as he hums along with a solo. Drummer Michal Miskiewicz is recorded so precisely it's as if every bristle of his brushes is discernible. The music becomes as enveloping and inescapable, yet imperceptible, as oxygen.—Robert Ham

Arctic Riff: Glimmer Of Hope; Vashkar; Cadenza; Fading Sorrow; Arco; Stray Cat Walk; L'amour Fou; A Glimpse; Vashkar (Var.); On The Other Side; Old Hat. (62:30)

Personnel: Marcin Wasilewski, piano; Joe Lovano, tenor saxophone; Slawomir Kurkiewicz, bass; Michal Miskiewicz, drums.

Ordering info: ecmrecords.com

