

Samuel Blaser
Consort In Motion

KIND OF BLUE 10046

★★★★½

There is so much baggage attached to the concept of jazz-classical fusion, so many dead ends along the Third Stream, that it's almost a disservice to Samuel Blaser's brilliantly realized new CD to refer to it in those terms. The conservatory-trained Swiss trombonist reaches back to Italian composers of the Baroque and Renaissance, recontextualizing centuries-old themes and melodies via modern improvisation, more an act of resurrection than archaeology.

The austerity with which Blaser and his stellar quartet approach these pieces at times suggests that we're hearing the ghosts of long-forgotten performances, howling remembered scraps of melody amidst their laments. The graceful opening cascade of Russ Lossing's piano and Paul Motian's cymbals on Biagio Marini's "Passacaglia," for instance, is soon scarred by a brief knocking from Thomas Morgan's bass and Blaser's pained, breathy squeal, before the ensemble combines for a dirge-like procession.

The bulk of the album focuses on the work of Claudio Monteverdi; the "Ritornello" from his early opera *L'Orfeo* is visited twice, recalling the way in which its sweeping melody recurs throughout the original opera. The first instance abstracts the piece over seven min-



utes, Blaser growling over Motian's most bop-inflected rhythms while Morgan and Lossing walk over the keys. The pianist's solo, which follows a particularly crisp, resonant burst from Motian, merely suggests the actual melody, hinting at it cleverly in fragmented and refracted form. The brief, second iteration finds Blaser and Morgan trading the explicitly-stated melody back and forth in a stately duet.

This is such an expansive take on the source material that the quartet seems to occupy a space surrounding the compositions, intersecting and deviating from them and each other at will. Where Blaser can tend towards the morose in his plaintive moans, Lossing cuts through the darkness like vinegar, suddenly erupting in frenzied outbursts or dense clusters. Motian is an inspired choice at the kit, bringing his signature amorphous style to Blaser's open-ended interpretations, meeting the leader's multiphonic bellows with sharp bursts or carpeting a sparse Morgan solo with insistent snare rolls. The bassist proves an intriguing foil for the veteran drummer, able to slyly slip in and out of time and idiom. —*Shaun Brady*

Consort In Motion: Lamento Della Ninfa; Reflections On Piagn'e Sospira; Reflections On Toccata; Passacaglia; Ritornello; Si Dolce è l'Ormento; Balletto Secondo—Retirata; Reflections On Vespro Della Beata Vergine; Ritornello; Il Ritorno D'Ulisse in Patria—Atto Quarto, Scene II. (58:13)

Personnel: Samuel Blaser, trombone; Paul Motian, drums; Russ Lossing, piano; Thomas Morgan, bass.

Ordering info: kindofbluerecords.com

John Brown Trio
Dancing With Duke: An Homage To Duke Ellington

BROWN BOULEVARD RECORDS

★★★★

Bassist John Brown's *Dancing With Duke* is a sophisticated and attractive set consisting of some of the most recognized compositions from the Duke Ellington songbook. One of the album's highest points is "In A Mellow Tone," which opens the album. It begins softly, with pianist Cyrus Chestnut playing the head delicately, with drummer Adonis Rose on brushes. Rose changes to sticks behind Chesnut's solo, which slowly builds and climaxes with a series of big tremolos, rapid right-hand lines and thunderous left-hand rumbling. Chesnut, who generates as much excitement as a big band at full power here, finishes his solo off with an Ellington-esque cascade of descending arpeggios that lead into Brown's solo. Brown has a rich, full sound, and he shapes each note. His lengthy solo on "Pie Eye's Blues" is a fine example of his musician-



ship, as is his melancholy arco playing on "Solitude."

Brown and company offer a couple twists to this familiar material. "Do Nothing 'Til You Hear From Me" is lovely as a waltz, and "Isfahan" lays in five so effortlessly you'd think it was written that way. "I Got It Bad,"

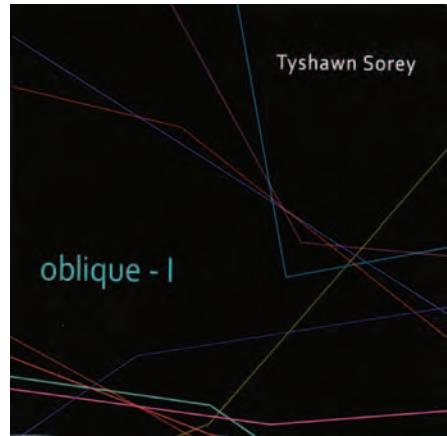
"Solitude" and Billy Stayhorn's "A Flower Is A Lovesome Thing" are grouped together into what Brown calls the "Sweet Ballad Suite." These ballad performances are excellent and full of meditative introspection, especially the glacially slow reading of "Solitude." Brown would have done well to vary the arrangements a bit, though, as the album can be a little predictable and repetitive at times.

—*Chris Robinson*

Dancing With Duke: In A Mellow Tone; Do Nothing 'Til You Hear From Me; Perdido; Pie Eye's Blues; Isfahan; I'm Beginning to See The Light; A Flower Is A Lovesome Thing; I Got It Bad (And That Ain't Good); Solitude; It Don't Mean A Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing). (69:21)

Personnel: John Brown, bass; Cyrus Chestnut, piano; Adonis Rose, drums.

Ordering info: brownboulevard.com



Tyshawn Sorey
Oblique-I

PI RECORDINGS 40

★★★★

Tyshawn Sorey's previous two albums as a leader showcased him as a budding composer, which wouldn't have been frustrating were he not so startlingly gifted behind the drums. 2009's *Koan* was more indebted to minimalist crusader Morton Feldman than anything found within the pages of *Modern Drummer*. In that regard, *Oblique-I* is a mild revelation—the first full-length to feature him wearing both hats. Here we get a taste of the lean and lightning quick stickwork deployed as a member of bands lead by both Steve Coleman and Steve Lehman, yet it's Sorey's compositional skills that unequivocally remain the focus. On one tune, "Eighteen," he sits out completely, instead entrusting his ideas to alto saxophonist Loren Stillman.

That's not the only track on which traces of his last album linger. "Eight" is similarly spare from the onset, punctuated by pianist John Escreet's dissonant chords, chiming like a broken alarm clock as Stillman's alto warbles tenuously. The Derek Bailey-esque shards of Todd Neufeld's acoustic guitar on "Seventeen" are no less ominous. Stoking the suspense with meticulously choreographed shifts of mood, the supporting cast carries out these often affectless meditations like mario-nettes bound to Sorey's drumsticks.

The current Ph.D candidate built a repertoire for this quintet over a period of four years, collected under the unambiguous banner 41 Compositions, and the ten numeric titles included here give some sense of the academic weight they contain. Drums are used to accent and color these knotty improvisations but never anything more than necessary.

Sorey wants it known that he's a conceptualist first and a percussionist second.

—*Areif Sless-Kitain*

Oblique-I: Twenty; Eight; Thirty-Five; Eighteen; Forty; Twenty-Four; Seventeen; Twenty-Five; Fifteen; Thirty-Six. (76:29)

Personnel: Tyshawn Sorey, drums; Loren Stillman, alto saxophone; Todd Neufeld, electric and acoustic guitars; John Escreet, piano; Fender Rhodes, Wurflitzer piano; Chris Tordini, bass.

Ordering info: pirecordings.com