

DownBeat

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MARS BRESLOW



INSIDE THE BEAT

- 18 Vinyl Freak
- 20 Backstage With...
- 24 The Archives
- 25 Living Jazz
- 26 The Question
- 28 Things to Come



Terence Blanchard



Jean-Michel Pilc

Great musicians bring forth special performances when playing on the world's most prestigious stages. This would explain why Terence Blanchard's trumpet seemed to have some added power and grace when he debuted his commissioned piece, "A Mood For Dizzy," at the Jimmy Lyons Stage at the opening night of the Monterey Jazz Festival Presented by MCL Sept. 17-19.

Blanchard opened his set with two tunes with his quintet—"Transform" and "Over There"—burning with an intensity that had not been heard in years. For the commissioned suite, Blanchard augmented this group with trumpeter Jon Faddis, trombonist Slide Hampton and saxophonist James Moody. Faddis opened the first movement of the three-part suite with one of his trademark double-C tricks, which put a stamp of authority on the show. The second movement, "Samba La Diz," used "Cin Alma" as a template for a set of lyrical solos. The closing "Three Sweet Notes" was a classic bebop tune (sounding like a hybrid of "Salt Peanuts" and "Anthropology"), that gave the group the chance to really swing.

Singer Betye LaVette's comeback to the stage has been welcome, and she held the crowd in the palm of her hand during her Saturday

afternoon Jimmy Lyons Stage performance. Sometimes to the point of absurdity, she spaced every ounce of emotion out of songs such as John Prine's "Souvenirs" and her own "You'll Never Change," theatrical and swaggering as she evoked some old-school soul spirits.

Then there were the pianos—from Bill Charlap and Jason Moran to Marian McPartland and Esbjorn Svensson, keyboards were centerpiece at the fest. This was most evident at the Starbucks Coffee House Gallery, which featured piano trios three nights in a row. Uri Caine opened the room on Friday night with bassist Drew Gess and drummer Ben Perowsky, and deconstructed and reconstructed a dizzying array of repertoire—from originals such as "Snaggletooth" to plenty of Thelma Houston—jumping in an instant from stride to modern, with barely a breath between stylistic shifts.

Lynne Arida's trio with bassist Jay Anderson and drummer Steve Davis has been together for 10 years, and their rapport shows this experience. The trio eschews an asaxian display of chops for more melodic, patient stylings. Arida stretched "I Don't Mean A Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)" and "The Nearness Of You" into lengthy tomes, exhuming every bit of melody possible.

Perhaps the most exciting piano trio performance came with Jean-Michel Pilc's group on Sunday. With drummer Ari Hoenig and bassist Francois Moutin, Pilc moved masterfully between ballads, lightning-quick bop and out explorations. This was perhaps best demonstrated in a Monk medley, during which the group traversed through tunes such as "Jackie-ing," "Bemsha Swing," "Evidence" and "Round Midnight" with humor and virtuosity.

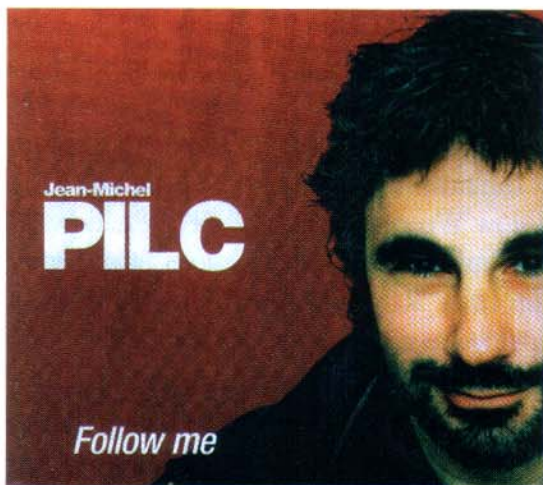
—Jason Koransky

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—Jason Koransky

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Jean-Michel Pilc

Follow Me

DREYFUS JAZZ 36665

★★★★½

Paul Bley

Nothing To Declare

JUSTIN TIME 199

★★★★

Canadian Paul Bley and France's Jean-Michel Pilc explore the genre of solo piano with different and varied results. While the veteran Bley has a history of playing along the edges, the 45-year-old Pilc seems to be satisfied with ruffling the feathers of convention in his own way.

Oddly enough, Bley and Pilc's discs approach the song form with opposite formats. Pilc's *Follow Me* is made up of 16 cuts that average somewhere between three and four minutes apiece, mostly covers with some originals. Bley, on the other hand, ruminates over four extended originals on *Nothing To Declare*. The effect, however, is a similar one, as Pilc manages to squeeze a fair amount of rumination into his bite-sized renditions of everything from "Ain't Misbehavin'" and "St. Louis Blues" to



his own "Beaver Dam" and "Happiness Seven." Bley likes the modal form to such an extent that one can almost hear him thinking out loud, see-sawing his way through the languorous "Blues Waltz" or returning again and again to the underlying progression of "All The Things You Are" with the title track.

Bley, never the virtuoso, keeps his flourishes to a minimum, making for a rather drab program. Pilc, conversely, might express substantial technical flair, as he does on the more classical-sounding "Raccoon" and robust swinger "Autumn Leaves," complete with left-hand bass lines. At other times, Pilc comes close to new age schlock, as on the title track, where a daintiness threatens to oversweeten; and his turn at whistling the melody of "One For My Baby" might be considered an acquired taste.

—John Ephland

Follow Me: Follow Me; Les Amants D'un Jour; St. Louis Blues; My Favorite Things; If I Should Lose You; St. James Infirmary; Happiness Seven; One For My Baby; The Raccoon; Autumn Leaves; Ain't Misbehavin'; Beaver Dam; Vous Qui Passez Sans Me Voir; B Minor Waltz; Oleo; Les Copains D'Abord. (54:49)

Personnel: Jean-Michel Pilc, piano, whistles.

Ordering Info: www.dreyfusrecords.com

Nothing To Declare: Nothing To Declare; Breakdown; Blues Waltz; 8th Avenue. (57:02)

Personnel: Paul Bley, piano.

Ordering Info: www.justin-time.com