

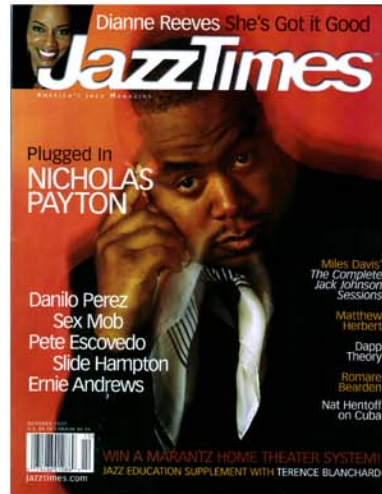
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JEAN-MICHEL PILC *Cardinal Points* Dreyfus

The next time you hear someone say, “You don’t have to be a rocket scientist to play jazz,” refer him to Jean-Michel Pilc. That’s precisely the route he took from his native Paris to his current status as one of the Big Apple’s most astonishing pianists, in terms of keyboard technique. Largely self-taught, Pilc shows he is also a formidable composer on *Cardinal Points*, his second release for Dreyfus. The CD also reveals he is a whistler: on “Trio Sonata, Part 3,” he whistles in unison to his tricky piano line, and then harmonizes with himself. (Someone should tell him the fate of whistleblowers in this country.)

Pilc’s ability to camouflage chords transcends ordinary reharmonization. As for mood swings, he runs the gamut from fragile to fearsome. He’s blessed with colleagues who can keep up with his sudden detours in dynamics and rhythm. Sam Newsome, soprano sax, adds to the dense texture on “South,” provides tasteful staccato comments over Pilc’s persistent comping on “West” and waxes legato over the pianist’s frenetic backing on “East.”



Don’t ask about titles. The CD’s last four tracks are “Parts 1–4” of *Trio Sonata*, which is neither in sonata form nor, by baroque definition, a trio sonata. All that matters is that the CD is filled with brilliant, swinging dialogue, enhanced by the percussion of Abdou M’Boup, the split bass work by James Genus and François Moutin and the drumming of Ari Hoenig.

The CD’s highlight is the unbelievable deconstruction of “Mood Indigo.” It should be studied in every music school in the galaxy. **HARVEY SIDERS**