



Sarah Bernstein Veer Quartet

NEW FOCUS

★★★★½

The days of complete separation between written classical music and improvised jazz are long gone, at least as far as violinist Sarah Bernstein and some of her contemporaries are concerned. Having explored a variety of music using many different types of instrumentation on her 10 previous albums as a leader and in collaborations with the likes of Anthony Braxton, Tomeka Reid, Adam Rudolph and Vinny Golia, in recent years Bernstein has been writing her originals for a traditional string quartet. However the only thing traditional about her Veer Quartet is the instrumentation.

Joined by like-minded and technically skilled string players (violinist Sana Nagano, Leonor Falcon on viola and cellist Nick Jozwiak) who have no difficulty playing the most complex arrangements while also being adventurous improvisers, Bernstein performs six of her diverse compositions. "Frames No. 1," which often utilizes a walking cello, swings

in its own way with riffs and dissonance interacting before a surprisingly peaceful ending. "News Cycle Progression" pairs together a through-composed ballad and improvised sections while making it difficult to tell which is which.

"Clay Myth" is accurately described as "softly unsettling." The episodic performance, the most colorful and lengthiest piece of the program, has Jozwiak's cello carrying the melody or playing patterns much of the time while the other strings improvise all around it.

"World Warrior" features some free improvising by the ensemble. "Nightmorning" fits its title with a dreamlike melody and unaccompanied solos by each of the musicians. Closing the thought-provoking set is the intriguing "Hidden," which has a melody by the violin purposely buried by the dense ensemble, a concept that one could imagine the Veer Quartet exploring more in depth in the future.

—Scott Yanow

Veer Quartet: Frames No. 1; News Cycle Progression; Clay Myth; World Warrior; Nightmorning; Hidden. (42:41)

Personnel: Sarah Bernstein, Sana Nagano, violin; Leonor Falcon, viola; Nick Jozwiak, cello.

Ordering info: newfocusrecordings.com



Eyal Vilner Big Band The Jam

INDEPENDENT RELEASE

★★★★½

Eyal Vilner is a composer, arranger and reed player hailing from Tel Aviv, who's been in New York City for some 15 years. His medium? Big band music for dancers.

The Jam, his latest recording, swings sweet and hard with toe-tapping rhythms, tight horn work and excellent soloing throughout. Take, for instance, the band's take on Duke Ellington's "Lucky So-and-So." It's and updated stroll down memory lane with Imani Rousselle's vocals ringing true. The tune also features sweet solos by trumpeter Brandon Lee and trombonist Ron Wilkins.

Vilner mixes in old classics with crafty originals. "Chabichou" is a nice, swinging Vilner piece named after his favorite goat cheese. "Another Time" has the appropriate swagger featuring stride-induced piano by Jon Thomas. And the title track comes packed with a fleet, swinging groove.

But my favorite is the tongue-in-cheek "Will You Be My Quarantine?" (Say "tine" like "vine.") After some two years of pandemic talk and feelings of isolation, this is the first tune these ears have heard that injects some humor into the situation. It's a kitschy, fun take featuring Rousselle's great vocals.

Bianna Thomas joins in for a swinging take on "Hard Hearted Hannah." Vocalist Brandon Bain delivers a great take on Al Hibbler's hit "After The Lights Go Down Low."

Is this groundbreaking music? No. But is it fun? Absolutely!

—Frank Alkyer

The Jam: Just A Lucky So-and-So; Chabichou; Another Time; The Jam; Will You Be My Quarantine?; Monday Stroll; Chad's Delight; Hard Hearted Hannah; T'aint What You Do; Call Me Tomorrow; I Come Next Week; After The Lights Go Down Low; Tap Tap Tap; Belleville; Jumpin' At The Woodside. (46:54)

Personnel: Eyal Vilner, alto saxophone, clarinet, flute; Imani Rousselle (1, 5), Bianna Thomas (8, 9), Brandon Bain (11), vocals; Caleb Teicher, tap shoes (12); John Lake, Brandon Lee, Bryan Davis, Michael Sailors, James Zollar, trumpets; Ron Wilkins, Robert Edwards, Mariel Bildsten, trombones; Bill Todd, Jordan Pettay, Julieta Eugenio, Evan Arntzen, Michael Hashim, Josh Lee, Eden Bareket, woodwinds; Jon Thomas, Jordan Piper (8, 9, 11), piano; Ian Hutchison, bass; Eran Fink, drums.

Ordering info: eyalvilner.com

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