



Mare Nostrum
Paolo Fresu/Richard Galliano/Jan Lundgren
 (ACT Music)
 by Fred Bouchard

This magical debonair international trio reminds us once again of the porosity of walls between nations and fluidity of musical styles, as it flits through an enticing shadow world that recaptures Paris in the '50s. Swedish Jan Lundgren's pointillist piano blends dreamily with Richard Galliano's poignant squeezebox and Sardinian Paolo Fresu's acerbic, haunted trumpet to raise the shades of Edith Piaf, Jacques Brel, Miles Davis, Charles Trenet, Maurice Ravel and Josephine Baker.

Waltzes, of course, are numerous, swirling and dreamy affairs that evoke smoky cabarets, midnight quais, Seine-side trysts. Unisons between Galliano and Fresu are mesmerizingly resonant, especially with flugelhorn or Harmon-muted trumpet (the eerie, soundtrack-destined "Sonia's Nightmare"). Filling out the program's sweeter side are tunes by Jobim (echoing Harold Arlen's "Over The Rainbow"), Trenet (that 'translates' to "I Wish You Love") and a semi-classic spin on Ravel's pristine "Mother Goose".

Any improvising? Why, yes, a little. Lundgren nips a tasty solo on his "Years Ahead". There's a bit of stretch time for Fresu and Galliano often, too, more poignant for lasting just a chorus. The communal warmth and understanding between these three expresses itself as earthy, organic and timeless. They achieve - with apparent effortlessness and grace - a session with Greek proportions of heart, mind and spirit: rather pretty, pretty moving, moving right along. Their sea - warmly, reassuringly Mediterranean - absolutely improves on second dips.

For more information, visit actmusic.com. Fresu is at Joe's Pub May 25th with Gianmaria Testa. See calendar.



Puzzles Alexis Cuadrado
Best of the West + Many Places
 Anne Mette Iversen
 (Brooklyn Jazz Underground)
 by Donald Elfman

Brooklyn continues to be a beautifully complementary alternative to the New York scene. The music that comes out of this borough is bold and audacious yet also eminently listenable and highly engaging. The independent artist-run Brooklyn Jazz Underground (BJU) label has as its stated goal the production of "creative and adventurous contemporary improvised music" on "quality recordings that define the shape of today's jazz". Here are two fine examples of that aesthetic.

Alexis Cuadrado is a talented bassist and composer who is the co-founder of the BJU label. He shows himself on *Puzzles* to be a talented soloist who also knows how to write music that calls forth a group

spirit as well as the notion of individual voices. And he does so with a sense of the possibilities inherent in a wide swath of American music.

The feeling hits you right out of the box as "Bright Lights" comes at us with a kind of pop/island feel. The ever-appealing Loren Stillman plays the main theme on the soprano with a pure, clear tone that calls the listener both to dance and listen. Each of the players follows with concisely expressive solo statements - guitarist Brad Shepik wailing 'fuzzily', the leader smartly getting down, Stillman once again displaying a funky intelligence in a lovely solo that leads back to the opening theme. The compositions have all the feel of a classic approach with some new avenues subtly explored. There are grooves galore here, some beautiful abstraction and some good old-fashioned Blue Note-like tunes.

The other leader/composer here is also a bassist. Anne Mette Iversen has a background in jazz and classical composition and so the first part of her two-disc set *Best of the West + Many Places* is laid out like a classical work and the sound of the group - the leader with John Ellis (tenor and soprano saxophones), Danny Grissett (piano) and Otis Brown III (drums) - is augmented by a string quartet that adds color and some truly intriguing textures. The strings are never just there to play under the jazz group; it's a vital voice on its own that never sounds out of place in a jazz context. The whole disc is a suite and thus there's a progression of ideas. None of the eight players calls attention to themselves yet each has an important role to play in the overall direction of the music.

The second disc in the set collects music written over the course of the three years in the Iversen group's recording history. This is a more standard jazz quartet album with every player given a shot to burn and shine. The first tune - "Cataldo One" - is a powerfully appealing example of the composer's way with a tune and just how well her players absorb her lessons and make music that moves them forward.

For more information, visit bjurecords.com. Cuadrado is at Bar Next Door May 15th and Jazz Gallery May 23rd. Iversen is at Jazz Gallery May 24th. See calendar.



Eponymous
 Chris Welcome Quartet (Tigerasylum)
 by Terrell Holmes

The 11 tracks here seem to be painted as much as played and the music is sometimes about effects as much as notes. The sequential numbering of these spare compositions, all penned by the guitarist/leader, recalls the method of numbering paintings in a series, thus underscoring the artistic parallel.

The songs revolve mostly around the sax work of Jonathan Moritz, whose brooding ruminations on soprano and tenor unfold slowly while Welcome, bassist Shayna Dulberger and drummer John McLellan fill the spaces on the canvas behind him with spirited, laconic riffs. For his part, Moritz sometimes breathes into his mouthpiece for effect before playing and his clever use of harmonics, the upper register and atonality serve as the album's thematic foundation.

There are a few moments, however, when the band falls into more conventional playing. "#4" has a free jazz bent that recalls Ornette Coleman; Welcome plays rapid-fire riffs like a man unshackled, his single note lines sounding sharp enough to break the strings.

On "#3" Moritz' skyscraping soprano mimics a flute and Dulberger's arco on "#8+15+6" moans somewhere between an Indian raga and a Tibetan monk chant. These moments of inventive mimicry widen the scope of the performances and raise the album above the level of plainness.

The atmosphere ranges from somber to lively to almost forbidding. The songs are carefully crafted and played by a group of distinct and talented musicians who manage to convey their unique and cohesive message amidst the mysterious, stark landscapes.

For more information, visit tigerasylum.com. Welcome is at Goodbye Blue Monday May 11th. See calendar.

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 CDs, info, mp3s, videos, pictures, and sheet music available at www.jacobgarchik.com.