

THE JAZZ PROJECT

by JEAN-KEITH FAGON

In Praise of Dreams ●●● Jan Garbarek, ECM 1880

What do Gato Barbieri, Jan Garbarek and Frank Sinatra have in common? They are superb musicians, each of whose "sound" cannot possibly be mistaken for anyone else's. Yet unlike the other two, Mr. Garbarek's tenor saxophone is almost unknown in this country. His music is very hard to categorize, containing as it does elements of classical, new age and jazz. It is above all meditative and spiritual. It is not music of the body or the soul, but the music of dreams. What's central is the capacity of all of Mr. Garbarek's music to grow in the listener's mind, deepening in appeal, strengthening in the conviction of its purpose. It is surely music to be heard and savored without words or interpretative feelings. Such is the musical power of Jan Garbarek.



JAN GARBAREK

Mr. Garbarek's music has always had the listener on the edge of the seat throughout most of his performances, and like any great performer, his music continues to cast a spell long after the music has ended. The title track, "In praise of dreams," does just that. The jazz vocabulary is not dissimilar, yet the world is different. We are immediately plunged into a vivid and completely individual world, packed with dramatic incident: off-stage war cries and exciting, dissonant violin strains. There is almost symphonic handling of pace, but the sonorities are unusual.

On "Knot of place and time," the violin and saxophone perform a very distinguished coupling, superbly played by both Garbarek and violist Kim Kashkashian. But Mr. Garbarek never approached contemporary jazz with the innate radicalism and inside knowledge as is often the case among contemporary jazz performers like Wynton Marsalis or Dave Douglas, or Terrence Blanchard, to name a few. In a performance as good as this, and it is intimately recorded, you can imagine it quite gripping in a live performance. Other highlights include "One goes there alone," and "Iceburn." Also featured is Manu Katché on drums.

A Kiss In The Sand ●●● Leon Ware, Kitchen Records

A Kiss In The Sand is an elegant collection of what singer-songwriter Leon Ware calls R&Boss, the marriage of R&B and Brazilian jazz. The melodies are gorgeous and Mr. Ware's laid back vocals are suave and silky smooth. His lyrical muse meanders between polar opposites: sensualism and spirituality.

A legend in the music business, Mr. Ware wrote hits for Marvin Gaye, Michael Jackson, and Quincy Jones, and has been sampled by musicians as disparate as

Prince, Aaliyah, and Tupac. He is boldly set to take a step in a new direction even as he prepares to celebrate his 65th birthday. *A Kiss In The Sand* is the kind of record perfect for romantic winter nights by the fireplace or lazy summer afternoons on the beach. Other musicians featured include Sandro Albert and Victor Bailey (guitars), Jimmy Branly (drums), Cassio Duarte (percussion) and Renato Neto (keyboards).

Classical

Chants, Hymns and Dances ●●●● Produced by Manfred Eicher, ECM 1888

This album by Anja Lechner (violin-cello), and Vassilis Tzabropoulos (piano) features the works of Georges Ivanovitch Gurdjieff (1877-1948) and Vassilis Tzabropoulos (1966-). This is beautiful music, haunting and quiet. Yet it is in no way "background" music; it commands your attention. Philosopher, teacher, guru Georges Gurdjieff felt that most modern art was all surface activity: subjective, uncritical manifestations of the personality, egotism unchecked. Ancient art, on the other hand, had, an "objective" character that transcended petty likes and dislikes. It was concerned with the preservation and transmissions of knowledge. In this spirit Mr. Gurdjieff spoke of an "objective music" which would work upon all listeners equally, transforming them, focusing their mentation, and bringing them to a new relationship with the vibrating universe.

Mr. Gurdjieff was born in either 1877 or 1866 in Alexandropol at the border of Armenia and Turkey. His Greek father was a local "ashokh" or troubadour who improvised "on religious or philosophical themes in verse or song." The ethnic diversity of the Caucasus was reflected in the overlapping of the music of many cultures, and after the family moved to Kars, now part of Turkey, the young Gurdjieff sang in the local choir of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Previously unaware of Mr. Gurdjieff's sacred music, Mr. Tzabropoulos has for several years been developing material that proceeds on similar principles. From her side, Ms. Lechner recognized a closeness to Armenian folk forms that she had become more aware of working with other musicians with similar background. The Gurdjieff compositions which form an arc around the repertoire on this recording, beginning and ending with the heart-dilating "Chant from a Holy Book," are treated quite freely here, bringing a sense of spontaneity to the music that is appropriate to its improvisational genesis. Improvising in context and with respect, but also taking risks, these two musicians both open up new vistas for the interpretation of Mr. Gurdjieff and reveal how clearly this music can speak in the present tense.

The music has its genesis in the oral music tradition, a world in which "classical" musicians can struggle to find their bearings. *Chants, Hymns and Dances* marks

the first time that the Gurdjieff music has been arranged for cello and piano. The outcome suggests that other instrumental combinations might also be successfully explored and, like all of Mr. Gurdjieff's writing, the music exists for the individual to make of it what he or she will, according to capacity. As Mr. Gurdjieff, ever the aphorist, once said, "I have very good leather to sell to those who wish to make shoes." More than half century after his death, the sturdiness of the leather is self-evident.

This is an admirable performance from two gracious musicians, achieving true eloquence, in a recording that registers without strain the many subtle shifts within dense textures. As for the music, it will repay close and repeated listening.

World Music

Rustico ●●●

Pedro Luis Ferrer, Escondido

Cuban musician Pedro Luis Ferrer believes that his music is all about his homeland and what it means to be Cuban. To listen to his music, is to hear the voices of Cuba; to dance to his music is to dance with Cuba; and to understand his music is to accept his *raison d'être* of the Cuban revolution, or "revolutionary songs on his own terms." While Rustico lacks the sometimes fiery, explosive Latin-Afro rhythms that personify Cuban dancing, the album evokes all the sentimentalities and sensibilities of the Cuban people and their enduring spirit. What is most memorable about this album is the evocation sweet aroma and gentle life of islanders, reminding us of our lost world—a world in which beauty and kindness guide us all.

Also featured are Basilio Perodin (percussion), and Mr. Ferrer's daughter, Lena Ferrer, whose voice is heard throughout the album.

Jazz

It's Time ●●●

Michael Bublé [Special Edition], Reprise Records

'It's (about) time,' Michael Bublé seems to be saying, his image on the *It's Time* CD cover staring unflinchingly at the potential listener. In this excellent sophomore effort, the 29-year-old Italian-Canadian makes his voice heard, loud and clear. While the young singer's skillfulness and musicality are evident in all of the selections, there are several tracks particularly worth highlighting.

The album opens with the Nina Simone favorite, "Feeling Good." Bublé alternately purrs and growls his way through a rendition so deliciously sassy, brassy, and slinky, it could've been a slice of Henry Mancini's Pink Panther soundtrack.

Bublé and the band bounce along

cheerfully in Gershwin's "A Foggy Day," which follows the first track. The crooner makes sure he stays close to the song's old-school feel while ornamenting the melodic line with tasteful jazzy embellishments.

He next takes up "You Don't Know Me," the Arnold-Walker tune immortalized by the late Ray Charles. Bublé's spin on this piece is intimate and graceful, but his understanding of the song's roots are clear; both he and the instrumentalists retain an appropriate tinge of soul in their interpretation.

The cool chic of "Quando, Quando, Quando's" bossa nova rhythm blends nicely with the smoothness of the crooner's voice and the lyrical quality of Renis's melody. Bublé's performance is clean and elegant, but Nelly Furtado's poppy sound doesn't quite work for this sort of collaboration. He should have been paired with a singer like Joss Stone or Diana Krall, whose sultry stylings and smoky timbres are better suited to the warmth of his voice and this genre of music.

"Home" is Bublé's own composition, written in collaboration with Amy Foster-Gillies and Alan Chang. While its country-flavored sound creates a moment of inconsistency within an otherwise jazz-inflected CD, it is, nonetheless, a lovely ballad. Furthermore, the straight-forward lyrics nicely highlight the simplicity of the song's sentiment.

With "The More I See You," the singer reminds us why standard jazz is so much fun. Bublé moves through the piece with ease, scatting with the facility of a Louis Armstrong or an Ella Fitzgerald.

"Try a Little Tenderness," is one of the best tracks on *Time*. Bublé's jazzy interpretation of the soul standard is perfectly balanced. It is by turns passionate and -- in part due to the crooner's silky, expressive runs -- heartbreakingly tender.

Sweet vocals, soft whistling, and breezy instrumentals make the bonus track "Dream a Little Dream," a delightful musical confection. This feel-good selection, available only on the special edition of *It's Time*, would have made a nice addition to the regular CD.

Bublé's unexpected embellishments, coupled with his swinging melodic line, give his rendition of "Mack the Knife" a rich, unique texture for a second bonus. Playfully paraphrasing Bobby Darin's ending to the Kurt Weill classic, Bublé closes the song with, "Look out, old Mikey is back!" Indeed, after a strong debut performance on Michael Bublé (Reprise Records), Mikey is back, and clearly, he intends to stay.

—By Lisette Atiyeh

All CDs reviewed in this article are heard through B&W Nautilus Series speakers and ASW 4000 subwoofer, AudioControl C-1 Special Edition equalizer/analyzer and Rotel Preamp, amplifier and CD player.