

WHAT'S ON YOUR PLAYLIST?

BY CHRISTIAN WISSMULLER

The pivotal moment in trumpeter, composer, producer, and bandleader John Vanore's career occurred while he was attending a summer program directed by Oliver Nelson. Nelson's singular identity was so inspirational that Vanore made his decision to pursue music right then and there. He went on to study with Philadelphia-based guitarist Dennis Sandole, a mentor to John Coltrane, and after graduating from Pennsylvania's Widener University – where Vanore would later have a long and celebrated career as an educator – he joined the legendary Woody Herman band. That experience led to Vanore forming his own large ensemble, Abstract Truth, an innovative collective combining small-group intimacy with the firepower of the big band. Abstract Truth has earned wide critical praise for its six albums.

Vanore's most recent album is *Primary Colors*, the long-lost duo album recorded in 1984 and '85 with keyboardist Ron Thomas. Vanore is a masterful trumpeter and it's a pleasure to hear him just open up and blow on this strikingly original album. His fluid virtuosity may remind listeners of his lifelong devotion to Miles, Freddie Hubbard, Art Farmer, and other greats.



1. Oliver Nelson – *Sound Pieces*

Conventional wisdom would imply the obvious choice of an Oliver Nelson recording is the iconic *Blues and the Abstract Truth*. That is correct and has earned its merit. Oliver passed away in 1975 at the age of 43. In that time he recorded about 80 albums!! – with about two dozen of them being under his own name. *Sound Pieces* presents Oliver the composer, arranger, saxophonist, and master improviser (in 1966). “Sound Piece for Jazz Orchestra” is a three-part suite – *not* just a tune. His adept and colorful orchestration and development of the blues is noteworthy as he employs varied elements such as time signatures, bass clarinet, French horns, et cetera. Contrasting the jazz orchestra component is Oliver the composer as improviser in “The Shadow of Your Smile.” The solo is a masterclass in structure and development bordering on perfection. I can’t help but to mention Bob Thiele, producer. He and other notable producers are responsible for the fulfilling of an artist’s vision and allowing us to disappear into the music. He is responsible for many of the Oliver Nelson, as well as John Coltrane recordings. Our jazz experience owes him a debt.



2. Wayne Shorter – *Alegria*

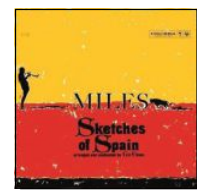
This album is a kaleidoscope. Wayne – through the Blue Note period, to Miles, Weather Report, and now – has remained an inspiring improviser. Add to that he wrote all the arrangements except “Bachianas Brasileiras No.5” by Villa-Lobos (arranged by Robert Sadin). This project embraces folk and traditional melody, classical inspirations, and original pieces. The Shorter classic, “Orbits,” morphs into a chamber piece and all the while Wayne stays true to his sound and identity. He provokes our curiosity with his overdubs. The music moves from angular to linear with moments of percussive drive. This album is a virtual Wayne Shorter thesaurus.

3. Kenny Wheeler – *One More Time*

Large ensemble recordings by Kenny Wheeler are more than “big band.” There is a lyrical and emotional content to his composing that is more like a cinematographer. You see into the music. Norma Winstone is ever-present. Her voice in combination with Kenny, or with guitar, or even as a component texture of the ensemble doubling the lead trumpet or other section adds a depth of humanity to the beautiful lines that comprise the charts. The solos separate in moments of a small group and the backgrounds are frequently paintings (or “set design” using another movie reference) as opposed to the typical big band riff. Then there is the Kenny Wheeler harmonic language applied to the large ensemble with the line writing creating dialog and weaving a path to more solos and band choruses that are soloistic in their own right. Nuanced in a way like no other big band – vivid and deeply emotionally expressive. Like Kenny himself.

4. Miles Davis – *Sketches of Spain*

Whether conscious of it or not, we, as humans, are always searching in our lives for that *moment*. It could be in a movie, a novel – and it may often be quite brief. The moment is emotional and it transports you. *Sketches of Spain* in its virtual entirety is a moment, a transcendent experience where the collaboration of Miles and Gil Evans created a work that never existed before and none such has existed since. The album and especially the “Concerto” know no time. In its 60-plus years of existence it remains humbling and rewarding to listen to.



5. The Dave Taylor Octet – *The Atomic Bomb Blues*

Dave Taylor is one of the great unsung heroes. A bass trombonist extraordinaire. One of the few instrumentalists who through their existence has “written the book” on their instrument. I’m talking here about the brass player hierarchy the likes of Con-

rad Gozzo, Snooky Young, and Adolph Herseth. Granted they are trumpet players, but this is what makes Dave unique and special. He has put a stamp on the bass trombone. More than a player, his voice has defined the instrument. As composer and instrumentalist, he forges an identity needing our attention. This is contemporary art – rooted yet explorative, unpredictable. As the disc explores the likes of Ellington, Gershwin, Mingus, Virgil Thompson, and of course Dave Taylor, it's a landscape of discovery.

6. Kurt Elling – *Nightmoves*

Spellbinding! Kurt Elling is a storyteller – a dream-weaver. “Singer” is such a limited word to describe the magic he brings to a song... a lyric. His collaborations with pianist Laurence Hobgood define empathy. The merging of the arrangement and song is like the screenplay to a great movie. The meaning and flow of the story immerse you. “The Sleepers” takes music by Fred Hersch with words from Walt Whitman set to Hobgood’s sensitive string arrangement and Kurt weaves the tale. “Leaving Again/In the Wee Small Hours” touches your heart.



7. Amina Figarova – *Road to the Sun*

I had the good fortune to see this group live (minus the string trio) and was enraptured. The inventive compositions with their twists and turns were both interesting and exciting. On this recording, the presence of the string trio is tastefully a part of the music. The front line of trumpet/flugelhorn, saxophones, and flute made for a colorful palette. The flautist Bart Platteau made a special contribution to the sonority. Bart’s flute is in B♭ – a rarity. It lent a color that helped define the unique sonic character that holds my curiosity to the music. And on this recording, the warmer sound of the flute with strings is velvet and transformational to Amina’s compositions.

8. Tomasz Stanko – *Dark Eyes*

Mystique... tension. The opening scene of “Homeland” season 4 shows Carrie driving down a murky street at night. The music track sets the mood and provides you with anticipation... The track is “Terminal 7” from *Dark Eyes*. Beauty and understatement pervade in the music of Tomasz Stanko. The tension is subtle – his sound carries the emotion of the lines. His discography is large, and many are worthy to be on a playlist. Like a Matisse, the simplicity enraptures. The lines flow and the accompanying cats create the canvas for Tomasz’s brush strokes. I’d be remiss to not mention ECM creator and producer Manfred Eicher. He is an architect. As with hundreds of his projects and artists the music *takes place*. The haunting pieces demand you search your soul.



9. Miles Davis – *Freedom Jazz Dance Bootleg Series Vol. 5*

Miles Smiles – historic and required listening. *Bootleg Series Vol. 5* takes us back to the moment. The insight into the creative process of Miles shaping the outcome of “Freedom Jazz Dance” is the gem. Like seeing the sketches from a painter that led to his masterpiece. Never one to embrace “outtakes” since there was usually a good reason for their rejection, this session reel inclu-

sion validates and brings us to the studio. We get to sit next to Teo Macero. Teo – another of the great producers – in this moment letting the creative process happen in the room. As we know, later in the *Bitches Brew*, *Silent Way*, *Jack Johnson* period, Teo is an active participant and important contributor to the creative outcome through his inventive editing.

10. Freddie Hubbard – *The Night of the Cookers*

How fortunate are we that this night was recorded. Freddie and Lee – only first names needed here for fellow trumpet players. The original LPs were two volumes, one song per side! It was a live date in a club in Brooklyn. Thankfully that moment was captured. In “Freddie’s Jodo,” after the intro, he enters, or more accurately explodes into the piece –tossing a match into a pool of gasoline and for seven minutes the pedal is down to the floor! In the great Clare Fischer tune, “Pensativa,” Lee begins and sets the groove, muted and pensive as the title implies. Then Freddie enters to set the path of development, and the exchange begins – Lee on the right, Freddie left. Their tête-à-tête takes us to the school of invention, creativity and the unexpected.



John Vanore’s *Primary Colors (Acoustical Concepts, Inc.)* was released on February 7, 2020. www.johnvanore.net

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