



Basil Hodge

## Tom Harrell Oak Tree

High Note HCD 7332 (CD, DL) ★★★

Tom Harrell (t, flhn), Luis Perdomo (p, el p), Ugonna Okegwo (b) and Adam Cruz (d).  
Rec. 24-25 November 2020



Tom Harrell's latest in a long line of releases finds the trumpeter the sole lead on a set of 11 song-form originals. Harrell's whimsical tone is pleasantly at one with his harmonically rooted lines and, with Luis Perdomo leading the piano trio support, the album never flags.

The set opens with the surging pedal-point bounce of 'Evoorg'. Mood established, Harrell delivers the twisty theme and spins lines over 'rhythm changes' without breaking sweat. 'Fivin' comes next, a gentle song with a calypso vibe and subtle Perdomo Fender Rhodes, and then the angular leaps of 'Oak Tree' the album's melodically ambitious title track.

As the album continues, light-touch Latin gives way to the double-tracked trumpet of the strident 'Zatoichi' and 'Sun Up' has a hip-hop trace. But despite the rhythmic shifts, the imaginative Harrell sticks to theme-and-variations principles by spinning lines over the harmonic foundation underneath. Perdomo's tasty voicings never intrude, and Ugonna Okegwo and Adam Cruz, Harrell regulars for over 20 years, are solid on bass and drums.

Overall, Harrell's thoughtful

lyricism and occasional bursts of speed always engage, as does Perdomo's professionalism and nous. And most of the songs bare the idiosyncratic Harrell touch. 'Robot Etude' edges to the odd, 'Love Tide' ends the set at pace. **Mike Hobart**

## Heroes Are Gang Leaders

LeAutoRoiOgraphy  
577 Records 5887(CD, LP, DL) ★★

Thomas Sayers Ellis (bandleader, poet), James Brandon Lewis (ts), Luke Stewart (b), Melanie Dyer (vla, v), Nettie Chickering (v), Jenna Camille (p, v), Randall Horton (poet), Devin Brahja Waldman (as, syn), Bonita Lee Penn (poet), Heru Shabaka-Ra (t), Brandon Moses (g) and Warren 'Trae' Crudup III (d).  
Rec. 1 February 2019



Poet and jazz critic LeRoi Jones – later known as Amiri Baraka – was a pioneer of fusing poetry and jazz. In the mid-1960s, that took the form of avant-garde recordings with the likes of Sunny Murray, but he also went on to explore more accessible contexts, as on his 1972 album *It's Nation Time*, featuring Gary Bartz and Lonnie Smith.

That's the tradition referenced in this hour-long live suite by a sprawling collective of younger US heavyweights including bassist Luke Stewart and tenor man James Brandon Lewis (who, together with poet Thomas Sayer Ellis, wrote all the tracks). Baraka's presence is invoked throughout, with his poem titles sprinkled liberally and Ellis dropping in personal anecdotes

of hanging with the elder. The music veers from wailing free-for-alls to funk grooves with a hint of the loose insouciance of the late Greg Tate's equally diffuse ensemble, Burnt Sugar The Arkestra Chamber.

At times, however, it feels like there's just a little too much going on, with the vocal recitations drowned out by a surfeit of enthusiasm – and the whole project suffers by comparison with William Parker's truly epic funk-to-free masterpiece *I Plan To Stay a Believer*, which featured impassioned readings by Baraka himself. **Daniel Spicer**

## Basil Hodge A Point of Reference

Zeal Records ZEALCD003 (CD) ★★★

Basil Hodge (p, Fender Rhodes), Ed Jones (ts, ss), Oli Hayhurst (b) and Winston Clifford (d).  
Rec. 16 March 2020



Pianist and composer Basil Hodge established himself on the British jazz scene in the 1990s before releasing his widely-acclaimed debut, *My Guardian Angel*, in 2003.

Releases have been thin on the ground since: indeed, *A Point of Reference* is only Hodge's third album, following 2009's *Sound Reasoning*. This is a pity, since it once again demonstrates its creator's fine compositional skills – eight of the 10 tracks are Hodge originals – and lilting, swinging touch at the keyboard. Hard-bop grooves like the opener 'Hanging Out' give Hodge and his fellow musicians a chance to spread out and shine – there's some fine blowing from saxophonist Ed Jones, who weaves driving, snaking lines here and elsewhere throughout the set.

Bassist Oli Hayhurst delivers a smart solo on 'Deep Down', while the band explore funk and Latin influences on the likes of 'Common Ground' and the lovely 'Port Louis'. One of the two covers is a gentle reading of 'A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square', with Hodge taking a delightful solo and Winston Clifford supporting with some fine understated drum work. 'Until Next Time', as Hodge puts in the handsomely dreamy closer – hopefully there won't be too long to wait. **Robert Shore**

## Chris Hodgkins and His Band A Salute to Humphrey Lyttelton

Bell 519 (CD) ★★★★★ EDITOR'S CHOICE

Chris Hodgkins, Noel Langley (t), Henry Lowther (t, flhn), Mark Basseby (tb), Diane McLoughlin (as, ss), Alex Clarke (ts, cl), Charlotte Glasson (bar s, cl, penny whistle), Jinjoo Yoo (p), Max Brittain (g), Amy Baldwin (b) and Buster Birch (d).  
Rec. 7 December 2021



Hodgkins, former Director of Jazz Services, has always enjoyed a separate career as a mainstream trumpeter. And a good one, too. Thinking to commemorate Lyttelton's centenary, Hodgkins selected an array of Humph's tunes, added two of his own, assembled the lineup as shown and then toured with it. He wanted, he said to "thank Humph for his contribution to, and advocacy of, the UK scene". A worthy aim, for sure.

As always, Hodgkins is an 'equal opportunity' bandleader, happy to mix youth and experience. There's 15 pieces on the album, and yes, Humph's solitary hit 'Bad Penny Blues' is here, the others from varied eras and with diverse hands holding the arranger's pen.

There was always more to Humph the composer than he ever claimed, the choices here certainly refreshingly varied and expertly constructed, arranger Frank Griffith especially effective at making this hefty mini-big band swing. It's packed with soloists, like Basseby, superb on 'Kath Meets Humph', and Clarke impressive as both clarinetist and tenor player, McLoughlin purposeful on alto. Lowther and Glasson get 'Late Night Final' pretty much to themselves and Henry (on flugelhorn) handles Chris' tribute to Susan Da Costa, Humph's manager, with his customary poise. The final track 'Let's Get Out' is a zesty piece and goes well, enlivened as it is by Glasson – 'the Roland Kirk of the penny whistle' – in Chris' words. I think Humph would have approved. As he would of Yoo's vibrant piano on 'Penny', still a mover after all these years. Good tenor from Clarke and nifty Lowther trumpet, too.

So, an invigorating tribute to a hero but more than that, a chance to hear present-day soloists responding valiantly to a past master's inspiration. Let's hope there's more of the same to come.

**Peter Vacher**