



Ian Patterson's Best Releases of 2012

By [IAN PATTERSON](#), Published: January 2, 2013

Vith more and more music being produced independently, it's harder each year to find the time to sten to a lot of it, never mind review it. The following baker's dozen represents some, though not ill of my favorite music of 2012.



[Jenny Scheinman](#)

Mischief and Mayhem

[Self Produced](#)

2012

The title of violinist Jenny Scheinman's sixth album as leader tells much of, but not the whole story. Playful and daring, with memorable melodies rubbing shoulders with arresting improvisations, there's an irresistible freshness and vigor about the music. However, there are more layers to peel away, and great subtlety and lyricism reveal themselves upon each subsequent listen. Scheinman's solo career has been somewhat overshadowed by her decade-long collaborations with guitarist [Bill Frisell](#) and her busy schedule as a side-musician, yet her solo recordings highlight her undoubted talents as a songwriter and, as demonstrated on *Jenny Scheinman* (KOCH Records, 2008), a singer to boot. Reverting here to instrumental territory, *Mischief and Mayhem* states the case for being Scheinman's most striking work to date. [click to continue reading...](#)



[Tribal Tech](#)

X

[Tone Center](#)

2012

According to guitarist [Scott Henderson](#), Tribal Tech never broke up; the band's work simply halted in 2000 when bassist [Gary Willis](#) moved to Spain. Henderson, keyboardist [Scott Kinsey](#) and drummer Kirk Covington continued to play in each others' respective projects in the following years. The first whispers of reunion came in 2009, and subsequently gathered force. Finally, a year after re-locking horns in thirty improvised jams and twelve years since *Rocket Science* (Tone Center,

2000), the doyens of modern fusion return with *X*, an energetic set of memorable tunes and wonderful individual and collective playing. [click to continue reading...](#)



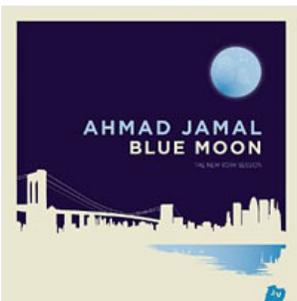
[Brad Mehldau](#) Trio

Ode

[Nonesuch Records](#)

2012

Seven years separate *Ode* from this trio's last studio recording, the outstanding *Day is Done* (Nonesuch, 2005), which has come to mark a before-and-after in Brad Mehldau's trajectory. Previously, the pianist had recorded in a traditional trio setting with few exceptions. Since *Day is Done*, however, Mehldau's projects have covered much more diverse terrain: setting poetry to music with classical soprano Renée Fleming; rubbing shoulders with guitarist [Pat Metheny](#); and blending classical and popular song with mezzo-soprano Anne Sofie von Otter. *Highway Rider* (Nonesuch, 2010) was an orchestral suite of cinematic scope, while *Modern Voices* (Nonesuch, 2011) paired Mehldau with pianist [Kevin Hays](#), simultaneously working their way through the compositional frameworks of Patrick Zimmerli and other contemporary classical composers. [click to continue reading...](#)



[Ahmad Jamal](#)

Blue Moon

[Jazz Village](#)

2012

Ahmad Jamal—senior statesman of jazz piano—first recorded 60 years ago. That he's still producing records of great energy, imagination and flair every couple of years is a remarkable testament to his singular talent. *Blue Moon* broadly follows the formula of *It's Magic* (Dreyfus Records, 2008) and *A Quiet Time* (Dreyfus, 2010); a few Jamal originals, a handful of timeless show tunes and popular numbers from bygone years, plus a nod to the jazz cannon. According to the liner notes the music is reminiscent of Jamal's classic Chess/Impulse! years, and whilst true to an extent, what's more notable is the burning intensity of much of the music. [click to continue reading...](#)



[Bojan Z](#)

Soul Shelter

[EmArcy](#)

2012

In twenty years as leader, pianist/composer Bojan Z has been judicious with the frequency and quality of his releases. *Soul Shelter* is his ninth CD in that time, and his first solo outing since *Solobsession* (Label Bleu, 2001). A new release by the pianist is always an event, and the wait, as always, has been worth it. The music on *Soul Shelter* covers wide stylistic territory and marks another significant milestone in Z's captivating career to date.

Ten of the eleven compositions are originals, and this marks the biggest shift from *Solobsession*, where almost half the tracks were interpretive ventures. Z's Balkan roots still influence much of the music, but he blends and bends genres so convincingly, that baroque figures, Balkan airs and rag rhythms intertwine to weave a vibrant, inclusive mosaic. Electric piano—reinvented to superb effect on *Xenophonia* (Label Bleu, 2006)—adds subtle textures occasionally, but this is essentially a bare bones piano outing, and a beguiling one at that. [click to continue reading...](#)



[Pat Metheny](#) Unity Band

Unity Band

[Nonesuch Records](#)

2012

It may be premature to write about the [Pat Metheny Group](#) in the past tense, but it's been seven years now since *The Way Up* (Nonesuch Records, 2005) and its last world tour. A feeling is creeping in that the 68-minute opus may have been a magnificent closing statement and a poignant swansong for that important group. How, precisely, do you top that? The perpetually busy Missouri guitarist has since occupied himself with shorter compositional song form in more intimate settings, either solo, in trio or quartet settings. The lunatic compositional and architectural ambition of *Orchestrion* (Nonesuch Records, 2010) proved in a sense that *The Way Up* was perhaps just another marker along the way; with Metheny the way is always up. [click to continue reading...](#)



[Yuri Honing](#) Acoustic Quartet

True

[Challenge Records](#)

2012

If the dust of jazz history ever settles, saxophonist Yuri Honing may well be looked upon as one of today's trailblazers. As the debate limps/rages on (take your pick) as to what jazz is or should be, it seems clear that more and more young musicians with a deep respect for and knowledge of the tradition and its language, feel nevertheless unbound by convention, and open to all music as a source of inspiration for their creativity. Honing has been delving into pop music—and many other sources besides—for over a decade and a half. *True* marks an all-acoustic studio recording for the first time since his captivating Middle Eastern odyssey, *Orient Express* (Jazz in Motion, 2002), and offers striking originals with a couple of interpretations of pop numbers. [click to continue reading...](#)



[Louis Sclavis](#) Atlas Trio

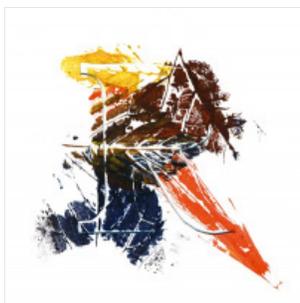
Sources

[ECM Records](#)

2012

Multi-reedist, composer and improviser Louis Sclavis' ninth release for

ECM sees this eternally restless seeker of new sounds and textures heading once more into personally uncharted territory; this is the first time Sclavis has led a trio of clarinet, guitar and piano. In guitarist Gilles Coronado and pianist Benjamin Mouassy, Sclavis has recruited open-minded musicians with the technique, discipline and imagination necessary to give life to his sketches of musical ideas, where formal structure and free rein coexist in such close symbiosis that the two are not always easily distinguishable. Contemporary classical ruminations, pulsing funk, subtle European and North African folk airs, improvisation, and searching impressionism flow in fascinating juxtaposition. [click to continue reading...](#)



[Rusconi](#)

Revolution

[Qilin Records](#)

2012

Revolution is in the air, and Rusconi knows it. The Swiss trio's fifth album sees it break with major record labels— following its memorable tribute to indie-rock band Sonic Youth on *It's a Sonic Life* (Sony, 2010)—and head out into the great unknown of self- promotion. It's a bold move, but one befitting of the sonic explorers its three members truly are. Following the likes of Radiohead and trumpeter [Cuong Vu](#), the trio's music is available on a pay-what-you-feel-its-worth basis, and the aim is to build a fan base that recognizes the serious need to support independently-minded, creative spirits in order to be able to hear their music at all. . [click to continue reading...](#)



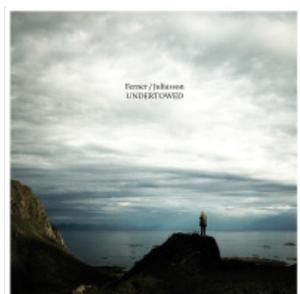
[Alex Machacek](#)

FAT

[Abstract Logix](#)

2012

Alex Machacek has been turning heads with his incendiary guitar playing and striking writing since he burst on the scene with *Featuring Ourselves* (Next Generation Enterprises, 1999). Whilst drummer Herbert Pirker and bassist Raphael Preuschi have a less visible profile, their equally outstanding chops play a big part in the success of *FAT*. These musicians also played on half the tracks on Machacek's *[sic]* (Abstract Logix, 2006), and there's significant chemistry between them, whether tearing it up on jazz-fusion/rock of a very contemporary hue, or exploring more meditative terrain. [click to continue reading...](#)



[Per-Arne Ferner/Per Gunnar Juliusson](#)

Undertowed

[NORCD](#)

2012

The striking artwork on *Undertowed* serves as metaphor for guitarist Per-Arne Ferner and pianist Per Gunnar Juliusson's musical relationship.

A brooding, cloud-heavy sky and a still sea seem like reflections of each other, or a seamless whole. The lone figure juxtaposed against this imposing landscape is at once a part of it, and yet apart. The inner gatefold reveals a snow blizzard on the left and two black birds in a leaf-shorn tree opposite—suggestive of quiet power, melancholy, and evolution. Everywhere in these images—designed by [Eple Trio](#) drummer Jonas Howden Sjøvaag—there is, like in the music itself, a natural, clearly defined symmetry. Contrast and balance between light and form is central, and there's a strong sense of interdependence between the various components. [click to continue reading...](#)



Just Music Trio

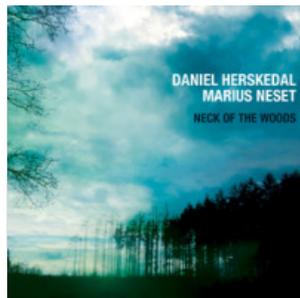
Standpoint

[Caligola Records](#)

2012

Cross-pollination of music is as old as the hills, but the increasing frequency of such experimentation—the result of evermore sophisticated home recording technologies and file sharing—has obliterated the lines

of latitude and longitude that traditionally separated musicians living in different countries/continents. This is leading to an ever greater number of sub-genres in all styles of music, and in jazz terms, may represent the greatest revolution in the music for forty years. It's increasingly futile to hang a name on so much music these days, much to the chagrin of the purists. However, when the wailing and gnashing of teeth finally abate, there may be—as this trio's name portends— one genre only: just music. [click to continue reading...](#)



[Daniel Herskedal/Marius Neset](#)

Neck of the Woods

[Edition Records](#)

2012

Saxophone and tuba duos have something in common with hens' teeth, so tubaist Daniel Herskedal and saxophonist Marius Neset's collaboration is already noteworthy for its pioneering spirit alone. Herskedal and

Neset—former students of Copenhagen's Rhythmic Conservatory and band mates in pianist [Django Bates](#) StoRMChaser—have, however, crafted music so sublime that it's a wonder tubaists and saxophonists aren't a dime-a-dozen. Drawing from the Norwegian folk tradition and classically influenced European church music, the result is a recording that has the haunting quality of sacred music while also carrying a vein of pastoral roots music. The judicious use of vocals in the form of tenor Hallvar Djupvik, and the 20-piece all-male Svanholm Singers choir adds to the music's ethereal and often devotional nature. [click to continue reading...](#)

0 comments



Leave a message...

Discussion

Community

Share



ALSO ON ALL ABOUT JAZZ

What's this? x

All About Jazz Upgrades to Disqus Comments

4 comments • a day ago



Michael Ricci — We're leaving comments in the very capable hands of the DISQUS developers and I'm lovin' the possibi...

Arbouretum: "Coming Out Of The Fog", jazz review by Glenn Astarita

2 comments • a day ago



Maxim Micheliov — Test 2

Jazz article: "ECM: A Cultural Archeology" by John Kelman

2 comments • a day ago



Michael Ricci — As John mentioned, we kept our archived comments and the posting function still works. That said, DI...

NPR Music, WWOZ & WBGO Broadcast SFJAZZ Center Opening Night Concert ...

1 comment • a day ago



Stacy Summers — wow! thanks for sharing!



Comment feed



Subscribe via email

[View 2 archived comment\(s\)](#)