

en to the instrumental
n," when it kicks into
ells you that there are
in the LP version that
nced on CD. There are
that all along the way.
Metal Baby" has more
ce on CD, but the LP
more open sound. By
ening to both formats,
at, as with most direct
arisons, it comes down
taste—they're two very
periences of listening to
n.

—Robert Baird

azz

ONÁLEZ

iano; Myron Walden, soprano
; Ron Blake, Azar Lawrence,
Christian McBride, bass; Jeff
ms
(CD). 2010. Benito González,
iano, eng. DDD.

men on this record are
well known and the lead-
but you will be hearing
out Benito González. He
y Tyner in his ferocious
assiveness, his careening,
mand chords, and a right
ays ideas like a fire hose.
s energy sounds even
al than Tyner's in his
on the edge of rocketing
l. And it contains subli-
mic elements and melodic
enezuela, where he grew

s also a talented compos-
dleader with a concept.
mplete album statement.
believes that all lives pro-
ses, and the music here
current cycle of his life.
s tunes tell a story, they
launch pads for the in-
power in this ensemble.
k in the pants because of
yron Walden, who has a
scography but who may
played better on record
absolutely smokes the title
prano saxophone, he fol-
ez's torrential solo (not
shes right to the precari-
chaos.



Tenor saxophonist Azar Lawrence played on Miles Davis's *Dark Magus* and one of McCoy Tyner's greatest albums, *Enlightenment*, in the early 1970s, when he was barely into his 20s. Then he dropped off the jazz radar for 30 years. He is back, with a vengeance. The naked aggression of his onslaughts in "Journey's End" and "Taurus" will knock you right on your ass.

Tenor saxophonist Ron Blake is, in relative terms, the voice of reason. On the album's only cover, Tyner's "Blues on the Corner," he offers a detailed, comprehensive exposition that, in this wild company, sounds almost scholarly.

It takes a strong leader to form the colorful personalities on *Circles* into a real band instead of a mere all-star group. It helps that the rhythmic foundation is first class. Christian McBride and "Tain" Watts give this ensemble its tight, hard thrust.

—Thomas Conrad

ANGELICA SANCHEZ *A Little House*

Angelica Sanchez, piano
Clean Feed CF206 (CD). 2010. Angelica Sanchez,
prod.; Joe Marciano, eng. AAD?
TT: 58:00
Performance ★★★★★
Sonics ★★★★★

As active as she is in New York City's underground jazz circuit, pianist Angelica Sanchez doesn't often record as a leader. But her first album, *Mirror Me* (2003), and its follow-up, *Life Between* (2008), both featuring Sanchez's husband, Tony Malaby, on tenor sax, are exceptional pieces of work—full of fire and dark shadow, skirting the edges of tonality, balancing poetic themes and torrid free improvisation. If her new solo-piano disc, *A Little House*, doesn't have the same by-the-lapels energy, it's

stamped with a similar aesthetic. The high abstraction, coiled intersecting voices, and bold sonic elements offer a vivid account of what makes Sanchez tick as a musician.

Versatility is one of Sanchez's strengths—her sideperson gigs range from trumpet great Wadada Leo Smith to indie-folk sensation Iron & Wine—so there's nothing jarring in the transition from the first track, the brusquely atonal "Chantico," to Hank Thompson's "I'll Sign My Heart Away," a country ditty about lost love and divorce lawyers. Thompson's original includes the baffling insertion of a bar in 2/4, which Sanchez discards. She begins in loose ballad mood, then renders the melody on a bell-like toy piano—an instrument featured in more dissonant contexts here in "Crawl Space" and the final track, "Mimi."

The tones on the recording are balanced and clear, though *A Little House* perhaps sounds best with the volume set a few notches higher than your norm. Through headphones the experience is more intense; Sanchez's voice becomes dimly audible, her unconscious murmuring drawing us inward into her improvisations. The clanging, hissing sounds of prepared piano in "Stretched" and "Crawl Space," and the ominous muted-string timbres in the Brazilian folk song "A Casinha Pequena" (Portuguese for "a little house"), also come across with bite and definition.

While the session doesn't lack for jagged edges, Sanchez finds breath in the quietly evolving E-flat major sonorities of "Glow," one of her most disarming and effective moments. Her rich tonal vocabulary and creative range make *A Little House* worth adding alongside Vijay Iyer's *Solo*, Omar Sosa's *Calma*, and Benoît Delbecq's *Circles and Calligrams* as one of our day's top solo-piano documents. —David Adler

HENRY THREADGILL ZOIOD *This Brings Us To, Volume II*

Henry Threadgill, flute, alto saxophone; Jose Davila, trombone, tuba; Liberty Ellman, guitar; Stomu Takeishi, bass guitar; Elliott Humberto Kavee, drums
Pi P136 (CD). 2010. Liberty Ellman, prod.; Andy Taub, eng. DDD? TT: 43:35
Performance ★★★★★
Sonics ★★★★★

Volume I of *This Brings Us To* was one of the most decorated jazz albums of 2009. In the "Album of the Year" category of the four

most important critics' polls (*JazzTimes*, *Downbeat*, *The Village Voice*, the Jazz Journalists Association), it placed from second to fourth.

Volume II will further solidify Henry Threadgill's renown. For over 40 years and 30 albums, as a point man for the jazz avant-garde, he has pursued a fiercely independent, uncompromised creative mission. His music sounds like no other.

Free jazz is usually loud and dangerous. Threadgill's music is measured and often quiet. Its oddity begins with the instrumentation.

Because Jose Davila's tuba sometimes functions as a bass, Stomu Takeishi on fretless bass guitar is able to move forward and configure intricate guitar choirs with Liberty Ellman. There are no apparent starting melodies or chord progressions. Instead, voices emerge and, before receding, overlay patterns of rarefied cumulative counterpoint. For all its complexity, most of this music feels airy and spare. On "Extremely Sweet William," Ellman's quivering guitar lines, floating in time, intersect Threadgill's esoteric flute filigrees, while Davila's tuba bumps along the bottom.

In an interview with Howard Mandel in the July 2010 *Downbeat*, Threadgill discussed the theoretical underpinnings of his current ensemble. He said that his compositions are "modular," and that he assigns blocks of pitch intervals to each improviser: "I want my musicians to play spontaneous ideas. The only way to get them to do that is to get past the usual cues."

This music is strikingly devoid of "the usual cues." The five players (none famous except Threadgill) offer provocative, unfamiliar concepts during their individual moments. But no one quite "solos." Everyone here has internalized Threadgill's system of group improvisation. Elliott Kavee's drums wash and stir. Independently and obsessively, Davila's tuba sings a guttural song. Ellman's guitar fidgets in place. The juxtaposed textures make new forms of order.

The limitation of this music is that its laconic cleverness engages the intellect long before it arouses emotion. It is not until late in the fourth and next-to-last track, "Polymorph," that any of the players sound more excited than thoughtful. Threadgill's Zen is a little cold, but anyone interested in the leading edge of the current jazz art form needs to hear Zooid. —Thomas Conrad