

JAZZ


AMY CERVINI
Jazz Country

Amy Cervini, voice, saxophone (2); Jesse Lewis, guitar, voice (6); Matt Aronoff, bass. With: Anat Cohen, clarinet (4, 10); Marty Ehrlich, saxophone (5); Nadje Noordhuis, trumpet (12); Nellie McKay, voice, ukulele (2); Oded Lev-Ari, piano (7, 8); Gary Versace, accordion (8) {<RB: the numbers in parens seem to indicate the number of tracks each musician appears on, but I think we can cut them}
 Anzic ANZ-0044 (CD). 2014. Matt Wilson, prod.; Brian Montgomery, eng. DDD.
 TT: 55:50

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
SONICS ★★★★★

It's perfect that drummer Matt Wilson would produce not just an album without drums, but one with as much wit and spark as Amy Cervini's *Jazz Country*. Cervini, a New York-based singer-songwriter steeped in jazz, has a strong, pliant voice and a clear-as-day sense of artistic self as she covers everything from "Frim Fram Sauce" and "Blue Moon" to Neil Young, Anne Murray, Carrie Underwood, and Celine Dion. What makes it work is her stripped-down and enormously talented trio, with Jesse Lewis on acoustic guitar and Matt Aronoff on bass.

Though six guests appear in the course of 14 songs, the trio sound is key, and Lewis's acoustic playing is a revelation throughout. Known for his fairly raw, intense electric sound in other settings, Lewis emerges here as a poet of the steel-string, sending many a track heavenward with just a simple accompaniment. His wordless vocal improvisation in "Calling You" is emotionally rich. He brings white-hot swing chops to Cervini's Gypsy-jazz original "Je Danse avec la Neige," and solos like an ace bebopper on the country-rock novelty "Before He Cheats."

Cervini's way with repertoire is consistently fresh, plotting a pathway from Dave Frishberg's "Wallflower Lonely, Cornflower Blue" to songs by Johnny Cash, Hank Williams, Dominique Eade, and herself, among others. It's jazz and country, and quite a few permutations in between. —David R. Adler


RENAUD GARCÍA-FONS
Beyond the Double Bass

Renaud García-Fons, five-string double bass; Claire Antonini, lute, theorbo; Kiko Ruiz, flamenco guitar; Jean-Louis Matinier, accordion; many others
 Enja ENJ-9608 2 (CD/DVD). 1993–2013/2014.
 Antoine Demantke, mastering. DDD. TTs: 68:35/79:34

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
SONICS ★★★★★

Renaud García-Fons is a French bassist and composer of Spanish descent and astonishing musicianship. This retrospective of his 20 years and 10 CDs' worth of work for Enja Records is so rich in creativity—of playing, technique, composition, arrangement—that I wonder why I'd never heard of him before. He seems to have reinvented what's considered playable on the double bass.

Much of this music is improvised, but García-Fons is not really a jazz musician; only one track hints at the blues. He plays flamenco bass. In all the flavors of its roots in northern India to its branchings into the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Spain, flamenco is audible everywhere here, in rhythms, harmonies, technique, *duende*. But often this album sounds like early music, or South American folk. While "world music" is now ubiquitous, García-Fons's music is so fresh it sounds as if he's the first to have tried to bridge cultural divides with sound. The compositions are all his own, arranged by him for ensembles of from one to 16 players. "Oriental Bass" is arranged for double bass, flutes, clarinets, trombone, lute, theorbo, accordion, derbouka, tar, bendir. The list reads like sonic mud. The music is clear as springwater.

García-Fons's pizzicati are so fast and clean that my ears often refuse to believe he's playing a bass. His flamenco-precise strummings of broken chords sound more like an oud or cittern. But mostly he plays arco, and then I could swear I'm hearing a deep-voiced cello bowed high and well. García-Fons presses strings to fingerboard with absolute assurance of pressure and pitch,

and plucks or bows with uncompromised accuracy and strength. He must have fingers of horn. He *looks* like a lean, sinewy bull somehow capable of the finest dressage, and his music sounds it. The overall impression of great power matched by pointillist poise and inerrant rhythmic grace can be almost overwhelming.

Throughout, the bass is not only a rhythm instrument but the voice that sings the melody. And such a *singing* tone, and such melodies—"En mi barrio" is lyrical *cantabile* embodied. "Entremundo" soars in a silvery arch linking the musics of India and South America. The strongly Brazilian "La Línea del Sur" is as fresh and clean as the first cloudless dawn after days of rain. "Bari," a duet for bass and accordion from an entire album of same, is balletic in its perpetual motion.

Musical *toro* he may be; in concert or in conversation, García-Fons seems almost to disappear, as evinced throughout disc 2, a DVD of a 79-minute film directed by Nicolas Dattilesi. Sumptuously photographed in HD, beautifully edited and paced, the film reveals someone entirely devoted to his art, with a mien so clear and artless as to almost efface the man from his music. Rather than his instrument seeming a part of him, García-Fons seems an outgrowth of his bass: as if it had grown two arms to play itself.

For \$17 from Amazon, this set is a deal. So is *Solo: The Marcevol Concert* (2012), a performance in a medieval sanctuary in southern France accompanied by a DVD of the entire event, also filmed by Dattilesi. It shows how much music one man, one bass, and a few samples can make in one evening. The sound of both albums is seductively clear, full, spacious—and, in the case of *Beyond the Double Bass*, remarkably consistent for 14 tracks recorded over 20 years.

The album answers the question its title implies: Beyond the double bass is *song*. —Richard Lehnert