

back and do traditional jazz. We played a cruise for the North Sea Jazz Festival a few months ago with just a trio, and after the gig Ira, Edsel and I were like, 'That was weird.' I don't know that my straightahead career is finished, but I'm already planning the next album in Mali."

While Bridgewater's immersion in Mali's famously rich music culture wasn't an obvious path for her, no other jazz singer in recent decades has created such a diverse body of work. From her brilliant hard-bop tribute to Horace Silver on 1995's *Love and Peace* to her emotionally taut exploration of the music of Kurt Weill on 2002's *This is New* and her love letter to France on 2005's *J'ai Deux Amours* ("Two Loves Have I"), Bridgewater has created a series of highly personal projects that reach far beyond the standard repertoire. She doesn't entirely abandon the jazz canon on *Red Earth*, opening the album with "Afro Blue," which was also the title track of her debut record in 1974. Her version of Wayne Shorter's "Footprints," with her original lyric, serves as a moment of calm introspection on an otherwise raucous album that concludes with a ferocious version of "Compared to What."

In a canny move, she uses Nina Simone's "Four Women" as a bridge connecting the world of jazz matriarchs with Mali's tradition of powerful female vocalists. The most memorable tracks on *Red Earth* find Bridgewater in various forms of dialogue with incandescent Malian stars. On "Bambo," an influential protest against polygamy, she joins the song's composer, Tata Bambo Kouyate. Bridgewater seems slightly awed by the great Wassoulou vocalist Oumou Sangaré on "Djarabi" ("Oh My Love"), while the young Kabiné Kouyaté is an eager jazz pupil on "The Griots." Bridgewater doesn't attempt to sing literal English translations, but on some pieces, like the heartrending "Mama Digna Sara Ye" ("Mama Don't Ever Go Away"), she captures the tune's incantatory phrasing and narrative momentum with a bluesy authority.

"For me, it was such a joy to have the opportunity to work with other singers who came from a place of love and sharing, with no competition," Bridgewater says. "I've wanted to do that with American singers, and when I approach people it gets very touchy. It was so amazing to go to this country and receive this welcome: the prodigal son who finds his way home. Everybody says I'm from a northern tribe called the Peul. People talk to me in Bambara. It's just amazing, to feel in your spirit that you know



Happy Apple, L to R: Erik Fratzke, David King and Michael Lewis

## Hometown Homeboys

**Drummer David King talks about his *other* genre-blasting trio (and why Minneapolis musicians rule)**

**I**t's hard to picture a band more grassroots than Happy Apple. Drummer David King, electric bassist Erik Fratzke and saxophonist Michael Lewis hail from Minneapolis, in the verdant northern Midwest, far from the concrete jungles where hard-hitting jazz musicians tend to congregate. "The stigma of improvising groups outside New York is that they're jam-bandy," King notes. "We would kind of use that. We'd roll into town and not much would be expected of us. Then we'd just really throw down. We always felt we could hang anywhere. But we decided to stay outside the New York system in order to commit to each other."

Many know King as the drummer in another acclaimed trio, the Bad Plus. Happy Apple, in fact, gave the Bad Plus its initial inspiration. At those storied Happy Apple gigs in New York, one could always find future Plussers Ethan Iverson and Reid Anderson, King's old friends and fellow Midwesterners, navigating the notoriously difficult New York music scene. "They were frustrated about keeping bands together," King recalls, "and they saw that what Happy Apple did was a conscious choice, to commit to a sound and create something new. The ideology of both bands is identical: bring the music out there with no charts and throw down; try to connect."

Even as King took up with the Bad Plus and met major-label success, he guided Happy Apple on a parallel path of furious creativity. In time, with four independent releases already under their belt, the scruffy trio landed a deal with Universal France. Their profile grew considerably in 2002 with *Youth Oriented*, followed by *The Peace Between Our Companies* in 2005. Their seventh album, *Happy Apple Back on Top* (Sunnyside), is a fine and wholly representative effort, steeped in free-jazz abandon, laced with complexity, and conversant with Minneapolis' punk and indie-rock heritage. King refers to the music's "crunchy, dark-tinged underbelly," a "core of down-homey, Midwestern spatial blues that seems to attach itself to every tune."

At times, Happy Apple's textural mix can bring to mind the historic Paul Motian/Joel Lovano/Bill Frisell trio. King's drumming is loose and playful, but finely calibrated when it needs to be. Fratzke's approach to the Fender bass is chordal and polyphonic; not surprisingly, he plays guitar as well. His technique is uniquely homespun, owing little to the flash of fusion. "Erik is deeply influenced by modern classical music," notes King. "He can sit and talk to you about Schnittke. He's such a weapon beyond the normal bass." Michael Lewis, who plays tenor, alto and soprano sax with something approaching demonic possession, has won praise from artists as diverse as Tim Berne and the late Michael Brecker. King refers to Lewis as "this gunslinger in his outpost. If you're in a room and he's playing, you're going to feel it."

All three members compose for the group, and King delights in their differences. "My tunes tend to be surreal in their structure," he says. The moods are diverse, however, ranging from the thunderous metal riff of "The New Bison" (initially a Bad Plus tune) to the peaceful 3/4 gait of "He's O.K." King continues: "Michael's tunes tend to be more poppy or folkloric in their melodies. He embraces the idea of writing something simple and breeding complexity underneath it."

Examples from *Back on Top* include the slow, silvery theme of “Most Popular to Succeed” and the nonchalant backbeat of “Calgon for Hetfield.” And Fratzke? “Erik’s music steers away from any overt melodic content. It’s more based on these different tonal systems he works in. He might combine kitschy, almost Mancini-style phrasing with these odd intervals. In ‘Density in Dan’s Fan City,’ for instance [*he hums part of the tune*], they’re almost like big-band phrases but the harmony is coming from somewhere else.”

Some might mistake Happy Apple’s irreverence—manifest in such song titles as “Starchild Cranium,” “Let’s Not Reflect,” “Hence the Turtleneck” and “Crème de Men-the Quasar”—for a lack of seriousness. But it doesn’t get more serious than maintaining a steady lineup and forging a distinctive body of work for 10 years. Happy Apple is the quintessential working band, even if its members throw their weight around elsewhere. King, in addition to the Bad Plus, has appeared on such sterling recent projects as *Shine Ball* by

pianist Bill Carrothers and *At the Center* by Meat Beat Manifesto. Multi-reedist Michel Portal sought out Fratzke for his latest release, the exceptional *Birdwatcher*. King and Fratzke teamed with fellow hometown heavies Craig Taborn and Greg Norton (former bassist with Hüsker Dü) for *The Gang Font Featuring Interloper*, one of the most adventurous items in Thirsty Ear’s Blue Series to date. “I’m so about all these Minneapolis homeboys,” King exclaims. “We have this bent way of going about it.” **DAVID R. ADLER**



Charles Mingus

## Buried Treasure

The second batch of *Jazz Icons* DVDs features forgotten performances by Trane, Mingus and more

**E**ric, I’m gonna miss your ass over here.” It’s Charles Mingus talking to Eric Dolphy in 1964 as the Mingus sextet rehearses in Stockholm. Mingus looks fierce in wrap-around shades. They’ve just gone through “So Long Eric,” a then-new tune composed as a farewell to Dolphy, who was planning to remain in Europe after the tour.

“How long you gonna stay?” asks Mingus.

“I don’t know. Not long,” Dolphy replies.

“What’s ‘not long?’” asks the leader, pushing. “What’s ‘not long,’ Eric? A year? A month?”

“Maybe a year. Not more than a year.”

Sandwiched between electrifying performances, it’s a fascinating piece of footage, showing the bandleader aggrieved at losing his close friend and star sideman. Dolphy, of course, would never make it home from Europe. A little more than two months later, the diabetic reedist would die in Berlin from insulin shock.

That fascinating snatch of conversation is part of *Charles Mingus Live in ’64*, one of seven new titles comprising the second installment of the *Jazz Icons* DVDs. “We promised that if the first series did well, there would be another,” says David Peck, who produced *Jazz Icons* along with his Reelin’ in the Years Productions partners Phil Galloway and Tom Gulotta. The first set was released last fall to excellent reviews. Not only were the performances—by artists including Art Blakey, Thelonious Monk and Buddy Rich—from peak creative years, but each disc included extensive liner notes by well-known jazz authorities, rare photos and superior sound and video restoration.

The new titles, available now, each contain more than an hour of classic jazz performances

filmed in Europe between 1958 and 1966, most of which have been hidden away ever since in the vaults of European television stations. In addition to Mingus, there are concerts by Dave Brubeck, John Coltrane, Duke Ellington, Dexter Gordon, Wes Montgomery and Sarah Vaughan.

“We know where the treasure is buried,” says Galloway. “We’re the world’s largest music footage archive. We’ve been combing through the vaults for years.” Still, there were some spectacular surprises, including a long-lost set led by Coltrane from 1960, with guest spots from Stan Getz and Oscar Peterson.

“That was one of the ‘eureka’ moments,” says Galloway. “That show in Germany was rumored to exist for years. We were able to find the original: a six-song concert that had never been seen before that Coltrane fans are going to go crazy for. The master was in wonderful shape, very crisp and clear.”

Shot during Coltrane’s last European tour with Miles Davis, the gig was intended for the Davis quintet. But when the trumpeter refused to show, Coltrane took over, leading bandmates Wynton Kelly, Paul Chambers and Jimmy Cobb through classics of the Davis repertoire. Two subsequent dates show the saxophonist at later, equally significant points in his artistic development.

“It’s a documentary without words,” adds

Peck. “It opens when he was doing standards, what he was doing during the ’50s. Then you see him start to morph on the ’61 show with ‘My Favorite Things,’ still keeping some of the melodies. By ’65 he was at the *Love Supreme* period.” This last section, in particular, is invaluable as it is some of the only footage of the classic Coltrane quartet taking extended

solos as they would on a club date.

Other standouts in the series include footage from ’64 and ’66 of the Dave Brubeck Quartet that Brubeck has called the best

