

JAZZ



**NICOLE MITCHELL,
TOMEKA REID,
MIKE REED**
Artifacts

Nicole Mitchell, flute, electronics; Tomeka Reid, cello; Mike Reed, drums
482 Music 482-1093 (CD). 2015. Michael Lintner, prod.; Dorian Gerhing, Dave Zuchowski, engs. DDD? TT: 47:15

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
SONICS ★★★★★

The Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) is one of the most important organizations in jazz history. These musicians accomplished what Charles Mingus attempted with Debut Records and Harold Battiste attempted in New Orleans with A.F.O. Records: establish a path to self-determination for jazz musicians outside the restraints imposed by the traditional music industry. Fifty years later, the AACM is still creating some of the most forward-looking music on the planet.

These current AACM members all lead their own bands (check out Mike Reed's *A New Kind of Dance*), and here they pay tribute to some of the great compositions in AACM history. Cellist Tomeka Reid organized the trio, which interprets material from Roscoe Mitchell's pre-AACM "Jo Jar," Anthony Braxton's "Composition 23B," and Muhal Richard Abrams's "Munkt Munk," to Leroy Jenkins's "The Clowns" and a medley of the interrelated pieces "Bernice," by Fred Anderson, and "Days Fly By with Ruby," by Jeff Parker.

The unusual instrumentation—flute, cello, and drums—allows for some unique interpretations. Without a reed instrument or piano in the mix, the ensemble buzzes and floats its way through the set. "Jo Jar" gets a great pizzicato groove from Reid, who can drive the group with her fingerwork. "B.K." really moves on her terrific rhythm pattern, allowing Mitchell to evoke an almost Afro-Cuban feel with her flute playing. —John Swenson



JONATHAN POWELL & NU SANGHA
Beacons of Light

Jonathan Powell, trumpet, flugelhorn; Jeremy Powell, soprano & tenor saxophone; Marko Churnchetz, piano, Fender Rhodes; Luques Curtis, double bass; Kenny Grohowski, drums. With: John Ellis, bass clarinet; Louis Fouché, alto saxophone; Joe Beaty, trombone.

Truth Revolution (CD). 2015. Jonathan Powell, prod.; John Davis, eng. DDD? TT: 52:56

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
SONICS ★★★★★

Trumpeter Jonathan Powell dedicates each of the eight tracks on his sophomore release, *Beacons of Light*, to a different inspiring figure: "Liberation" to Aung San Suu Kyi, "Lifetime" to Mahatma Gandhi, and so on. The goal of venerating spiritual or political role models is clear, yet this music also roars like a custom Ferrari. It's crisp and beautiful, nimble and smoothly gliding even at its highest speeds. The album has its sparser, contemplative moments, but they tend not to linger. Drummer Kenny Grohowski has much to do with the prevailing bold rhythm and groove, but he never overpowers in the mix, which is full and rich and scrupulously balanced.

Powell writes in a quartal harmonic vein that can recall the fiercely swinging modality of McCoy Tyner and Woody Shaw. With his brother Jeremy Powell on tenor and soprano sax, he favors rapid, imaginative lines voiced mainly in fourths or in unison. Pianist Marko Churnchetz plays an orchestrated melodic role as well, adding unpredictability to the arrangements. In "Chant," bassist Luques Curtis comes to the fore, pairing beautifully in unison passages with guest bass clarinetist John Ellis. Four overdubbed voices end the track, chanting "om mani padme hum," making explicit the Buddhist theme.

There's a relentlessness and unerring clarity to Powell's trumpet and flugelhorn work. He uses echo effects sparingly and with genuine musicality, pushing the sonic envelope in "Maw-lana" and other tracks. —David R. Adler

And boy, does it rock. Unlike the studio album, which at times sounded a bit self-conscious in a now-we-are-gonna-play-some-swing-blues manner, *Bluenote Café* nails the tight-but-loose aesthetic, the rhythm section perfectly in the pocket and the six horns alternating between snappy call-and-response with Young's guitar and muscular soloing. Swinging opening cut "Big Room" and the primal, undeniably sexy "Ten Men Working"—the latter, complete with primal "chain gang" grunts—in particular breathe new life into the *TNY* material.

Three deep-catalog gems also make this a must-hear. First and foremost is the near-mythical "Ordinary People," previously heard only as a *TNY* studio outtake on 2007's odds'n'sods *Chrome Dreams II*: this 13-minute version is epic, musically (the cinematic arrangement) and lyrically (the Springsteenian evocation of the working class). There's also a remarkable reworking of Buffalo Springfield's "On the Way Home," simultaneously sunny and elegant, with massed vocal harmonies and sweet sax lines. A 20-minute "Tonight's the Night," though, is what'll have you picking up your jawbone from the floor. Flush with adrenalin, woozy with booze, it seesaws dynamically from moody, rumbling meditations to full-ensemble blasts as frenzied as a classic Crazy Horse jam.

On this tour, the boy definitely wasn't singin' for Spuds, that's for sure. Those notes were for us, fellow fans—and, unlike a number of Young's eclectic, short-lived detours, this music has aged brilliantly. —Fred Mills

ON THE WEB

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