

JAZZ



VARIOUS ARTISTS
Mardi Gras in New Orleans

Mardi Gras MG1001 (LP). 1977/2016. Joe Assunto, Quint Davis, Joe Ruffino, others, prods.; Cosimo Matassa, Lynn Orso, Cy Frost, others, engs. AAA. TT: 35:50

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
SONICS ★★★★★

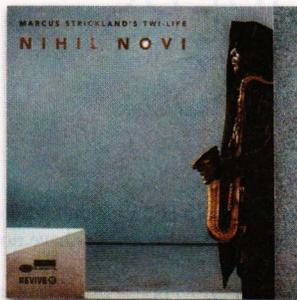
Many of the greatest recordings in the history of New Orleans music were not made for albums. This is particularly true of the city's most iconic R&B records, recorded at Cosimo Matassa's J&M Recording Studio. Warren Hildebrand has been one of the most successful repackagers of such material, and *Mardi Gras in New Orleans*—a reissue of a 1977 LP—is the crowning achievement of his label, Mardi Gras Records.

It opens with the unmistakable piano figure that kicks off Professor Longhair's party anthem "Go to the Mardi Gras," with its parade-snare second-line rhythm from drummer John Boudreaux. No song captures the feeling of being caught up in the middle of Mardi Gras revelry better than this blissful anthem.

Hildebrand obtained the rights to one of the most obscure treasures in New Orleans music history, "Handa Wanda." The song opens with a bone-chilling call to assembly from the greatest Mardi Gras Indian vocalist, Big Chief Bo Dollis of the Wild Magnolias. This was the first commercial recording of Mardi Gras Indian music, and this record brought it to the public at large for the first time.

Also included are Al Johnson's anthem "Carnival Time," Earl King's "Street Parade," Professor Longhair's "Big Chief," and the irresistible "Second Line." From Art Neville's band, the Hawkettes, comes "Mardi Gras Mambo," which opens with the Mardi Gras clarion call of Israel Bell's trumpet fanfare, a trope dating back to the early days of the New Orleans brass bands.

This record is the ultimate soundtrack to Mardi Gras.—John Swenson



MARCUS STRICKLAND'S TWI-LIFE
Nihil Novi

Marcus Strickland, soprano, alto, tenor saxophones, bass clarinet; Keyon Harold, trumpet, flugelhorn; Chris Bruce, guitar; James Francies, Robert Gasper, Mitch Henry, Big Yuki, keyboards; Kyle Miles, Meshell Ndegeocello, Pino Palladino, electric bass; Chris Dave, Charles Haynes, drums; Jean Baylor, vocals; E.J. Strickland, dialog

Blue Note Revive 002468402 (CD). 2016. Meshell Ndegeocello, prod.; Bob Power, eng. DDD. TT: 52:30

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
SONICS ★★★★★

After years of indie releases on his Strick Muzik label, saxophonist Marcus Strickland joins the Blue Note roster with *Nihil Novi* (Nothing New). The title, from Ecclesiastes, speaks to the eternal feedback loop of creativity itself, and indeed, in the beat-driven electric jazz of Strickland's Twi-Life ensemble one hears a logical progression—not just an echo of the "fusion" era but an affirmation of jazz's shamelessly omnivorous essence from its earliest days.

The mastery of Strickland's producer and intermittent bassist, Meshell Ndegeocello, in summoning these insinuating musical moods isn't remotely in question. But Strickland's melodic and textural sensibilities are his own, from the lilting lyricism of his co-creations with singer Jean Baylor ("Talking Loud," "Alive," "Inevitable") to the nasty, tangled dissonance of the opener, "Tic Toc."

Strickland's funk finesse is only strengthened by his penchant for complex, densely voiced harmony, and he doesn't let this record's multilayered texture eclipse his muscular horn playing, of which there's a great deal. His tenor work is especially fine, but his alto forays in "The Chant" and "Cycle," and the blend of soprano sax and Hammond organ in "Truth," also stand out. "Celestlude," highlighting the iron hookup between bassist Kyle Miles and drummer Charles Haynes, finds Twi-Life at its pared-down instrumental best.—David R. Adler



CUONG VU TRIO
Meets Pat Metheny

Cuong Vu, trumpet, electronics; Pat Metheny, guitar; Stomu Takeishi, bass, electronics; Ted Poor, drums
Metheny Group Productions/Nonesuch 554650-2 (CD). 2016. Pat Metheny, Cuong Vu, prods.; Pete Karam, eng. DDD? TT: 53:19

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
SONICS ★★★★★

Pat Metheny is one of jazz's few genuine superstars. It is a testament to his humility and curiosity that he continues to pursue collaborative projects with less famous artists who challenge him. Cuong Vu was a member of the Pat Metheny Group for two excellent albums, *Speaking of Now* (2002) and *The Way Up* (2005). Since then, Vu's own ventures have sought to expand the trumpet's expressive potential through electronics. His base of operations for over a decade has been an edgy, wildly unpredictable trio with bassist Stomu Takeishi and drummer Ted Poor, purveyor of merciless, deadpan intellectual funk.

Meets Pat Metheny is very much a Cuong Vu Trio record: cinematic, textural, dense. Single streams of haunting trumpet lyricism electronically repeat themselves, dissolve into atmospheric mists, and explode into churning upheavals. Metheny is a sideman. What a sideman. His role takes two forms. Pieces like "Not Crazy (Just Giddy Upping)" and "Seeds of Doubt" contain actual solos. Hell-bent unison theme statements lead to free yet focused trumpet and guitar forays. "Seeds" has one of those Metheny solos where he seduces you into believing you thought of those feelings first. But in "Acid Kiss" and "Tiny Little Pieces," Metheny's keening cries and rasps alter the sonic landscape from within. At first the guitarist is not clearly Pat Metheny, until you recognize his gift for climactic crescendos. That the crescendos are deeply embedded in the seething ensemble proves that Metheny has internalized the Vu aesthetic.—Thomas Conrad