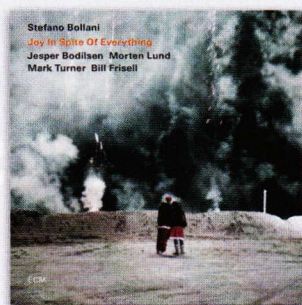


JAZZ


STEFANO BOLLANI
Joy in Spite of Everything

Stefano Bollani, piano; Mark Turner, tenor saxophone; Bill Frisell, guitar; Jesper Bodilsen, bass; Morten Lund, drums
 ECM 2360 (CD). 2014. Manfred Eicher, prod.; James A. Farber, eng. DDD. TT: 75:55

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★

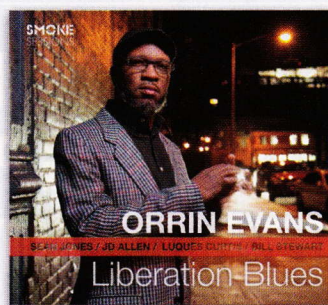
SONICS ★★★★★

This is a very good album. It should have been a great album. Stefano Bollani and Bill Frisell are in the top three or four in jazz on their respective instruments. Mark Turner is an uncompromising, searching artist of the tenor saxophone.

Two problematic tendencies in current jazz are the scarcity of stable working bands and the fact that nearly all jazz musicians want to be composers. Frisell had never played before with Bollani's trio. They all met for the first time in Avatar Studios. Everyone had minimal prior experience with Turner. Bollani is a great pianist and an average composer. All nine tunes are his.

It is a testament to the musicianship here that *Joy in Spite of Everything* is cohesive, high-level jazz. But the ad hoc, one-off nature of the project imposes a ceiling. Frisell becomes just another good guitarist taking solos. He never gets a chance to work his magic: There are none of Frisell's signature cryptic counterproposals within the ensemble, no bright notes flickering in unexpected places. Bollani plays with casual mastery. He is clearly having fun. "Easy Healing," a catchy calypso, is infectious. "Ismene" is ethereal and pretty. But this music lacks urgency—it never burns. The player who fares best is Turner. His entrances in "Las Hortensias" and "Vale" introduce new, dark, pensive atmospheres. They are the most arresting moments on the album. Perhaps if the band had played some gigs before recording, they would have unlocked some doors.

The recorded sound deserves all five stars. It is so right you don't hear it. You hear only music. —Thomas Conrad


ORRIN EVANS
Liberation Blues

Orrin Evans, piano; Sean Jones, trumpet; JD Allen, tenor saxophone; Luques Curtis, bass; Bill Stewart, drums; Joanna Pascale, vocals
 Smoke Sessions SSR-1409 (CD). 2014. Paul Stache, prod., eng., mix; Roman Klun, mix, mastering. DDD. TT: 72:39

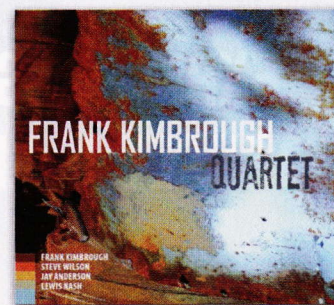
PERFORMANCE ★★★★★

SONICS ★★★★★

Tireless and prolific, pianist Orrin Evans is like many jazz musicians: he thrives on the spontaneity of the bandstand. *Liberation Blues*, recorded live at Smoke in uptown Manhattan, benefits from all that energy while communicating something larger in scope than a blowing session. The recording, released on the club's new label, captures an ideal blend of rawness and clarity.

The first five tracks flow together as "The Liberation Blues Suite," dedicated to bassist Dwayne Allen Burno, recently lost to kidney disease at 43. Two of Burno's pieces, "Devil Eyes" and "Juanita," begin the suite with alert, flexible swing tempos. Evans's "A Lil' D.A.B. a Do Ya," titled for Burno, floors the accelerator, showcasing drummer Bill Stewart at a burning, virtuosic peak. Then Evans recites poetry over the hovering ballad "A Free Man?" by unsung piano great Donald Brown, before finishing the suite with his own boogaloo-based "Liberation Blues."

Saxophonist JD Allen, featured on the Trudy Pitts ballad "Anysha," pairs brilliantly in the front line with trumpeter Sean Jones in Evans's "Simply Green" and "Meant to Shine," while Paul Motian's "Mumbo Jumbo" pushes the quintet into a more turbulent, fragmented improvisational space. Evans omits the horns for the final three tracks, parrying with Stewart and bass marvel Luques Curtis on "How the High Moon" and "The Theme." A trio encore adds Philadelphia singer Joanna Pascale in a moving rendition of "The Night Has a Thousand Eyes" that's full of elegance and understatement. —David R. Adler


FRANK KIMBROUGH
Quartet

Frank Kimbrough, piano; Steve Wilson, alto & soprano saxophones; Jay Anderson, bass; Lewis Nash, drums
 Palmetto PM2173 (CD). 2014. Frank Kimbrough, prod.; Jon Rosenberg, eng. DDD? TT: 57:13

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★

SONICS ★★★★★

Frank Kimbrough and Steve Wilson are unknown to the mass media, but in the jazz world they are studs. Kimbrough plays in the major orchestras of Maria Schneider and Ryan Truesdell. Wilson is one of the most in-demand saxophonists in New York. The other musicians here, bassist Jay Anderson and drummer Lewis Nash, are strong enough to generate high levels of complex rhythmic energy, and to join Kimbrough and Wilson in the foreground, improvising primary content.

Quartet is exceptional for its creative audacity. Throughout, the four players push themselves beyond the margins of safety into free air. Kimbrough leaves every song to chisel irregular blocks of affiliated sound. Wilson shrieks distantly related melodies with jagged edges. Kimbrough's tunes ("The Call," "Blue Smoke," "Herbivore") are slingshots that launch intense group action. He also writes ballads strung tight with tension. The liner notes state that "November" is about "the stillness that marks . . . falling leaves." But it is not impressionism. It is a suspenseful hovering.

Kimbrough and Wilson are not into charming and delicate. They display Lewis's melody in stark relief, then break it down and scatter it. One of the great ballad jazz vehicles is "It Never Entered My Mind," by Rodgers and Hart. Kimbrough and Wilson come down hard on it. Their loose, brazen version contains gut-level emotional truth. In a rapt solo, Anderson sings the lonely lyrics on his bass.

Quartet is a brilliant example of what is truly happening in jazz right now. —Thomas Conrad