MUSIC ARCHIVES

The Village Voice's Top 10 Jazz Albums of 2014

by DAVID R. ADLER

December 8, 2014

With so many worthy jazz recordings in 2014 — from the likes of Vijay Iyer, Tyshawn Sorey, Melissa Aldana, Kris Davis, Ideal Bread, Otis Brown III, Fabian Almazan, Hafez Modirzadeh, and more — it was, as always, insanely hard to pick a top 10. But decide we did. These are the albums that stood out most in the year in jazz, from duo to big band and between.

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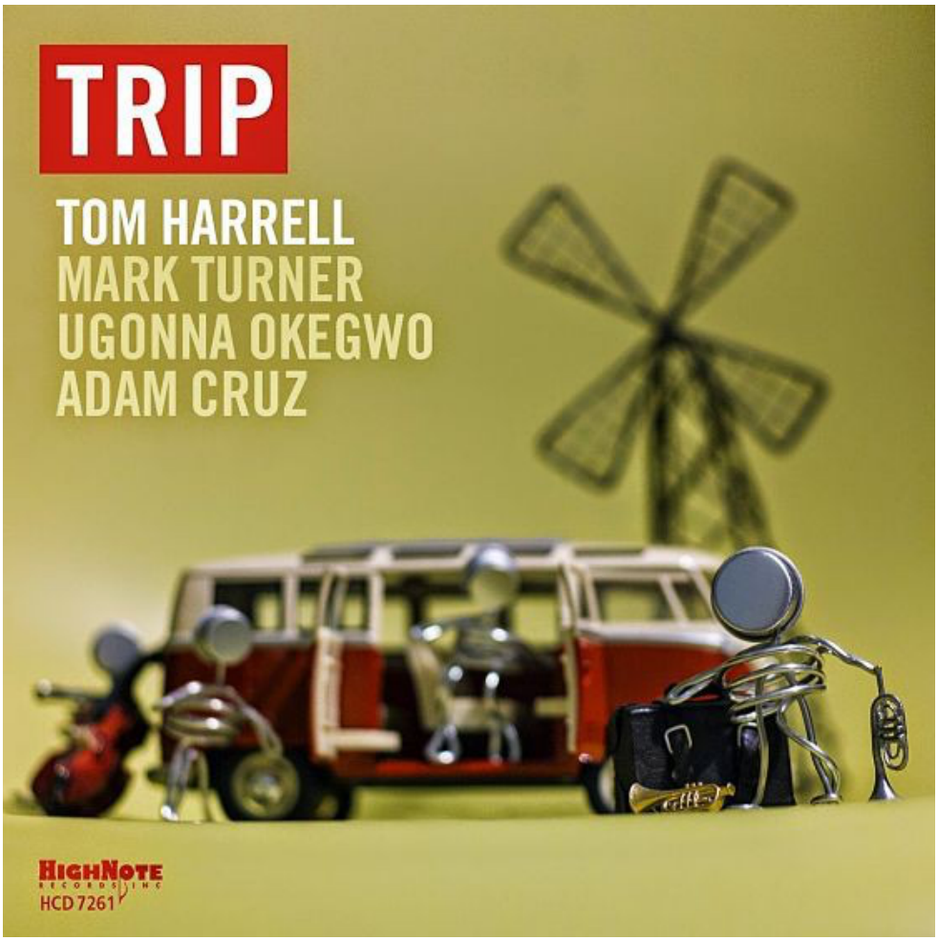
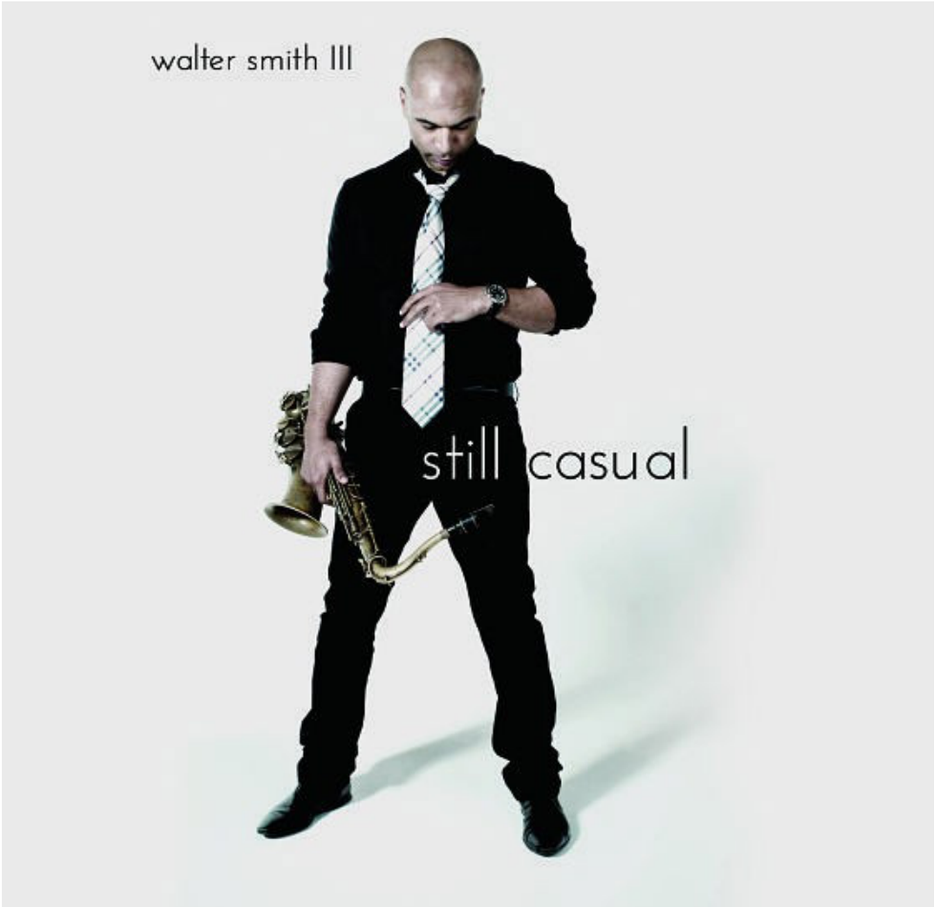


10. **Tom Harrell**

TRIP

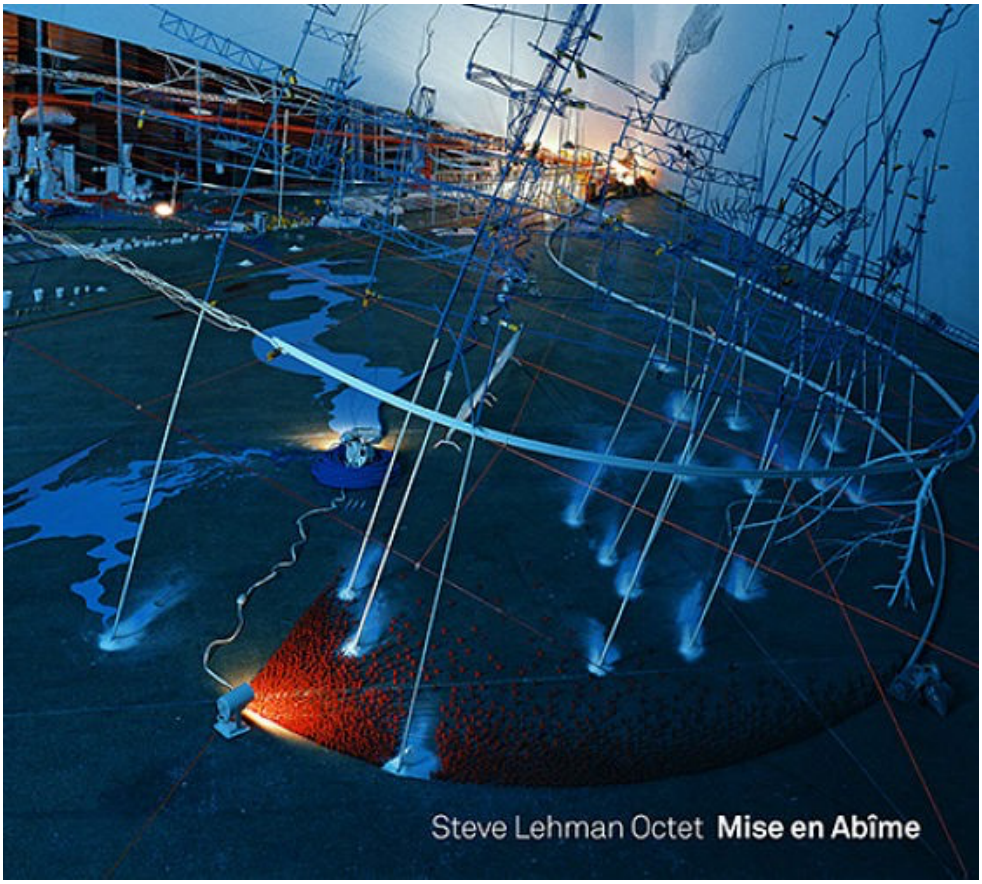
After a stream of must-hear quintet outings, the veteran trumpeter sounds lithe and unencumbered in a sparser setting with no chords. The compositions also ingeniously suit the band: Mark Turner on tenor sax, Ugonna Okegwo on bass, and Adam Cruz on drums. As it happens, the instrumentation is the same on Turner's ECM quartet disc *Lathe of Heaven*, a serious contender for this list as well.



9. **Walter Smith III**

Still Casual

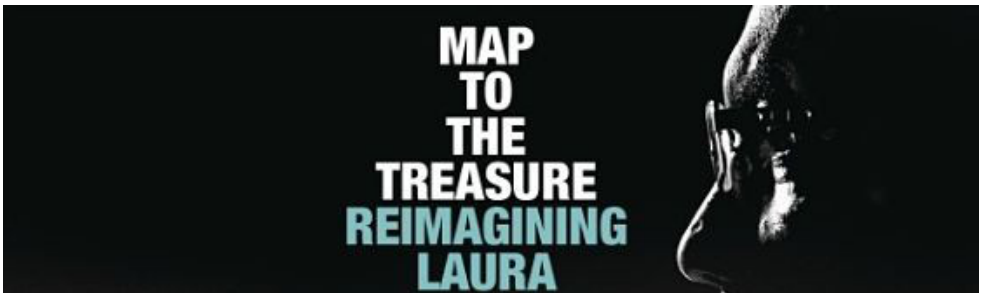
Houston-born tenor saxophonist Walter Smith III, 34, gained major seasoning in bands led by Terence Blanchard, Eric Harland, and Ambrose Akinmusire, among others. The quintet on *Still Casual*, his fourth release, features pianist Taylor Eigsti, guitarist Matt Stevens, and others all but guaranteed to lift Smith's highly melodic writing into the realm of catharsis.

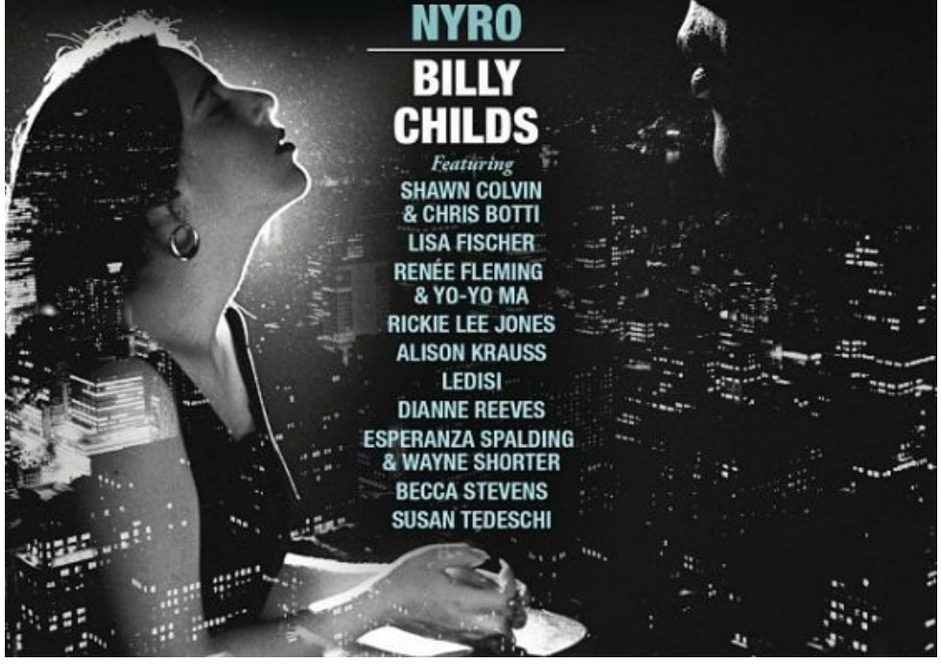


8. **Steve Lehman Octet**

Mise en Abîme

Returning to the octet lineup of his 2009 release *Travail, Transformation and Flow*, alto saxophonist Steve Lehman uses tuba, trombone, tenor saxophone, trumpet, alternate-tuned vibraphone, and rhythm section to conjure sounds of withering complexity and searing groove. Not to be missed: his out-there renderings of Bud Powell and Camp Lo (last time around it was GZA).





7. **Billy Childs**

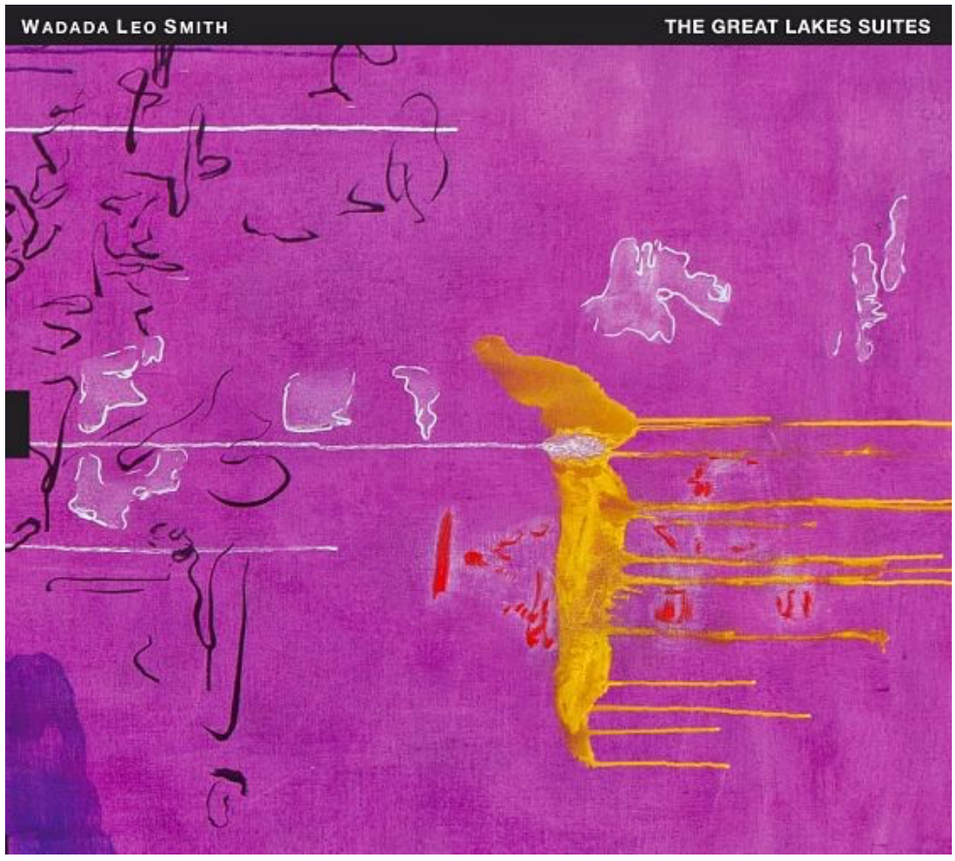
Map to the Treasure: Reimagining Laura Nyro

Albums packed with guest vocalists can either be messy and forgettable, or turn out like this gem from L.A.-based pianist and composer Billy Childs. Every pick, from Renee Fleming on "New York Tendaberry" to Alison Krauss on "And When I Die," manages to capture and even deepen the mystery of Laura Nyro's songwriting. Childs's orchestrations are gorgeous and stylistically adept, and his piano playing wails.

6. **Yosvany Terry**

New Throned King

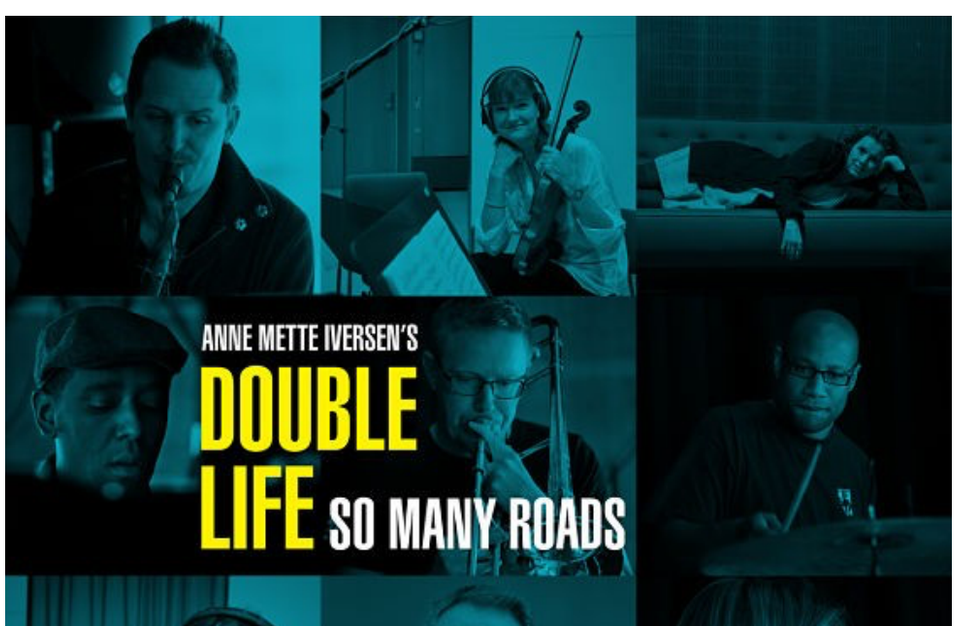
Steeped in the music of his native Cuba, alto/soprano saxophonist Yosvany Terry has contributed greatly to the health of the New York jazz scene since his arrival in 1999. His 2014 release follows an immersion in the Arará culture of Cuba's Matanzas region, known for multilayered, rhythmically intense chants and percussion. Arará, like jazz, stems from the African diaspora, and Terry knows like few others how to give that connection new life.[



5. **Wadada Leo Smith**

The Great Lakes Suites

With a quartet of staggering talents (Henry Threadgill on alto and flutes, John Lindberg on bass, Jack DeJohnette on drums), trumpeter Wadada Leo Smith devotes a suite to each of the Great Lakes, including, for good measure, Lake St. Clair northeast of Detroit. At 72, Smith has gained untold expressive capacity on his horn — perfect for the vast landscapes of natural beauty he's imagining. Threadgill's bass flute (on two tracks) sounds like night, in a place impossibly remote.



4. **Anne Mette Iversen's Double Life**

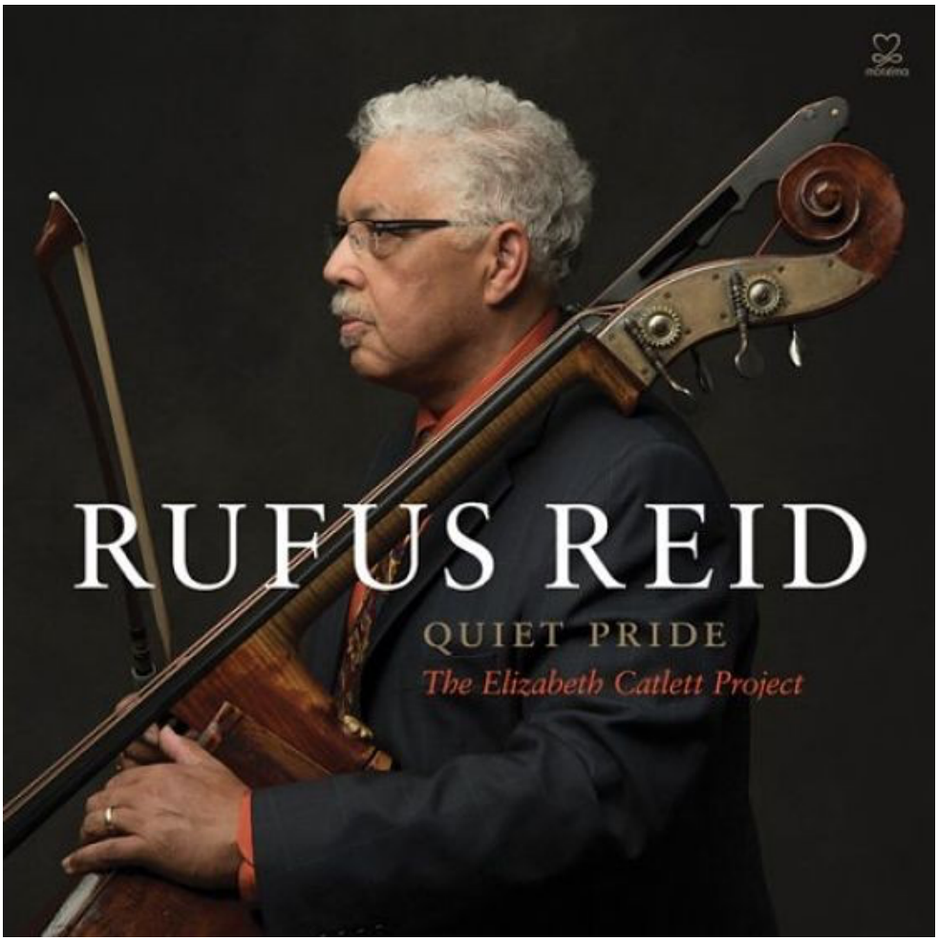
So Many Roads

Danish bassist Anne Mette Iversen is now based in Berlin, though her leading role in the Brooklyn Jazz Underground has had a huge impact on the New York scene. Her Double Life ensemble combines jazz quintet and string quartet with extraordinary results: Just behold the profusion of harmonic color and naturally flowing swing on the group's second release, *So Many Roads*. The album says a lot in just under 37 minutes.

3. **David Virelles**

Mbókò: Sacred Music for Piano, Two Basses, Drum Set and Biankoméko Abakuá

The young Cuban-born pianist follows up *Continuum* (2012) with this ECM debut, an abstract jazz reading of the ritual music of Cuba's Abakuá culture. Ethereal chords, undulating tempos, the intertwined basses of Thomas Morgan and Robert Hurst, endless rhythmic subtlety from drummer Marcus Gilmore and biankoméko percussion master Román Diaz: It's Virelles's most unusual and enthralling achievement to date.



2. **Rufus Reid**

Quiet Pride: The Elizabeth Catlett Project

This should sit alongside Marty Ehrlich's *A Trumpet in the Morning* as one of the most stirring recent big-band efforts by a living master of the music. Bassist Rufus Reid leads a fiercely swinging 21-piece ensemble in a tribute to sculptor and activist Elizabeth Catlett, with such top-tier soloists as Ingrid Jensen (trumpet) and Vic Juris (guitar). Reid's use of Charenee Wade's voice as an instrument, even in the most challenging block-harmony passages, is particularly inspired.

1. **Diego Barber & Craig Taborn**

Tales

With just two instruments — nylon-string guitar and piano — Diego Barber and Craig Taborn can evoke the oceans, the planets, the universe. The first piece, "Killian's Mountains," is nearly a half-hour of cascading chordal patterns and intricate through-composed material, by turns meditative and mystifying. Barber's classical background is very present, as is Taborn's free-jazz/experimental/techno sensibility. Together they play almost as one being.

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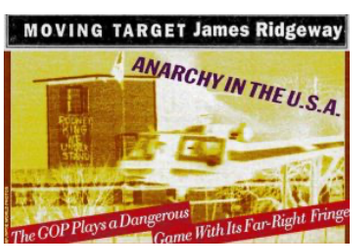

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