



Un Día Cualquiera
Harold López-Nussa (Mack Avenue)
by Tom Greenland

Cuban pianist Harold López-Nussa grew up in Centro Habana, absorbing the sounds of indigenous classical composers in the conservatories where he trained, alongside the *batá* drumming and songs of the AfroCuban *Santería* ceremonies prevalent in his neighborhood, later turning his attention to jazz improvisation. On his second release for Mack Avenue, *Un Día Cualquiera*, his intention, as the title suggests, is to present (mostly) original music for trio as you would hear it played on an “everyday day”. For someone with López-Nussa’s considerable skill set, however, this presumably unpretentious effort is still likely to dazzle the unsuspecting listener.

The pianist’s taste and technique are both impressive and impeccable on “Cimarrón”, the incisive opener; on “Elegua” (named for the Orisha deity), where his lines rush forward over the pulse; and especially on “Ma petite dans la Boulangerie”, where his busy left-hand bassline anchors even busier right-hand figurations that accelerate independently. Other tracks, notably “Danza de los Ñañigos”, “Una Tarde Cualquiera En Paris (to Bebo Valdés)”, the rhapsodic “Preludio (to Jose Juan)” and the *son/danzón* “Y la Negra Bailaba” are comparatively refined, even courtly, revealing a more classical temperament. At times, as on the staid ballad “Contigo en la Distancia” (a cover of César Portillo de la Luz), one could wish for a bit less of the delicate agility and a bit more brazen chance-taking, but López-Nussa doesn’t seem the type to risk painting himself into a musical corner.

Supported by his younger brother Ruy Adrian on traps or congas and Gaston Joya on bass, both formidable technicians in their own right, both well comfortable with the leader’s artistic inclinations, the session boasts cohesive interplay, particularly on “Una Tarde Cualquiera En Paris”, “Elegua” and the spirited closer, “Mi Son Cerra’o”, which features dramatic piano work, edgy bass solo and conversational congas over the outro before it all ends quietly.

For more information, visit mackavenue.com. This project is at Jazz Standard Aug. 1st. See Calendar.



The Source
Tony Allen (Blue Note)
by Jim Motavalli

Nigerian drummer Tony Allen spent more than a decade (1968-79) as the musical director for the celebrated singer/saxophonist Fela Anikulapo Kuti, the founder of the African jazz hybrid known as Afrobeat. Before leaving for Europe, Allen was a major architect of the uniquely infectious sound, something that Kuti openly acknowledged. Now 78 and living in Paris, Allen—who chafed at not getting writing credit on Kuti’s songs, for which he created the rhythms—

is still carrying the torch for Afrobeat. *The Source* is something of a repertory tribute to the sound, performed ably by a mostly French little big band.

All the compositions are either by Allen or co-written by him and every one is an earworm. Instead of the loose 20-minute workouts typically delivered by Kuti’s Africa 70 and Egypt 80, these pieces are tightly—and brilliantly—arranged (by Allen) and none makes it to the seven-minute mark. Allen, who also recorded a tribute to drum influence Art Blakey last year, is a master at interweaving riffing horns and pushing the music forward with a firm rhythmic pulse. The album features creative use of baritone saxophone, tuba, flute and trombone, playing solo or in ensembles.

If Wynton Marsalis organized a tribute to Kuti at Lincoln Center, it would sound like this. That’s not meant negatively, but the approach tends to emphasize the artists as composers first, improvisers second. The players don’t stand out on this album and most get fairly brief solos. “Ewajo”, for instance, is one of the few pieces that features a Kuti-like tenor solo and Jean Jacques Elangué (who also plays soprano) does a good job of evoking the master without significantly expanding on his legacy. But as an ensemble, playing a compelling circular theme, the piece is first-rate. Rhythm guitarist Indy Dibongue from Cameroon gets in some good work on “Life is Beautiful”, as he does on the propulsive “Tony’s Blues”.

“Push and Pull” doubles bass (Mathias Allamane, great here) and tuba (Daniel Zimmerman) over some totally in-the-pocket drumming. The big swaggering piece has a bit of a Dollar Brand township feel to it. “Cool Cats” is a pulsating tune featuring Yann Jankielewicz on alto. He’s fine, but never exhibits the kind of urgency and fire that was typical of Kuti at his best. That could be said of the whole band, which might have been better off recording before an impassioned audience.

Of course, one big thing this project is missing is Kuti’s always committed baritone voice, railing against the latest authoritarian impulses of the Nigerian government. Allen says in the liner notes to his album *Secret Agent*, “Fela wrote like a singer, I write like a drummer.” Fair enough and Brian Eno says—no contest here—that Allen is maybe the most brilliant drummer ever. He never overplays—one of the marks of a truly great drummer—and doesn’t even solo on the album. His playing is in total service to these sturdy compositions. I suspect I’m going to come back to this album frequently. No mistake, it’s really, really good. But I’m going to keep my copies of Kuti’s *Expensive Shit* and *Zombie* too.

For more information, visit bluenote.com. This project is at Le Poisson Rouge Aug. 1st. See Calendar.



Live in Zurich
Aruán Ortiz Trio (Intakt)
by Stuart Broomer

This is Cuban-born pianist Aruán Ortiz’ third recording for Intakt since 2015, following on the trio recording *Hidden Voices* with Eric Revis and Gerald Cleaver and the brilliant solo set *Cubanismo*. Recorded in 2016 with bassist Brad Jones and drummer Chad Taylor, *Live in Zurich* provides Ortiz and this version of the trio an opportunity to stretch out on previously developed materials at the end of a two-week tour. Recorded 20 months after *Hidden Voices* (and a week

before *Cubanismo*), the recording is largely devoted to extended versions of pieces from the earlier trio record.

“Analytical Symmetry” and “Fractal Sketches” are fragmented and extended, transformed in a 34-minute performance, “Part 1”, more suite than medley, highlighted by solo, duo and trio passages. It begins with Taylor playing mbira with Ortiz developing guitar-like, hand-muted figures with which Jones gradually merges. The whole becomes a shifting suite opening in new directions. This includes a beautifully articulated bowed bass solo and extended piano solo of Scriabin-like passion that eventually surrenders to a three-way dialogue on a Latin base that Ortiz takes to new levels of two-handed complexity. The trio’s developed dialogue is most apparent on “Fractal Sketches”.

While there are definitely elements of Cuban polyrhythms in Ortiz’ improvisations, his playing engages comparable levels of harmonic density, with strong kinship ties to pianist/composers like mentor Muhal Richard Abrams and Andrew Hill. “Part 2” begins with an exploratory bass solo, segues to Ortiz’ highly personal account of Chopin’s “Etude #6 Op. 10”, then lands on another piece from *Hidden Voices*, Ortiz’ pairing of two Ornette Coleman compositions, “Open or Close & The Sphinx”, eliciting Taylor’s maximum fire and the trio’s most interactive complexity.

A concluding treatment of the standard “Alone Together” (with Jones’ rubato introduction suggesting Richard Davis’ 1963 duet with Eric Dolphy, complete with double-stop glissandi) is further evidence of Ortiz and company working deep within the tradition and further expanding possibilities for dialogue, with both contemporary partners and a rich past.

For more information, visit intaktrec.ch. Ortiz is at The Stone at The New School Aug. 2nd. See Calendar.

RECOMMENDED NEW RELEASES

- Cyrille Aimée – *Cyrille Aimée Live (Mack Avenue)*
- Gordon Beck – *Jubilation! (1964-1984) (Turtle)*
- John Coltrane – *Both Directions At Once: The Lost Album (Impulse-Verve)*
- Robert Dick/Tiffany Chang – *Raise the River (Rogue Art)*
- Marty Ehrlich – *Trio Exaltation (Clean Feed)*
- Satoko Fujii/Joe Fonda/Gianni Mimmo – *Triad (Long Song)*
- Il Sogno – *Birthday (Gotta Let It Out)*
- Jowee Omicil – *Love Matter (Jazz Village)*
- Daryl Sherman – *Lost in a Crowded Place (GHB)*
- Jason Stein’s Locksmith Isidore – *After Caroline (Northern Spy)*

Laurence Donohue-Greene, Managing Editor

- Jeremiah Cymerman – *Decay of the Angel (5049 Records)*
- Robert Dick/Tiffany Chang – *Raise the River (Rogue Art)*
- Peter Evans/Cory Smythe – *Weatherbird (moreismore/Tundra)*
- Satoko Fujii/Joe Fonda/Gianni Mimmo – *Triad (Long Song)*
- Erroll Garner – *Nightconcert (Mack Avenue/Octave Music)*
- Sigurd Hole Trio – *Encounters (Elvesang)*
- Hungry March Band – *Running Through with the Sadness (Imaginart)*
- Lee Konitz/Dan Tepfer – *Decade (Sunnyside)*
- Kjetil Møster/John Edwards/Dag Erik Knedal Andersen – *Different Shapes/Immersion (Va Fangool)*
- Mako Sica/Hamid Drake – *Ronda (Out & Gone)*

Andrey Henkin, Editorial Director