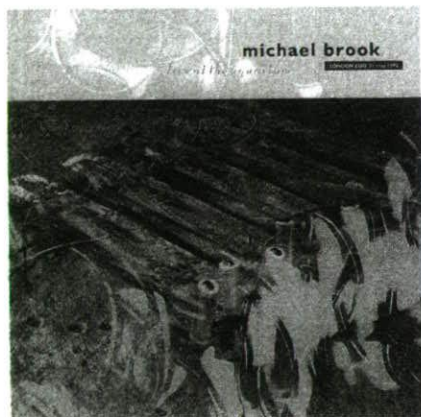


cial direction since Cream, this is pretty poor stuff and shouldn't have been released. Time for a spell with Billy Jenkins again, maestro.

When Shannon Jackson toured two years back new guitarist Jef Lee Johnson showed he was a player to watch. *Raven Roc* proves his mettle. He twirls his notes into highly original shapes, indulging long curling lines like a Duane Allman on harmolodics ("Xmas Woman" – wow! talk about everything at once). Dave Fiuczynski plays guitar from the other speaker, harmonic steps taken with a great sense of occasion.

Brilliantly recorded, the quartet (Dom Richards is on bass) have such a great group feel that it is unlikely they will be applauded for genre-transgression. However, unlike much posey eclecticism it asks genuine questions about the assumed teen bracket for heavy metal excess. Roll over Van Halen and tell Steve Vai the news. **BEN WATSON**



BOURBONESE QUALK

Unpop
Total 2TF13 CD

FOLLOWING ITS adoption by every at-a-loss jazz muso who suffers from the dreaded "need to progress", world music has lost its flavour. "Crossing boundaries" has become as hackneyed (and meaningless) as "contains no artificial ingredients". Bourbonese Qualk are different. They open with "Vac", whose non-4/4 rhythms are reminiscent of Bulgarian folk or Algerian pop, but they play it with a mellow sense of absorption that is utterly convincing.

Perhaps the key is instrumental production. Unlike too many college-educated jazzers, who think that playing technique sees them through everything, Bourbonese Qualk are careful about *sound*, in the manner of rock musicians. They mix electric keyboards over

padding drums with the care of a Robert Wyatt. Their music is warm and powerful.

As the CD proceeds, they cover other bases – pounding dub-rock with Mafia-like industrial vocals from Simon Crab, ambient gamelans, rave-dance freak-outs. It is all informed by a measured sense of music as the voice of the disestablished people of the world: programme next to Jah Wobble, Smith & Mighty and Rebel MC. Unlike Jon Hassell, who explores similar realms of hi-tech ethnicity, their funk does not come in quotes. Akbar Zekra adds excellent tabla to "Our Great Economy". I suppose Can are the godfathers of this genre, but Bourbonese Qualk's strength is their *lack* of art-wackiness. A testament to On-U Sound's benign (and continuing) influence on British music. Solid. **BEN WATSON**

ANTHONY BRAXTON

Composition No. 165 (for 18 instruments)
New Albion NA050 CD

HERE IS a further extension of Braxton's negotiations with shape, sound, space and colour, recorded live last April and conducted by the composer. As ever, it's hard to locate the precise relation between improvisation and composition, but their interaction is central to the work. The governing metaphor, following Braxton's notes, is the unceasing forming and unforming of clouds. Musically, this translates as a surging continuum of sombrely-paced brass parts out of which brief solo soundbursts rise and fall. It sounds like one of Braxton's richest and most fully-realised works. Obviously his profound and far-reaching eclecticism has emerged unscathed from the too "white"/too "black" crossfire of earlier years. Yet somehow the range of reference (Boulez, Mingus, you name it) seems irrelevant – spurning the deepest divisions in our music, he is managing to knit together fascinatingly homogeneous sound worlds.

WILL MONTGOMERY

MICHAEL BROOK

Live At The Aquarium
4AD tad 2011 CD

GARY LUCAS

Gods And Monsters
Enemy EMY133 CD

HENRY KAISER

Lemon Fish Tweezer
Cuneiform RUNE45 CD

ROMEO VENDRAME

The Principle Of Moments
RecRec Music ReCDec 35 CD

FOUR GUITARISTS charging out in utterly different directions. A reviewer voted Michael Brook's previous album *Cobalt Blue a Wire* "winner" (*Wire* 100). I suspected at the time they were making a complex – or sarcastic – case for new age banality. They were. Brook has invented an instrument called the "infinite guitar". So what? He's worked with Brian Eno and Daniel Lanois. Again, so what? Techno-romanticism listens with forked ear. *Live At The Aquarium* is the sound of TV commercials, and dated ones at that. Next.

Gary Lucas plays rock of various persuasions (psychedelic folk, heavy, Cajun, industrial, funk) full of rough-and-ready clutter and the occasional well-managed guitar freak-out. Heavy friends include Jon Langford (Mekons, Three Johns) and Keith LeBlanc (George Clinton, Adrian Sherwood). Nice moments, but nothing gets serious or nasty enough to imply Lucas means it. User-friendly and unkempt, which may be your cup of tea. I'd prefer something a bit more coherent. Whatever happened to Mallard?

At Company Week 1990 Henry Kaiser seemed to be a victim of his technology, walled off from musical interaction. This series of solo free improvisations, though, shows another side. Unlike Michael Brook he does not rely on the fact that you probably forgot what he just played: his notes are tense with discovery. Kaiser uses many effects, sounding like drums, drills, orchestras – but there is always a guitarist's propulsion to see you through (what used to be called "swing"). At 24 minutes, "It's A Wonderful Life" nearly gets lost, but it is saved by some fast-stream inventiveness that recalls Conlon Nancarrow. Every improviser has a harmonic world in which they live and move: Kaiser's expands as he plays, which is a great achievement.

Close attention to sonority is a rare and special thing. The pop example is Ennio Morricone, who scored soundtracks from buzzing flies, harmonicas and wind. The high art example is Giacinto Scelsi. Romeo Vendrame could be the example from free improvisation (though his "events" are unrepeatable: the tape is the "work"). This does not sound like guitar, it is slow and quiet, like Ambient, but it employs none of the dinky music-college kitsch usual in that area.

The only people that compare in terms of achieving such longspan, near eventless tension are the Logos Duo from Amsterdam. Amazing. Eat your heart out, Brian Eno.

BEN WATSON

CECIL BROOKS III

Hangin' With Smooth

Muse MCD 5428 CD

JUSTIN ROBINSON

Justin Time

Verve VCD 513 254-2 CD

GOOD FELLAS

Good Fellas

King KICJ 101 CD

THREE ALBUMS that keep the sound and spirit of the great Art Blakey alive and very



nearly kicking; each one flying the hard bop flag high and proud, with varying degrees of success.

Closest to Buhaina's Big Beat is drummer Cecil Brooks, and a tough, straight ahead session with young guns Phillip Harper, Craig Handy and Justin Robinson in the frontline, and Blakey rhythm section acolytes Benny Green and Peter Washington. Brook's three originals are classic, driving hard bop — back beat and soul-jazz tunes with room for the leader to swop fours and all the soloists to impress. If anything it is the ballads that expose the band's weaknesses (although the spark and vulcanising originality of Green's playing occasionally lifts the performances) — "I've Grown Accustomed To Her Face" is not so much slow-paced as pedestrian, Phillip Harper's solo hesitant, unconvincing, hemmed in.

Ballads, conversely, show altoist Justin

Robinson at his best. On *Justin Time*, his reading of the slower tunes is beautifully controlled. He injects a slight vibrato and breathiness into his tone on these tracks, giving his playing an emotional elan, a romantic depth. Sounding close in tone to his producer Bobby Watson (another Blakey graduate of course), Robinson is a similarly sharp, quicksilver and metallic-toned player, but having said that there is not quite enough in his dynamics or patterns of melodic phrasing to give the music real strength.

Strangely, the most successful and cohesive of the three is the one that appears to be the most casually thrown together. A project organised by another tough, post-bop drummer, Japan's Yoichi Kobayashi, *Good Fellas* features a string of driving bop classics and soloists including Phillip Harper (again) and the young Vincent Herring on alto. Apart from a searing one-off solo from Gary Bartz (a man decidedly back on form) on Robinson's record, Herring provides the most inspired moments over the three records. There are simply more ideas and colour in his playing — no more so than in a middle section exchange with Kobayashi on "Cherokee" on which he bounces ideas off the drummer with thunderous power. Young pianist Steven Scott's oblique work on this track has a similar punch.

PHILIP WATSON

BETTY CARTER

It's Not About The Melody

Verve 513 870-2 CD

PATRICIA BARBER

A Distortion Of Love

Antilles 314 512 235-2 CD

It's Not About The Melody is another reason why Betty Carter is the greatest living jazz singer. The title tells you what sets her apart: the lady doesn't just trot out the melody like 99.9 per cent of other singers; she fractures it, bends it, reshapes it until it becomes a new creation. Her creation. It's not about the old melody, it's about her new one (listen to what she does over the re-harmonized changes of "You Go To My Head" for an example). Her own compositions are best — "Make Him Believe" or "Dip Bag". On these it's impossible to determine where the writing ends and the improvising begins. Betty Carter — jazz singer.

Patricia Barber inhabits the other end of the jazz vocal telescope. Betty is larger than life, hot and swinging, Barber has a small

sculptured voice that only comes out in the moonlight; it's an oh-so-cool sound, haloed in protective echo. Words are carved in ice, like Jan Garbarek's introspective meanderings; there's no ambiguity, nuance or irony, just a deliberate melancholy that attracts a thousand subjective meanings.

STUART NICHOLSON

AL COHN

Meets The Jazz Seven

Jazz House JHCD 022 CD

AL COHN looked like a retired bank manager. His appearance belied a powerful tenor saxophonist, who, cheeks distended like Dizzy's celebrated pouches, had a huge tone and swung like the clappers. For years Cohn was an in-demand arranger for television and Broadway, but towards the end of his life he returned to his first love, the tenor sax, and spent long periods on the road. An uncomplicated player, he didn't try to bury the listener with avalanches of notes, but, like most members of the Lester Young school, sought to tell a story.

The Jazz Seven, organised by Jack Sharpe and directed by alto saxophonist Andy Mackintosh is a genial, London based ensemble that's a worthy successor to groups like Johnny Dankworth's Seven and Tubby Hayes' mid-band. It's neat, unfussy and to the point, which is its strength. Its soloists are frequently given enough rope to hang themselves, which is a weakness.

Cohn, however, fits into the proceedings like a charter member. He features with just a rhythm section on a so-so "Mood Indigo" and a swinging "High On You". Chris Laurence on bass is never less than excellent, doubling the melody line when asked and playing strong time. Standout track is Mackintosh's "Bilbo Baggins"; had it been made 40 years ago it would have been sensational.

STUART NICHOLSON

LINDSAY COOPER

Music For Other Occasions

No Man's Land nml 8603 CD

LINDSAY COOPER has never established a major reputation as an executive musician, despite a stint with the Mike Westbrook Orchestra during its high-profile period, despite her activities with the Feminist Improvising Group, which she helped set up, and despite being able to play virtually any reed, woodwind, keyboard or guitar-like