

The Top 10 Soul Jazz CDs of the Year from Chuck Ingersoll and the Soul Jazz Spectrum on Jazz 90.1/Rochester and jazz901.org

Top 10 New Releases

1) Legacy – Jimmy Smith and Joey DeFrancesco (Concord)

With the passing of Jimmy Smith in February 2005, the ranks of remaining old guard B3 masters is sadly dwindling to Jimmy McGriff, Reuben Wilson, Lonnie Smith and Mel Rhyne. Thankfully, Joey D got together with Smith one last time to create this final collaboration. Smith regarded DeFrancesco as a prodigious talent and the likely heir to his Hammond throne. This set, especially the Latinized “Back at the Chicken Shack,” is dynamic, grooving, mellow and always compelling, no matter what the tempo. This was the first studio meeting of these two giants and it’s a beautiful way to remember “the boss.”

2) Melvin Sparks – This Is It (Savant)

Thankfully, Melvin Sparks has crossed from the jazz world to find a place in the groove and jam band universe, along with folks like Karl Denson, Stanton Moore and Soulive. It’s amazing how effortlessly Sparks and compatriots serve up the funk with clever melodies and well-constructed solos. Melvin Sparks done done it again, with a CD that jazz and jam fans will each find rewarding, grooving and totally in the pocket. To quote Nina Simone, it’s “funkier than a mosquiter’s tweeter.”

3) Vibrant Tones – City Rhythm Orchestra with Special Guest Joey DeFrancesco (Limehouse)

Listen or watch this (there’s also a DVD) and go “Wow!” Wow at the playing, the charts, the solos and Joey D. DeFrancesco’s playing is amazingly agile, almost elegant for the B3, yet his swing is infectious and soulful. And the arrangements by Joe Matt add new twists and interest to some classics, including “Senor Blues,” “Moanin’,” “Walk on the Wild Side” and “The Cat.” On the latter two tracks, Matt and Joey D both create something fresh that takes a new angle on what Jimmy Smith and arrangers like Lalo Schifrin and Oliver Nelson did in the ‘60s. Highly recommended for those who love a groove and appreciate great swing.

4) Jim Cifelli – Groove Station (Short Notice)

Trumpeter/composer Cifelli usually releases little big band albums full of interesting charts and ambitious playing. This time he went for the groove (thus the title) and brings together a cast with lots of rock, soul and jazz experience. As

in his more straightahead work, Cifelli takes soul jazz to a higher plane, with intelligently funky compositions and soloists with something to say. Guitarist Dave Phelps adds a Stevie Ray Vaughan-like presence and Cifelli, keyboardist Will Boulware and saxophonist Joel Frahm demonstrate that just because you can dance to it doesn't mean it has to be vapid.

5) Ron Levy's Wild Kingdom – Voodoo Boogaloo (Levtron)

Back in 2003, Ron Levy's *Finding My Way* was our top Soul Jazz CD of the year. This release combines cooking rhythms with some inspired soloing and a sound that often harkens back to the soul of the late '60s. Karl Denson and Melvin Sparks are along with Levy, assuring that the improvisations will be first rate. There are dollops of hip hop, New Orleans, Memphis and the blues. As always, Levy strives to deliver more than heads and jam-band noodlings, writing interesting tunes with varied textures, grooves and even movements. As usual, Levy is all over the groove like Anna Nicole on a geezer with big bucks.

6) Radam Schwartz – Conspiracy for Positivity (Blue Ark)

Along with sporting a wide array of tasteful headgear, Newark-based organist Radam Schwartz keeps the New Jersey city's B3 heritage cooking. He hosts a weekly jam session and is an educator continuing the bop and soul jazz traditions of the city. **Conspiracy** brings together students and veteran saxophonist James Stewart for a varied set, mostly Schwartz originals plus an R. Kelly cover. This isn't a non-stop funkfest, but the jam session-like vibe features a relaxed feeling and plenty of room for stretching out. Although a studio date, there's a live set ambience and sound. Trumpeter James Gibbs III especially stands out. Smokin' when it should be and swingin' in all the right places.

7) Ximo Tebar – Goes Blue (Sunnyside)

Spanish guitarist Ximo Tebar, acclaimed for his virtuosity, sense of swing and blues feeling, sometimes sounds like a Charlie Christian/Paco deLucia summit meeting. For this outing, he added Lou Donaldson and focused on the bluesy, soulful side, including tastefully grooving renditions of "Midnight Creeper" and "Blues Walk," two soul jazz classics made famous by Poppa Lou.

8) Reuben Wilson – Fun House (Savant)

Hey, it never hurts to book Melvin Sparks for your groove project. Here he sounds incredibly relaxed; fluently and funkily soloing while tossing in random quotes with casual style and impeccable timing. If a man can be laid back and

totally in the pocket, that's Sparks. As always, Reuben Wilson reminds of the old Blue Note days, keeping things cooking and allowing plenty of space for talented saxophonist Cochemba Gastelum, Sparks and drummer Mike Clark to have their way with the groove.

9) Organissimo – This Is the Place (Big O)

These three guys last produced the wonderful *Waiting for the Boogaloo Sisters*, and their humor combined with chops and an adventurous spirit creates music bridging grit and funk with the organ trio tradition. B3 man Jim Alfredson is a talent, and the group brings a Larry Young-like sense of courage to their repertoire, including a multi-faceted take on Zappa's "Peaches En Regalia."

10) Soulive – Breakout (Concord)

Soulive remixed? Reinvented? Not exactly. Some have crabbled that this is Soulive's attempt at a commercial breakthrough, with half the tracks featuring guests like Chaka Khan, Ivan Neville and pedal steel whiz Robert Randolph. Neville's tracks do cook more than Chaka's, there's a cool blues tune in "Vapor," but the jazzier feel and shifting rhythms aren't as much in evidence as in Soulive's Blue Note oeuvre. A few sparkling sips of Chablis awash in a sea of tepid Tab.

Reissue of the Year Think! – Lonnie Smith

Before he became a "doctor," Lonnie Smith closely examined the funk on several classic soul jazz albums for Blue Note. This reissue teams great sidemen (David "Fathead" Newman, Lee Morgan, Melvin Sparks and Idris Muhammed) with tunes featuring richer harmonies and structures than many soul jazz jams. Listen to the opening solo by Lee Morgan on "Slouchin'." It's sly yet cocky; a perfect example of Morgan's confidence, chops and amazing sense of time. Great tunes, fine remastering, a must-see (and hear) CD.