

Top 12 Soul Jazz and Groove Releases of 2006 on the Soul Jazz Spectrum

Here's a rundown of the Top 12 albums we enjoyed the most on the Soul Jazz Spectrum in 2006

1) Trippin' - The New Cool Collective (Vine)

Imagine a big band that swings, funks, grooves and mixes together R&B, jazz, soul, Afrobeat, Latin and more of the stuff in their kitchen sink into danceable jazz. This double CD set features the Dutch ensemble in their most expansive, challenging effort to date. When you can fill two discs with great stuff and nary a dud, you're either inspired or Vince Gill. These guys are inspired and it's impossible to not feel gooder after listening to Trippin.' Highly recommended.

2) On the Outset - Nick Rossi Set (Hammondbeat)

It's a blast of fresh, rare, old air. You can put Rossi up there on the Hammond B3 pedestal with skilled survivors like Dr. Lonnie Smith and Reuben Wilson. This album is relentlessly grooving, with no ballad down time. If you think back to the glory days of McGriff and McDuff, this "set" compares nicely.

3) The Body & Soul Sessions - Phillip Saisse Trio (Rendezvous)

Pianist Saisse throws in a little Fender Rhodes and generally funks up standards and covers some newer tunes soulfully and exuberantly. Great, great version of Steely Dan's "Do It Again." Has that feel good aura of the old live Ramsey Lewis and Les McCann sides, even though a studio recording.

4) Step It Up - The Bamboos (Ubiquity)

If you're old enough or retro enough to recall the spirit and heart of old soul groups like Archie Bell and the Drells, these Aussies are channeling that same energy and nasty funk instrumentally. Great grooves, tastefully served. It's get-down-right bootyful!

5) III - Stanton Moore (Telarc)

After surviving some Katrina-related issues, New Orleans' drummer Moore serves up a gumbo of funk mixed with some sadness. He breaks the album into the groove tunes, and follows up with three more thoughtful, sometimes pensive pieces that reflect on Katrina. Strong, in-the-pocket stuff for the most part with great support from Skerik, Robert Walter, Will Bernard and others.

6) Berlin Serengeti - Radio Citizen (Ubiquity)

Track 1, "The Hop," is a killer, featuring a vocalist named Bajka who guests on a few other tunes. She sounds like a hip-hop Billie Holiday with a dash of Macy Grey. As you guessed, this group - led by multi-instrumentalist Niko Schabel - is from Germany. Schabel says he's bored with lazy programming and lounge overkill and does a bodacious job of energizing the rhythms and creating a techno-soul jazz with heart.

7) Jungle Soul - Dr. Lonnie Smith (Palmetto)

Back in the day, even before he became a noted medical organist, Lonnie Smith could get into a slinky, insinuating groove like nobody else. Blue Note's Francis Wolff loved cuts like "Dancing In An Easy Groove." On this release, featuring the quietly sensational guitarist Peter Bernstein, Smith recaptures that funky-yet-relaxed feeling and spins it out to a new generation digging people like James Taylor and the Sugarman 3.

8) Husky - Skerik's Syncopated Taint Septet (Hyena)

One reviewer termed Husky "fractured funk," and that's a savvy way of implying that this is not your father's Rusty Bryant record. There's some controlled chaos here that never completely leaves the pocket, as long as you don't mind a pocket with a good deal of elastic. There's jazz, funk, even some hip hop that all coalesces nicely. Bonus points for clever tunes names, including the subtly titled "Go to Hell Mr. Bush." Five horns up front give the saxophonist's band a hard-charging, aggressive, big sound.

9) Psychedelic Eye - Adam Scone (Organtone)

Organist with the Sugarman 3, Scone named this disc after his "two-tone" right eye. Psychedelic, baby! Musically, he blends the funk with the more experimental, adding vocals and creating a slightly dark yet almost always in-the-pocket vibe. "Tantalize" is one great tune for the soul jazz hall of fame, hypnotic and propulsive with rock guitar from Al Street and a sense of grooving urgency. Like Ron Levy, Scone explores the sonic possibilities of the B3 to create a groove record with deeper layers that reward repeated listening.

10) The Survivor - Donald Harrison (Nagel Heyer)

Alto saxophonist Harrison adds some touches of hip hop and soul jazz to his normally straight-ahead sound. Not all the tunes on this album reach for the groove, but a couple hit it dead on. Sometimes it's simply a slightly off-center rhythm mixed with a bed of record static that provides the perfect propulsion, as on "The Hook Up." There's also a prescient nod to the late Godfather of Soul with "Caravan (Who Is the Funky Drummer?)" which mashes turntable, alto and a sampled Clyde Stubblefield to bridge the Ellington/JB gap.

11) Rewind That - Christian Scott (Concord Jazz)

The trumpeter, who also appears on Harrison's disc, reminds of Miles with his often mournful tone and interest in the rhythmic styles of the day. He covers "So What" as an up tempo kicker, and his band maintains the propulsive, broiling, fusionesque underpinning more reminiscent of Bitches Brew than Kind of Blue. The juxtaposition of Scott's more lyrical style with the energy of the band creates some delights and tension that keep the disc intriguing.

12) New Tones - Nomo (Ubiquity)

Afrobeat lives! In Detroit, no less. Like the Antibalas Orchestra of Brooklyn, Nomo attacks African polyrhythms fiercely with a wall of horns and a few touches of outside playing. Most of this disc cooks mightily and it's fresher than Eddie Haskell dissin' the Beaver. OK, let's make that fresh as sushi at the dock.

Reissue of the Year

Live at Club Mozambique - Grant Green (Capitol Jazz)

For whatever reasons, this 1971 club date remained vaulted until now. Green's touring band of the time, featuring Buffalo's Ronnie Foster on organ and an underrated sax player named Clarence Thomas (no, not THAT Clarence Thomas) added Idris Muhammed and Houston Person for this date. The results are funkifying, including an early, less complex version of "Jan Jan" and covers of popular soul tunes of the day. The whole thing is smoking, even with the mono mix (apparently the multi-track masters are still MIA). Closer to ALIVE! than Live at the Lighthouse, this date is a must for fans still hungering for more of the greatest soul jazz guitarist of all time.

**Chuck Ingersoll, Friday nights from 9 'til midnight on Jazz 90.1
And www.jazz901.org.**