



Among The Stars
Kelley Suttentfield/Tony Romano (s/r)
 by Marcia Hillman

This is as simple as musical storytelling gets—one voice and one nylon-string guitar. Vocalist Kelley Suttentfield and guitarist Tony Romano have joined together to deliver a collection of eclectic material, including standards and folk, R&B, pop and Broadway theater tunes. Romano provides excellent support to Suttentfield's vocals. He plays only rhythm and fills except for one solo on "Beautiful Love", where he shows off his fluid style ably.

What immediately strikes you about this intimate CD is the slow tempo used on all of the tracks (with the exception of the oldie "Beautiful Love", which is only slightly uptempo) and the lack of any kind of heavy musical arrangements. This results in a soft, quiet, almost lullaby-like feel to the performances. However, because of Suttentfield's ability to sing in many styles, this slow pace does not make the listener lose interest. She has a wide range of sounds, starting off with the first track ("Fly Me To The Moon") on which she displays a breathiness reminiscent of Peggy Lee (who also recorded the song). Her straightahead theatrical approach is heard on "People Will Say We're In Love", done as a bossa and in which she plays with the melody. There is even a bit of a folksy twang in her voice to be heard on renditions of Bob Dylan's "I'll Be Your Baby Tonight" and Neil Young's "Harvest Moon". Her slow version of the Gerry Goffin-Carole King pop hit "One Fine Day" is refreshing, almost like a new song. The standout track is a moving version of Buffy Sainte-Marie's "Until It's Time For You To Go", sung to highlight all the song's emotional impact.

Although Suttentfield may not have a true jazz voice, she is an accomplished songbird of many musical colors.

For more information, visit kelleysuttentfield.com. This project is at *Perez Jazz* Mar. 15th. See Calendar.



Dust (solo)
Chloe Levy (Unit)
 by Laurence Donohue-Greene

It's been six years since Chloe Levy's debut *Leinicha* (also on Unit), a vocal/piano duo recorded at Oslo's Rainbow Studio, legendary for hundreds of ECM sessions. Levy has returned with a well-crafted solo statement, which, like her first release, is impeccably recorded at another wisely chosen locale. The acoustics of an ancient Catalanian church accentuate the fragility of the voice as an instrument and the natural reverberations reinforce the album's extreme intimacy.

This is a daringly sparse and personal statement, with only ethereal kalimba as accompaniment. Renditions of such standards as "I Fall in Love Too Easily", "My Favorite Things" and "Strange Fruit" are given nearly complete melodic overhauls in confident

yet risky reworkings, reflecting the deep familiarity she has developed with each piece. In Levy's voice we hear extensive work beyond her jazz background—having sung the works of Schoenberg, performed in orchestral settings and initiated a project based on Ned Rorem's song cycle *Ariel* from poems by Sylvia Plath. Levy's extended techniques include fluttering notes like a hummingbird's wings (e.g., "My Favorite Things") and piercing crescendos à la Patty Waters, providing contrast to a charmingly girlish delivery in the vein of Blossom Dearie or Björk ("I Fall In Love Too Easily").

Inspired by medieval composer Hildegard von Bingen (of the nine selections, two are hers), Levy's melodies soar and linger over kalimba shadings. That tiny instrument's significance cannot be understated, adding a necessary backdrop not only to the bending of sung words but also to the poetic quality of the lyrics and Levy's frequent improvised flights. Her playing on "My Favorite Things" hauntingly replicates church bells while on "Strange Fruit" the kalimba sounds like a slowly wound music box one moment, a delicately played wooden Balinese Tongue Drum the next.

From the hypnotic opening title track to just-as-mesmerizing closer ("Tree")—two of her three original compositions—it's 45 minutes that magically fly by before you know it, beckoning closer listens.

For more information, visit unitrecords.com. Levy is at *SEEDS* Mar. 18th, *Bowery Arts + Science* Mar. 22nd and *The Firehouse Space* Mar. 27th. See Calendar.



The Secret Escapades of Velvet Anderson
Nicole Mitchell's Sonic Projections (Rogue Art)
 by Ken Waxman

Although not as overly programmatic as the recording of *Intergalactic Beings*, her Afrofuturistic sci-fi suite, this CD is another instance of how Nicole Mitchell's burgeoning compositional abilities are keeping pace with her acknowledged command of the flute. With *The Secret Escapades of Velvet Anderson*, Mitchell's quartet honors one of her mentors, tenor saxophonist Fred Anderson (1929-2010), with a nine-part linked composition.

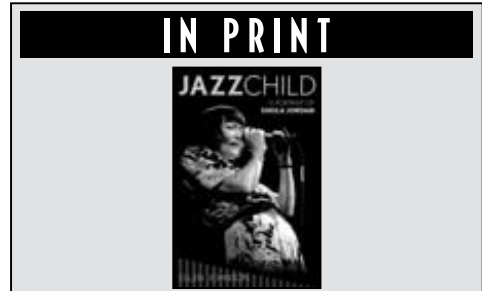
Mitchell, now based in California, established her flute mastery during two decades in Chicago, one of many younger musicians offered gigs at Anderson's Velvet Lounge club. Reimagining him as a superhero, symbolically named Velvet Anderson, the titles of the composition are suitably heroic to fit the graphic escapades of a comic book hero, elucidated musically by Sonic Projects, Mitchell's own version of the Fantastic Four with New Yorkers, drummer Chad Taylor and pianist Craig Taborn, and tenor saxophonist David Boykin, Mitchell's long-time Chicago colleague. Buoyant power is maintained throughout via keyboard surges and percussion energy, with diamond-hard flute bleats and saxophone breaths outlining and toughening the themes.

Framed by an introduction ("Bright City") and coda ("The Heroic Rescue"), Mitchell and Boykin use parallel expositions to define themselves as hero and sidekick on "For the Cause", the darkening scene set by kinetic piano runs. Dramatic keyboard flourishes help build up suspense on the subsequent "Scaling the Underground", as rugged puffs and glottal abstractions from flute and tenor cut through the TV-cop-show-like

exposition to offer genuine discursive and deconstructed improvisations. Mitchell's ingenuous flutter-tonguing slyly undercuts the rock-inflected and percussive narrative that characterizes "Running the Rooftops" and is later expanded with the penultimate "The Labyrinth of Capture". By the end of that track, Taborn mirrors Mitchell's lead so that the suite's nerve-wracking poignancy is replaced by a heraldic fanfare.

Honoring her mentor in a unique fashion, Mitchell has created a sophisticated tone poem that moves in its own fashion and might inspire a line of action figures.

For more information, visit roguart.com. Mitchell is at *The Stone* Mar. 24th with *Myra Melford*. See Calendar.



Jazz Child: A Portrait of Sheila Jordan
Ellen Johnson (Rowman & Littlefield)
 by Marcia Hillman

If anyone had a story to tell, it's vocalist Sheila Jordan. Ellen Johnson has painstakingly crafted this portrait of a unique jazz talent.

Born in Detroit, Jordan was left by her mother to be raised by her grandparents in a poor coal-mining region of Pennsylvania, reunited with her mother in Detroit as a teenager. Her grandparents, mother and other members of her maternal family were alcoholics and Jordan has fought a battle with alcohol for most of her life. What saved a teenaged Jordan was the music of Charlie "Bird" Parker. Bird became her mentor, her inspiration, her prophet, a close friend and her reason for deciding to live a life "in jazz".

The book tells of hanging out with jazz musicians as a teenager in Detroit, writing words to Bird's solos, Jordan's relationship with saxophonist Frank Foster and her move to New York City in 1949. There she married Duke Jordan, had a daughter and sang wherever and whenever she had the opportunity. Her divorce left her in the same position as her mother—a single parent—and as late as her 50s, Jordan held down a full-time job in order to bring up her child. It wasn't until 1962 that Jordan made her leader debut after having guest appearances on records. Since then she has been busy recording, performing and educating a new generation of jazz vocalists. She was named an NEA Jazz Master in 2012.

Johnson candidly portrays Jordan's career history, battle with addiction in an environment where alcohol and drugs were easily available and struggle with a biracial marriage and raising a biracial daughter in a time when society frowned upon such relationships.

The book contains a bibliography, discography and reproductions of music and lyrics for Jordan's songs, such as "The Crossing"—about her decision to fight her addiction—which she still performs.

In this fascinating read, Johnson has captured Jordan's engaging personality—a legend surviving life's ups and downs with the clear vision of an inner child, sustained by her love of music.

For more information, visit rowman.com. Jordan is at *Birdland* Mar. 31st-Apr. 4th. See Calendar.