

Best jazz albums of 2000 ranged across genres

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Ken Burns' sweeping made-for-TV documentary "Jazz" might give the potential record buyer helpful background in appreciating the roots of contemporary jazz from mainstream and progressive jazz to Latin jazz, Brazil's many expressive voices and even to some African music.

Here's a list of my personal "best" of this mix of genres from the year 2000.

First a batch of five female singers who made recording news last year: Nienna Freelon's "soukall" (Concord) hypnotizes in a wide range of styles; Monica Mancini's "The Dreams of Johnny Mercer" (Concord) revises 12 gems from half a century ago; Jelena Anja Milicetic aka Helen Merrill (Verve) splits time between Merrill's career as an American jazz singer and her Yugoslav roots revivalist; Cesaria Evora's "Mar Azul" (Nonesuch) continues her warm Cape Verde Islands ballads; Terrey Sutton's "Unsung Heroes" (Telarc Jazz) delivers classy mainstream interpretations.

Here are more:

• "Where Is the Wide" (ECM). Underappreciated, innovative tenor saxophonist Charles Lloyd leads a stellar quintet on covers (e.g., Georgia, "Lotus Blossom") and originals (e.g. his sweet, wispy take on the title track). Joining him are pianist Brad Mehldau, drummer Billy Higgins, guitarist John Abercrombie and bassist Larry Grenadier.

• "Vintage Legacy — with the High Priests Vol.1 and "Battle of the Saxes" Vol.2 (Prestige). These two compilations should be listened to after viewing Burns' documentary. On the first volume are recordings of four masters of jazz — Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk, John Coltrane and Sonny Rollins. (If you want the aegle Rollins' latest recording pick up "This What I Do.") The second volume has more than 20 saxmen in more than 75 minutes of music; among them are Stan Getz, Sonny Criss, Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis, Gene Ammons, Sonny Stitt, Phil Woods and Eric Dolphy.

• "Bogotá" (GM). The Andy Biskin Quintet wakes up the listener with more than an hour of live, fun jazz instrumentals that will leave you craving more.

• "Monty Meets Sly and Robbie" (Telarc) and "Monty Alexander — Ballad Essentials" (Concord). Pianist Monty Alexander always seems to find something new to say. He certainly does on his jazz-funk meetings with the Jamaican duo of percussionist Sly Dunbar and bassist Robbie Shakespeare, a follow-up to Alexander's tribute to Bob Marley... "Ballad Essentials"



is a collection of previously recorded cuts from the last 20 years. They haven't lost their romantic warmth.

• "Written in the Stars" (Blue Note). Pianist Bill Charlap is one smoothie, a throwback to hotel lounge players who made life more palatable for barflies. Charlap heads a small ensemble.

• "One Alone" (Topic). This solo album proves that octogenarian pianist Dave Brubeck retains his unmistakable touch. There is beauty and romance in his interpretations of such melancholic ballads as "That Old Feeling," "You've Got Me Crying Again" and "Red Sails in the Sunset."

• "Cedar Walton: The Maestro" (32 Jazz). Walton is a veteran, unsung jazz pianist who leads a sextet, plus Abbey Lincoln's vocals in this stirring recreation of some standards, including "In a Sentimental Mood," "Blue Monk" and "Young and Foolish."

• "Solo" (Warner Bros.). Except for two compositions he had sketched out, pianist Lyle Mays, known for his work with the Pat Metheny Group, plays pieces that demonstrate the breadth of improvisation.

• "Romance on Film, Romance on Broadway" (Concord). Noted vocalist-pianist Michael Feinstein cruises his way through 22 classic ballads on this two-CD set. Save this set for quiet weekend nights in front of the space heater.

• "The Single Petal of a Rose" (Concord). Pianist Marian McPartland is joined by bassist Bill Douglas on seven cuts in a sea cruise through tunes, like Ellington's orchestras popularized. Remember "Mood Indigo" and "I Let A Song Set Out of My Heart?"

• "Outbound" (Favored Nations). Jazz-rock guitarist Stuart Hamm offers this album, which is industrial strength, except for the respectful ride he gives for the respectful rider he gives "The Star Spangled Banner."

• "You Remind Me of Someone" (Palmetto). Pete McCann is one very cool New York jazz guitarist. And he's a sterling composer whose music will have you telling your friends about the album.

• "Live at Smalls" (Jen Bay). The Mace Ellington features Ellington's guitar in this piping hot potpourri of bebop, hard bop and jazz fusion



takes of originals and a few covers, notably "Stella by Starlight."

• "The Great Lost Sun Ra Albums" ("Cymbals & Crystal Spears" (Evidence). The cosmic music of the Sun Ra Arkestra is not more in evidence than on this two-CD set by the unique music innovator and bandleader.

• "The Pizza Tapes" (Acoustic Disc). This is the first legitimate recording of sessions with Grateful Dead guitarist Jerry Garcia, jazz mandolin player David Grisman and guitarist Tony Rice. It seems a pizza delivery boy had stolen a cassette of mixes from Garcia's kitchen years ago and the tapes went into the bootleg world.

• "Jazz Takes on Joni Mitchell" (Arkadia). David Lahm, Randy Brecker and Lew Tabackin and others turn Mitchell's songs into nicely honed instrumental jazz tunes.

• "Serenity" (ECM). Sweden's Bobo Stenson Trio shows that jazz knows no borders. This serene piano-led trio shows its creativity and sense of adventure in taking on diverse works by Wayne Shorter, Silvio Rodriguez, Charles Ives and Alan Berg.

• "Always Pack Your Uniform on



Top" (XtraWatt). Experimental jazz bassist Steve Swallow leads a quintet into the unknown — places where few have traveled musically. No passport required.

• "Colors" (Stretch). Bassist Avishai Cohen and friends bring together elements of jazz fusion and pop while maintaining strong melodic lines that come under the heading of "music to drive the interstate with."

• "Eastern European Roots" (Herbie Mann Music). Eastern Europe is the latest destination for world-traveling jazz flute pioneer Herbie Mann. Here he leads his Sona Terra ensemble, the same group that inaugurated the new Outpost Performance Space last spring. The album is available online at www.herbiemannmusic.com

• "Spain" (Verve). The duo of Dominican pianist Michel Camilo and Spanish guitarist Tomatito brilliantly fuse jazz and flamenco.

• "... de vuelta al barrio" (Caimán Music). Salsa meets pop music meets the orchestra on this album that Chichi Peralta wrote, arranged and plays Latin percussion.

• "Distinto, diferente" (World



Circuit/Nonesuch). Juan de Marcos' Afro Cuban All Stars is the same Cuban ensemble that packed the Sunshine Theater last spring. The ultimate in traditional Afro-Cuban dance music.

• "Chanchullo" (World Circuit/Nonesuch). Cuban pianist Rubén González leads some of his Buena Vista Social Club buddies through a golden treasure of oldies, such as two '50s cha-cha hits "Rico vacilón" and "El Bologero."

• "The Stars of the Buena Vista Social Club, 21st Century: When Life Begins..." ("Tumi Music). Rubén González, Compay Segundo, Ibrahim Ferrer, Eliades Ochoa and other Cuban elders jam.

• "Tribute to the Quarteto Patria" (Higher Octave World). Eliades Ochoa, a Grammy Award-winning Cuban artist, leads an ensemble that honors his quartet from his younger years. It's a mix of unforgettable bolero, son and guaracha stylings.

• "Taken By Surprise" (Palmetto). Norman Hednán's Tropique is a band that has found the happy, groove form in Latin jazz, funk and salsa that is in the Poncho Sanchez mold.

• "memories, chronicles, declarations of love" (metro blue). Brazilian vocalist Maria Monte stamps her music with deeply emotional statements that make you think she's singing for you.

• "The Story of Bossa Nova" (EMI). Through various talented Brazilian vocalists, many unknown to most Americans, this album presents a journey into the history of bossa nova (jazz samba). The tunes may be quite familiar. Like "Girl from Ipanema," "One Note Samba," "Meditation" and "Felicidade" from the film "Black Orpheus."

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