

Uri Caine *Calibrated Thickness*

816MUSIC 1502

★★★★½

It's all acoustic, all the time, on pianist Uri Caine's *Calibrated Thickness*. His first trio recording since 2011's *Siren*, the pianist brings in longtime collaborators bassist Mark Helias and drummer Clarence Penn for this recording, and Caine and company play fast and furious over 15 originals that include cornetist Kirk Knuffke on three tracks.

Caine possesses virtuosic talents across many genres, and excels in both acoustic and

electric settings. Here, as the trio plays through various styles, the focus is intimate and intense. "Manahatta" is roughhewn, straightahead swing. Caine's chordal work and behind-the-beat rhythmic drive combine nicely with Helias' forceful pulse and Penn's explosive attacks.

Many of the tunes, including "Woke Up This Morning," "Climb To The Top" and "Time In Between," dwell in more abstract regions, where one might think of early Cecil Taylor or Andrew Hill, but tunes like the funky "Night Wrestler" and the jagged swinger "Golem" unfold in more readily apparent patterns. The more contemplative side of Caine's writing comes out with "Bleeding Heart," "Icicles" and "He Said She." Knuffke's voice offers a bright edge on denser material, exuding a darting dynamism.

Overall, *Calibrated Thickness* is a release of controlled Caine energy, and an admirably swinging recording by a pianist known for progressivism and intelligence. It captures top-notch playing from three musicians who have played together for more than 20 years.

—John Ephland

Calibrated Thickness: Manahatta; Woke Up This Morning; Icicles; Submission; Golem; Bleeding Heart; Night Wrestler; Climb To The Top; Hidden Glances; Scatterbrain Suite; He Said She; Sticks And Stones; Time In Between; Shadow Of A Doubt; Downward Spiral. (60:51)

Personnel: Uri Caine, piano; Mark Helias, bass; Clarence Penn, drums; Kirk Knuffke, cornet (4, 9, 15).

Ordering info: uricaine.com

Orbert Davis' Chicago Jazz Philharmonic Chamber Ensemble *Havana Blue*

316 RECORDS 08

★★★★★

The Chicago Jazz Philharmonic—versatile, elegant, explosive, cinematic—has enjoyed a spectacular relationship with the acoustically perfect Auditorium Theater, appearing there eight times in various iterations. A historic concert took place there on an auspicious Friday the 13th last November, marrying the CJP orchestra with a host of Cuban musicians, and one hopes some record of that concert will follow *this* album, which commemorates a meeting 17 months prior between CJP Chamber Ensemble and Cuban-born choreographer Frank Chavez.

We can't witness the dancers on this part live/part studio recording, superbly captured by co-producer Roger Heiss, but if you're not moving your hips or at least feeling a quiver during "Havana At Twelve," there may be something wrong with you.

Though Davis avowed to depart from the Cuban cliché of "fast tempos, bright colors and ruffled shirts," there is plenty of virile swagger on "Manteca" and "Orlando's Walk." And Afro-Cuban hijinks erupt in the "Havana Blue



Suite," which includes a moving take on Ernesto Lecuona's "Al Fin Te Vie" arranged for a clarinet combo of Anna Najoom and Michael Salter.

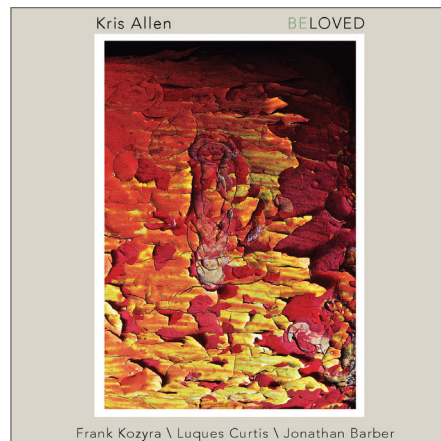
With succinct and porous writing, Davis has made the best use of his ultra-pro cohorts.

—Michael Jackson

Havana Blue: Concierto De Aranjuez; Congri; Solteras; El Malecon; Al Fin Te Vi; Orlando's Walk; Chega De Saudade; Manteca; Seraphim; Orlando's Walk. (49:29)

Personnel: Orbert Davis, conductor; trumpet, flugelhorn; Leandro Lopez Varady, piano; Fender Rhodes; Stewart Miller, bass; Ernie Adams, drums, cajon; Jose Rendon, congas; Suzanne Osman, percussion; Steve Eisen, tenor saxophone, flute, alto flute; Anna Najoom, clarinet; Michael Salter, bass clarinet, tenor saxophone; Eréndira Izguerra, baritone saxophone, violin; Sylvia de la Cerna, violin; Talia Pavia, violin; Lynn LaPlante-Allaway, viola; Ellen Frolichstein, cello; David Spencer, Chris Davis, trumpet, flugelhorn; Jessica Pearce, French horn; Tracey Kirk, trombone; Henry Salgado, bass trombone, trombone.

Ordering info: chijazzphil.org



Kris Allen *Beloved*

TRUTH REVOLUTION 037

★★★★★

On his terrific second album, saxophonist Kris Allen embraces those near and dear to him, whether writing tunes for various members of his family, saluting his mentor Jackie McLean or working with musicians from his hometown of Hartford, Connecticut. That sense of closeness is palpable throughout, providing a comfort zone that allows Allen and his cohorts to locate the profound within the familiar.

Allen shares a remarkable rapport with frontline partner and tenor saxophonist Frank Kozyra, also a Hartford native; the pair's warm and buoyant unison lines recall the indelible bond of Lee Konitz and Warne Marsh, but *Beloved* doesn't otherwise visit the Tristano school. Instead, this piano-less quartet draws upon a broader range of bebop and post-bop to forge a sound timeless in its elegant precision.

"Mandy Have Mercy," composed for the Allen family pooch, deploys a lengthy melody that folds back in on itself, based on the changes of the ballad "I'd Rather Have A Memory Than A Dream," recorded by Sarah Vaughan when Charlie Parker was in her band. As an educator, Allen has developed exercises for his students drawing upon Bird's music, and he used one of those gambits for "Bird Bailey," during which Kozyra and bassist Luques Curtis—another Hartford guy—play 17 different Parker solo fragments beneath the leader's keening alto solo. The brisk closer, "Threequel," is the only tune to embrace the standard head-solo-head format. As much as anything on the album, it's rooted in the lessons imparted by McLean; Allen proves that those ideas are all alive and well.

—Peter Margasak

Beloved: Lowborn; Mandy Have Mercy; Lord Help My Unbelief; Flores; One For Rory; Bird Bailey; Beloved (for Jen); Hate The Game; More Yeah; Threequel. (53:34)

Personnel: Kris Allen, alto saxophone, soprano saxophone; Frank Kozyra, tenor saxophone; Luques Curtis, bass; Jonathan Barber, drums.

Ordering info: truthrevolutionrecords.com