

Norwegian Invention
**Julian F. Thayer/Jarmo Savolainen/
 Scott Robinson/Klaus Suonsaari (KSJazz)**
 by Gordon Marshall

Norwegian Invention takes some patience. An eight-part suite lasting an hour, it really picks up pace midway in Part III or 20 minutes in, when what started as a dry, tempoless abstract weave segues into a bass-propelled pedal point supporting a sonic adventure. Such a strategy, involving a slow start and a surprise, has become a (good, I think) trend in recent jazz. Deferred gratification, if you like, it makes for more cohesion and conceptually satisfying wholes.

Part IV brings another slow-down. It is a lyrical piece, tinged with humor and the blues. It is pleasant in itself and also more energy to come can be expected. Still, the mellow mood is seductive and the track settles into a slow swinging dance tempo. Jarmo Savolainen (who died in June 2009 and to whom the disc is dedicated) holds down the fort, like a melancholy cocktail pianist no longer to be ignored, ready to bare his true soul to the gathered patrons.

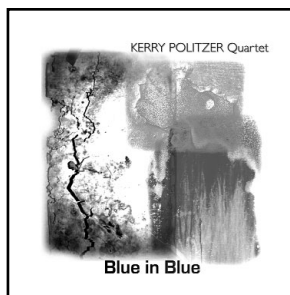
Klaus Suonsaari's drums open Part V. He manages to blur the line between swing and abstraction, with rubato sweeps of the snare giving way to staccato pokes. As he builds tension, he even

starts to suggest a kind of soft-shoe Elvin Jones, with heavy but somehow muffled syncopation. Finally at midpoint bassist Julian F. Thayer ratchets his way into the action along with Savolainen. The latter's playing on this track has the fleet, birdlike quality of an early Chick Corea.

Thayer opens Part VI with some intermittent honks on sax from Scott Robinson - and some shaken bells. This one has an African feel to it, haunting, mysterious, with a heavy beat that breaks quickly after two minutes and gives way to the soprano sax solo that starts Part VII, on which Thayer booms out on banjo. Savolainen takes this as a cue to pluck the inside strings of the piano as Robinson develops his scattershot motif.

The final Part VIII is the most exciting of the lot. What's more, it concludes the suite (recorded as one continuous performance with intentional pauses included) with impeccable logic. The rhythm section interlocks like pieces of a wooden jigsaw puzzle and three minutes in Robinson cuts into the mesh with driven, midtempo sheets of sound: seemingly random but highly considered recombinations of offbeat arpeggios. However overstated this may seem, this conclusion gives us an idea of what it might have been like to hear Cecil Taylor, Max Roach, John Coltrane and Charlie Haden play a dream date.

For more information, visit ksjazz.com. Robinson and Suonsaari are at Brooklyn Lyceum Dec. 8th. See Calendar.



Blue in Blue
Kerry Politzer Quartet (Piloo)
 by Elliott Simon

An emotive piano tugs at your heartstrings while making you feel all warm and fuzzy at the same time. Blend that into the context of a rhythm section not afraid to take chances and you have the depth needed to do justice to these beautifully rendered artistic compositions from pianist Kerry Politzer. Politzer's fifth offering is a solid return to this jazzwoman's roots and showcases her instrumental leadership and compositional depth in the context of this superb rhythm section.

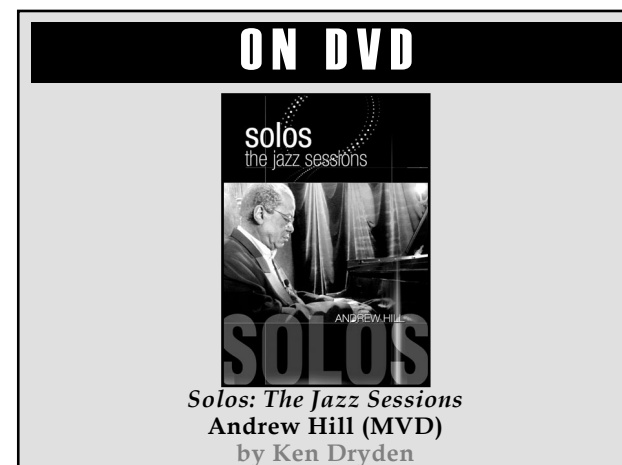
Although pianist Bill Evans' influence can be heard on many of these intellectual and introspective pieces, these *Blue in Blue* shades are not the kind of blue that necessarily instantly bring him to mind. This is due in no small measure to Donny McCaslin, who turns the trio into a quartet and contrasts with Politzer's warm chords and precise delicate lines on both tenor and soprano saxophone. McCaslin's tonal mastery and inventive soloing allow his sprightly soprano to soar through the quickly "Shifting Clouds" elegantly portrayed by Politzer's deft runs. He likewise contributes both emotions to "Desolation or Hope", adds the right amount of breezy Latin lilt to "Brazilian Accents" and sparks up what would otherwise be a stark "November" day.

It is however as a piano trio that Politzer's elegance is best experienced and also where she really gels with bassist Paul Beaudry and drummer George Colligan (himself usually a pianist). "Early Spring Chill" has its frosty yet pretty melody warmed up by Beaudry's gorgeous extended solo before he aggressively leads the way through what becomes a Latin-tinged "Washington Park", courtesy of Colligan's rhythms. The title cut is a contemplative

and cohesive instrumental excursion as the rhythm section supports and joins Politzer's explorations of these varied shades of blue while the pianist is at her pensively chordal best with the all-too-short "Left Unsaid". Special mention goes to "Sing", whose breezy perky rhythms are presented with and without voices in two separate versions.

Blue in Blue's strength lies in Politzer's obvious emotional attachment to these original compositions and her ability to share this depth with her bandmates on this very personal material.

For more information, visit myspace.com/pilooorecords. Politzer is at Smalls Dec. 17th. See Calendar.



Solos: The Jazz Sessions
Andrew Hill (MVD)
 by Ken Dryden

This remarkable date features Andrew Hill performing in Toronto's Berkeley Church, filmed in HD video for broadcast by Bravo! Canada, circa 2004, just a few years prior to the pianist's death from cancer in 2007. Producer Daniel K. Berman utilizes imaginative multiple camera angles, dramatic lighting, superb audio and video, along with creative editing (sometimes superimposing different views) to interpret Hill's intriguing performances. Although Hill makes a few brief comments to the camera at times, there is no audience, aside from the discreet, unseen production staff.

Hill made his mark in the '60s as a forward-thinking composer/pianist who stretched the perceived boundaries of jazz without losing sight of melody, bridging the worlds of bop and avant garde jazz. Throughout his four selections (three of which he evidently never recorded for CD), Hill appears to be reading his sheet music, yet each song sounds simultaneously improvised and fully composed.

There isn't a lot of variety in tempo and overall feeling between the four songs, though that isn't really a problem, as the pianist seems to be more interested in establishing a mood and building upon it, rather than playing entertainer to a television audience of the future. "East 19th Street" is a brooding, ruminative work with a very introspective flavor, its often-sparse essence adding to its dramatic air. "Bent Forward" has a definite Thelonious Monk influence with its choppy theme, though resemblance ends there, as Hill casts an ominous air while occasionally working in a Latin rhythm. "Unsmooth" is a jagged, dissonant work that has some brief flashes of pop-like snippets. An earlier solo piano version of "Tough Love" appeared on Hill's 2000 Palmetto CD *Dusk*, yet this later effort has a more melancholy air to it.

Likely one of the few (if not only) times that Andrew Hill performed on television, this rewarding solo piano session serves as a moving coda to his brilliant career.

For more information, visit movdb2b.com. A Hill tribute by Ron Horton and Tim Horner is at Littlefield Dec. 15th. See Calendar.

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