

Legends Live: Liederhalle Stuttgart (November 22, 1977)

Gerry Mulligan Sextet (JazzHaus)

Stompin' With

Ronnie Ross (Parlophone/Ember Jazz - Fantastic Voyage)

Sign The Book **Jason Marshall Organ Trio (s/r)**

Boplicity **Ronnie Cuber (SteepleChase)**

by Clifford Allen

The baritone saxophone, as ungainly as it might look at first blush, is an incredibly versatile instrument and can be played with slick low-to-midrange facility or hot, lung-busting devilishness. As St. Louis baritonist Hamiet Bluiett has opined, the instrument gets to a deeper level of the psyche and the effects of its range on human physiology are yet to be fully researched. That said, it's also the provenance of four recent discs by bari leaders past and present - Gerry Mulligan, Ronnie Ross, Jason Marshall and Ronnie Cuber.

The baritone saxophone, jazz and Gerry Mulligan are an inseparable concept, though the latter is often treated as an influence to escape as much as he is one of the instrument's most elegant practitioners. At the height of romanticism and fusion in the jazz mainstream, this late 1977 Stuttgart performance finds Mulligan in full collaborative flower. He's joined on a program of originals and a pair of chestnuts ("My Funny Valentine" and "Satin Doll") by bassist George Duvivier, drummer Bobby Rosengarden, guitarist Mike Santiago, pianist Thomas Fay and vibraphonist Dave Samuels. The opening "For an Unfinished Woman" is a kaleidoscope of jazz-rock and Latin flair, vibes and guitar flinty and oblique across a filmic ten minutes. The warm lilt of "Line for Lyons" is rendered with assurance and a sweet keen, the leader supported by an attuned rhythmic amble. A surprisingly moody date, poised just to the right of oddness, this first volume of the *Legends Live* series is a fine tribute to Mulligan's small group work during his most ambitious years as a composer.

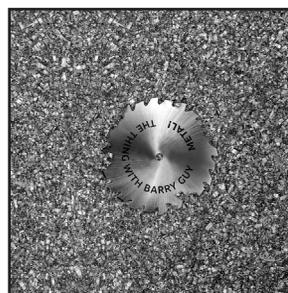
British baritone saxophonist Ronnie Ross isn't particularly well known on this side of the pond, though he was a standout member of groups and big bands led by saxophonists Johnny Dankworth, Tubby Hayes and Don Rendell. His combos with vibraphonist/pianist Bill Le Sage were consistently well regarded in swinging '60s London, reaching their apex with the fine *Cleopatra's Needle* (Fontana, 1968). *Stompin' With* from Ross' quintet was recorded in 1958 and released on a rare Ember LP now being reissued. The leader is joined by pianist/valve trombonist Eddie Harvey, trumpeter Bert Courtley, bassist Pete Blannin and drummer Andy White on ten originals, contemporary tunes and a rendition of "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes". Ross can put forth both soft, delicate phrasing and voluminous forward motion; joined by this spry foursome, he's an elegant cooker. Though the recording's a little thin and in the red at times, that lo-fi quality just helps push the music in a heartier direction.

Sign The Book is Jason Marshall's second disc as a leader, following 2010's *Overt Negritude*. The program features nine original compositions performed by a organ-driven trio, with Czech-born Ondrej Pivec on the B3 and Russell Carter on drums. Marshall has studied with Bluiett and Cuber and has worked

extensively with trumpeter Roy Hargrove. On this spry hardbop date that dips heavily into R&B, Marshall is both crisp and blowsy while Pivec enunciates an approach derived from John Patton and early Larry Young, as well as occasional languid dabbles into Freddie Roach territory. The opening "CCC" finds the organist laying out syrupy, drawn-out chords against Carter's dry, cracking time with the leader's ebullient gobs robustly engaging the changes. With no frills, the trio has put together an hour's worth of crackling, toothy soul jazz definitely worth seeking out.

Ronnie Cuber first came to recorded prominence with organist Dr. Lonnie Smith and guitarist George Benson and he also worked with Chick Corea, Idris Muhammad and Grant Green in the '70s. *Boplicity*, Cuber's fifth date for SteepleChase, finds his muscular and rollicking horn complemented by pianist Michael Wolff, veteran bassist Cameron Brown and drummer Johnathan Blake on nine knotty bop workouts. Charlie Parker's "Cheryl" is a particularly fine example of Cuber's angular facility, as he's both robustly churchy and coolly eliding at a medium tempo. Wolff evinces pointillism and earthy funk in a strong solo, before a few 'fours' are exchanged with Blake at the tune's close. "My Little Suede Shoes" features curious behind-the-beat phrasing from the pianist while the leader navigates with slight burrs and a winking fullness. Finely recorded to boot, *Boplicity* is a refreshingly hip jaunt through the bebop songbook.

For more information, visit jazzhaus-label.com, futurenoisemusic.com, jasonmarshalljazz.com and steeplechase.dk. Marshall is at Jazz Standard Jul. 6th-8th with Dr. Lonnie Smith and Smoke Tuesdays. Cuber is at Blue Note Jul. 24th-29th. See Calendar and Regular Engagements.



Metal!
The Thing (with Barry Guy) (NoBusiness)



The Cherry Thing
Neneh Cherry/The Thing (Smalltown Supersound)

by Andrey Henkin

In February 2000, three young Scandinavian musicians - saxist Mats Gustafsson, bassist Ingebrigt Håker Flaten and drummer Paal Nilssen-Love - came into a Stockholm studio to record a tribute to the late Don Cherry (*The Thing*, *Crazy Wisdom*). At the time, Gustafsson had already established himself as one of the lights of the Swedish improvising scene while Flaten and Nilssen-Love, who first recorded together in 1996 with Element, were making names for themselves 500 kilometers away in Norway. They never could have anticipated that, over a decade later, *The Thing* would be one of the most popular and consistent bands in modern avant garde jazz. Now all three are luminaries on their own, making scads of albums a year with a variety of projects. But something inimitable happens when the three get together, documented on over a dozen albums since that auspicious debut.

Yet for that special chemistry, the group is very amenable to working with guests, inserting a fourth (or more) voice as an equal partner into their maelstrom. Ken Vandermark, Thurston Moore, Otomo Yoshihide, Peter Evans and ZU (*The Thing's* Italian doppelgänger) have all been beneficiaries of this munificence live and on record but *The Thing's* most regular partner has been eminence grisé saxist/trumpeter Joe McPhee. Last month, this mighty quartet played as part of a celebration of McPhee's career at the Vision Festival,

capping in bombastic fashion an evening that saw McPhee leading a large ensemble and then performing solo with a small dance troupe. Two new albums find *The Thing* hosting first-time guests, both intriguing choices for very different reasons: bassist Barry Guy and vocalist Neneh Cherry.

Gustafsson and Guy have a history going back to the early '90s with several albums together but Flaten and Nilssen-Love know Guy with one degree of separation (Flaten has made duo records with longtime Guy partner Evan Parker; Nilssen-Love has worked with collaborators of the bassist like Paul Lovens, Louis Moholo and Marilyn Crispell). Guy's level of detail, the precision with which he plays each note or generates each sound seems at odds with the shovel-to-the-face brutality of *The Thing*. Would the component members opt for a more measured approach - of which they are more than capable - or would they pick Guy up like a tornado snatches up a cow? Well, Barry Guy ain't no cow and is, along with McPhee, the most experienced improviser with whom *The Thing* has heretofore worked (Guy's trio with Evan Parker and Paul Lytton poured the foundation upon which bands like *The Thing* are built). *Metal!* documents an 80-minute April 2011 concert from Vilnius, Lithuania. 10 of the 11 tracks (presumably improvised) are named after elements with the closer, *Thing* favorite "Ride The Sky", by Lightning Bolt. The latter is a perky 2 minutes while the opening "Lanthanum" is close to 18, so both power and exploration are amply present. With Guy in tow, the bombast is more bombastic and the delicacy (if such a word can be used in Gustafsson's presence) more delicate. All four players sound particularly emboldened, with the saxist at his yelping best and Guy and Flaten, two of improvised music's best bassists, bouncing around each other like superheated atoms. *The Thing* has only relatively recently focused on totally improvised sets and this album is the perfect culmination of that aesthetic.

The Cherry Thing brings the trio full circle, sort of. The featured collaborator is Don Cherry's stepdaughter Neneh (people of a very specific age range will remember her 1988 hit "Buffalo Stance"). But the group is further expanded with the contributions of Christer Bothén (guimbri and donso n'goni), Mats Äleklint (trombone) and Per-Åke Holmlander (tuba and cimballo). The material continues *The Thing's* penchant for covering interesting material, in this case tunes by Suicide, Martina Topley Bird, Madvillain, The Stooges and Ornette Coleman along with a piece each by Cherry (elder and younger) and Gustafsson. This album now displaces the collaborations with Norwegian indie rock band Cato Salsa Experience as the most unusual in *The Thing's* discography. And lest one worry that it will be relegated to the role of backing band, one needs to remember dominant musical personalities simply figure out how to adapt most successfully to different circumstances. So Flaten and Nilssen-Love, underrated as a 'rhythm section', are positively buoyant in their accompaniment while Gustafsson does his best Big Jay McNeely impression. When Cherry lays out, the band is like a teenager whose parents have left for the weekend. Also of note are Äleklint's horn arrangements. But what is most interesting about this album is how it sort of starts out as *The Thing* with Cherry and sort of ends up as Cherry with *The Thing*. This transformation begins with Martina Topley Bird's "To Tough To Die", continues with Gustafsson's "Sudden Moment" and reaches its apex with *The Stooges' "Dirt"*. The most unique tracks from this album, which is finally a well-conceived and executed 'crossover' album, are the closing "What Reason Could I Give" by Ornette Coleman and the poignant reading of Don Cherry's "Golden Heart", lyrics by Neneh, from his *Complete Communion* suite.

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