



Beyond Now
Donny McCaslin (Motéma Music)
 by Eric Wendell

Saxophonist Donny McCaslin's *Beyond Now* is dedicated to the late David Bowie, fitting as McCaslin and the album's core ensemble of keyboard player Jason Lindner, bassist Tim Lefebvre and drummer Mark Guiliana were the backing band on the legend's final album *Black Star*. The group was already perfecting their blend of jazz, rock and electronic textures when they recorded *Black Star* and *Beyond Now* feels like an organic extension of that work with Bowie.

From the opening salvo of "Shake Loose", McCaslin and Co. showcase a propulsive sound that festoons the record with excitement and power. What McCaslin does so well is balance the controlled with the chaotic, the destructive with the fragile and the experimental with the expected. This is evident on the title track, a slow boil building to a large, cacophonous finish with a hard-hitting motif to drive the force of the ensemble home.

This power is especially evident on "FACEPLANT", Lefebvre opening the track unaccompanied with a dirty punk rock riff, which McCaslin then doubles, resulting in a fun dialogue between the pair. And it's the dialogue that McCaslin has with his group that is the most satisfying, especially noteworthy on "Bright Abyss", where the leader and Lindner weave in and out of each other's lines in a gentle balance between their respective timbres.

Beyond Now features three covers: Bowie's "A Small Plot of Land" and "Warszawa" and Deadmau5's "Coelacanth 1". It is here that the group is at its strongest and weakest. "A Small Plot of Land" is an early highlight featuring the ethereal vocals of Jeff Taylor while "Warszawa" from the Bowie masterpiece *Low* is just as haunting and superb as the original, perhaps more so as the group taps deeper into the emotional core of the piece. However, "Coelacanth 1" meanders, never reaching any emotional or compelling heights but this is only a mere slight on an otherwise rock-solid record that satisfies with every listen.

For more information, visit motema.com. This project is at *Village Vanguard* through Dec. 4th. See Calendar.



High Art
The Power Quintet (HighNote)
 by Joel Roberts

Aptly named The Power Quintet brings together five of the most powerful mid-career players on the New York mainstream jazz scene: trumpeter Jeremy Pelt, vibraphonist Steve Nelson, pianist Danny Grissett, bassist Peter Washington and drummer Bill Stewart. All are highly sought after as sidemen, with Pelt probably the best known as a leader.

On their inaugural release, the group, which toured together in Europe before stepping into the

studio late last year, covers a set of mostly original material fitting neatly within a straightahead/postbop context. A hint at the band's cooperative nature is offered on the first number, Pelt's "Look at Here", a catchy hardbop blues on which Washington states the opening theme, before giving way to convincing solos from Pelt, Nelson and Grissett.

What makes the group distinctive, besides the unique personalities and general excellence of the musicians involved, is the unusual trumpet-vibraphone frontline. Pelt has won widespread acclaim for his firebrand trumpet skills and delivers as expected here. He turns in one blistering solo after another, reaching a peak with an explosive turn on Grissett's "Mr. Wiggleworm" that favorably recalls the likes of Freddie Hubbard or Lee Morgan. But it is Nelson, more of a journeyman throughout his three-decade-long career, who really impresses with his intricate, harmonically complex work. His adventurous solo on Stewart's "Tincture", for example, easily places him among the premier vibraphonists working today. Nelson's ballad skills, along with the rest of the band's, are on clear display on a subtle and flawless reading of the standard "But Beautiful", with Washington, Grissett and Pelt all contributing moving solos.

Though not a particularly trail-blazing group, The Power Quintet is a highly accomplished and interesting one. This brand of music, while familiar, has seldom been played so well.

For more information, visit jazzdepot.com. This project is at *Jazz Standard* through Dec. 4th. See Calendar.



Perfectly Out of Place
Will Vinson (5Passion)
 by Matthew Kassel

Perfectly Out of Place is saxophonist Will Vinson's sixth album as a leader, but is also a debut in many regards. The record showcases Vinson's first use of overdubbing, synthesizers, vocals and strings. "I wanted to explore writing some music that was just a touch more through-composed and to add some sounds in addition to those made by the quintet format that accounts for 5 out of 6 of those records," Vinson writes in the liner notes. With the help of a quintet supplemented by the singer Jo Lawry and the Mivos String Quartet, Vinson has succeeded in producing an album rough enough around the edges to maintain some improvisational frisson but also sufficiently polished to give off a vivid, cinematic quality.

The core group is Gonzalo Rubalcaba (piano, Fender Rhodes and synthesizers), Mike Moreno (guitar), Matt Penman (bass) and Jeff Ballard (drums); Vinson, who mostly plays alto, tackles a number of instruments outside his usual bailiwick, including soprano, flute, synthesizers and celeste. The album is a compendium of upbeat tracks, slow tunes and sweeping compositions spanning the emotional spectrum, coming off, in many ways, as a kind of soundtrack to a movie. In its fusion-y approach, the album somewhat recalls the early efforts of Return to Forever featuring Brazilian singer Flora Purim and Chick Corea's electric piano, though Vinson's album certainly stands on its own.

Highlights of the album include: Moreno's watery chords, which add an emulsifying quality to the mix; Rubalcaba's dexterous, satisfying solos on acoustic piano; Ballard's quiet-storm drumming and fluttery

stick-work, never to be underrated; and Vinson's full-bodied sound, grainy with bluesy undertones. Opener "Desolation Tango" is subdued and foreboding, making the best use of the guest string quartet (violinists Olivia De Prato and Lauren Cauley, violist Victor Lowrie, and cellist Mariel Roberts). The title track builds slowly, stuttering its way to an ominous climax. "Limp of Faith" and its short introduction—presented as another track—are melancholy tone poems, with an excellent saxophone-piano duo bringing to mind a noirish crime drama.

For more information, visit 5passion.com. Vinson is at *Smalls Dec. 1st*. See Calendar.

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