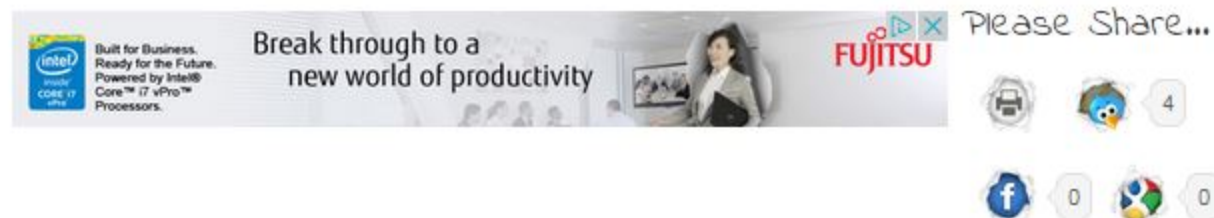


MUSIC REVIEWS: JAZZ FROM CHRISTIAN FINGER, JACK MOUSE AND SCOTT ROBINSON, AND NYSQ

Posted by: Jack Goodstein March 6, 2015 in Album Reviews, Jazz, Music, Music Genres, Reviews music



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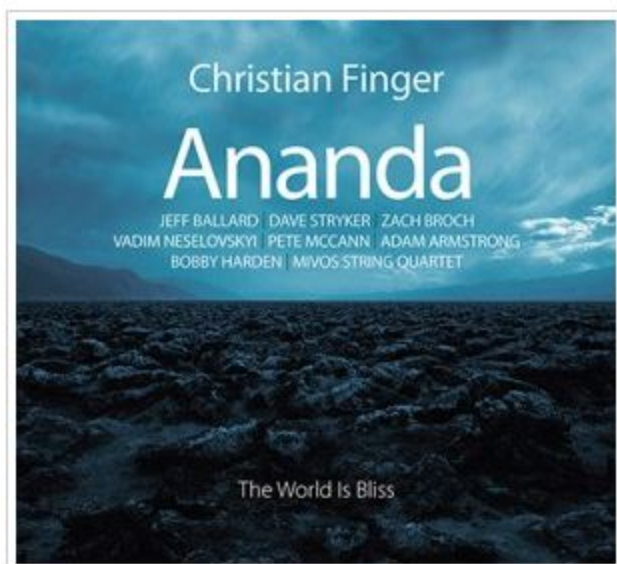
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Ananda, the third album from drummer/composer Christian Finger is one of those artistic adventures which defies easy classification. Finger's compositions combine elements of jazz with classical overtones and world music to create a programmatic soundscape that defines *Ananda*, which in Sanskrit means "the world is bliss." Working with musicians ranging from the jazz-oriented-like guitarists Dave Stryker and Pete McCann and pianist Vadim Nezelovskyi to the Mivos String Quartet, Finger creates what he calls in the liner notes "a journey, a document of the atmosphere and feel of life I experienced, a remembrance, and an indication we are not alone."

Finger's *Ananda* is as much a set of tone poems as it is a jazz suite, but the one thing it is not is the same old same old. Tracks like the opener "African Skies, Linear Lives" and "Nights Beyond, India" as well as "In's Weltenall 1: Into the Sky" and "In's Weltenall 2: Endless Stars" show the range of Finger's musical journey.

On the other hand, the duo of Jack Mouse and Scott Robinson opt for a different sort of exploratory journey in their program of free improvisations on the newly released *Snakes & Ladybugs*. Mouse plays drums and Robinson plays tenor and C melody sax, cornet and E-flat clarinet.



It is perhaps the one cardinal rule of improv, in the theater at least, to take what your partner gives you and run with it. The actors need to know and trust each other. Two musicians working together in much the same kind of unstructured format need to know and trust each other as well. In a sense, they have to get in each other's head. Mouse and Robinson have that kind of compatibility, the kind that seems to create harmonious momentum out of what could well have been chaos.

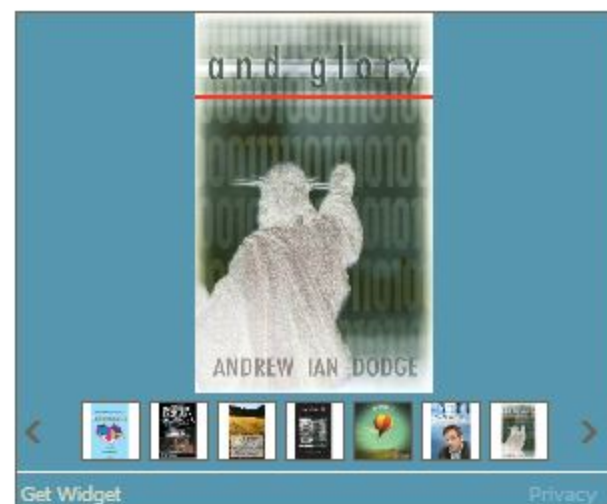
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Certainly, what they come with will not go down well with all audiences, but for those with a taste for creative invention in the moment, for those happy to trade canned musical ideas for new sounds, Mouse and Robinson are a duo with a musical soundscape all their own.

The varied 12-track set includes titles like "Bolero Incognito," "Two Minute March," "Dual Duel" and "Fandango," and ends appropriately with a defining piece, "Freebop."

Those with somewhat less adventurous tastes would be more comfortable with last summer's release from NYSQ (The New York Standards Quartet) *The New Straight Ahead*. NYSQ takes as its focus the reinvention of standard material, a focus some might imagine not all that revolutionary. After all, is that not the working plan for a good many jazz ensemble? The difference, if there is a significant difference, is that NYSQ uses the familiar material as what they call an "entry point" for the exploration of new ideas. Now while some may consider that a distinction without a difference, there can be little disagreement about the quality of their product.



The New Straight Ahead takes classic jazz standards like Thelonious Monk's "Misterioso" and Charlie Parker's "Ah-leu-cha" and familiar pieces out of the Great American Songbook like "When You Wish Upon A Star" and pushes them a little beyond where others would be likely to go. It's not so far that they become unrecognizable, but simply that they move them in new, unexplored directions.

You find unusual solo instrumentation in unexpected places, like Daiki Yasukagawa taking the bass opening in Herbie Hancock's "The Maze" or drummer Gene Jackson

providing the lead into "Autumn Leaves." They play around with time signatures, and there is a constant dynamic interplay between pianist David Berkman and saxophonist Tim Armacost.



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