

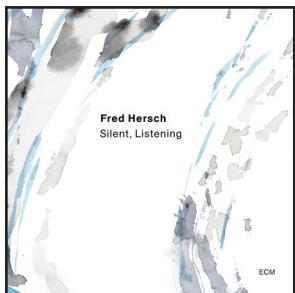
Flesh and Bones
William Hooker (Org Music)
by Andrew Hamlin

Drummer William Hooker, noted Simon Adams in *Grove Music Online*, often did not play with bassists, owing to his “intensity and volume.” But times and bold, curious, evolving artists change. This set (and Hooker’s *LeWitt Etudes*, from 2022), both feature two bassists each (given, not the same two), and though the leader smashes through any passage where he so chooses, *Flesh and Bones* manifests an admirable strain of respect.

Listened to from start-to-finish, *Flesh and Bones* suggests a tour through the wide and rich varieties of emotion and emotional expression, to which we humans find ourselves prone. Hooker knows he can make noise, but he leaves room—for Hilliard Greene and Luke Stewart (basses), Ras Moshe (tenor, flute), On Davis (guitar) and Charles Burnham (violin). And each member contributes vividly to the timbres at hand.

“Illustrious Posterity” sounds off with what appears to be Burnham fiddling through a wah-wah pedal, tones wavering at their edges like a sunny pond’s refraction. Nobody else joins in; nobody needs to. There’s plenty of full-blast, locomotive energy in the classic free jazz manner, but “Reveal a Truth”, featuring some more wah-wahed violin, settles into a classic swing feel, jump-started by the others through handclaps and foot pats. A bass anchors the pulse; then Hooker steps in with his subtle knack of playing the negative space between cymbals, hi-hat and snare. He builds to a boil, then lets the sound ebb, the way a conversation might sometimes end informally, with someone simply dropping the thread. Davis finds his spot with “True Dat”, another solo excursion, this one folding in on itself as distortion and speed build momentum. Hooker audibly laughs excitedly, then tests how much feel he can get out of a single tom-tom hit. “Talk to me!,” he shouts, amongst his many passionate exclamations throughout. And his sidemen respond by musically embodying communication. The sextet stakes out full-blown passion on one side and near-silence on the other, but the group devotes considerable time and considerable energies to the richness of gradations.

For more info visit orgmusiclabel.bandcamp.com. Hooker is at Nublu as part of Cadence Magazine Fest Apr. 11 and Saint Peter’s Church Apr. 21. See Calendar.



Silent, Listening
Fred Hersch (ECM)
by Ken Dryden

Over his long career, pianist Fred Hersch has explored a variety of styles, creating a distinctive, immediately recognizable sound. His occasional solo recordings have given listeners an opportunity to savor the

richness of his voicings, much like experiencing a fine vintage wine—yet there are always new dimensions to discover within his interpretations and moving originals. One has the feeling of being a private eavesdropper in the studio as Hersch alternates between playing standards, compelling originals or how he spontaneously creates brand new melodies. The mood throughout much of the session is mellow, as if the pianist is reflecting at the end of a day as he winds down, though there are moments of drama, especially with his deft hand muting the bass strings in spots. Hersch’s stunning improvised introduction to Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn’s “The Star-crossed Lovers” leads into a luxurious, leisurely unveiling of the melody, a rendition that would captivate the attention of any size audience.

The late pianist Russ Freeman’s “The Wind” was a twisting, peppy bop vehicle when he recorded it with Chet Baker in the ’50s, but Hersch transforms it with a more deliberate tempo, adding a long, haunting improvisation before briefly and sparingly hinting at its theme near its conclusion. The pianist approaches “Softly, As In a Morning Sunrise” in a more conventional manner, though his darting bass notes and surprising, strident right hand unveils new possibilities within this oft-played chestnut. Stylistically diverse composer Alec Wilder wrote a number of ballads championed by jazz artists, although “The Winter of My Discontent” has rarely been recorded. Hersch captures its melancholy air with his unique voicings, which mix a bit of playfulness to its somewhat somber setting. The pianist’s originals prove equally compelling, including a tense “Arkasia”, which has an air of mystery worthy of use in a film soundtrack, possibly due to the fact he improvised much of it after the opening. There’s a dissonant, eerie quality to the title track, which similarly makes it sound like an improvisation.

Fred Hersch reaffirms his mastery of solo piano and composition with this certainly formidable release.

For more info visit ecmrecords.com. Hersch’s album release concert is at Merkin Hall Apr. 26. See Calendar.



New York Jazz Stories/Billy's Birthday Bash
David Haney (s/r)
Live at Earshot
David Haney/Julian Priester (Cadence)
by Mike Shanley



Although Billy’s Birthday Bash comes from the “New York Jazz Stories” series presented by the Public Theater at Joe’s Pub, the album doesn’t actually contain tales from any musicians, at least not in the verbal sense. The 2016 set features about 45 minutes of improvisations that flow like conversations without worrying about a central point in the discussion. The “Stories” program is helmed by pianist David Haney, and the title refers to drummer Billy Martin (of Medeski, Martin and Wood), who was indeed celebrating a birthday the week of the performance. Bassist Adam Lane completes the rhythm section over which multi-instrumentalist Daniel Carter adds an array of colors from his various horns. When he first enters with a muted trumpet, his spare but arresting sound can’t help but evoke the open qualities of ’60s era Miles Davis. He later switches to clarinet before some solo space is taken by Martin (moving all over the kit rapidly, adding chimes for good measure) then Lane (utilizing a bow for sustained intensities and high harmonics). Haney sets the scene throughout, with descending figures and dynamic variations. Along with his angular on/off playing in the final track, flutist

Yael Acher KAT Modiano joins the frontline for some muscular interplay with Carter’s saxophone playing.

Anyone familiar with trombonist Julian Priester, primarily from his work with Herbie Hancock or his many sideman sessions for Blue Note, might be surprised by this *Live at Earshot* set with Haney, recorded in 2010 at Seattle’s Earshot Jazz Festival. The high brass squeals that launch the album, behind rumbling prepared piano, sound closer to George Lewis. Of course, Priester’s experience also includes stints with Sun Ra and Sam Rivers, and more recently, heavy rockers Sunn 0))), so his flexibility cannot be underestimated. Near the top of the album, Haney and Priester begin to engage each other in rapt discussion. Sometimes the sound is spare and subdued, but it always feels focused—and sometimes they sound like they’re ready to pause (“Earshot Jazz Fest B”), but inspiration calls for one final rumble of sound. The pianist likes to play out of tempo, but frequently introduces brief musical motifs, which he delivers utilizing the sustain pedal, allowing notes to ring out and create a scene-scape. Even when he plays in the lower register, Haney never gets heavy handed; in fact, his touch feels pretty agile, especially when he teases by continually pulling out a bluesy riff (“Earshot Jazz Fest D”). Together with Priester, who ranges from quick tart notes to sustained tones that sound like they’re cuing a ballad, the duo reveals how understatement and subtlety are also essential in free improvisation. Some incidental stage noise sounds like Haney’s feet moving on and off of the pedals. While this is a bit distracting, it thankfully doesn’t spoil the experience.

For more info visit davidhaney1.bandcamp.com. Haney is at Nublu as part of Cadence Magazine Fest Apr. 11. See Calendar.

RECOMMENDED NEW RELEASES

- Matthieu Bordenave – *The Blue Land* (ECM)
- Tomasz Dabrowski & The Individual Beings – *Better* (April)
- Dave Douglas – *Gifts* (Greenleaf Music)
- Leo Genovese, John Lockwood, Nat Mugavero – *The Art of Not Playing* (577 Records)
- Nicole Glover – *Plays* (Savant)
- Mary Halvorson Amaryllis – *Cloudward* (Nonesuch)
- Mark Helias – *Snapshot* (Radio Legs Music)
- I Am Three (Nikolaus Neuser, Silke Eberhard, Christian Marien) – *In Other Words* (Leo)
- Fumio Itabashi – *Watarase* (Denon-Wewantsounds)
- David Leon – *Bird's Eye* (Pyroclastic)
- Yusef Lateef – *Atlantis Lullaby: The Concert From Avignon* (Elemental Music)
- Charles Lloyd – *The Sky Will Still Be There Tomorrow* (Blue Note)
- Tim Motzer/Gregg Bendian – *The Eternal* (1K Recordings)
- NRG Ensemble – *Hold That Thought* (Corbett vs. Dempsey)
- Baden Powell – *The girl from Ipanema: Live in Liege* (Fremaux & Associes)
- Dave Rempis, Pandelis Karayorgis, Jakob Heinemann, Bill Harris – *Truss* (Aerophonic/Driff)
- Brandon Ross Phantom Station – *Off The End* (Sunnyside)
- Angelica Sanchez/Chad Taylor – *A Monster Is Just An Animal You Haven't Met Yet* (Intakt)
- Terton (Louie Belogenis, Trevor Dunn, Ryan Sawyer) – *Outer, Inner, Secret* (Tzadik)
- Fay Victor Herbie Nichols SUNG – *Life Is Funny That Way* (TAO Forms)