

Piano and More, Past/Present

On this short list of new/old releases, the item of greatest historical importance is undoubtedly the revelatory unburied treasure that is **Thelonious Monk's *Live In Paris 1967, Vol. 1*** (Rhythm-a-Ning; ★★½ 46:39), the first of two albums from a classic archival cachet, elevated from the former bootleg ghetto into pristine restoration by the Monk Estate. We know and love the tunes: "Epistrophy" "Evidence," the glowsome ballad "Ruby, My Dear" and the angular dance "We See," heard in a rambling 14-minute epic version. But this familiar material springs to life and triangulates in new ways in the hands of minimalist Monk, his allies Charlie Rouse on tenor saxophone, drummer Ben Riley and bassist Larry Gales, as well as eager Monk-loving guests then in Europe: Johnny Griffin (who had played in Monk's group before Rouse), alto saxist Phil Woods and trombonist Jimmy Cleveland.

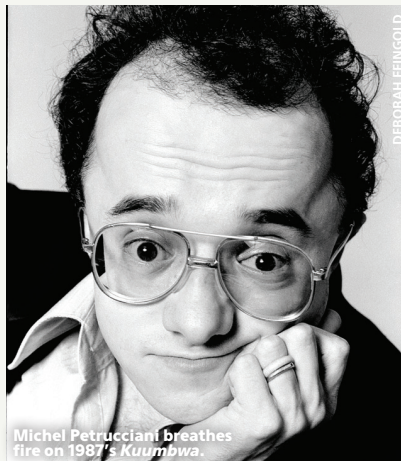
It adds up to a distinctive lovefest/Monk-fest, capturing a moment in time and place previously untapped — at least legally and in due, proper clarity.

Ordering info: theloniousmonk.store

When the late, great French jazz piano phenom **Michel Petrucciani** performed at the historically vital — and still active — Kuumbwa venue in Santa Cruz in 1987, he was only five years out from having veritably helped lure Charles Lloyd out of semi-reclusion in Big Sur, just down the coast highway from Santa Cruz. The new archival rescue mission that is ***Kuumbwa*** (Elemental; ★★★★★ 1:54:09), curated by jazz detective Zev Feldman from Kuumbwa director Tim Jackson's taped trove, celebrates a passionate, ever-on-his-feet virtuoso at work, with a power trio completed by bassist Dave Holland and the pianist's regular drummer, Eliot Zigmund. Opening with Wayne Shorter's "Limbo," Petrucciani boldly wends through rich, energized takes on the standards "All The Things" and "Stella By Starlight," makes graceful turns on ballads "The Prayer" and "Morning Blues" (with a lustrous solo from Holland) and revisits Lloyd's Monk-juiced "Sweet Georgia Bright." Even given a less-than-pristine piano to work with, Petrucciani's literate life force as a jazz titan shines through on this gem of a set.

Ordering info: elemental-music.com

A certain historical turning point is represented by **Brian Auger's *Oblivion Express*** (Strut; ★★½ 40:12): the point, in 1970, when British keyboardist Auger was lured from his more soul-influenced style towards a more pointedly jazz-rock fusion base, partly inspired by his friend John McLaughlin's *Devotion* album. The six-track sequence of *Oblivion Express* is framed by two of the project's signature instrumental ravers, a version of John



Michel Petrucciani breathes fire on 1987's *Kuumbwa*.

McLaughlin's "Dragon Song" fueled by side-winding riffs and "Oblivion Express," which juggles tough-guy attitudes and a playful, carnival-evoking chromatic descending line. The vocals tracks in the mix of songs, sung in Auger's serviceable journeyman style, range from the restless prog rock of "The Light" to the smartened-up boogie rock of "On The Road," also a showcase for Auger's nimble-fingered B-3 work. Guitarist Jim Mullen plays in an edgy style yoking closer to a rock mode than the harmonic and dynamic sensitivity of jazz, as such. But that approach stays true to the pivotal rock part of Auger's jazz-rock — or rock-jazz — chemistry.

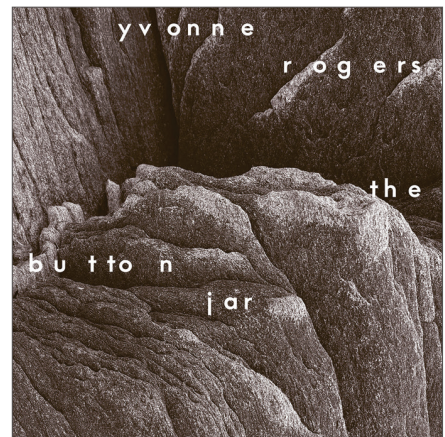
Ordering info: strut-records.co.uk

Denman Maroney's *Mean Times* (Cuneiform; ★★½ 1:04:10) was recorded in 1995 at the Knitting Factory, and its bristling qualities of adventurism and freedom speak well for the musical powers of its relatively all-star cast — trumpeter Herb Robertson, tenor saxophonist Ellery Eskelin, bassist Mark Dresser and drummer Phil Haynes — as well as the innate brave spirit embodied in the historic Knitting Factory sensibility.

Maroney supplied the glue and the guiding principle for the six-section "Mean Times" (so named not necessarily for the temper of the times in the '90s, but the musical meantime temperament, symbolic of intermediary), as composer and an interwoven sonic palette on "sampled hyperpiano." But, Maroney's central role notwithstanding, this is very much an ensemble outing, with a tapestry-like blend of freedom and skeletal melodic and structural elements, sometimes in kinship with the Art Ensemble of Chicago's operations.

Addressing this project, Maroney writes that "Oscar Wilde said all art is quite useless. I disagree." Here lies some proof of his argument. **DB**

Ordering info: cuneiformrecords.com



Yvonne Rogers *The Button Jar*

PYROCLASTIC

★★★½

Yvonne Rogers, who grew up in rural Maine, remembers with fondness the button jar that her mother kept. An artist, her mom used the button jar to store random objects that she might be able to use in the future for her projects. The young pianist sees the parallels between the button jar and her own batch of formerly unused ideas that she uses on this set of unaccompanied solos.

Rogers, who had previously recorded a quartet album (*Seeds*) and is a member of saxophonist Ingrid Laubrock's Lilith and Adam O'Farrill's Elephant, considers Kris Davis to be a mentor. Davis was so impressed by Rogers' creative ideas that she persuaded her to record for her Pyroclastic label and even produced the album.

The Button Jar consists of 11 originals by the pianist and three free improvisations. Rogers' playing on her fairly concise pieces is often so adventurous and spontaneous that it would be difficult to pick out the three songs that she made up on the spot. The pianist sometimes uses a repetitious figure in her left hand while her right plays freely on top, as on "Luster" where a seven-note figure gradually becomes one with seven notes. She explores a variety of moods on this set with the hyper title cut being followed by the comparatively laid-back "Cloud Chorale" and "Scatter And Sort," which is soulful in an avant-gardish way.

Other selections include ones dedicated to Geri Allen (the eccentric "Linear Gel") and Kris Davis (a rather stormy free improv on "Avid Risks"), a joyful and bluesy "Little Dance" that could almost pass for Keith Jarrett and "Puzzle Building," which swings in its own way.

—Scott Yanow

The Button Jar: Luster; The Button Jar; Cloud Chorale; Scatter And Sort; Monkey's Fist; Avid Risks; Little Dance; Thread The Needle; Linear Gel; Puzzle Building; The Craft Room; Mismatch; First Attempt; Exhale. (46:39)

Personnel: Yvonne Rogers, piano.

Ordering info: pyroclasticrecords.com