

Outside Voices

Some of jazz's greatest players—Eric Dolphy and Yusef Lateef spring to mind—have peppered their records with oddball instruments, but true specialists in unusual instrumentation are more rare. These five releases all feature out-of-the-ordinary instrumentation, often to outstanding results.

Unusual instrumentation doesn't necessarily dictate an unusual approach. **Paul Hemmings' *Blues And The Abstract Uke* (Leading Tone 15-006; 57:06 ★★★★★)** may be built around his ukulele, but it has a classic feel, with dips into boogaloo, hard-bop and cool jazz. Hemmings' original "Goodbye Lentil" is even somewhat haunting, teasing sounds out of the little chordophone that fit no stereotype. The uke mixes well with the tenor sax and trombone on the gospel revival "Hello Bean," and it stands beautifully on its own over minimal backing on superb renditions of "Nobody Knows You When You're Down And Out" and "Sittin' On Top Of The World," the latter of which features Hemmings making hair-raising use of harmonics. It may not have the biggest range, but in Hemmings' hands, the little ukulele belongs.

Ordering info: paulhemmings.com

Daniel Smith's *Jazz Suite For Bassoon* (Summit 656; 40:36 ★★★★★½) takes more of a hybrid jazz/classical approach to jazz bassoon. He leans heavily classical on the set of baroque compositions he arranges for himself and a piano/bass/drums trio to open the album; these would likely sound familiar to Purcell and Vivaldi. The middle of the album is devoted to chamber arrangements of Joplin rags, firmly demonstrating Smith's precise technique on his instrument. But the album's most exciting portion is the final title suite, composed by pianist Steve Gray. "Jazz Suite For Bassoon" swings, and it's here that we finally get to hear Smith do extended improvisation. His long, unaccompanied cadenza on the "Allegro" movement is astonishingly complex and fluid.

Ordering info: summitrecords.com

Also bridging the jazz/classical divide is composer and accordionist **William Schimmel**, whose ***Theater Of The Accordion* (Roven 51115; 58:43 ★★★★★)** finds him performing almost entirely solo, with the exception of two guest spots by Winton Marsalis. The duo takes on "St. Louis Blues" and a portion of Mahler's ninth symphony together, and the former playfully welds Brechtian mordancy to lighter passages of fleet dialogue. On his own, Schimmel is largely immersed exploring



classical themes, interpreting and re-working Strauss, Bartók, Schoenberg, Bernstein and Dvorák, with occasional odd nods to Kurt Weill or Bill Monroe.

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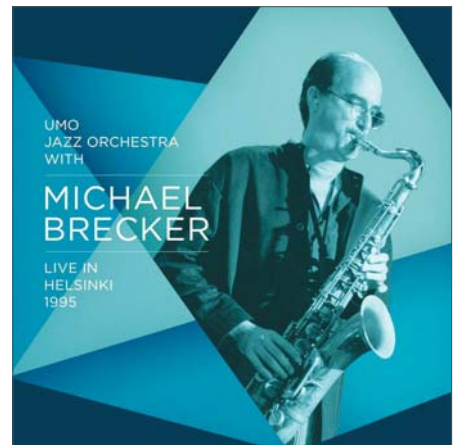
On the wilder side of things, the **Cristina Pato Quartet's *Latina* (Sunnyside 1415; 36:00 ★★★★★½)** is built around explosive 6/8 rhythms, and Pato plays her Galician bagpipes (called *gaita*) with bold authority. Her band—bassist Edward Perez, drummer Eric Doob and accordionist Victor Prieto—kicks up a charging racket behind her. But Pato's virtuoso playing is the clear star of the show. The *gaita* typically includes a bass drone, but she often eschews it in favor of greater harmonic freedom, finding a surprisingly violin-like tone. Her melodic lines swoop and flutter, and her command of the instrument's dynamic range is superb; her playing on "Llegará, Llegará, Llegará" is ferocious, while on "Landó: Maria Landó," she concludes a solo with a gentle legato trail-off. The *gaita* may never take its place alongside the saxophone as a common jazz lead, but *Latina* is revelatory nonetheless.

Ordering info: sunnysidezone.com

Jen Shyu & Jade Tongue's *Sounds And Cries Of The World* (Pi 61; 61:00 ★★★★★) ventures deep into the avant-garde, and finds the bandleader playing a closetful of Far Eastern instruments, including the *gat kim* (a two-stringed Taiwanese lute), *gayageum* (a Korean zither), *ggwaenggwari* (a Korean gong) and *kemanak* (a Javanese idiophone), but this unusual menagerie is far outshined by her dominant vocals. The instruments are used less as leads and more for texture, ably merging with her band of Ambrose Akinmusire on trumpet, Dan Weiss on drums, Mat Maneri on viola and Thomas Morgan on bass. The result is a shifting, uneasy soundscape for her sudden octave leaps and searching, melted melodies.

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UMO Jazz Orchestra with Michael Brecker *Live In Helsinki 1995*

RANDOM ACT 1018

★★★★½

At any given time, there are dozens of top-flight musicians in transit around the globe, settling down here and there as guest soloists with various ensembles. This is one aspect of music where things don't differ much between the worlds of jazz and classical. In both worlds, the challenges are legion: poorly rehearsed ensembles, indifferent conductors, mediocre compositions or arrangements and the general vagaries of long-distance travel. Is it any wonder that those soloists—even if they generally sound amazing in the studio or fronting their regular groups on their home turf—sometimes sound less than inspiring at these guest appearances?

If any of those challenges bedeviled saxophonist Michael Brecker on this 1995 trip to Helsinki to appear with the UMO Jazz Orchestra, he left them behind when he hit the stage. In short, this is one of those performances that made fans love Brecker, and made his premature death—in 2007, at the age of 57—so deeply felt. From his first notes on "Invitation," Brecker never sounds less than fully engaged, playing at the top of his game with gruff muscularity and remarkable facility. Not surprisingly, he sounds most at home on his own compositions—"Slang," "Song For Barry" and "Never Alone"—but he also embraces a pair of Horace Silver compositions, and takes Finnish tenor player Manuel Dunkel to the wall in a fiery duet on "Ginare," the piece that will grab most listeners.

—James Hale

Live In Helsinki 1995: Invitation; Slang; Andrea's Song; Nica's Dream; Ginare; The Meaning Of The Blues; The Big Picture; Song For Barry; Nutville; Never Alone. (73:32)

Personnel: Michael Brecker, tenor saxophone; Pentti Lahti, Mikko Mäkinen, Teemu Salminen, Manuel Dunkel, Pertti Päivinen, saxophones; Esko Heikkinen, Timo Paasonen, Sami Pöyhönen, Tero Saarti, trumpets; Markku Veijonsuo, Mikko Mustonen, Pekka Laukkanen, Mikael Långbacka, trombones; Seppo Kantonen, piano, keyboards; Markku Kanerva, electric guitar; Pekka Sarmanto, bass; Pekka Pohjola, electric bass (1, 5, 8); Ricardo Padilla, percussion (1, 4, 5, 8-10); Markus Ketola, drums; Rich Shemaria, conductor.

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