

Record Reviews

endary performer given what might be termed updated treatments but in keeping with their original ethos. One imagines Huddie Ledbetter, known as Lead Belly, warming to the project whether or not he could readily identify with all the tunes.

Adam Nussbaum, who wrote *Insight*, *Enlight* and *Sure Would Baby* and presumably master-minded the arrangements, keeps a tastefully subdued presence at the back of the quartet. The two guitarists weave around each other, coming up with the right kind of blend for music that is intended to evoke the country blues. How do you interpret the vocal Lead Belly role? The method adopted notably by Ohad Talmor is to present the tunes in a relaxed, underplayed manner, perfectly suited to the overall concept while edging well away from the more upfront and rugged directness of the original versions.

This works fine on, for instance, the opening *Old Riley*. Among the tracks to showcase the guitarists, *Bottle Up And Go* will do nicely. The one song we all know, *Goodnight Irene*, might even have encouraged Lead Belly to join in.

Ronald Atkins

MEG OKURA & THE PAN-ASIAN CHAMBER JAZZ ENSEMBLE

IMA IMA

Ima Ima; A Summer In Jerusalem; A Night Insomnia; Birth Of Shakyamuni; Blues In Jade; Black Rain; Tomiya (58.00)

Okura (vn, v, erhu); Anne Drummond (f, af, pic); Sam Newsome (ss); Sam Sadigursky (bcl); Tom Harrell (t, fh); Brian Marsella (p, elp); Rez Abbasi (elg); Riza Printup (hp); Pablo Aslan (b); Jared Schonig (d). EastSide Sound, 23 December 2015.

megokura.com

Born in Tokyo in 1973, the American violinist Okura recently converted to Judaism: the album title *Ima Ima* apparently means "mum" in Hebrew and "now" in Japanese. Based in New York – and classically trained at The Juilliard School – she has worked with Michael Brecker, Lee Konitz and Steve Swallow, Dianne Reeves and David Bowie. She's an excellent player – in equal measure extrovert and swinging, mellow and thoughtful – and a refreshingly broad-minded composer and arranger, sensitive to



both spare modal mood and enriching harmonic movement. If there are delicate textures and voicings here – witness the opening of *Ima, Ima* – there is also plenty of diversely grooved muscle, epitomised by the burning development of the initially abstracted *Blues In Jade*, but one excellent piece in a suite of knockout compositions.

Okura's Pan Asian Chamber Jazz Ensemble has long garnered critical praise and with *Ima, Ima* she has fashioned a flowing, widely cast yet integrated album as poetically compelling as it is rhythmically energising. Sample the subtly swelling voicings of the beautifully driven *Tomiya* or the similarly shape-shifting and potent *A Summer In Jerusalem*, with its eventual passing allusions to *Sketches Of Spain* eliciting some lovely lines from Harrell. Or relish the near-Alan Hovhaness atmosphere in the rubato opening of *Birth Of Shakyamuni* – a violin, flute and harp-fed piece which later develops some diversely swinging, deliciously pitched passages before the coda's reprise of the initial, deeply reflective mood. All Okura's compositions here evince considerable genre-bridging poetic sensibility and structural intelligence; each is well served by spot-on, pin-bright playing all round. A terrific album.

Michael Tucker

JUAN ANDRÉS OSPINA

TRAMONTANA

Tramontana; Todavía No; 102 Fahrenheit; Like Someone In Love; Recuerdos De Un Reloj De Pared; Ver Llover (54.51)

Sam Hoyt, Jonathan Powell, Bryan Davis, Guido Gonzalez (t); Michael Fahie, Matt McDonald, Malec Heermans (fb); James Rogers (btb); Hader Naiberg (f); Alex Terrier (ss, as); Uri Gurvich (as, f); Linus Wyrsh, Justin Flynn (ts, cl); Carl Maraghi (bar, bcl); Carolina Calvache, Nicolas Ospina, Juan Andrés Ospina (p); Nada Remez (g); Andres Rtmistrovsky (elb); Petros Klampanis (b); Franco

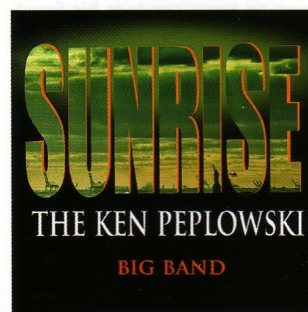
Pinna, Ronen Itzik, Dan Pugach (d); Marcelo Woloski (pc); Magda Giannikou (acc); Sofia Ribeiro, Luis Pulido (v). New York City, 7 – 9 January, 2017.

jaospina.com

Musicians from 10 countries and three continents collaborate in this big band venture documenting the compositions of Colombian musician Ospina, who conducts and plays occasional piano. Internationalism in jazz is, of course, nothing new; cultural and language barriers don't impair musical communication. Ospina is a skilled writer and his arrangements make good use of the textures which can be deployed in an ensemble of this size and scope. The section work is excellent, and the band is clearly well drilled.

On the debit side the melodies are not especially memorable, the soloists are competent but rarely inspired and swing is neither consistently maintained nor estimable when a groove is occasionally established. Therefore, not a great deal to provoke that glorious intensity of feeling that a Basie or a Herman could summon up at the drop of a hand. The clever orchestrations are insufficient to disguise the flaws. The sleeve note consists largely of the longest thanks list I've ever seen on a CD sleeve – a positive army of helpers.

Mark Gardner



KEN PELOWSKI

SUNRISE

All I Need Is The Girl; Chega De Saudade; Estate; If I Were A Bell; Clarinet In Springtime; When You Wish Upon A Star; The Eternal Triangle; Spring Is Here; Duet; The One I Love Belongs To Somebody Else; I Like The Sunrise; Come Back To Me (62.13)

Peplowski (cl); Jack Stuckey, Jon Gordon, Mark Lopeman, Adrian Cunningham, Carl Maraghi (reeds); John Aldred, Harvey Tibbs, Bruce Eidem, Jennifer Wharton (fb); Bob Millikan, Jon-Erik Kellso, Randy Reinhart, Andy Gravish (t);

Ehud Asherie (p); Nicki Parrott (b); Matt Munisteri (g); Chuck Redd (d). New Jersey, April 2017.

Arbors 19458

From the opening bars of the Billy May chart *All I Need Is The Girl*, the controlled precision and finesse of this band of New York maestri will win you over. Apart from masterly playing all round, the ability to tread lightly when tenderness is required, and an excellent sound balance, this enjoyable CD has other delights for any inquisitive listener. One is the inclusion of two arrangements by the late Allan Ganley, Jobim's *Chega De Saudade* and the Harline/Washington tune *When You Wish Upon A Star* (from Disney's *Pinocchio*), both especially commissioned by Ken Peplowski. Another delightful surprise is the Alec Wilder composition *Clarinet In Springtime*, written and arranged for Benny Goodman in the early 1940s.

A further discovery occurred when I was typing up the personnel and came across the name of trombonist Jennifer Wharton. Wanting to know more about a player new to me, I came across an informative interview with Wharton on the internet – worth seeking out. But, of course, so is the whole CD, which is highly recommended.

John Robert Brown

OSCAR PETERSON & FRED ASTAIRE

THE ASTAIRE STORY

CD1: (1) *Isn't It A Lovely Day; Puttin' On The Ritz; I Used To Be Color Blind; The Continental; Let's Call The Whole Thing Off; Change Partners; 'S Wonderful; Lovely To Look At; They All Laughed; Cheek To Cheek; Steppin' Out With My Baby; The Way You Look Tonight; I've Got My Eyes On You; Dancing In The Dark; The Carioca; Nice Work If You Can Get It; New Sun In The Sky; I Won't Dance; (Ad Lib) Fast Dances; Top Hat, White Tie And Tails; No Strings; I Concentrate On You; I'm Putting All My Eggs In One Basket* (79.21)
CD2: *A Fine Romance; Night And Day; Fascinating Rhythm; I Love Louisa; (Ad Lib) Slow Dances; (Ad Lib) Medium Dances; They Can't Take That Away From Me; You're Easy To Dance With; A Needle In A Haystack; So Near And Yet So Far Away; A Foggy Day; Oh, Lady Be Good; I'm Building Up To An Awful Letdown; Not My Girl; Jam Session*