

*At This Time...*  
**Steve Kuhn Trio (Sunnyside)**  
 by Joel Roberts

Veteran pianist Steve Kuhn has operated somewhat below the radar for decades despite a long and varied career that has included notable gigs with John Coltrane (preceding McCoy Tyner in the classic quartet), Stan Getz, Art Farmer and Sheila Jordan. Now 78, he has settled into a steady groove as a leader in recent years, turning out consistently excellent albums of expressive mainstream jazz, primarily fronting trios.

Kuhn's latest finds him in the esteemed company of bassist Steve Swallow and drummer Joey Baron, both with whom he has worked frequently in the past, including on Kuhn's splendid 2011 ECM recording, *Wisteria*. The easy rapport among the three artists is evident right from the top in their relaxed rendering of Harold Arlen's classic "My Shining Hour". Like most of what follows, the tune is delivered with an unhurried expertise, all members of the trio given the time and space to show off their chops and personalities.

The setlist is split between Kuhn's lyrical originals, including a gorgeous solo piano version of the wistful "The Feeling Within", and well-chosen, somewhat unexpected covers from the likes of Al Cohn, Quincy Jones and Leonard Bernstein. A spry romp through Kurt Weill's "This Is New" is the closest the album comes to an uptempo number, highlighted by Kuhn's exceptionally crisp, clear solo lines.

This is a recording of quiet moments and subtle joys, like the moving interplay between piano, bass and drums on the whisper-soft closing version of the Gil Fuller-Dizzy Gillespie ballad, "I Waited for You". It's an impressive outing by an experienced artist with nothing left to prove, but plenty more to say.

For more information, visit [sunnysiderecords.com](http://sunnysiderecords.com). Kuhn is at *Jazz Standard* Mar. 10th-13th and *Birdland* Mar. 22nd-26th. See Calendar.



*Azul Infinito*  
**Ryan Keberle & Catharsis (Greenleaf Music)**  
 by Eric Wendell

"Latin Jazz" is an umbrella term littered throughout the history of jazz. *Azul Infinito*, trombonist Ryan Keberle's third release with his group Catharsis, sets out to differentiate itself by focusing on South American music styles and chamber jazz, resulting in a compelling marriage of aesthetics.

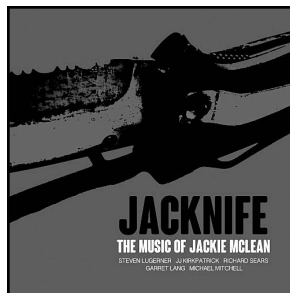
Keberle navigates the lack of a chordal instrument beautifully. From the opening number "I Thought I Knew", voice (Camila Meza), trumpet (Mike Rodriguez) and trombone each gets a repetitive melodic figure while bassist Jorge Roeder plays a beautiful ostinato underneath the group, Keberle showcasing lush counterpoint that becomes the most memorable part of the album. The lyrical content adds much of the emotional weight, Meza elegantly

delivering the words while emphasizing each song's emotional display. On "Cancion Mandala", she mimics the laid-back groove set by Roeder and drummer Eric Doob in a simple yet intricate articulation of the lyrics. On the ballad "She Sleeps Alone", Meza hangs on to every syllable while the band's dynamic slowly builds, hitting the listener right in the heart.

While the lyrics provide beautiful arcs to the album, the way that the main melodic figures weave in harmony is also thrilling. On "La Ley Primera", Meza, Keberle and Rodriguez create seamless harmony that cuts right through the ensemble and shows Keberle's ability to be simultaneously muscular and tender.

The most memorable tune is "Mr. Azul", which represents the best parts of Keberle's compositional talents and the ensemble's musicianship. From the blending of the melodies and Roeder's flawless solo to Keberle and Rodriguez trading masterful solos, the song highlights the group's innovative take on a genre we thought we knew.

For more information, visit [greenleafmusic.com](http://greenleafmusic.com). This project is at *Jazz Standard* Mar. 15th. See Calendar.



*The Music of Jackie McLean*  
**Jacknife (Primary)**  
 by George Kanzler

Here is an album that displays the benefits of exploring, reviving and reinvigorating repertoire from the past. Assembled by alto saxophonist Steven Lugerner from members of the Stanford Jazz Workshop where he was on the faculty, *Jacknife*, a quintet of all 20-somethings, essays tunes recorded by alto saxophonist Jackie McLean for Blue Note between 1959-65, when McLean was in his late 20s and early 30s (he died ten years ago this month at 74). Clocking in at just over 40 minutes, the six-track CD is the same approximate length as the 12-inch LPs from which it draws. But aside from the nine-plus-minute "On the Nile", the tunes average about six minutes each, often much shorter than the original versions. So there is more emphasis on the compositions (three by McLean, two by Charles Tolliver and one by Jack DeJohnette) here, where they are more fully fleshed out in arrangements that are as much the focus as the individual solos.

A good example is one of McLean's most famous tunes, "Melody for Melonae". On *Let Freedom Ring* (1962), McLean's theme seems to be just an appetizer for over a dozen minutes of serious blowing. Here, on a six minute track, the tune is treated to a fully detailed, Monk-ish quintet arrangement at both ends, with grumbling piano solo (Richard Sears) followed by Lugerner's alto and J.J. Kirkpatrick's trumpet dueling in tandem solos and trades as the tempo flexes and retards to a coda-like suspension before the head returns.

One of the advantages of a repertory band over one playing originals or familiar standards is that an honoree's best work can be gleaned quite selectively. The pieces here, from modal "On the Nile" to funky "Das Dat", all have memorable themes and the band is inspired by them as well as by the original playing of McLean and his cohorts. Lugerner, especially, channels the creative heat and searing, tart tone of the young McLean. *Jacknife* proves to be a sharp, cutting-edge band, even with a repertoire over 50 years old.

For more information, visit [primaryrecords.org](http://primaryrecords.org)



*1971*  
**Peter Brötzmann/Fred van Hove/Han Bennink**  
 (Corbett vs. Dempsey)  
 by Ivana Ng

*1971* is a snapshot of a momentous time for European free jazz. Leading the charge were Peter Brötzmann (reeds, who turns 75 this month), Fred Van Hove (piano) and Han Bennink (drums). Three years prior, the trio had collaborated, along with five others, on Brötzmann's *Machine Gun*. That album helped catapult the still-vibrant European free jazz movement.

Brötzmann, Bennink and Van Hove collaborated as a trio for several years post-*Machine Gun*. *1971* features three tracks from this time period. "Just for Altena" is a 26-minute piece from the 1971 Internationales New Jazz Meeting Auf Burg Altena. Bennink and Brötzmann dive right in with explosive horns and incandescent, clashing percussion while Van Hove is frenzied yet understated. Amid the chaos, intriguing sounds and textures emerge. Brötzmann moves from sandpapered honks and throaty crescendos to blustery breaths with cinematic scope. But for the few rare moments when he teases with dulcet tones, he is focused on breaking down the conventions of his instrument. Van Hove's melodic forays are more elongated, which only makes it all the more suspenseful when he does descend into uncharted territory. Bennink augments his kit with metal and steel found objects, adding a tropical, steel-drum quality to the percussion palette. He commands the audience with dialectic beats and fierce yips and howls. Only Brötzmann's piercing screeches can match his beatific shouts.

The other two tracks are studio sessions recorded shortly before the Altena festival. In "Filet Americain", Brötzmann starts off focusing heavily on breath play, but gasping staccatos quickly give way to heady, full-bodied tenuto chords. Then Van Hove and Bennink engage in a call and response, with the latter's metallic tinkering and vigorous drum rolls almost overpowering the former's ethereal keys. The final track, "I.C.P. No. 17", draws out Brötzmann further, oscillating from voluptuously guttural drones to high-pitched peaks and valleys. *1971* showcases this trio's command of their instruments and the varied textures they draw out of them in both live and recorded settings.

For more information, visit [corbettvsdempsey.com](http://corbettvsdempsey.com)



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