

Garry Booth enjoys the rich variety on show in this month's new jazz albums

JAZZ CHOICE

Undiluted energy

Hamasyan's album is a thrilling, virtuosic showcase of diverse influences and invention



Power trip: the ever-versatile Tigran Hamasyan



Tigran Hamasyan

The Call Within

Tigran Hamasyan (piano, keyboards), Evan Marien (electric bass), Arthur Hnatek (drums)
Nonesuch 0075597920291

Jazz music produces mould-breakers by its very nature, but the seismic sound of pianist Tigran Hamasyan is something

else. Brought up in earthquake-prone Armenia on a diet of prog rock, electronic era Miles Davis and local folk music, Hamasyan is a jazz fusion phenomenon.

Lauded on his arrival in the jazz world a decade ago by the likes of Herbie Hancock, Hamasyan's dizzying Cecil Taylor-style avant-gardism and power trio riffing, shot through with folk themes, has also found favour with rock and modern classical audiences. This fourth album for Nonesuch renews Hamasyan's commitment to his home culture, and densely packed compositions incorporate Armenian modes into fiery, sometimes bewildering, improvisation across 10 tracks.

The opener, 'Levitation 21', puts us on notice of what's to come with its headlong drum/bass rhythm and careering piano lines that are paused intermittently by melismatic vocal harmonies. 'Ara Resurrected' is another torrent of heavy chording, darkened by a keyboard fuzz effect, while on 'Vortex' the leader's synth engages with guest Tosin Abasi's soaring metal guitar.

File under F for fantastic, in both senses of the word. ★★★★★

December round-up

Worlds also collide in the startling new album from newcomer **Raphaël Pannier**, namely 20th-century classical and modern conceptual jazz. Training at Berklee



and then at the Manhattan School of Music bestowed a rarefied aesthetic on Paris-born

Pannier not often found in a drummer: **Faune**, his debut as leader, draws on compositions by Ravel and Messaien, as well as Wayne Shorter and Ornette Coleman. It's an audacious project that Pannier pulls off magnificently, helped in large part by the mastery of his soloists, especially the protean alto saxist Miguel Zenon. Zenon's plaintive outline of Messaien's 'Le Baiser de L'Enfant Jesus', set against Pannier's shimmering cymbals, is exquisite. The drummer also provides painterly settings for outstanding pianists Aaron Goldberg and Giorgi Mikadze. (French Paradox FP004) ★★★★★

Singer **Julia Karosi** has a not-so-secret weapon on her classical/jazz crossover disc **Without Dimensions**: electric guitarist Ben Monder. On paper it's not an obvious pairing as Karosi is classically trained and has a fondness for Hungarian folk music as well as mainstream jazz, while NY-based Monder is much



in demand for his abstract use of the axe. Yet their haunting interpretations of works from

Béla Bartók (arranged by Karosi) and linked original pieces are rather beautiful. Karosi's high-flying vocalese lines go well with Monder's supersonic soloing. Pianist Áron Tólas anchors the music across the setlist and adds an element of sparkling clarity when Monder steps out. (Double Moon Challenge DMCHR71378) ★★★★★

End of Summer comes 10 years after the **Espen Eriksen Trio's** debut recording. For a band that's thrived on live performance over

that time, the shutdown was always going to be problematic. Yet the isolation seems to have stimulated the pianist/leader's writing and intensified his interaction with bassist Lars Tormod and drummer Andreas Bye. The seven short pieces in this LP-length album form a melancholic suite that's



ripe in melodic invention, simply delivered. The title piece, just short of four minutes, is a gem

of a tune. Eriksen's music is often described as minimalist but really it is about purity of expression. (Rune Grammofon RCD2216) ★★★★★

UK tenor sax player **Dave O'Higgins** went for an old school LP format with new release **His & Hers** (Hers being a reference to fellow tenorist Mrs Higgins, Judith). Recorded in their own vinyl-friendly studio, the golden sound combined with a boppy setlist recall the glory days of Blue Note and Verve. The approach is era-correct too, with Mr and Mrs O'H fronting a quintet. Locking horns, then



trading choruses across a swinging setlist that mixes standards with co-authored whipsmart

original numbers, it's a marriage made in mainstream jazz heaven. The only reason we haven't heard more of Mrs O'Higgins's playing is that her day job as a forensic pathologist takes up so much time. (Ubuntu UBU0066) ★★★★★

Forward is Chicago trumpet player **Chad McCullough's** eighth album as leader. With a deep, warm sound that recalls the late, great Kenny Wheeler, McCullough has an understated approach that belies a strong tug in every line he



plays. Backed by an attentive quartet here, McCullough's timeless original tunes are lent a

cinematic feel by producer Ryan Cohan's imaginative programming. (Outside In Music OiM 2022) ★★★★★