

Roundup

Five in the Chamber By Scott Yanow

New recordings continue to blur boundaries between jazz and classical.

The term “Third Stream” was coined in the 1950s to describe the ambitious meeting of jazz and classical music. During the five decades since, so-called “chamber jazz” has become a staple of the genre, revered by some, reviled by others. Each of the five CDs reviewed here either utilizes strings or crosses over into classical music, while retaining an adventurous jazz sensibility.

Guitarist-composer **Mitch Haupers**, a faculty member at Berklee College of Music, makes his recording debut with *Invisible Cities* (Liquid Harmony). He leads an all-star post-bop quintet that includes Bob Mintzer on reeds, pianist Alan Pasqua, bassist Darek Oles and drummer Peter Erskine. On the four-part classical- and folk-oriented “Four Minor Love Songs Suite,” Haupers employs flutes, English horn, clarinet, bassoon, three strings, harp and wordless voice plus other horns. The playing is superior throughout. Mintzer’s expressive improvisations on soprano sax place him among the greatest voices on the instrument. Haupers’ excellent sound is showcased on the trio piece “Waltz for Bill” and on a brief guitar duet with Mike Miller. One drawback: While Haupers composes and arranges harmonically advanced and challenging material, his themes are rarely melodic or memorable by themselves.

In contrast, jazz giant **Abdullah Ibrahim**’s music often centers on beautiful melodies. As a pianist, composer and bandleader, Ibrahim — who turns 80 in October — pens cinematic pieces with rich, optimistic themes that often convey picturesque scenes from his native South Africa. On *Mukashi — Once Upon a Time* (Sunnyside), he performs thoughtful, heartfelt piano solos which, as always, display his debt to Duke Ellington and Thelonious Monk. He sometimes uses cellists Eugen Bazijan and Scott Roller as high-note bassists. Most pieces are laid-back, befitting titles such as “Dream Time,” “Serenity” and “Peace,” with “The Balance” spotlighting a particularly charming melody. However, Cleave Guyton, playing clarinet on “Mississippi” and flute on “Trace Elements/For Monk,” adds a great deal of excitement to the music.

Austrian-based percussionist/pianist **Doug Hammond**’s original compositions for *Pictures and Hues Live* (Idibib) include performances that are partly improvised along with scored classical music. The line between improvisation and composition is not always obvious here since, in Hammond’s music, they complement one another. The composer opens and closes the set with a piano solo, recorded in Germany in 1978. And, on “Rushing,” he engages in a largely improvised duet with cellist Muneer B. Fenell. A classical flute-cello-piano trio performs two pieces, and a string group plays the somewhat forbidding “Hues.”

Perhaps because Hammond has a full understanding of jazz, his classical works often sound spontaneous and lively.

Yitzhak Yedid’s *Visions, Fantasies and Dances — Music for String Quartet* (Between the Lines) is a seven-part, 34-section, one-movement classical work performed by the Israeli-based Sapphire String Quartet. Yedid, an Israeli living in Australia, writes modern Western classical music that’s strongly influenced by the Arabic melodies and scales he



Mitch Haupers

heard as a youth. In selected spots, he allows the strings to improvise within prescribed limits. All 34 short sections bear titles that refer to incidents from his life, with “The vision of the woman does not loosen its grip on me” being particularly dramatic. The colorful music, while mostly of interest to classical listeners, is full of surprises.

The latest CD by bassist Anne Mette Iversen’s group **Double Life**, *So Many Roads* (BJU), presents a particularly rewarding balance of jazz and classical music. Her program comprises a bass-solo “Prologue,” four movements and a brief “Epilogue.” Guest trombonist Peter Dahlgren joins the other members of the Double Life quartet — Iversen, saxophonist John Ellis, pianist Danny Grissett and drummer Otis Brown III — plus 4Corners, a string quartet from the Danish Radio Symphony Orchestra. Iversen’s music moves seamlessly between swinging sections and stretches of through-composed classical, with the two quartets sometimes switching roles. Ellis’ soprano playing on the first movement, Grissett’s piano on the second, and the writing for the last two movements — a somber ballad and a heated jazz waltz — demand listeners’ attention. One theme leads logically to the next throughout this consistently stimulating program. ▲