

Roundup

Organ Donors

As sidemen and session leaders, Hammond players bring the funk. By Mark Holston

Over the past half century, the Hammond B-3 organ has cemented its growly, virile presence as a signature aural ingredient of funky R&B-seasoned jazz. As heard on a handful of new releases,

use of the instrument continues to evolve, expanding beyond the traditional repertoire and the conventional organ-guitar-drums format.

On *CYO3* (OA2), the **Craig Yaremko Organ Trio** prepares listeners for a spirited ride from the opening track, a jovial treatment of “Jitterbug Waltz.” Organist Matt King’s ingenious arrangement of the Fats Waller classic slides between waltz and 4/4 time. And when Yaremko’s alto sax locks in with King’s organ line, the pair playing the song’s slippery melody in unison, it’s pure magic. Multi-reedist Yaremko, who also plays soprano and tenor saxes, goes the flute route for the trio’s take on Freddie Hubbard’s “Little Sunflower,” typifying the leader’s unconventional approach.

An effervescent, joyous quality pervades the **Bill McBirnie Trio’s** *Find Your Place* (Extreme Flute). The Canadian flutist, backed by organist Bernie Senensky and drummer Anthony Michelli, showcases a wide range of grooves, from bop and bossa to gospel and swing. The dozen selections sprint right along, thanks in large part to Senensky’s assertive comping. A perky reading of “Estate,” usually rendered as a languid ballad, bestows a charming new persona on the Italian bossa standard. Duke Pearson’s neglected gem “Jeannine” is another triumph for McBirnie, whose breathy flute-work reflects the influence of masters such as Herbie Mann and Jeremy Steig. Listeners unfamiliar with McBirnie will be amazed at his imagination and originality on this engaging album.

Organist **Greg Lewis** and his quintet — guitar, tenor sax, trumpet and drums — apply equal measures of hard bop and “free” sensibilities in their reconstructions of Tin Pan Alley evergreens that are typically treated to a more straightforward approach. On *Organ Monk: American Standard* (self-released) — so titled because Thelonious Monk was drawn to this same collection of tunes — Lewis and crew apply jarring, Monk-inspired chords and spacey rhythmic structures to “Tea for Two,” “I Should Care,” “Nice Work if You Can Get It” and other pop hits of the World War II era and

earlier. The results, true to their Monk-ish orientation, are simultaneously edgy and disarmingly attractive.

All but one of the 12 tracks on *A Meeting of Minds* (Cellar Live) were penned by the session’s leader, guitarist **Sheryl Bailey**. But all are laden with funk and R&B and are tailor-made for the traditional organ-trio sound. Bailey’s effortless give-and-take with



Kevin Coelho

organist Ron Oswanski underscores how this working trio has matured in recent years. Although generally relaxed, the set burns with well-directed rhythmic intensity. “Cheap Jersey Gas,” with its introductory explosion of fusion-era effects, is the one exception on a program of easy-flowing, melodically inviting tunes. Bailey, an under-appreciated virtuoso, is the session’s top dog.

On 18-year-old organist **Kevin Coelho’s** *Turn It Up* (Chicken Coup), the chords are thick and greasy and the tremolo effects are frequent and furious. Coelho’s choice of Jimmy Smith’s “Root Down” as an opener sets the tone for the hard-edged, soulful funk that follows. The Hammond prodigy leads his trio through Leslie-speaker-whirling fare such as “The World Is a Ghetto,” “Georgia on My Mind” and “Come Together.” Guitarist Derek DiCenzo layers piquant chords and drummer Reggie Jackson keeps the rhythmic edge sharp while Coelho demonstrates core tenets of the organ-trio tradition. ▲