



Drummers Lead With Power

Steve Gadd Band: *Gadditude* (BFM Jazz; 56:21 ★★) Is there any doubt that Steve Gadd is one of the most mysterious drummers in the world? The veteran jazz drummer-turned-tubthumper-to-the-stars retains his good groove on *Gadditude*. But while the album is divided between atmospheric, Miles Davis-inspired experiments and funkier fare, Gadd remains an enigma throughout, serving the music with as little embellishment as possible beyond his superbly plush groove. Surrounded by a slick Los Angeles crew (guitarist Michael Landau, keyboardist Larry Goldings and bassist Jimmy Johnson), Gadd lays way back, pulsing the 16th-note beat on Landau's "Africa" and the equally spectral "Ask Me." The band turns Keith Jarrett's "The Windup" into a funky good time, then dissects Radiohead's "Scatterbrained" with as much gloom as the original. The drummer's loose snare drags and punchy ride cymbal accents are like a race-horse galloping slowly to the finish.

Ordering info: bfmjazz.com

Scott Neumann Neu3 Trio: *Blessed* (Origin Records; 59:22 ★★★★★) Scott Neumann's sophomore solo release is not a blowing but a simmering session. His exceptional trio, with saxophonist Michael Blake and bassist Mark Helias, creates a furnace of ideas where creativity is inspired, swing incessant, and the performances exhilarating. The trio revels in a simpatico exchange. Precise movements and improvisations erupt from a collective identity where listening may be the greatest skill of all. Neumann, who has recorded more than 50 CDs as a sideman and has extensive Broadway and academic credits, performs with detailed abandon on *Blessed*, his transparent, explosive drumming and rich tone inspiring a true group effort.

Ordering info: origin-records.com

Alex Snyderman: *Fortunate Action* (Alex Snyderman Music; 57:14 ★★) Newcomer Snyderman is pursuing his master's degree in jazz performance at the California Institute of the Arts. His debut recalls the heartland approach of Brian Blade's Fellowship band—whirling melodies, cascading piano lines and exuberant rhythms. Though Snyderman's drums are oddly under-miked, he executes fluid rim and hi-hat combinations. His meticulous

cymbal work recalls his instructor Eric Harland, as well as Peter Erskine's touch.

Ordering info: alexsnymusic.com

Joe Locke: *Lay Down My Heart: Blues & Ballads Vol 1* (Motéma; 55:25 ★★) Joe Locke's rich vibraphone work, characterized by flawless solos of emotional clarity, has graced 30 solo albums and even more sideman recordings. Locke's latest is an album of jazz and r&b covers, cabaret ditties and thoughtful original material. Locke's "Broken Toy" creates an ethereal mood, Sam Jones' "Bittersweet" swings and "Makin' Whoopee" lulls gently. Ultimately, the songs are less the focus than Locke's consistently engrossing solos.

Ordering info: motedma.com

Albert "Tootie" Heath/Ethan Iverson/Ben Street: *Tootie's Tempo* (Sunnyside; 47:00 ★★★★★½) Where Locke's approach to standards is dutiful, Albert "Tootie" Heath plays "The Charleston," "Charade," "How Insensitive" and "Cute" like he's just discovered gold and wants to share it with the world. A wonderful trio recording with pianist Ethan Iverson and bassist Ben Street, *Tootie's Tempo* is both history lesson and joyous event. Like many an old master, the 78-year-old Heath lives by his ride cymbal, imbuing it with a stately grace that drives as hard as a '60s Cadillac. Iverson and Street are equally inspired, their accompaniment exploratory but mostly fun. In that spirit, Iverson's "Danube Incident" recalls Roy Budd's "Get Carter," the Street/Heath duet "Cute" rollicks joyously and "The Charleston" is just as riotous as the original '30s craze.

Ordering info: sunnysiderecords.com

Ray Mantilla: *The Connection* (Savant; 54:11 ★★) How better to end a drum fest than with a Latin block party? Percussionist Ray Mantilla leads his sextet through standard Latin fare, but with bright ideas. The sonorous opening of "Les Apolypticanos" bles like warning sirens. "Pieces" brings on a rambunctious New Orleans street parade segueing into a straight-ahead percussion romp. "Blues For Ray" closes the party with one of those infectious grooves that can be heard blocks away, and deep into the night.

Ordering info: jazzdepot.com

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