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PLAYLIST Vision, Transition and Juxtaposition



Ayano Hisa

Béla Fleck, center, and the Marcus Roberts Trio.

By NATE CHINEN
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Béla Fleck and the Marcus Roberts Trio

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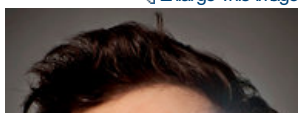
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Clean Feed

Joe McPhee, left, and Ingebrigt Haker Flaten, whose latest is "Brooklyn DNA."
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There's a distinction between traditionalism and conservatism, and it plays a central role on "Across the Imaginary Divide" (Rounder), the new album by the style-hopping banjoist Béla Fleck and the scrupulous jazz pianist Marcus Roberts. As the title suggests, it's the seamless product of an unlikely pairing, though to call it bluegrass meets jazz would be misleading. Mr. Fleck, one of the world's most accommodating virtuosos, functions here as a fourth member of Mr. Roberts's trio with Rodney Jordan on bass and Jason Marsalis on drums. So the framework is firmly jazz, cooperative and swinging, neither showdown nor hoedown. (Sorry.) Notwithstanding some ersatz ragtime gentility and some rickety habanera rhythm, the music sounds disarmingly fresh. And if the banjo playing stands out as superb, it's partly because of the flexible support of the trio, notably on a busily embroidered tune like "Petunia." Even better is what happens a couple of minutes into the title track, when Mr. Fleck and Mr. Roberts create a sublime swirl of arpeggios. This album feels like the beginning of something. In any case, you'll have the chance to witness it at the Blue Note

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Mike Gamble

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Salvatore Corso

Tom Harrell, whose new album is "Number Five"

(bluenote.net) from Tuesday through June 10.

Anna Ternheim

A singer-songwriter from Stockholm, Anna Ternheim has a delicate chill in her voice and a knack for songs that signal wariness and stillness. She hasn't made a more beautiful or haunted album than "The Night Visitor," her fifth, due out on Die Rider/V2 on Tuesday. Produced by Matt Sweeney and recorded by Dave Ferguson in Nashville, it's full of songs about distances, about leaving and returning. "I am moving away from you," Ms. Ternheim warns in the opening track, "Solitary Move," setting a tone for what follows in songs like "[Walking Aimlessly](#)." Through most of the album she fingerpicks an acoustic guitar, backed by a casual but serious assortment of musicians, including Will Oldham on background vocals. On June 26 she'll play the Rockwood Music Hall (rockwoodmusicall.com) with Mr. Sweeney and Mr. Ferguson — essentially the same sparse help as on "God Don't Know," a hymn of blind forbearance, and the rare song on this album about being stuck in place.

Joe McPhee and Ingebrigt Haker Flaten

If the Vision Festival is on your radar, as it should be, you may already know that this year's edition will confer a lifetime achievement honor on the saxophonist and trumpeter Joe McPhee. A veteran of the post-1960s avant-garde, Mr. McPhee makes spirit music, rousing and incantatory, roughly in the lineage of Albert Ayler. His most recent album, "Brooklyn DNA" (Clean Feed), finds him in duologue with the Norwegian bassist Ingebrigt Haker Flaten, and what's striking is how often their interplay leans toward the ruminative. They'll team up again as part of Mr. McPhee's festival appearance, at Roulette in Brooklyn on June 13 (visionfestival.org) — but in the more combustible context of the Thing, an unstoppable band consisting of Mr. Flaten, the multi-reedist Mats Gustaffson and the drummer Paal Nilssen-Love.

Tom Harrell

The trumpeter Tom Harrell favors a precise but shadowy sort of post-bop, sonorous and warm and alert. The lack of declarative drama in his style means he's easy to take for granted, though he keeps putting out unstintingly fine albums. "Number Five" (High Note) is his latest, arriving without any overriding theme. It's a bulletin reaffirming the lean enlightenment of his working quintet and its component parts. The opener is a sparring horn-and-drums reduction of the bebop standard "[Blue 'n' Boogie](#)," and later there are tunes arranged for trio or quartet. Mr. Harrell is 65, and his younger associates — the tenor saxophonist Wayne Escoffery, the pianist Danny Grissett, the bassist Ugona Okegwo and the drummer Johnathan Blake — can come across as apprentices filling in his compositions, which often hinge on a fragment of melody. The quintet will appear on June 29 and 30 at Smoke (smokejazz.com), as part of the club's monthlong tribute to Miles Davis.

Mike Gamble

Atmosphere reigns in "Loomer" (Engine), the intriguing new solo release by the guitarist Mike Gamble, but that doesn't mean the music lacks for plot or incident. Mr. Gamble, a trained improviser who also travels in the same orbit as the Seattle doom band Earth, recorded "Loomer" with loops and effects but no preprogrammed material: everything, including the shrewd, shambling drumming, was created alone [in real time](#). (If you're in New England, you can see him do this live sometime over the next two weeks; check his schedule at mikegamble.tumblr.com.) Mr. Gamble knows his way around a drone, but he also puts a lot of shifting harmony and texture in these one-man sketches, some of which — like "I'm on Your Side," with its abstracted trip-hop beat — come across as thoughtfully developed compositions.

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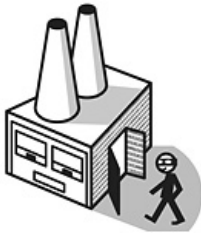
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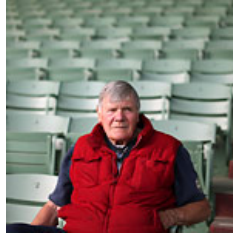
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