

# The Genre is Boundless

These four projects—a trombonist's hard-bop excursion, a veteran pianist/composer's chamber jazz, the latest works from a European vintage swing quartet and a computer-aided avant-garde pioneer—are wildly dissimilar. If nothing else, it's a testament to jazz's wide tent in the 21st century.

**Michael Dease: *Reaching Out* (Posi-Tone 8177; 55:00 ★★★½)** On his 11th album, Dease, one of the most gifted trombonists in jazz, shows he is also a facile composer. His four originals are among the high points of this bracing, straight-ahead set.

In his notes, Dease expresses the hope that fans "will dig in to under-explored composers of different generations, rather than continuing to exhaust the repertoire of the four to five most recorded jazz musicians." To this end, he includes a mix of jazz and pop covers. The problem, to be concise, is that the pop songs aren't so hot. Paul McCartney's "Live And Let Die" is an interesting choice; but even Dease's fine arrangements of the other two, Extreme's "More Than Words" and Boyz II Men's "Water Runs Dry," can't overcome their essential mawkishness.

Far more nuanced are Cedar Walton's bouncy "Something In Common," trombonist Conrad Herwig's sophisticated "Morning Shade" and an exquisite rendering of Kenny Drew's melancholy "Ballade." Regarding "Blackfoot," a high-speed "Cherokee" contrafact written by Dease's former teacher, Steve Turre, the bandleader notes, "I like to play fast, I do it well, and this is a fast tune, so we took it nearly at max tempo." It ain't bragging, if you can do it, as Dizzy Dean reportedly said—and, boy, can he ever.

**Ordering info:** [posi-tone.com](http://posi-tone.com)

**Alan Pasqua: *Northern Lights* (Self Release; 53:29 ★★★★★)** Last year, when pianist Pasqua got the unexpected assignment of composing music to accompany Bob Dylan's Nobel Prize lecture, he was asked to make it interesting, but not too interesting—"not really melodic, not cocktail, not super jazzy, but sort of background-y piano music," as he told *The New York Times*. By contrast, the highly melodic music on Pasqua's new trio album, alternately thoughtful and swinging, is more attention-getting and deserving. After spending a little time with Pasqua, it's hard to get his melodies out of your mind. A veteran of both the jazz and pop worlds who has played with Tony Williams, Dave Holland, Ray Charles and Dylan, Pasqua creates chamber jazz from Americana, pop and classical. "The Turnaround" is clever and full of turnarounds. The title track is evoc-



Michael Dessen

ative and cinematic, so it's no coincidence that Pasqua also works as a composer for Hollywood films.

**Ordering info:** [alanpasqua.com](http://alanpasqua.com)

**Echoes Of Swing: *Travelin'* (ACT 9104; 55:30 ★★★½)** There are no lack of bands that play vintage jazz of the 1920s-'50s well. But this German-British quartet brings a couple of things to the party that are unique: a spare lineup of alto saxophone, trumpet, piano and drums that leans heavily on the left hand of phenomenal stride pianist Bernd Lhotzky, as he covers for the absence of a bass player; and their enthusiasm for not just recreating vintage sounds but using them as raw materials for ambitiously modern arrangements, played immaculately. Their latest album contains striking originals, surprising re-imaginings of "Where Or When" and "Volare," and deep cuts from Duke Ellington, Coleman Hawkins and even Franz Schubert. How can you not love a group that invents a contrafact to a classic Frank Loesser tune, renaming it "On A Slow Goat To China"?

**Ordering info:** [actmusic.com](http://actmusic.com)

**Michael Dessen Trio: *Somewhere In The Upstream* (Clean Feed 461; 50:04 ★★★★★)** Three master improvisers—Dessen on trombone and computer, bassist Christopher Tordini and drummer Dan Weiss—collaborate with help from a computer that acts both as an electronic roadmap and a fourth improvising group member. Dessen uses a "scorestream" that displays on-screen notations that vary unpredictably each time the piece is performed. The results are startling, from pensive to aggressive, punctuated by moments of cosmic electronica. **DB**

**Ordering info:** [cleanfeed-records.com](http://cleanfeed-records.com)



## Jarrett/Peacock/DeJohnette *After The Fall*

ECM 2590/91

★★★★½

When Keith Jarrett, Gary Peacock and Jack DeJohnette began investigating standards as a unit in 1983, it wasn't about working up clever arrangements or casting tunes in a nostalgic sheen, a practice Jarrett finds appalling. The idea was to approach each composition in the moment, just as the pianist approaches the blank canvas of silence in solo recitals.

At this stage of their collaboration, any new release by the trio will stir a sense of having been here before. Familiar details assert themselves throughout *After The Fall*—Jarrett's love for long, adventurous harmonic territory enabling him to swoop and soar before ending on a gospel lick or a few beats of breath. At times, even this trio falls back a bit on formula. "Bouncin' With Bud," for example, sticks close to what passes for performance practice: theme, everyone plays the hook on the bridge, Peacock lays down a walking pattern, reprise, end.

We know they can conjure magic, too, and they do near the top of "Old Folks." Jarrett comes up with a four-note motif that he weaves into the theme with a kind of effortless reverence, honoring the composition while shining light into its neglected corners.

On a larger scale, "Autumn Leaves" kicks off with the last eight bars of the tune as a piano intro. And during the following 13 minutes, it's turned into a fantasia of similar motivic development, ferocious drum rhythms steaming just below the surface, a reconfiguration and reprise, then a sublime diminuendo and finish. This is real, in-the-moment playing. It deserves—and will reward—serious listening.

—Bob Doerschuk

**After The Fall:** The Masquerade Is Over; Scapple From The Apple; Old Folks; Autumn Leaves; Bouncin' With Bud; Doxy; I'll See You Again; Late Lament; One For Majid; Santa Claus Is Coming To Town; Moment's Notice; When I Fall In Love. (47:15/58:30)

**Personnel:** Keith Jarrett, piano; Gary Peacock, bass; Jack DeJohnette, drums.

**Ordering info:** [ecmrecords.com](http://ecmrecords.com)