

David Virelles
Carta

INTAKT
★★★★½

Chris Speed Trio
Despite Obstacles

INTAKT
★★★★½

Intakt has long been a rich source of American jazz of an adventurous stripe. The Swiss label's recent releases include two prime examples of bold New York artists, saxophonist Chris Speed



and pianist David Virelles, stating their artistic cases beyond stifling mainstream standards.

The empathetic relationship between Speed and drummer Dave King has by now gone public through the enrollment of Speed in King's long-standing band the Bad Plus. Speed seems ideal in his new front-line position, supplying restraint, wit and heat when needed. Such qualities are also reflected in King's playing, as heard on *Despite Obstacles*, the third release by the "chordless" Chris Speed Trio.

Speed leads the session with a benevolent and democratic hand. His soft touch and muted tone on tenor, even on the more intense

passages, serves him well on his lyrical-yet-angular ballad "Sunset Park In July" and gives distinction to more energetic terrain, as on "Uncomfortable Truths" and the title track.

On *Carta*, Virelles brings his own brand of poise and artful economy to the more common, but ever-malleable context of the classic piano trio format, in tight collaborative esprit de corps with bassist Ben Street and drummer/percussionist Eric McPherson. Improvisation plays a key role in the eight tracks, but always in service of the songs.

As with other bedazzlements in Virelles' discography, the pianist is carving out a fascinating new musical pathway to call his own. Cuban roots freely intermarry with touchpoints of jazz history (including the present moment), with measured virtuosity and deep musicality in check. Virelles' piano work impresses without distracting from the prime directive: heeding the musical integrity of the song set as an almost narrative whole. —Josef Woodard

Carta: Uncommon Sense; Confidential; Lamento Taino; NY-Chepinsón; Carta; Tiempos; Island; El Tivoli; Samio. (51:09)

Personnel: David Virelles, piano; Ben Street, acoustic bass; Eric McPherson, drums and percussion.

Despite Obstacles: Advil; Wrangled; Uncomfortable Truths; Despite Obstacles; Sunset Park in July; In the Wild; Lone Satellite; Amos. (35:55)

Personnel: Chris Speed, tenor saxophone, clarinet; Chris Tordini, acoustic bass; Dave King, drums.

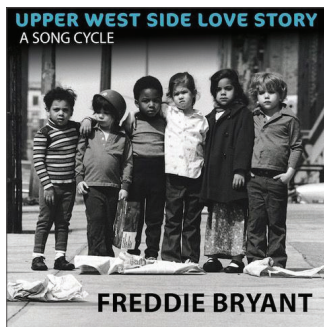
Ordering info: intaktrec.ch

Freddie Bryant
Upper West Side Love Story—A Song Cycle

TIGER TURN
★★★★★

The multitalented Freddie Bryant highlights his native New York City on *Upper West Side Love Story: A Song Cycle*. His project speaks to joys and tribulations common to us all. Over more than 90 minutes, Bryant, fortified by vocalist Carla Cook, violinist Regina Carter and bassist John Benitez, delivers blues, hip-hop, Afro-Cuban, Afrobeat, reggae and spoken word. His passionate lyrics and colorful music suffuse his reflections on a neighborhood so lyrical he had to leave.

Bryant's "haikus" preview tracks that explore topics at greater depth. Many feature Bryant's classically elegant guitar, a balm each time. "His Bed Is a Box: Haiku #6" is a deep blues deploring homelessness. Cook's voice brims with emotion and despair, paving the way for "Intro—Moses The Pharaoh: Who Will Stay And Who Will Go?" —Carlo Wolff



Upper West Side Love Story—A Song Cycle: (CD 1) Columbus, Quiet; Haiku #1; Intro—We Used To Dance; We Used to Dance; Intro—Love Can't Live On Nostalgia; Love Can't Live On Nostalgia; Life Of The Playground; Haiku #2; A Walk In The Hood—part 1; A Walk In The Hood—part 2; Lost MJLP; Haiku #3; Intro—My Home Sings; My Home Sings; High-rise Kiss; Haiku #4; Kid's Rhymes; Remember That? (CD 2) Always Be Aware; Haiku #5; Intro—Roses And Rubies; The Cost of What We Lost; Roses and Rubies; The Cost Of What We Lost; His Bed Is A Box; Haiku #6; Intro—Moses The Pharaoh: Who Will Stay And Who Will Go?; Moses The Pharaoh: Who Will Stay And Who Will Go?; Central Park Life; Haiku #7; Intro—Finale; Finale; Spoken Word: Like Sand Is To Coral; A Box of Pictures; Haiku #8; Last Song: It's Time To Say Goodbye. (48:34/43:32)

Personnel: John Benitez, bass; Freddie Bryant, guitars, vocals; Regina Carter, violin; Carla Cook, vocals; Akua Dixon, cello; Maria Alejandra Hoyos Escobar, voice (track 3, CD 1); Alvester Garnett, drums; Gwen Laster, viola; Donny McCaslin, tenor and soprano saxophones; Roberto Quintero, additional percussion (tracks 3, 5, CD 1); Steve Wilson, alto and concert flutes, alto and soprano saxophones.

Ordering info: freddiebryant.com

Louis Hayes
Exactly Right!

SAVANT
★★★★★

It always burns a little bit when an artist's record is reissued with someone else's name on the top, on the grounds that they're the more bankable artist. That happened to Louis Hayes' 1960 debut on VeeJay, which reappeared under Yusef Lateef's byline as *Contemplation*. Unfair, when it's so obviously the drummer's album, without slipping into that awkward category of "drummers' albums."

"Underrated" is another weaselly term in music criticism; easy to throw around generously but bordering on meaningless much of the time. If anyone merits it, it's Hayes, who has been making records for seven decades but has never been elevated in the manner of some of his peers. But just listen to his interpretation of Cedar Walton's "Ugetsu" here, or that difficult, twisty line of "Nefertiti," and it's obvious what a master he is — master of the simple things, rather than of mazy complexities.

Working with Hazeltine, who includes Walton and Oscar Peterson among his audible influences, and Steve Nelson, a like-minded exponent of fat-free vibes playing, he produces beautifully open-form jazz that's instantly communicative but still engagingly subtle and provocative.

Hayes has certainly been taken for granted up to now. This one should do something to spark a little deeper appreciation. —Brian Morton



Exactly Right! Exactly Right!; Is That So?; Hand In Glove; So Many Stars; Carmine's Bridge; Nefertiti; Mellow D; Theme For Ernie; Scarborough Fair; Ugetsu. (54:50)

Personnel: Abraham Burton, tenor saxophone; David Hazeltine, piano; Steve Nelson, vibraphone; Dezron Douglas, bass; Louis Hayes, drums.

Ordering info: jazzdepot.com