

Crusader

Your Personal Guide To The New American City

HOVAN AT THE HELM - 1997's Top Ten Jazz Picks

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This past year provided us with an immense amount of new music, the majority of it coming in at an unusually high caliber. For the first time since I began compiling my yearly lists, I've decided to limit the number of reissues included on the list because there were simply too many impressive new releases that merited discussion. With no further ado, here's the best jazz picks that 1997 had to offer.

10. John Coltrane - THE COMPLETE 1961 VILLAGE VANGUARD RECORDINGS (Impulse) - Although previously available in Japan, this is the first American packaging of this near mythical material and its appearance has been long overdue. Coltrane's classic quartet (McCoy Tyner, Jimmy Garrison and Elvin Jones) is heard here along with such special guests as Eric Dolphy and Reggie Workman. A MUST HEAR!

9. Bill Evans - THE COMPLETE VERVE RECORDINGS (Verve) - This CD boxed set is hefty (it is literally housed in a steel metal box). It includes previously unissued performances as part of this package, you haven't heard Evans until you've checked this one out.

8. John Abercrombie - TACTICS (ECM) -Abercrombie's killer trio with organist Dan Wall (currently making his home in Cleveland!) and drummer Adam Nussbaum is caught before a live audience on a generously-long set that simply cooks. As they say, "the pots were on."

7. Billy Harper - IF OUR HEARTS COULD ONLY SEE (DIW/Disc Union) - Even though he remains far from a household name, tenor saxophonist Billy Harper is easily one of jazz's modern day treasures. His usual quintet (highlighted by trumpeter Eddie Henderson and pianist Francesca Tanksley) is featured along with the debut of Harper's rich vocals.

6. Horace Silver - PRESCRIPTION FOR THE BLUES (Impulse) - Reuniting with the Brecker Brothers and bassist Ron Carter and drummer Louis Hayes, this groovy disc is Silver's finest record since the Blue Note days.

5. Pat Metheny Group - IMAGINARY DAY (Warner Bros.) - after 20 years with this group, Metheny and pianist Lyle Mays continue to make vital music and this is their greatest effort yet. Simply put, this is a gem and worthy of your attention.

4. Clarence Penn - PENN'S LANDING (Criss Cross Jazz) - This young drummer makes a dazzling debut with a piano-less quartet date featuring trumpeter John Swana, saxophonist Ron Blake and bassist Rodney Whitaker. Influenced by Elvin Jones, Penn leads with courage and great technical fluency. Highly recommended!

3. Steve Swallow - RECONSTRUCTED (ECM) Bassist Swallow leads a hard bop quintet with Chris Potter and Ryan Kisor and writes some exceptional lines using old standards as a base. Who says jazz can't be fun and profound at the same time?

2. Victor Lewis - EEEYESS! (Enja) - Drummer and composer Lewis shows here why he was such a valuable contributor to Bobby Watson's talented ensemble. Potent Lewis compositions and sprightly solo work from trumpeter Terrel Stafford, saxophonist Seamus Blake, and pianist Stephen Scott all make for a joyous romp.

1. Walt Weiskopf - SONG FOR MY MOTHER (Criss Cross Jazz) - Weiskopf is frankly one of the most talented composers and tenor saxophonists to emerge in the last 15 years. His nine-piece group explores an excellent program of Weiskopf originals and two brilliantly-arranged standards. Simply the BEST release of the year!