

THE BOSTON PHOENIX

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The Year in Review

A look back at banned things, AP Style, Dutch hip-hop, politics, movies & more

TEN LONG-PLAYERS

JAZZ THAT LINGERS FROM 2010

BY JON GARELICK

Here, in no particular order, are some of my favorite things from among the people, CDs, and concerts I wrote about this year.

DARCY JAMES ARGUE'S SECRET SOCIETY

Argue and his Society's *Infernal Machines* (New Amsterdam) made year-end lists in 2009, but this extraordinary big band — based in New York — didn't get to Boston for a live show until a Regattabar gig in February. For the first wave of press, Argue sold the band as steampunk, drawing on the idea that big bands themselves are an anachronism in 2010 and that he's using acoustic instruments to impersonate electronic studio effects like digital delay, filter sweeps, and phase shifting. If you weren't cued in to those references, you might just respond to the swirling texture of layered meters and to the sweeping harmonies and sunburst chords that are the legacy of Argue's New England Conservatory teacher Bob Brookmeyer. The band also played Newport in August.

PHIL WILSON DOES MILES AND GIL

Speaking of jazz orchestras: Berklee big-band sage Phil Wilson conjured one of Argue's

progenitors when he gathered a group of faculty and students to perform Gil Evans's landmark 1958 arrangement for Miles Davis of the Gershwins' *Porgy and Bess*. A complex suite for 19-piece band (including tuba and three French horns), it doesn't get played live often. But here it was, from the first blasts of "Buzzard Song": the many layers of Evans's conception, where low brass could conjure a chorus of double basses or fill out beguiling harmonies behind the soloists. Trumpeter and singer Christine Fawson (of the group Syncopation) brought the idea to Wilson after performing the piece at a concert in Mexico. Here she was joined by Miles Evans (son of Gil) for the trumpet solos and also sang the opening "I Loves You Porgy." But the piece was the star.

TAYLOR EIGSTI

At Scullers in July, he showed why he's a young star in the making: he has the chops and the imagination to cover a broad range of material — from Ellington and Mussorgsky to Coldplay and Mutemath — and an inventive flair as a composer. As a pianist, he doesn't seem to have a weak finger. His guest that night was singer-songwriter Becca Stevens. Together, and with a line-up that included the great drummer Kendrick Scott, they previewed his September release, *Daylight at Midnight* (Concord), which claims the likes of Chris Martin, Feist, Nick Drake, and Elliott Smith for the book of contemporary jazz standards. And "Midnight Afternoon" is a promising start to an Eigsti-Stevens songwriting partnership. Here's hoping they come back in 2011.

FLYING Esperanza Spalding tried a new direction — and her audience went with her.

RON GILL/JOHN STEIN

Singer Gill and guitarist Stein have been long-time teammates, and on *Turn Up the Quiet* (Whaling City Sounds), they show each other at their best. The only other musician on the CD is pianist Gilad Barkan (playing beautifully), and the scaled-back setting gives Gill's warm, conversational directness a chance to shine. An April show at Scullers was meant to showcase both *Turn Up the Quiet* and Stein's equally fine *Raising the Roof* (also on Whaling City) but Gill — a one-time fixture on the Boston scene as a musician and WGBH jazz announcer, now living in North Carolina — was felled by illness, and Stein's band went on alone. With any luck, Gill and Stein will perform together again in Boston in 2011.

ESPERANZA SPALDING

After her pop-leaning major-label debut, this year's *Chamber Music Society* (Heads Up) was supposed to be bassist/vocalist/composer Spalding's "difficult" album. Yet despite

its contrapuntal voice and still no more in a 2008's *Esperanza*. And like that has traction: Paisagem" (and the vocal and Gretchen's ardent take on Kin & Ned Wash Is the Wind," he of William Blake's exploratory originals edge of Good and Evil" triple listens. A sold-out Sa concert in October proved the audience is willing to move a

IDEAL BREAD

It shouldn't be a secret after that one way to get my attention Steve Lacy. The composer and saxophonist was a master of passionate compositions that infused the music of life-long inspiration Thelonious Monk and the many poets he loved. The quartet Ideal Bread play the music of Lacy exclusively. In place of Lacy's soprano, we have bandleader and former Lacy student Josh Sinton's baritone, and he's joined by trumpeter Kurt Knuffke, bassist Reuben Radding, and drummer Tomas Fujiwara. On their second CD, *Transmit* (Cuneiform), they showed that Lacy — like all the great jazz composers — can be a source of individual expression.

MIKE REED

Reed's *Stories & Negotiations* (482 Music), with his project People, Places & Things, concluded a trilogy dedicated to their home town of Chicago in which the band juxtaposed their own tunes with repertoire of progressive hard bop that flourished in that city between roughly 1954 and 1960. For this album, they brought in some of the players from that era: 75-year-old trombonist Julian Priestler, 79-year-old trumpeter/saxophonist Ira Sullivan, and 81-year-old trumpeter Art Hoyle. So they play "Urnack" — the Priestler tune that he and Hoyle recorded with Sun Ra in Chicago in 1960 — as well as a handful of others that stretch everybody on the date and make the whole thing sound like the coolest of young avant-garde bands. In October, Reed brought the core quartet — saxophonists Greg Ward and Tom Haldeman and bassist Jason Roebke — to the Lily Pad.

TED ROSENTHAL

Pianist Rosenthal's *Impromptu* (Playscape) was one of the most ridiculously entertaining CDs of the year. A piano-trio record (with bassist Noriko Ueda and drummer Quincy Davis), it could easily pass for a collection of superbly well-played jazz standards — until you realize that that beautiful ballad whose words you can almost remember is Chopin's F-minor Nocturne. But *Impromptu* is more than a parlor-game

BENNY SHARONI

Tenor-saxophonist Sharoni's *Eternal Elixir* (Papaya) snuck up on me like the great lost hard-bop album of 1962 — and with good reason. Here were Donald Byrd's "French Spice" and "Pentecostal Feelin'" and Blue Mitchell's "The Thing You Do." Even the *Fiddler on the Roof* chestnut "To Life" (a natural for this kibbutz-raised Israeli-American Boston resident) was inspired by the classic 1964 Cannonball Adderley recording of the score. None of which would matter a whit if we didn't have Sharoni's expressive playing, his crushed-felt tone, his feeling for boogaloes and bossa, and his own sturdy originals to round out the program.

MATT WILSON

The drummer, composer, and bandleader gave us an early holiday present, *Matt Wilson's Christmas Tree-O* (Palmetto), that could stand among some of the better horn-and-rhythm albums (with saxophonist Jeff Lederer and bassist Paul Sikivie). That and his Sunday-morning set at the Newport Jazz Festival — with a cover of Beyoncé's "If I Were a Boy," Wilson's Carl Sandburg-inspired "Bubbles," Mary LaRose singing her lyrics to Ornette Coleman's "Broken Shadows," and an auxiliary string quartet — sealed Wilson, and his generosity of spirit, in my mind as one of the great lingering memories from 2010. ☺

