

The Hot Box

Critics	James Hale	John McDonough	Michelle Mercer	Giovanni Russonello
Jensen/Treseler <i>Invisible Sounds: For Kenny Wheeler</i>	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★
Marquis Hill <i>Modern Flows Vol. II</i>	★★★½	★★★½	★★★★½	★★★★
Marcus Strickland Twi-Life <i>People Of The Sun</i>	★★★	★★	★★★	★★★
Helen Sung <i>Sung With Words</i>	★★★★	★★★½	★★★★	★★★½

Critics' Comments

Jensen/Treseler, *Invisible Sounds – For Kenny Wheeler*

It's difficult to overstate Wheeler's influence on fellow Canadian improvisers like Jensen. She's incorporated his balletic leaps into her own voice, and repays her debt to him with performances that find the heart of the late trumpeter's distinctive compositions. —James Hale

The Wheeler songbook is not widely played, but it receives an energetic showcase here as curated by Jensen and Treseler. Jensen shows unexpected variety, from even-tempered underplay to some unexpected Ellington growls and hues on a live "Old Time." —John McDonough

Wheeler's underappreciation makes simply playing his music straight a radical necessity. Yet Jensen and Treseler go further, refiguring Wheeler's tunes across space and time, and rehabilitating his unassuming musical reputation with some agitation. —Michelle Mercer

Marquis Hill, *Modern Flows Vol. II*

"Flow" is the operative word here; from Hill's constantly buoyant lead lines to Pinson's fluid drumming, all is in flux. Ross' shimmering vibes add liquidity, his marimba another percussive layer. Green's spoken-word contribution is a sharp highlight. —James Hale

The strength here is the smooth ensemble continuity that Hill's trumpet and Johnson's bright alto achieve. Their long, languid blends float through the music like a river of clear air, their dialogs models of moderation. —John McDonough

Hill is well on his way to defining a new style—built of jazz, hip-hop, new age and plenty else—that has the potential to ripple out widely. —Giovanni Russonello

Marcus Strickland Twi-Life, *People Of The Sun*

The banality of much of the lyrical content undermines the power of the most-potent music. But Strickland's decision to flit relentlessly between musical cells also is problematic. —James Hale

This vanguard manifesto tracing the African diaspora is virtuosic but defensive, as if Strickland is working against pushback in advance. I'd love to hear him trust listeners to grasp his spectacular artistic vision. —Michelle Mercer

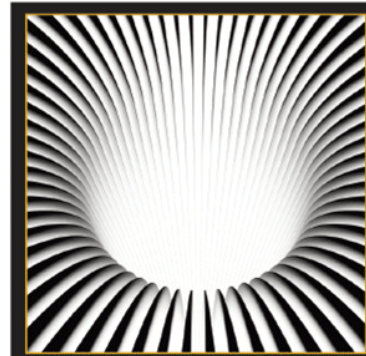
Strickland is a commanding player, but much of the music here stays somewhere in the middle: between late-'90s nostalgia and urbane millennialism, between exultation and self-possession, between full-court press and acting like he's already won the game. —Giovanni Russonello

Helen Sung, *Sung With Words*

Gioia's poems have an inviting emotional clarity grounded in experience, not abstraction. And Sung wraps them carefully in orderly musical structures that make the readings a bit redundant. —John McDonough

Give yourself over to Gioia's avuncular delivery and you'll hear music in his words. Sung certainly did, obliterating poetry and jazz's beret-and-bongos past with these brilliant compositions on which expert musicians say exactly what they mean. —Michelle Mercer

Sung does admirable work here, crafting arrangements of great diversity and conviction, despite the limitations of her apparent inspiration. Gioia's poems gladly revel in ease—even frivolity—mistaking the clink of cliché for the ring of insight. —Giovanni Russonello



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The runner dashes toward the cliff's edge, his hang glider's wings rattling above. He has reached the crest and, before he can think to stop, he is falling. For those few seconds before the wind mercifully sweeps him away, he is in a freefall, in a state of exhilaration, heightened awareness and, perhaps, terror. Yet, he has committed himself and had to push through the fear in order to soar.

The members of *Harriet Tubman* find this an apt analogy for their musical approach. For over two decades, guitarist *Brandon Ross*, bassist *Melvin Gibbs* and drummer *JT Lewis* have thrown themselves into making music that is sans genre, infective and overpowering.

photo by Michael Halbard



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