

Dave Hartl's 2025 Top Ten Most Influential Albums

It's time once again to look back and do that annual tradition of picking out the 10 or so most influential albums I heard in the past year. Not the most popular, or even the best, but what made me think the most as a musician.

You can always go to <http://www.davehartl.com/top10.html> and look at all the other years' postings. The links there go all the way back to 1998, when I started this with George Tucker. **It's a way of hearing about great music you might otherwise miss.** If you want to contribute your thoughts, please write to dave@davehartl.com with your own list and your contribution will be added to this document online for future downloads. This is why I do this! It always gives me some great recommendations for what to listen to that would be off my radar otherwise. So, don't be shy!

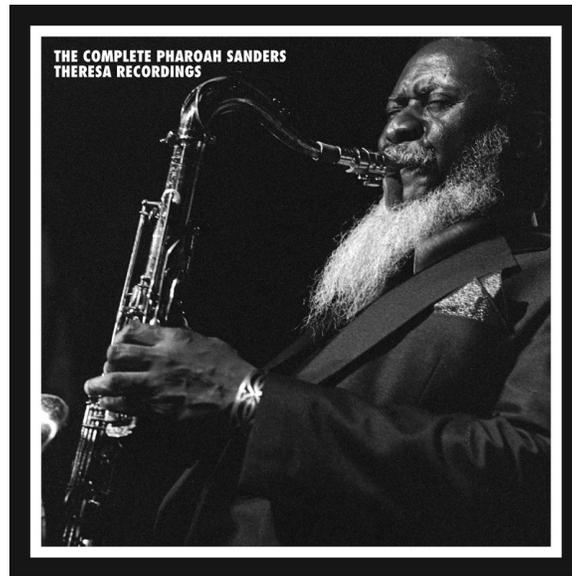
Last year, Jack Loughhead and Don Knabb responded and shared their own opinions of what was hot for them, and I got alerted to some really good music from them. Please respond, I don't like streaming (it's basically the biz's latest way to rip off the musicians) and don't listen to the nonsense of corporate radio, so this is really the only way I find out about the Good Stuff you stumble upon.

BEAT - Neon Heat Disease Live in Los Angeles



BEAT is a group consisting of Adrian Belew, Steve Vai, Tony Levin, and Danny Carey. They're dedicated to recreating the tunes from the King Crimson albums of the 1980's: Discipline, Beat, and Three of a Perfect Pair. What started out as a lark blessed by the de facto leader of King Crimson, Robert Fripp, soon turned into a worldwide phenomenon that has to be seen to be believed. I caught them early on in Reading, PA, and was completely floored. I had seen Crimson twice in the early 80's and their "Beat" concert in 1982 had changed my musical life, making me learn the Chapman Stick and buying a Fender Stratocaster with a whammy bar. Seeing BEAT reaffirmed that I hadn't wasted my time. Here's their show in all its splendor, and remains the ultimate souvenir of an amazing occurrence.

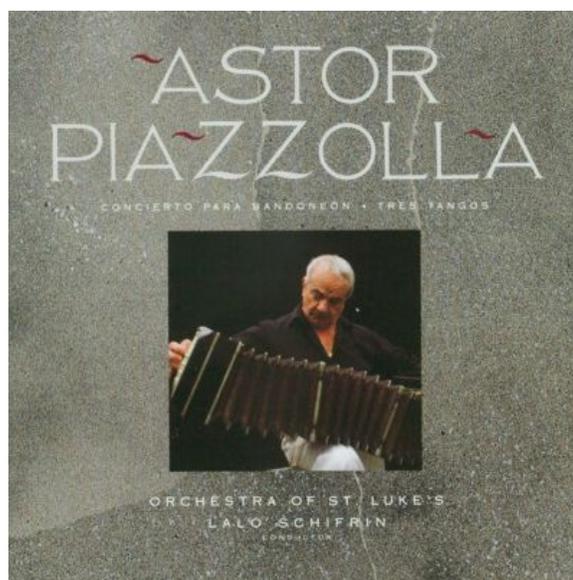
Pharoah Sanders - The Complete Theresa Recordings



This is actually a large box set from Mosaic Records, the preeminent company for jazz collections and limited edition releases. This one gathers together all of Pharoah Sander's recordings for Theresa Records, including Journey to the One, Rejoice, Live, Heart Is a Melody, Shukuru, A Prayer Before Dawn, Ed Kelly and Friend, and Idris Muhammad-Kabsha. It's a fantastic overview of an amazing stylist and brought back a lot of good memories of a concert I caught in the East Village shortly before Pharoah's passing.

Mosaic somehow has survived the downturn of CD players and the death of its founder and continues to serve up great collections unavailable anywhere else. Go to www.mosaicrecords.com for more info.

Astor Piazzolla - Concierto para Bandoneon/ Tres Tangos



A lot of the music I find in a given year happens when the creator of it passes away and I feel that I missed something. Such was the case with Lalo Schifrin, who had composed a lot of soundtracks I admired from high school days onward (Mission: Impossible, Bullitt, Cool Hand Luke, and many more). When reading of his accomplishments, I was pleasantly surprised to find that he had conducted the orchestra for a Piazzolla concerto and sought this out. It didn't disappoint. Astor Piazzolla is the star here as composer and featured soloist, but Lalo holds up his end very well to help create one of the all-time great tango albums.

Paul Schütze - New Maps of Hell



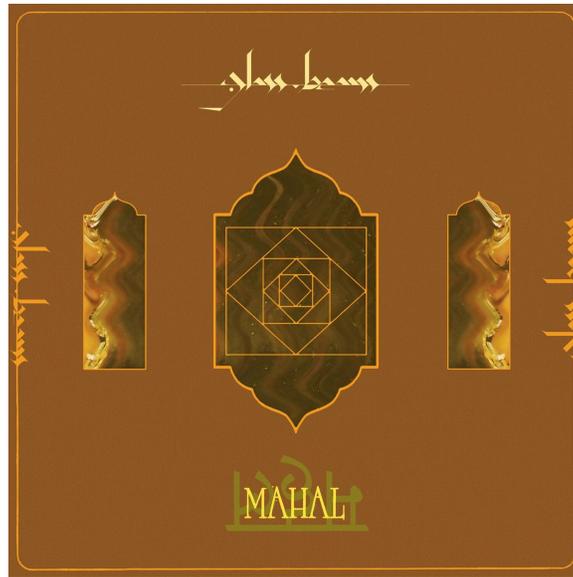
I sell my original music on bandcamp.com and sometimes hear of albums on various Facebook pages dedicated to different synthesizers. This was the case here where I heard that this London-based Australian composer and performer had featured an old Korg Wavestation synth from the '90's in new ways on this album. Intrigued, I went to his page on Bandcamp and found a host of albums he's done. This one is dark and foreboding soundscapes and sent me off in a cool direction in my own originals in my studio, so it definitely influenced me. Drop by Paul Schütze's page on Bandcamp and audition some cuts for yourself.

Michel Camilo - Live at the Blue Note



Back in the mid-'80's I was lucky enough to wander into a small hall and catch Michel Camilo playing with bassist Anthony Jackson and drummer Dave Weckl. They were unbelievable. I've always felt an affinity with Camilo's approach to the piano, highly rhythmic and percussive, and Anthony Jackson (who we lost this year) and Dave Weckl were one of the most dynamic rhythm sections I had ever seen. This double album captures a different rhythm section but provides a great career overview of Camilo's compositions. If you've heard him, you know what to expect and this release will not disappoint you. If you don't know him, put on a seat belt and hang on tight. He's a badass.

Glass Beams - Mahal



After performing at the Sellersville Theater with the Divine Hand Ensemble, I was breaking down my gear and packing up when I heard something very intriguing. I asked the sound man what he was playing and he mentioned this album. I've been listening to it ever since, along with another one by Glass Beams called "Mirage". This is a music project from a man named Rajan Silva and combines Eastern scales with lots of augmented seconds with a Western approach to improv and form. Such a glib explanation doesn't do it justice, but the pleasure it's given me goes beyond analysis.

Grace Jones - Inside Story



Don't ask me why, but I've been listening to a lot of Grace Jones. Again, it may have been the passing of bassist Robbie Shakespeare that made me go back and reassess his contributions, which include his playing and production on a bunch of her albums. This one doesn't include him, unfortunately, but finds a pop sensibility that makes it work. I would highly recommend her other albums "Nightclubbing" and "Warm Leatherette".

Connie Han - Secrets of Inanna



Here's the pianist I'm finding the most interesting of the post-Herbie/McCoy/Chick gang. Connie Han has intense independence and an ability to play seemingly impossible jazz counterpoints, attacking the piano like McCoy and having the angularity of Chick or Herbie. She seems to know how to use her sexiness and propensity for huge spiked heels and leather outfits to best advantage, but may be overplaying that part of her presentation. The music is what matters, and it's here.

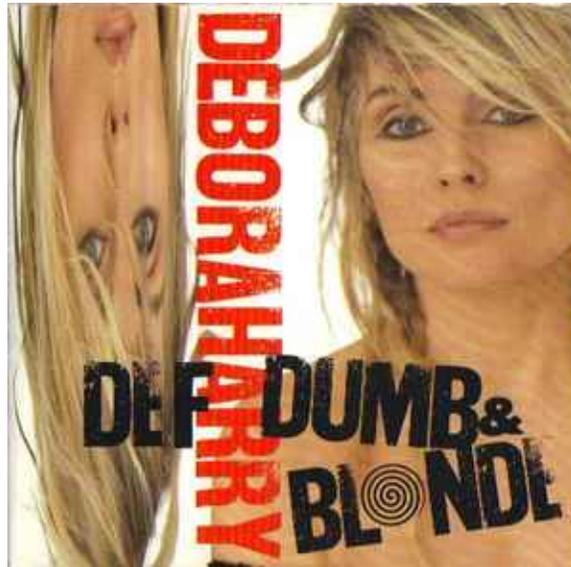
I went up to Birdland in NYC to catch her with a trio about a year or so ago and was floored. She seemed smart and savvy but seems to have been a bit overwhelmed by the cliquish New York Jazz Scene. She signed a CD for me and we chatted, and I came away with a lot of respect for her. Check out her YouTube page to get a taste of the intensity with which she plays. After many technically good but ultimately uninteresting pianist wannabes, I feel refreshed by what she's accomplishing.

Peter Gabriel - Flotsam and Jetsam



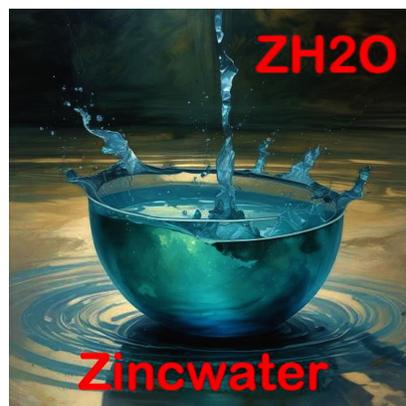
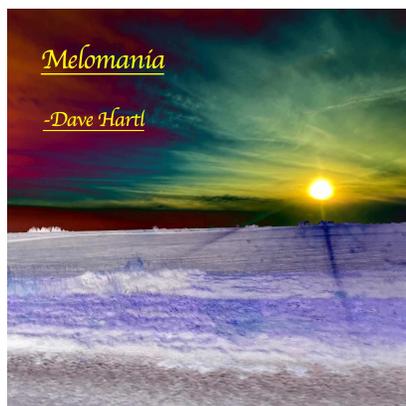
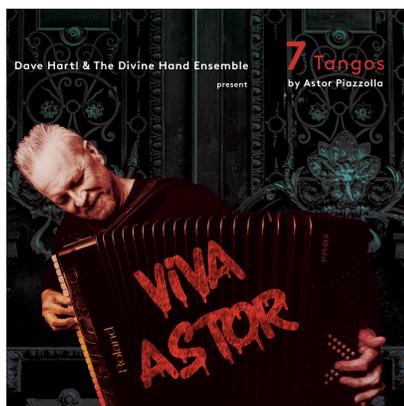
This was a pleasant surprise, a collection of 62 Peter Gabriel outtakes, remixes, and oddities that showed up on Bandcamp and unavailable anywhere else. If you're familiar with Gabriel's output you'll find this very interesting. As a fan of Tony Levin, this is a treasure trove of his work as well. I don't know if it will win any new fans, but for old ones it's a treasure.

Debra Harry - Def Dumb & Blonde



OK, we're talking guilty pleasure here. Along with Grace Jones and Marianne Faithfull, I seem to be revisiting the female vocalists of the '80's in my listening habits and enjoying the things I was working too much to pay attention to. Debra Harry was the lead singer and focus of the group Blondie back in the day, and this is a very good pop record she did right after Blondie's breakup. I don't question it, I just like it.

My own albums that ate up a lot of my bandwidth in 2025:



To be completely honest, if this list is about what albums were influencing me this year, I would have to include the ones I released with the help of friends and on which I worked long hours to prepare them.

“Viva Astor” was a release on Label 51 Records with the Divine Hand Ensemble; it’s 7 tangos by Astor Piazzolla that I arranged for the group. Learning Astor’s parts transformed my accordion playing forever. This contains the most passionate accordion playing I’ve ever done, I believe.

“Melomania” was my own Bandcamp release and reflects a love of working with synthesizers and trying to be spontaneous and in the moment. These tunes were mostly not pre-composed, but grew organically as I worked on them.

“ZH2O” is an album that was in development for almost four years by a studio group called Zincwater, consisting of me, Ricardo Zayas, Josh Orlando, Miles Hartl, and a guest appearance by Gesenia Gerena. As I write this we’re waiting for the masters to come from the

studio and it will see a release early in 2026. It's funky, frantic, ferocious, and fun and took a LOT of time out of 2025 to make happen, and I guarantee it's like nothing you've ever heard.

This space reserved for YOUR picks...

Seriously, this only works if you are motivated and share your own thoughts about what music rocked you this year. I miss having friends recommend good music, and I deeply resent the corporate shills making suggested playlists "just for me" filled with whatever swill and copycat crap they want to make a buck from.

Send me your thoughts and I'll add them right here!!

Chico Huff

Here's my hurried, tardy list for 2025. Not much explanation but hopefully some New listening for folks! Apologies in advance for the short descriptions! Wanted to get this out.

Dijon "Baby"

Happened upon this band on SNL doing the tune "HIGHER" and was floored By the collective vibe and passion. Certainly not harmonically complex but I love the sonic palette of the whole album

Sam Greenfield "Worst of Sam Greenfield"

Former Philly saxologist Sam Greenfield, who've I've done a load of Gigs with over the years with, is really doing some cool stuff these days And playing his arse off.

Big Thief "Double Indemnity"

My daughter turned me on to this band. Indie rock, I guess? Very much Dig them

Rich Brown "Nyaeba"

Former Dapp Theory and Five Elements bassist, a long time fave. Mostly solo Bass but such a great and creative player.

Alpha Mist “Roulette”

Discovered Alpha Mist last year. Creative rap, interesting harmonically. I’ve dug everything I’ve heard from him so far.

Jonathan Blake Jr “My Life Matters”

Great compositions, great playing all around! To my ear this album reflects more Of a direction “jazz” is headed these days.

Nate Smith “LIVE-ACTION”

More great music from drummer Nate Smith. The version of the Pointer Sisters “AUTOMATIC” with Lalah Hathaway is killing! Highly recommend the whole album!

nimino “Rooms on the Ark”

Cool electronica, where my ear is leaning these days it seems!

Charlie Hunter & Ella Feingold “Different Strokes for Different Folks”

Straight up, Sly inspired funk and grooves, done instrumentally. Massive pocket for days! Thanks to Josh Orlando for hippping me to this one!

Daniel Garcia Trio “Wonderland”

Thanks to Mark Oppelander for hippping me to this pianist. Beautiful playing and compositions!

Happy Listening and Happier New Year!!

Don Knabb

Here is my list for 2025.

Jill Haley and Deb Martin – Rendering Time – Jill Haley is an amazing oboe player who has played with Will Ackerman and plays in One Alternative. Deb Martin runs the Spotted Peccary independent music label. This is a quiet album, very enjoyable.

Jill Haley – Quietude and Alaskan Landscapes – Jill Haley has a series of albums about our national parks. All nice mostly acoustic music.

Luca D’Alberto – In Our Hearts – wonderful modern classical.

Tom Caufield – The Lonely Variations – nice acoustic guitar music.

All India Radio – The Slow Light - this group was founded by and is mostly just Martin Kennedy in Australia. It leans toward ambient-hop-sci fi. Lots of fun, sometimes wild.

David Helping and Eric “the” Taylor – The Precious Dark – electronic ambient chamber music.

.foundation – mountain ambient IV – pure drone, soothing, with a sci-fi galaxy sound.

Christopher Tignor – A Light Below – amazing modern classical with interesting tonal variations in the violins.

Wil Bolton – Slow Shapes – another ambient chamber music album.

Tigerforest – Today and Onward – hard to describe, some vocals, high energy songs, love it.

Dave Hartl – Melomania – we listen to this often!

Avawaves – Heartbeat – Their newest one, this is one of my favorites of the year. It is ambient chamber or modern classical.

Craig Padilla – Heart of the Soul – ambient chamber music/electronic

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Mike Dotterer

Like a typical trombone player, my entrance is a little late. My 2025 listening:

With a couple of exceptions, most of my 2025 listening was probably done in preparation for some performances for a couple of groups I arranged for. Sometimes it was listening to the material, sometimes it was going off tangents

and down into rabbits holes when my attention would start to wander. Also, I lost a dear friend and trumpeter extraordinaire last year which made me think back to several conversations about music and his influences.

Dave, the **Divine Hand Ensemble's 7 Tangos by Astor Piazzolla** made the rounds. I didn't know much about him until you shared his music a few years ago. I found myself listening to it quite a few times. Interestingly, between your 5 Tangos and this, somebody brought a trombone quartet arrangement to one of the tangos to a rehearsal which I'm sure I enjoyed more because of your recordings.

Jon Batiste's Beethoven Blues - I loved this. I loved it even more after listening to an interview on Fresh Air about it.

My friend Rob that I mentioned earlier was a big **Talking Heads** fan. I spent a lot of time listening to Speaking in Tongues, Remain in Light, More Songs About Buildings and Food, and of course, Stop Making Sense.

He was an avid Beatles fan, as am I, but he turned me on to **George Harrison's All Things Must Pass**. I knew of a couple tunes, but I never really sat and just listened to the album until last year.

Brian Wilson's passing sent me to revisit **Smile**, but then an arranging project took me to really listen and tear apart **The Beach Boys Pet Sounds**. Again, something I never really listened to in the past until I had to. That got listened to a lot, even after my project was done.

Fanfare Ciocarlia - The Devil Rides Again - Love this group. Balkan brass group. It doesn't matter my mood, I'm always better after listening to them.

Trombone Shorty - Second Line Sunday. I listen to a lot of this guy. That's his new album, so it got a lot of listening time last year.

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Jack Loughhead

Here's my faves for 2025.

Peter Gabriel - In The Big Room. I'm always a sucker for Gabriel live material, and this one was not a disappointment. Recorded in 2003, it

is a live recording of a concert done for members of Gabriel's Full Moon Club, and features songs from the "Growing Up" era.. Kudos to your choice, Flotsam and Jetsam, as well, which was queued up a good bit during the year.

Steven Wilson - The Overview. While there was a lot of hype for this one, and it garnered a number of "Best Prog Album of the Year" awards, it's not one of my favorites. That said, it's still a great listen, and listen I did over and over. Some outstanding guitar work. Word is Wilson will be joining a new iteration of King Crimson in the near future. That would be interesting!

Chris Potter - Eagle Point. Some powerful stuff served up by an allstar crew including Brad Mehldau, Brian Blade and John Pattitucci. They really know how to swing together.

Artemis - Arboresque - I struggle a bit with the fact that every mention of this group has to include at the outset the that it's all women. I certainly get the challenges women face in the industry, and particularly in this day and age I want to be an advocate for DEI, but part of me feels like it takes something away from the fact that they are all just outstanding musicians, compared with anyone. At any rate, the album is a great mix of original material and standards.

Taking Turns - Jakob Bro. This album actually was recorded over a decade ago, but for some reason only recently came out. It features 86 year old Lee Konitz on sax, and the somewhat unusual lineup of two guitars, Bro along with Bill Frisell. Jason Moran is on keys, Thomas Morgan on bass, and Andrew Cyrille on drums. While that's a lot of musical firepower, they do a beautiful job of creating an open, spacious textures. Nice listening!

Lonely Robot - A Model Life. This album is actually one of five from prog guitarist John Mitchell. Yeah, it's kind of poppy prog, but I like it and all five recordings showed up on my playlist often this year.

Omar Sosa - Sendas. Omar always seems to make my list. This recording is from a 2020 solo concert in Italy, and is all improvisations. They carry me away! I wish this guy would come play somewhere I can get to in the near future!

Gazpacho - Magic 8 Ball. Newest one from this Norwegian prog group. Somewhat eerie and haunting, but beautiful.

Genesis - The Lamb Lies Down. For some reason I never listened much to the album when it first came out. Maybe that's why I got fixated on the remastered 50th (can you believe it???) anniversary release. Still powerful stuff!

Beatles - Anthology IV. My wife and I both got quite a kick out of this one, with it's window into the Beatles' creative process. We tried to share it with our kids, but I guess you had to be there to really appreciate it. My favorite was the alternate orchestral version of "I am the Walrus."

Dave - Thanks so much for keeping this tradition alive. Like you, I pick up on some great new stuff every year!

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Brian Groder

Greetings Dave, here are some of the albums that made my year so enjoyable... in no particular order:

Bassist Felix Henkelhausen's "The Excruciating Pain of Boredom" (Bandcamp)

<https://felixhenkelhausen1.bandcamp.com/album/the-excruciating-pain-of-boredom?>

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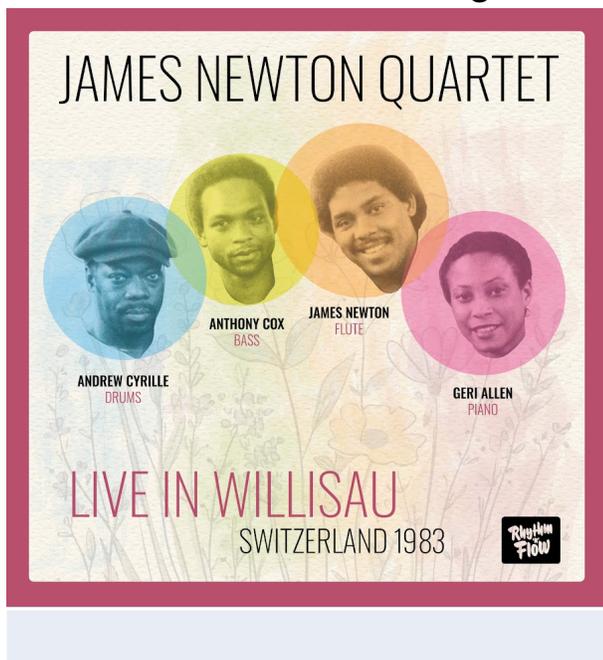
Live recording from Berlin & Cologne, Germany of a distinctive quintet with progressive compositions and improvisations that I find interesting and inspiring. They definitely have their own thing going on.

Stanley Cowell - “Musa-Ancestral Streams”

<https://stanleycowell.bandcamp.com/album/musa-ancestral-streams>

originally released on StrataEast Records which Stanley co-founded with trumpeter Charles Tolliver. Mack Ave Records is co-releasing selected albums from the Strata East catalog and this is one of the finest, showcasing Cowell’s impressive & highly creative abilities.

James Newton “Live in Willisau Switzerland” with a young Geri Allen on piano, Anthony Cox on bass and Andrew Cyrille on drums for this 1983 European tour recording which had been lost until last year. Great music from some great Masters.



Freddie Hubbard “On Fire-Live from the Blue Morocco”

Outstanding Freddie from a 1967 gig in The Bronx... with Bennie Maupin on tenor sax, Kenny Barron on piano, Herbie Lewis on bass and Freddie Waits on drums.

It’s killin’ ...



Ethiopian composer/musician Mulatu Astatike - “Mulatu Plays Mulatu”. - 2025 release with UK band on BandCamp

“ Mulatu Plays Mulatu realises Mulatu’s long-term vision of Ethio-jazz, intricately balancing Western jazz arrangements with the rich sounds of traditional Ethiopian instruments including the krar, masenqo, washint, kebero and begena. Throughout the album, he reshapes familiar material with rich textures, expanded improvisations and a deepened rhythmic complexity, creating a body of work that feels as vital and contemporary as it does steeped in tradition. Familiar tracks like ‘Yekermo Sew’, ‘Netsanet’ and ‘Azmar’, composed by Either/ Orchestra’s Russ Gershon, are reinvented here as elegant big band performances.”

