



THE FAT BABIES

solid gassuh

BEAU SAMPLE • ANDY SCHURM • JOHN OTTO • DAVE BOCK • PAUL ASARO • JAKE SANDERS • ALEX HALL



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DELMARK 257

★★★★★

Classic jazz, which is a good term for jazz styles that originated before the swing era, can be thought of as the true underground music of the 21st century. Largely absent from television and (with a few exceptions) radio and the press, it inhabits a parallel world from that of more modern jazz. Classic jazz has its own festivals, record labels, cruises, clubs, publications and modern-day heroes. The music did not end in 1930 or 1970, as proven by the existence of The Fat Babies and other worthy bands.

Based in Chicago—a city that spawned its own brand of trad jazz—The Fat Babies were founded by bassist Beau Sample six years ago. Since that time, they have built up a large repertoire and demonstrated quite a bit of versatility. *Solid Gassuh* features The Fat Babies emulating many different groups, mostly from the 1926–’32 period. Rather than being hard-charging Dixieland, the performances mostly have The Fat Babies sounding like a relaxed but hot dance band from the time, despite only having three horns. While the group sometimes uses transcriptions from vintage records, their solos are creative within the genre, rather than pure copies.

With the exception of “Did You Ever See A Dream Walking?” (a dance band chart with Asaro contributing a period vocal) and an exuberant version of “Maple Leaf Rag,” none of these pieces would qualify as standards. Certainly, one does not often hear “Pencil Papa,” “Sing Song Girl” and “Parkway Stomp” covered by contemporary bands, even in the trad-jazz world. *Solid Gassuh* is a must for anyone interested in early jazz. —Scott Yanow

Solid Gassuh: Doctor Blues; After A While; Feelin’ Good; Did You Ever See A Dream Walking; Original Charleston Strut; Pencil Papa; I Miss A Little Miss; Parkway Stomp; You Were Only Passing Time With Me; Alabamy Bound; Slow River; Delirium; Egyptian Ella; Sing Song Girl; Maple Leaf Rag. (47:45)

Personnel: Andy Schumm, cornet; Dave Bock, trombone; John Otto, clarinet, alto saxophone; Paul Asaro, piano, vocals; Jake Sanders, banjo, guitar; Beau Sample, bass; Alex Hall, drums.

Ordering info: delmark.com

Symphonies of Swing

Jazz holds a tenuous position in relation to classical music. Few would disagree that the two were once intertwined—one can hear, for example, the influence of the European piano tradition and early American military music in jazz pioneers like Scott Joplin, Jelly Roll Morton and King Oliver. Yet despite this early confluence—and the brief emergence of Third Stream—jazz and classical have evolved within separate tributaries. This batch of jazz musicians, inspired by modernism and equipped with new tools for orchestration, are reaching back out across the aisle to engage with classical music in progressive new ways.

Boston-based guitarist **Eric Hofbauer** has released two previous albums under his *Prehistoric Jazz* series, which found the young composer reinventing the music of Shostakovich, Webern and Messaien. For the series’ third installation, *Prehistoric Jazz Vol. 3—Three Places In New England* (Creative Nation 028; 39:39 ★★★★★), Hofbauer has chosen to re-contextualize a three-part suite by American modernist composer Charles Ives. Much is gained in translation. The delicate string passages of the original are rendered here through gossamer guitar chords and billowing clarinet, and piquant brass statements are transformed into smeary plunger-muted trumpet solos. Beneath it all thrums the pulse of unabated swing, which Hofbauer doesn’t so much append to the music as unearth it from its source.

Ordering info: erichofbauer.com

Keyboardist **Richard Sussman** pursues a different path on *The Evolution Suite* (Zoho 201614; 75:19 ★★★★★), penning a collection of nine originals (including the five-part suite that is the album’s namesake) that envision what the future of chamber jazz might look like. His orchestrations blend instruments of the classical tradition with the futuristic sounds of elec-

tronics and synths, which is how songs like “Movement I: Into The Cosmic Kitchen” come to sound like a dialog between Schoenberg, Cage and Weather Report.

Ordering info: zohomusic.com

Australian saxophonist **Jacám Manricks** provides his own definition of classical/jazz hybridity with *Chamber Jazz* (Self Release; 71:17 ★★★½), a taut, neatly executed album that advances the notion of jazz as a chamber music. The quartet assembled here—Manricks on various woodwinds, Ari Hoenig on drums, Ginaluca Renzi on bass and Kevin Hays on keyboards—stresses musical communication over flashes of virtuosity. Meticulous interactions between Manricks’ soprano saxophone and Hoenig’s snare drum on “Cloud Nine” are marvels of rhythmic interplay.

Ordering info: jacammanricks.com

As **DYAD**, pianist Eric Olsen and saxophonist Lou Caimano have released two albums on which they explore composers as diverse as Duke Ellington and Giacomo Puccini. On their latest disc, *DYAD Plays Jazz Arias* (Ringwood Records; 53:29 ★★★), the duo tackles historically significant arias, self-contained pieces written for voice and originally intended for inclusion in an opera. Even in the rarefied air of classical-jazz crossover, this approach is a novel one, but in this case, the premise is more compelling than the execution. Trumpeter Randy Brecker enlivens a few numbers (including a bracing take on “Finch’han Dal Vino” from *Don Giovanni*), and saxophonist Ted Nash sounds positively tempestuous on “Dio! Mi Potevi Scagilar,” from Verdi’s *Othello*. But on their tracks, the musicians seemed weighed down by their own heavy ideas and grandiose diction. Far better when they unwind on “Meditation,” with its bluesy, windblown freedom. **DB**

Ordering info: dyadplays.com