

classics of improvised chamber music. On *Music Matador*, his bass clarinet roars with celebratory abandon.

Dolph's breadth is as apparent in his range of collaborators, from bassoonist Garvin Bushell, who recorded with Mamie Smith in 1922, to 18-year-old trumpeter Woody Shaw, here making his recording debut. Along with the expansive and illuminating alternate takes, the set includes a remarkable bonus, *A Personal Statement*, with an extended musical dialogue that includes pianist Bob James (yes, that Bob James) and countertenor David Schwartz.

Stuart Broomer

La Fenice

Keith Jarrett

ECM ECM2601-02 (ecmrecords.com/catalogue)



► A new release from the Keith Jarrett concert archive is always a welcome occasion. Such is the case with *La Fenice*, the ECM label's latest offering from the

virtuoso pianist, which comes to us as a two-disc set featuring an improvised solo concert recorded at Gran Teatro La Fenice, Venice, in 2006. By this time, Jarrett had adopted a concert format during which he would improvise a series of relatively short pieces, as opposed to the long uninterrupted sets that he favoured on earlier iconic recordings such as *La Scala* and *Bremen/Lausanne*.

Interestingly though, Jarrett begins *La Fenice* by breaking these self-imposed format limits, as he launches into a mostly atonal musical exploration which clocks in at over 17 minutes, until its final unexpected resolution in F-sharp Major. In *Part 3*, the pianist visits one of his more familiar trademark styles wherein his left hand lays down an ostinato pattern while the right hand improvises fluid gospel/blues lines. Rhythmic clarity, direction and superb melodic development are present throughout, as Jarrett pulls off one amazing pianistic feat after another with apparent ease. The music then segues into an achingly beautiful ballad, possibly one of the most breathtaking improvised pieces he has ever recorded.

On disc two, the pianist breaks up more complex harmonic territory with a bitter-sweet Gilbert and Sullivan tune (*The Sun Whose Rays*), before proceeding on to a straight-out blues romp. We are also treated to several encores, including *My Wild Irish Rose*, *Stella by Starlight* and a stunning Jarrett original, *Blossom*. On *Stella*, the pianist is clearly enjoying himself as he weaves complex bop lines over a left hand walking bass, while also tapping his foot on beats two and four: a one-man band!

All told, *La Fenice* is a deserving

addition to Jarrett's long and distinguished recording legacy.

Barry Livingston

POT POURRI

(I) *Les vents orfèvres*;
(II) *Les entrailles de la montagne*
Jean-François Bélanger
Les Productions de l'homme Renard
(jfbelanger.com)

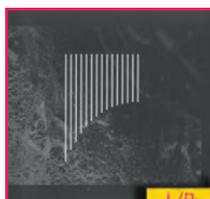


L/R

principally to the Swedish folk instrument the nyckelharpa. However, unlike Olov Johansson of the Swedish group Väsen and renowned exponent of the three-rowed nyckelharpa, the music created by the Montréalais Bélanger seems to fuse a myriad of musical idioms, drawing from Swedish and Celtic ones, on his single-rowed instrument.

The first of Bélanger's diptych of recordings is *Les vents orfèvres*, a piercing journey into the interior landscape of the artist's mind, "dedicated to matters of the spirit," as Bélanger explains. There is an astonishing variety of music here, from the spine-tingling and airy *Ouverture tirée à quatre épingles* and *Le penseur* with their eloquent silences punctuated only by the sound of the keys as they are depressed, to serve as frets to change the pitch of the string, to the knock-about *Suite norvégienne* with its highly theatrical and dance-like gestures that closes out this disc.

Throughout we hear music-making of great vividness and immediacy; the songs seem to traverse not just time, but also a musical topography infinitely more vast than the relative insularity of the instrument. It bears mention too that Bélanger also plays numerous other stringed and percussion instruments and is accompanied by 12 other virtuoso musicians who play a staggering range of instruments from the Jew's harp and the Brazilian caxixi to the Indian bansuri and the viola da gamba.



L/R

the mountain takes shape. As the disc progresses the music seems to pour out of the instruments in a proverbial volcanic mix that melds opulent orchestral arrangements with a

► Jean-François Bélanger is a specialist in period and contemporary string instruments. Between 2015 and 2018 he completed an enduring diptych

percussive folksy theatre that seems to criss-cross the earth's music. But to describe it as such gives the impression of overcooking when in fact the whole project is a masterpiece of subtlety.

Somehow Bélanger's nyckelharpa appears to give way more frequently to other instruments from his Pandora's box that even includes the sitar and tampuri-swarmandal. Here too, Bélanger is accompanied by 15 musicians plus a string quartet, each deeply attuned to his vision. The surprises, when they come, are effective but discreet: a gamelan-like riff played as pizzicato harmonics and a delicate curlicue of a bass line that sounds like a Gaelic lament and, as in *La broussaille - Chemin de traverse*, a close-knit passage that develops from a single phrase. Small wonder that Bélanger received the Instrumental Solo Artist of the Year prize at the 2018 Canadian Folk Music Awards for *Les entrailles de la montagne*.

Raul da Gama

Concert notes: Jean-François Bélanger has many performances around the province of Quebec in February and March. Full details can be found at jfbelanger.com/spectacles/.

Before You

Alicia Hansen

Independent (aliciahansen.com)



L/R

► Alicia Hansen does not write party music. What the Vancouver-based singer and piano player does write are artistic, original and harmonically complex songs. Her propensity for

minor keys and stark lyrics make her latest album, *Before You*, feel a little dark at times, but her beautiful voice and vulnerability more than make up for it.

Hansen's third studio release comprises 11 tracks all written by her and produced by JUNO Award-winner, Jesse Zubot, who also plays violin on the album. Zubot and cellist Peggy Lee's string work add to the haunting quality of many of the tunes, such as *Who I Am* or the opener *Disintegrating Heart* which explores themes of love and relationships, as many of the songs do. Other themes are emotional growth, self-acceptance and the rejection of standards set by others. In *Fame and Glory* Hansen writes, "So I hope that you're not waiting for me, to turn into something that I'll never be." And that sums this record up well. Hansen's work is worth exploring for anyone tired of formulaic pop offerings and keen for fresh, interesting, yet accessible songs.

Cathy Riches

Concert note: Alicia Hansen performs at Merge in Vancouver February 15.