

CARRIER

BY KURT GOTTSCHALK

Categorizing the unclassifiable is a fool's errand, to be sure, one upon which the channels of music production and distribution—marketers and distributors to broadcasters and journalists to merchants and streaming algorithms—largely rely. It's a model that rarely reflects consumer preference and which forces the avoidance of genre to be considered a niche.

There are, of course, enterprises resisting the confines of race, region and definition of style. Carrier is one such endeavor. Launched in New York City in 2009 by composer/performers Sam Pluta and Jeff Snyder, the label has grown to have partners in four cities and a catalogue attracting the attention of such uncategorizable artists as Fred Frith and George Lewis.

"The goal of the label was to make a place for all these different musical worlds we find ourselves in that seem to be separate," said Pluta, speaking from Paris where his wife, composer Sky Macklay, has a fellowship. (He is fulfilling his obligations at the University of Chicago, where he is an assistant professor in the Department of Music, online.) The label, he explained, began as a way to put out music by Snyder, himself and their friends, setting an eclectic agenda from the outset. The first two releases were by the composer/performer collective Wet Ink Ensemble and a sort of electro-chamber drone project called Glissando Bin Laden. Pluta is a member of both groups.

Label management has since expanded with the

addition of composers Katie Young in Atlanta and David Brynjar Franzson in Los Angeles, with each bringing projects to the table to be voted on and then seen through production by one of the four. "We each have really different tastes, so hopefully there's a breadth of different musical ideas," Pluta said.

Some recent releases leaning toward the improv sector of the Carrier umbrella were brought in by Pluta: *Lock Me Up, Lock Me Down*, a trio by Fred Frith with two Turkish musicians, electronics improviser Cenk Ergün and Sudhu Tewari, who works with "recuperated junk"; *Rainbow Family*, an archival recording by George Lewis with Derek Bailey, Douglas Ewart, Steve Lacy and Joëlle Léandre; and *The Cat of Sadness*, a soprano saxophone trio by Dan Blake, Jon Irabagon and Ingrid Laubrock.

Rainbow Family came about after Lewis emailed Pluta saying he'd come across a 1984 Betamax recording of some early electro-acoustic experiments recorded at Institut de Recherche et de Coordination Acoustique/Musique in Paris. "George is very well known for the Voyager project but I didn't even know about this Rainbow Family project," Pluta said of his former instructor at Columbia University. "What he was doing in 1983-84 with electronic instruments and improvisation is what I try to do in my work. To be able to put out this heavyweight, major document in the field was really important." Releasing *Rainbow Family* and Ted Moore's *bruit*, a set of contemporary acoustic/electronic improvisations, outlined a four-decade continuum of what the label sets out to document. "This is so central to the core of what we do," Pluta said. "For us to be able to release this and then the Ted Moore album and to show those things next to each other and lay out a tradition, that is important."

Carrier has gone to DL-only for some releases, such as the new Frith trio. Others have only a limited physical run. "To make a CD is very expensive, to make an LP is absurdly expensive," Pluta said. "Even the best-selling CDs don't make the money back for us."

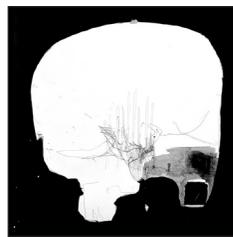
With the label founders working in audio production and engineering, the sound quality is, across the board, to a high standard. Most releases are recorded specifically for release, often by Pluta or Snyder. When they're brought a recording, they often still are involved in mixing and production. In the case of the Blake/Irabagon/Laubrock trio, they were brought a live recording but then invited to record at the Princeton University Electronic Music Studio, which Snyder directs. Snyder engineered the recording and Pluta mastered it for release. "The music, we thought, was just incredible, but the recording was a little unpolished," Pluta said. "Jeff and I are both recording engineers, we record or mix or produce half the records." Pluta and Snyder have from the beginning set out to realize a fuller, more contemporary production than many recordings of experimental music and contemporary composition—closer to the studio sound of current pop bands than the traditional concert hall document. For a recent recording with Wet Ink singer Kate Soper, for example, Pluta combined recordings of her made in multiple locations, far from the audio verité that many labels strive for.

But as it was 12 years ago, the main intention is just to get music into the hands and ears of people who might not otherwise hear it. "Our goal is that someone will come to our Bandcamp page looking for George Lewis and realize that Dana Jessen is totally awesome." ❖

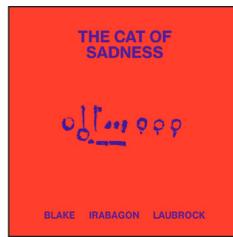
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Wet Ink: 20
Wet Ink Ensemble



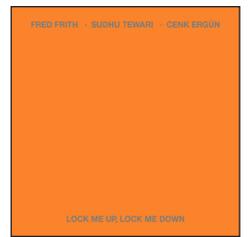
Two Live Sets
Peter Evans/Sam Pluta



The Cat of Sadness
Blake/Irabagon/Laubrock



Rainbow Family
George Lewis



Lock Me Up, Lock Me Down
Fred Frith/Sudhu Tewari/Cenk Ergün

VOXNEWS

VOCAL MUSICIANS

BY SUZANNE LORGE

In November 2000, Lara Pellegrinelli published an article in *The Village Voice* that took Wynton Marsalis to task for the dearth of female instrumentalists in the famed Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra (JLCO). The historic piece, thorough and thoughtful, still stands as a clarion call for gender equality, even as several of the players mentioned—pianist Renee Rosnes, trumpeter Ingrid Jensen and drummer Terri Lyne Carrington—have set strong precedents for women in jazz. Further, in the years since the article was published, Marsalis has opened up the JLCO to female instrumentalists and in 2018 he gave a permanent chair in the ensemble to a woman for the first time. That player—saxophonist **Camille Thurman**—is also a kickass jazz vocalist. Thurman is not the only jazz singer who excels at an instrument typically championed by virtuosic male players, the elite against whom all others are measured. The contributions of singer-instrumentalists like Esperanza Spalding (bass), Bria Skonberg (trumpet) and Nicki Parrott (bass), to name three out of scores, have long challenged the tired tropes that women players are not good musicians and that singers are perhaps not musicians at all.

Curiously, around the time that Pellegrinelli was

calling attention to the jazz world's sins of omission, some of today's most promising newcomers were first picking up their instruments—and the mic. Though just 25, singer/trombonist **Hailey Brinell** has already played prominent stages like Dizzy's Club and The Kennedy Center, often alongside groundbreaking musicians like Sherrie Maricle's DIVA Jazz Orchestra. Her debut as a leader, *I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles* (Outside In Music), reveals why Brinell was tapped for these early honors: her mastery of these two instruments defies expectations for one so young. Or, perhaps, sets new expectations. Opener "Orange-Colored Sky" introduces the listener to Brinell's judicious use of back-phrasing and relaxed approach to a lyric and the ballad "You Go To My Head" or the blues "What's The Use In Getting Sober" shows off how expressively she wields her delightful voice. But it's when she scats on "Give Me The Simple Life", a bass-voice duet, that the sophisticated understanding of jazz is fully unveiled, with her precise enunciation, clever allusions and intricate vocal improvisations. Brinell will release the new album via Facebook and Instagram Live (Mar. 13th).

Brinell's clear talent has landed her a spot in the finalists' circle for the 9th Annual Sarah Vaughan International Vocal Competition, one of five selected from dozens of submissions. These finalists usually square off in November, but that didn't happen in 2020, when performance venues throughout the New York metro area remained closed owing to the pandemic. The

competition was slated instead for this month, but then was bumped again to Jun. 6th. This June Brinell won't be the only horn player on the ticket: New York-based trumpeter **Benny Benack III**, a finalist in the 2014 Thelonious Monk International Jazz Trumpet Competition, will also compete—the third male singer ever to do so. The shifting composition of winners in these high-profile competitions indicates that pretty soon we're going to have to stop noting when musicians demonstrate excellence across genders and instruments and genres. Consider that Thurman placed as a finalist in the Sarah Vaughan competition in 2013, its second year, and that other singer-horn players have followed.

Three Grammy-nominated singers offer online concerts this month: **Jazzmeia Horn** performs in the Live From Dizzy's Club series, a pay-what-you-wish event (Mar. 4th). **Thana Alexa**, whose *Ona* is up for two Grammy awards this year, reprises the album via live-stream from ShapeShifter Lab (Mar. 7th), a week before the Grammy broadcast. And **Jane Monheit** launches *Come What May* (Club 44), a celebration of her 20-year career, with a concert at Feinstein's at Vitello's (Mar. 12th).

In honor of Women's History Month, free improviser **Judi Silvano** joins Cheryl Pyle's Musique Libre Femmes ensemble as part of the 19th annual Lady Got Chops Festival (Mar. 7th). This gig follows on the heels of the release of *Unity* (Muse-Eek), an explosion of vibrant ambient sound by Sonic Twist, Silvano's masterfully eclectic duo with guitarist Bruce Arnold. ❖