

**Note To Readers:**

As you might expect, we receive many more recordings for review than we can possibly process. To those of you who submit, we thank you for your art and wish you all the best.

**America the Beautiful; Alan Broadbent, piano, composer, arranger.; with the NDR Big Band.**

Broadbent's very first "name gig" was as pianist, arranger and musical director for Woody Herman. He was 22 years old. He recalls those years as important in his musical path and has the warmest of memories of Woody. Eventually though, he left in order to fully pursue his first love: the piano trio. Then, after



Reviews by George Fendel

all these years, what happens? An opportunity to play and arrange with the NDR Big Band, one of Europe's most prestigious organizations. So, it was "full circle" for Alan, as he returned to playing and arranging for this greatly admired jazz orchestra.

And this absolutely stunning album is the result. It consists of eight Broadbent originals, a few which he has recorded previously in the trio context. The finale is the title tune, and I would submit that you've never heard it played and arranged with such passion as this version by a native New Zealander. Other favorites include "Sonata For Swee' Pea," which honors one of Broadbent's musical heroes, Billy Strayhorn; a new take on the changes to "All the Things You Are," which he calls "Between The Lines"; a delicacy he wrote at age 23 called "Love in Silent Amber"; a brisk melody that sounds like it was born in the bebop era called "Sonny's Step"; and "Mendocino Nights", a waltz with a gentle and serene melody line.

On all these and others, the NDR Big Band, an outfit honed to perfection, takes up the pianist's charts and make them sing with pleasure and musicality. And their solo work is full of surprise and excitement. Finally, there's Broadbent the pianist. I'm sometimes troubled to find adequate words to describe him. But let's try these: harmonically rich; romanticist; swing is all important; honest melody lines; love of the tradition; classically influenced; breathtaking virtuosity; and, I would suspect, he's one of those "hopeless" guys who wakes up at 3:30 AM with a new melody in his head. When one person exhibits all those qualities, all that inspiration, there's a word for it — genius. In his humble and quiet way, I believe Alan Broadbent to be just that.

*Jan Matthes Records; 2014; 73:49.*

**The Clare Fischer Orchestra - After The Rain; Clare Fischer, composer and conductor.**

The late Clare Fischer, a most versatile musician, was equally skilled as pianist, arranger, conductor and composer, as evident in his work as jazz pianist, accompanist and arranger for singers like The Hilos, and for his frequent excursions into Latin music. On these two CDs, released through the efforts of Clare's son, Brent Fischer, we are treated to the orchestral, classically-influenced side of his musical psyche. Written

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***The NDR Big Band, an outfit honed to perfection, takes up the pianist's charts and make them sing with pleasure and musicality.***



## **Reviews by George Fendel - continued from previous page ...**

for strings, the music is for the most part gentle, ethereal and thoughtful. It most certainly brings into focus a side of Fischer that many of his fans may have been unaware of. I could "hear it" many years ago on an album called "Songs for Rainy Day Lovers," where Fischer wrote exclusively for strings. His affinity with 19th century classical composers is clear. So, any time you want a little break from bebop, these two stirring (but never jarring) CDs might be a nice place to go.

*Self-produced; The Clare Fischer Orchestra, 2013; appx. 75 min.; After The Rain, 2001; appx. 62 min.*

### **Step On It; Mike Longo, piano.**

Now and then an album like this comes out and reaffirms that, despite things being passed off as jazz these days, all is indeed well in the jazz world. Longo, a decades-long fixture in New York jazz circles, has scored again with a straight ahead trio outing. Two grizzled veterans, bassist Bob Cranshaw and drummer Lewis Nash, complete this superb trio. This time out, Longo opts for a menu of long-admired jazz compositions, a couple of Americana standards, one delightful detour, and a lone Longo original. The jazz standards include the trio's solid and fiery takes on such winners as "Impressions," "Nefertiti," "Cantaloupe Island," "Black Nile" and "Blue In Boogie." The latter was written by Dizzy Gillespie, with whom Longo spent many glorious years as pianist and musical director. The two standards, played with precision and beauty, are "Poinciana" and "My Ship." And perhaps you'll remember the delightful detour, "Tico Tico," of all things! Longo's title tune is a boppy and vital original. On these and several other selections, he, Cranshaw and Lewis brew up a savory stew of middle of the highway, real deal piano trio material. As I said at the outset, these things still happen once in a while.

*CAP; 2014; appx. 58 min.*

### **Dream Your Troubles Away; Kat Gang, vocals.**

Right off the bat, let me assure you that our singer has no connection to a gathering of felines at a veterinary clinic. But Kat Gang, as the liner note writer puts it, never "gets in the way of a good song." I would compare her just a bit with the likes of Maxine Sullivan, another singer smart enough to leave songs "un-fooled around with." And you may be sure that Gang profits from front line sidemen such as Harry Allen, tenor sax, Warren Vache, trumpet, and John Allred, trombone. Additional swing style mavens include Bucky Pizzarelli, guitar, Mike Renzi, piano, Jay Leonhart, bass, and Joe Ascione, drums. And those good songs that she doesn't get in the way of? Thirteen in all, with all-timers like "Say It Isn't So," "In My Solitude," "I Didn't Know About You," "Some of These Days," "More Than You Know" and lots more. All in all this is a solid session from a fresh voice.

*Arbors, 2014; appx. 61 min.*

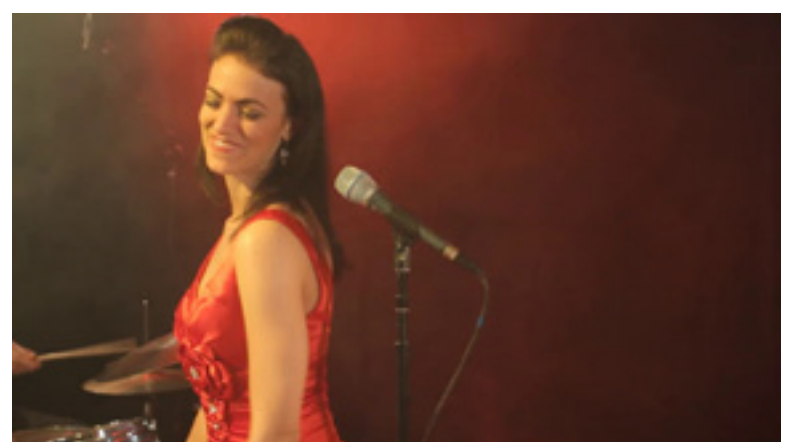
### **Moment to Moment; Cava Menzies, piano; Nick Phillips, trumpet.**

Now and then in this fast-moving, complex world, it's wise to treat oneself to something unabashedly beautiful. And this is it! While technically we have a quartet here with the above named players ably joined by Jeff Chambers, bass, and Jaz Sawyer, drums, this is a serene and stirring exercise in communication

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