



Live at Smalls Jazz Club  
**George Coleman (Cellar Music)**  
*Big George*  
**One For All (feat. George Coleman) (Smoke Sessions)**  
*The Proper Time (ft. George Coleman)*  
**Marcus Persiani (Persiani Music)**  
 by Scott Yanow

Tenor-saxophonist George Coleman, who turns 89 this month, will probably always be best known for his recordings with the Miles Davis Quintet (1963-64) where he succeeded Hank Mobley and preceded Sam Rivers and Wayne Shorter. Coleman has had a busy solo career during the 60 years since, consistently playing with fire and creativity while stretching the hard bop tradition.

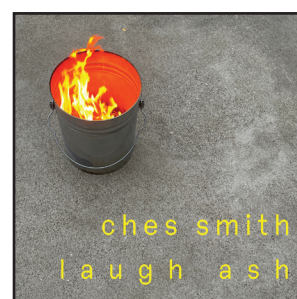
Live at Smalls Club is one of his best recordings of the past decade; 87 at the time of this 2022 set, Coleman stretches out in a quartet with Spike Wilner (piano), Peter Washington (bass) and Joe Farnsworth (drums). Still sounding close to the peak of his powers, the tenor saxophonist provides plenty of surprises throughout the set. "Four" begins with his out-of-tempo reading of the melody before taking a seven-minute solo. He gives both "At Last" and "(Theme From) New York, New York" unusual treatments, playing them at cooking tempos. Coleman tops off "Blues for Smalls" with a surprising high note, caresses the melody of "When Sunny Gets Blue" (a duet with Wilner) and takes some blazing double-time runs on "The Nearness Of You". Throughout the set, which also has some fine solos and sympathetic accompaniment from Wilner, the

apparently ageless saxophonist never runs short of ideas or enthusiasm.

Since it was first formed in 1997, One For All has been one of jazz' top hard bop-oriented combos despite being a part-time group with: Jim Rotondi (trumpet), Steve Davis (trombone), Eric Alexander (tenor), David Hazeltine (piano), John Webber (bass) and Joe Farnsworth (drums). Each of its members have had long busy solo careers, so aligning their schedules for a record date or a club engagement can be tricky. Prior to *Big George*, One For All had gotten together for at least 16 albums (for Sharp Nine, Criss Cross, Venus, Jazz Legacy, Cellar Live and Smoke Sessions labels), but their new set is their first recording since 2015. The first three selections of *Big George* showcase the group on a couple of cooking numbers, plus Alexander's boogaloo blues "Chainsaw". Coleman, long a booster of the band, is on the next three numbers: a medium-tempo blues ("Oscar Winner"), a ballad feature that is mostly taken at a medium-tempo pace ("My Foolish Heart") and filled with his expressive double-time outbursts and a memorable rendition of Hank Mobley's "This I Dig Of You". The arranged harmonies behind Coleman and the other players are particularly memorable. The album concludes with three additional songs sans Coleman, including a Davis feature on a tasteful version of "The Nearness of You" and Rotondi's tribute to Lee Morgan on "Leemo".

While pianist-keyboardist Marcus Persiani's *The Proper Time* proudly states that it features George Coleman, the tenor is only on one of the nine songs. Seven of the numbers (all Persiani originals) have the pianist heading a quintet that also includes Joe Magnarelli (trumpet), Wayne Escoffery (tenor, soprano), Kenny Davis (bass) and Byron Landham (drums). Persiani's music employs complex melodies and original chord changes, some of which one could imagine are from Wayne Shorter's pen. His songs inspire inventive and generally swinging solos. The highlights include the unusual stop-time rhythm during Escoffery's solo on "Little House Mouse", Persiani's improvisation on "Tropic Rain", the '60s Blue Note-style funky jazz of "Walking & Talking" and the brooding ballad "Before You Go". A change of pace is offered on the electric and somewhat eccentric "Mirage". Coleman appears with an altogether different group, a quintet with Persiani, Patience Higgins (tenor), David Williams (bass) and David Gibson (drums), taking a typically inventive and swinging solo on the straight-ahead "Forecast Blues" that holds its own with Higgins' solo that follows. The same unit without Coleman is excellent on the uptempo "Voodoo Call". One can understand the album giving George Coleman a major billing, but it is a pity that Persiani did not feature the great tenor more extensively on his otherwise rewarding album.

For more info visit [cellarmusicgroup.com](http://cellarmusicgroup.com), [smokesessionsrecords.com](http://smokesessionsrecords.com) and [marcuspersiani.com](http://marcuspersiani.com).  
*The One For All* featuring George Coleman album release concert is at Smoke Mar. 14-17. See Calendar.



*Laugh Ash*  
**Ches Smith (Pyroclastic)**  
 by Kurt Gottschalk

Rarely is a record so perplexing and, in equal measure, so enjoyable as Ches Smith's *Laugh Ash*. I have listened to it repeatedly, and quite happily, and still have little idea what to truly make of it. Calling it a "pop outing"

would be a cop-out, even though the processed beats and the warm vocals of Shara Lunon and the deep bass of Shahzad Ismaily suggest something contemporary and potentially populist, whether or not it's destined for mainstream popularity. There are also horn charts and a string section, but it's not a pop record and, despite occasional, brief but burning solos, it's not a jazz record either. Desperate for guidance, I looked at Smith's liner notes and nodded approvingly, saying "uh huh, uh huh," under my breath as he introduced elements of influence: Steve Reich, Beethoven, early hip hop. But the truth is, Smith could have cited anything as an influence: people he's played with (Tim Berne, Mike Patton, Terry Riley) or arbitrary names (Björk, Alice Coltrane, Keith Moon) and I would have scratched my chin and muttered, "yes, yes, I can hear it." And I could just as easily say that *Laugh Ash* is the logical conclusion of the Haitian inspirations of his previous *Path of Seven Colors* and the near perfect, sheer beauty of *Interpret It Well*, which preceded it, and say to myself "yes, yes, I can hear it." And again, it wouldn't be wrong.

I'm going to suggest *Laugh Ash* is a part of something that might be called "New Brooklyn Expressionism," or maybe that should be "Nu Brooklyn Expressionism," a particular pastiche also being mined by the likes of Kris Davis, Tomas Fujiwara and Mary Halvorson—that they don't all live in Brooklyn is irrelevant to the branding (and please, I hope that name doesn't catch on). Ultimately, *Laugh Ash* is the work of musicians with a lot of talent who have done a lot of listening in their lives and are unconcerned about delineation of source or flow. Every January, I start a list of potential best-of-the-year albums for the perfunctory year-end lists. By June, I've usually forgotten about it, so the exercise doesn't gain me much ground. But for 2024, *Laugh Ash* is the first entry.

For more info visit [pyroclasticrecords.com](http://pyroclasticrecords.com). Smith's album release concert is at Roulette Mar. 20. See Calendar.



*The Milwaukee Tapes, Vol. 2*  
**Fred Anderson Quartet (Corbett vs. Dempsey)**  
 by Alex Henderson

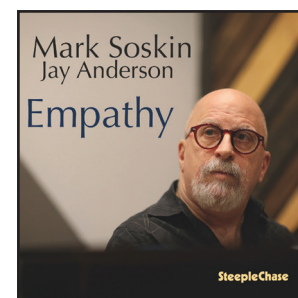
The late saxophonist Fred Anderson (who this month would have been 95) was very much a product of Chicago's big-toned tenor tradition, albeit with a strong John Coltrane influence. And when he brought his sound into the avant garde, the results were often compelling. Anderson is in fine form on *The Milwaukee Tapes, Vol. 2*, which contains previously unreleased live performances in that city from early 1980. Here Anderson draws on influences ranging from late-period Coltrane to saxophonist Ornette Coleman to the AACM (Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians). His Chicago-based pianoless working quartet of that time consisted of Billy Brimfield (trumpet), Larry Hayrod (bass) and Hamid Drake (drums), the same lineup which appears on the preceding first volume (also 1980) as well as the live *Dark Day* album from the year prior (excepting, in the case of the latter, the bassist was Steven Palmore).

The album's most intense moments come on "Our Theme", and like many of the AACM-associated musicians of that era, Anderson brings a great deal of nuance to the table. The mysterious "Bernice", the dusky "Another Place" and Coltrane-ish "3 On 2" are not an exercise in scorching atonality, but rather favor an inside/outside approach and underscore the group's

desire to use some restraint and subtlety. Throughout, Brimfield is featured extensively, including his own "He Who Walks Alone" (the only non-Anderson original of the five tracks), which is a dark, melancholy piece that, as its title indicates, conveys a mood of loneliness and isolation. Like Anderson, the trumpeter (who died in 2012) was also heavily involved in the AACM—and it shows. During the '60s, the AACM became known for an approach to avant garde jazz that made extensive use of space and was more restrained than the dense, blistering free jazz coming out of NYC. There is plenty of passion on "Another Place", "Bernice" and "3 On 2", but the two horn players never sound like they're going out of their way to be abrasive. And even on "Our Theme", the intensity is something the cohesive quartet builds up to.

*The Milwaukee Tapes, Vol. 2* reinforces that the early '80s were a highly creative period for Anderson and his Windy City colleagues.

For more info visit [corbettdempsey.com](http://corbettdempsey.com)



*Empathy*  
**Mark Soskin/Jay Anderson (SteepleChase)**  
 by Ken Dryden

Pianist Mark Soskin and bassist Jay Anderson are old friends who fit hand in glove in any setting on stage or in the studio, having recorded several albums together over the past two decades. The COVID-19 pandemic was especially hard on New York-based musicians as venues closed and social gatherings were discouraged. When Soskin invited the bassist over to play in the midst of it, Anderson suggested playing via webcam, where they could interact without risk, and thus the seeds of this 2022 recording were planted. While Soskin chose the music, penning ten of the twelve tracks, Anderson is far more than just an accompanist. He engages the pianist in musical conversations as the two weave intricate lines that compare with some of the landmark piano-bass meetings ever recorded.

The tracks range from music Soskin recorded decades ago to new works. While the arrangements are laid back and mellow, they allow for musical expression that is sometimes sacrificed in more uptempo approaches. "Saints and Sinners" is the tantalizing opener, which constantly shifts focus in unpredictable ways without losing its bright, upbeat mood. The pianist's deliberate ballad, "Shadow Dancing", is made for a lyric (though it may present challenges for a vocalist). Anderson's inspired solo serves as its centerpiece. The ballad "Little Fingers" begins with a delicate air but as the tempo and intensity increases, it keeps revealing new facets. The passionate "Breathless" draws the listener in with its lush, circular theme, as the musicians develop the love story within it. The luxurious jazz waltz "Wanderlust" shimmers with Anderson's creative bass line blending beautifully with Soskin's lush chords. The engaging and lyrical "Better Times" delivers its message quite well without words. The duo also performs two pieces by jazz piano greats: the intimate setting of McCoy Tyner's waltz "Three Flowers" gives listeners a chance to stop and smell (or maybe hear) the roses and Joe Zawinul's "In A Silent Way", which contrasts with Miles Davis' landmark recording, evoking both beauty and a brooding air in this moving, acoustic setting.

For more info visit [steeplechase.dk](http://steeplechase.dk). Jay Anderson is at Mezzrow with Kenny Wessel Mar. 5. See Calendar.

# Blue Note NEW YORK

## MARCH SHOWS



FEB 23 - MAR 3  
**CHRIS DAVE  
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 ISAIAH SHARKEY**



MAR 5-10  
**GONZALO  
 RUBALCABA**



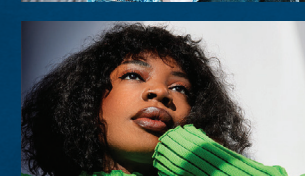
MAR 11 & 25  
**EDDIE PALMIERI  
 SPRING RESIDENCY**



MAR 12-13  
**KIEFER TRIO**



MAR 14-17  
**NATE SMITH  
 & FRIENDS**



MAR 18 + APR 1  
**MELANIE  
 CHARLES**



MAR 19-24  
**RAVI  
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MAR 26-31  
**HIROMI'S  
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**STEVEN  
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 ORCHESTRA**



MARCH 20  
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 RELEASE CONCERT  
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APRIL 4+5  
**INCOGNITO**



APRIL 8  
**KEIKO  
 MATSUI**



MAY 10+11  
**MADELEINE  
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 JILL SOBULE**



JUNE 5  
 BLUE NOTE JAZZ  
 FESTIVAL PRESENTS  
**MS.  
 LISA FISCHER**



JUNE 14  
 BLUE NOTE JAZZ  
 FESTIVAL PRESENTS  
**ELIANE  
 ELIAS**