

Benny Green: *These Are Soulful Days* (Blue Note 99527; 45:00) ★★★★★ Green arranges eight Blue Note repertoire tunes just-so for himself, guitarist Russell Malone and bassist Christian McBride. The pianist exhibits his considerable bluesiness on Horace Silver's "Come On Home," and his sweet uptempo swing and trademark parallel octaves on Silver's "Virgo." On Lee Morgan's "Hocus Pocus," Benny delights with his relaxed swing; Malone does the same.

Michael Weiss: *Milestones* (Steeplechase 31449; 63:12) ★★★★★½ New York-based, should-be-better-known Weiss here teams with bassist Paul Gill and drummer Joe Farnsworth for an A-1 set. The leader, who consistently picks choice notes for his percolating solos, injects freshness into "Love For Sale" and "Stella By Starlight," which features a tasty Gill improv.

John Hicks: *Something To Live For: A Billy Strayhorn Songbook* (High Note 7019; 66:44) ★★★★★½ A worthy journeyman, Hicks digs deep with boisterous drive in essaying 11 by Strayhorn. Teamed with bassist Dwayne Dolphin and drummer Cecil Brooks III, the pianist matches Stray's warmth and melodicism with winsome arrangements and improvisations.

Steve Kuhn: *Countdown* (Reservoir 157; 55:40) ★★★★★ Longtime vet Kuhn's contemporary statements are filled with a crackling musical intelligence. The pianist swings in a personal manner—the title track and "Four" are among those with rhythmic snap and extensively developed lines. Bassist David Finck and drummer Billy Drummond are empathetic sidekicks.

Kenny Drew Jr.: *Winter Flower* (Milestone 9289; 66:51) ★★★★★½ Armed with monster technique and a deep musicality, Drew Jr. gets better and better. Here with bassist Lynn Seaton and drummer Tony Jefferson, the pianist is constantly engaging, highlighting melody and time. The lyrical title track sports a customary flowing improv, and

Herbie Nichols' "117th Street" is filled with treasures.

Horace Tapscott: *Dissent Or Descent* (Nimbus West NS 509; 67:13) ★★★★★ The late Tapscott could swing with feeling and precision, and he could let fly,

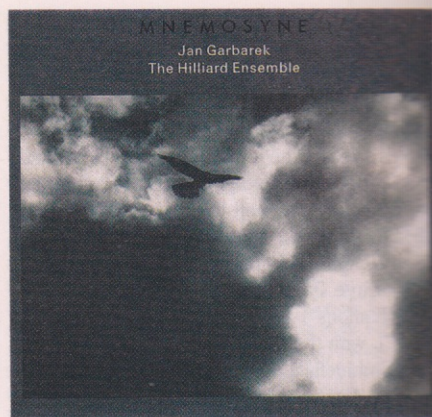


creating squibs of sound. He exploits those aspects with drummer Ben Riley and bassist Fred Hopkins on this 1984 date. Monk's "Ruby, My Dear" finds Tapscott both delicate and thorny.

Mike LeDonne: *To Each His Own* (Double-Time 135; 53:21) ★★★★★ With the knockout pair of bassist Peter Washington and drummer Mickey Roker, LeDonne (a '90s Wynton Kelly) nails everything.

Mike Wofford: *Synergy* (Heavywood; 72:29) ★★★★★½ The West Coast wonder's first CD in ages is farther-reaching than any previous album. In conjunction with bassist Rob Thorsen and drummer Joe LaBarbera, Wofford opens almost everything up.

Adam Berenson: *Dialectical Constructs* (Dream Play; 69:46) ★★★★★½ Most of what's here is loosely structured and is delivered with musicality and empathy by Berenson, bassist Scott Barnum and drummer Bob Moses. "Incarnation Dialectic" is a bossa that blends tradition with an appealing quirkiness, while "Ricerar," Ornette's "The Sphinx" and "Inheritance" are among those that celebrate unshackled spontaneity. To order, contact Berenson at: <http://members.tripod.com/~adamberenson/>. **DB**



**Jan Garbarek
Hilliard Ensemble
Mnemosyne
ECM New Series 78117-21700**

★★★★

Mnemosyne reunites the saxophone improvisations of Jan Garbarek with the four voices of the Hilliard Ensemble. In 1993, they combined to record *Officium*, a startlingly successful exploration of sacred music from the Middle Ages. The saxophonist and singers have continued to perform as a quintet, and their new recording reflects a broader interest in devotional music from a range of cultures. Named for the Greek goddess of memory and mother of the Muses, this ambitious two-CD set compiles 20 diverse tracks linked by the expression of man's spirituality across 22 centuries. Familiar composers such as Thomas Tallis and Hildegard von Bingen are represented here, but many other pieces are drawn from eclectic sources including ancient Greece, Native American and Peruvian folksongs, contemporary Estonian composer Veijo Tormis and Garbarek himself.

As with *Officium*, the performers make the unusual combination of horn and singers sound natural and compelling. Garbarek's rapturous work on soprano horn provides a creative spark, alternately blending with the Hilliard voices or improvising against their harmonies. On more traditional pieces, the soprano soars and swoops as the singers follow a predetermined course. Open textured tracks like "Eagle Dance," derived from aboriginal songs, give the quartet an opportunity to improvise and interact freely with Garbarek. The ensemble's performance of von Bingen's "O Ignis Spiritus" expresses its mysticism with an eerie, floating quality as soprano sax and voices intermingle. *Mnemosyne* offers the same fusion of early music and improvisation as its predecessor, but further challenges the listener by exploring alternatives in its search for glory.

—Jon Andrews

Mnemosyne: Quechua Song; O Lord In Thee Is All My Trust; Estonian Lullaby; Remember Me My Dear; Gloria; Fairfax Africanus; Agnus Dei; Novus Novus; Se Je Fayz Dueil; O Ignis Spiritus; Alleluia Nativitatis; Delphic Paeon; Strophe And Counter-Strophe; Mascarades; Loiterando; Estonian Lullaby; Russian Psalm; Eagle Dance; When Jesus Wept; Hymn To The Sun. (58:04/46:58)

Personnel: Jan Garbarek, soprano and tenor saxophones; David James, countertenor; John Potter, tenor; Rogers Covey-Crump, tenor; Gordon Jones, baritone.