

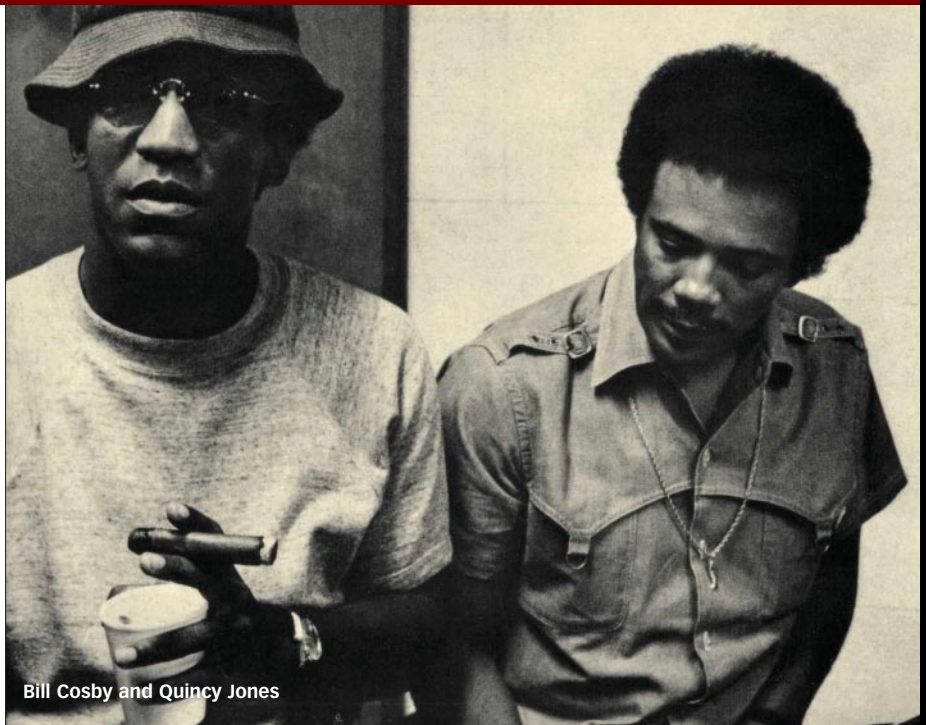
By John Murph

The *New Mixes Vol. 1* is an intriguing remix project based on the newly reissued album *Quincy Jones & Bill Cosby: The Original Jam Sessions 1969* (both on Concord). The remixes sort of pick up where the Dream Warriors left off in 1990 with their daffy hip-hop hit “My Definition of a Boombastic Jazz Style,” which sampled Quincy Jones’ kitschy “Soul Bossa Nova.” Much has changed in the DJ culture since then, but spin *The New Mixes* a few times and you’ll realize some things remain the same.

A bulk of these remixes can be mistaken for anonymous, early ’90s acid-jazz sides. From the fat, swarming Hammond B3 organ, percolating rhythm guitar and boom-bap kick drums on Mario Caldato Jr.’s “Jimmy’s Theme” to the retro-futuristic glitches, popping percussion and French chanteuse on Cornershop’s “Valeurs Personelles,” there’s an old-school hip-hop feel that many would argue sounds dated. That might be the case on some cuts, but the upside is that the remixers are applying hip-hop techniques drawn from its “Golden Age,” when the genre was rapidly absorbing a multitude of sonic information and reconfiguring it into brilliant collages.

Many of the remixes are built on scraps from Jones’ soul-jazz sessions for Bill Cosby’s late ’60s, early ’70s comedy show. Having almost no finished songs to reference, the remixers had more room to interpret the late ’60s jam-session vibe that Jones concocted with the likes of Joe Sample, Ray Brown, Paul Humphrey and Arthur Adams without worrying about “defacing” jazz classics. That makes it easier to enjoy, say, Los Amigos Invisibles’ Latin disco “Pelando” or Matthew Herbert’s art-geek joint “Technically Amateur Mix.” But the hokey theme song “Hikky-Burr,” featuring Cosby repeating the nonsensical, onomatopoeic title, loses its appeal after one listen.

Leave it up to the Munich’s Compost label (Jazzanova, Trüby Trio) to come up with the summer’s tightest soundtrack of jazz-laden electronica. The eponymous debut by **Intuit** is Compost’s jazz-savviest disc yet. Make no mistake, the production team of drummer Thomas Braun and bassist Till Maragnoli keep the rhythms and



Bill Cosby and Quincy Jones



grooves firmly rooted in multiculti funk, from Afro-beat (“Wewa” and “Peace of Mind”) to Brazilian bounce (“Criança das Ondas”). But it’s the excellent guest appearances of Andy Bey, Dean Bowman, Flora Purim, Ray Obiedo and Airto that elevate the proceedings. Much like how Brit electronica innovators 4Hero craft mesmerizing soundscapes for the likes of Terry Callier and Mark Murphy to sing over, Intuit reinvents Bey as a jazztronica crooner. And judging from “Planet Birth,” Intuit knows its jazz history, because the duo constructed a funky groove reminiscent of Gary Bartz’s NTU Troop and Horace Silver’s *Total Response* trilogy. Even though the lyrics were penned by Braun and Maragnoli, it’s easy to believe that “Planet Birth” is a lost track from Bey’s 1970 cult classic *Experience and Judgment*. He sings of reincarnation over chunky Moog bass line, haunting background vocals, twinkling vibraphones and snappy horns. (Bey also assists Intuit on its Afro-futuristic “Western Sunrise.”)

In fact, much of *Intuit* is glorious summation of pan-African futurism with distinct links to the Black Power-ed jazz-funk from influential labels such as Strata-East, Tribe, Flying Dutchman and Cadet. The moody “A New Beginning,” featuring galactic vocals from Cécile Verny, sounds like a fantasy session by Sun Ra, Bobby Hutcherson and Rotary Connection. Then there’s the melancholy “Let It Flee,” featuring urgent pleas from vocalist Dean Bowman, that could easily pass for one of Gil Scott-Heron’s urban parables.

Joseph Malik’s second disc for Compost, *Aquarius Songs*, is edgy psychedelic soul that touches on personal and socio-political angst. The Nigerian-Scottish singer again collaborates with multi-instrumentalist and producer David Donnelly, who insulates Malik’s ghostly cries with sweeping, cinematic orchestrations that are heavily influenced by Charles Stephney and David Axelrod. With a shimmering tenor that falls somewhere between Curtis Mayfield and Bill Withers, Malik ignites the emotional fuse on “Aquarius Song,” where he sorrowfully sings about an absent father, and on “Race Relations,” a meditation on being multiracial. In short, *Aquarius Song* is a thought-provoking, sonically exquisite masterpiece of 21st-century soul.

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Grooves

The compilation *[re:jazz] (re:mix)* (Kriztal) is the result of a cat-and-mouse game initiated by the Ifracom label. Last year, Infracom curated material from its 10-year-deep catalog for *[re:jazz]*, which converted electronica tunes into organic jazz. On *[re:jazz] (remix)* those same tunes are reincarnated once again, as electronica. It's a high-minded gambit that doesn't always work, such as with Jazztronik's remix of "Cupid & Orlando," which limps along aimlessly, and Yukihiro Fukutomi's take on "Second Sight," which starts off with misty piano flourishes but never evolves into anything memorable. But things fare better with the Society's lovely "La Mouche Lumière," which is filled with enchanting piano, alluring French spoken word and spectral strings, and with Bugge Wesseltoft's Spanish-tinged "Arena," where he recasts the song as a Keith Jarrett-inspired piano-trio outing embellished with electronica swirls. No surefire hits pop out, but Les Gammas' energetic 2-step makeover of "People Come Running," featuring a nice flugel-horn solo from Till Brönner, as well as Frost & Wagner's dubbed-out "Torch of Freedom" and Nicola Conte's samba-fied "Quiet Nights" will get the masses moving.

There are no structural deficiencies in the source material for *The Porter Project* (Kriztal), on which guitarist, vocalist and producer **Billy Paul Williams** recontextualizes a batch of Cole Porter tunes into chilled-out ear candy. Williams' ragamuffin take on "I've Got You Under My Skin," featuring attractive vocals from Lauren Carter, and the dreamy "Easy to Love," which employs Afro-Cuban percussion, are done in good taste. But for the most part *The Porter Project* fails to excite—there are simply too many interchangeable Cole Porter projects these days. Also, Williams' sensibilities lean closer to smooth jazz than electronica's more adventurous side. Songs like "Love for Sale," "Gigolo" and "Be a Clown" are remodeled into the sort of innocuous cushion music that NPR uses between stories.

As with Cole Porter, there's gluttony of Stevie Wonder tributes, especially in the neosoul sector. Madlib's one-man ersatz jazz



project **Yesterdays New Quintet** serves up a baffling tribute with *Stevie* (Stones Throw). As an idiosyncratic hip-hop producer and DJ, Madlib brings a jazz sensibility to his sample-based music, but when he actually *plays* the keyboards, vibes, bass and drums—as is the case here—his studio brilliance is vastly overshadowed by weak musicianship. His inchoate, almost antivirtuosic noodlings have a certain initial charm that wears off quickly. The samba take on "Visions" goes nowhere, the reverb-heavy "Superwoman/Where Were You Last Winter" just drones on and the hazy rendering of "Rocket Love, Pt. 1" nearly implodes. *Stevie* would have made a better homage had Madlib brought some of the rhythmic fire he displayed on *Theme for a Broken Soul* (Stones Throw), his transcendental broken-beat project with DJ Rels, or his tribute to Weldon Irvine Jr., *Monk Hughes & The Outer Realm* (Stones Throw), also under the Yesterdays New Quintet guise. (No denying he's prolific.) Or Madlib could have simply brought his remix gifts to some of Wonder's original cuts as he did with Blue Note's *Shades of Blue*. Instead, *Stevie* amounts to a meandering failure.

One of the more fascinating and heartfelt remix projects to come along is **Tangle Eye's** *Alan Lomax's Southern Journey Remixed* (Zoe). Imagine if Lomax brought along maverick producers Craig Street and Moodymann to his field-recording excursions and found out a way to give work songs, gospel shouts and blues numbers a subtle electro-bump without sacrificing any of their raw emotional punch. The production duo of Scott Billington and Steve Reynolds excels at giving makeovers of *real* old-school songs like "John Henry's Blues" and "Home" without sounding gimmicky—unlike, say, Moby's gospel-blues sampling hit "Find My Baby." The banjos, piano,

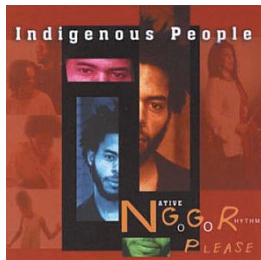
slide guitars and washboards retain their rustic splendor as Tangle Eye sometimes complements the originally barren instrumentation with tasteful bass, organs, drums and various horns and strings. This CD captivates with each listen.

Mocean Worker's *Enter the MoWo!* (MoWo!) is an uneven tribute to jazz boogaloo. Despite such esteemed guests as Bill Frisell, Houston Person, Jane Monheit and Steve Bernstein, the CD can't shake much of its kitchiness. Worker is actually Adam Dorn, the son of legendary producer Joel Dorn, so it comes as no surprise that the disc's most significant references are the glorious sides his dad produced for Atlantic. In fact, Dorn even loops Rahsaan Roland Kirk's flute playing in tandem with vocals by Rhinôçerôse's Franck Gauthier on "Shamma Lamma Ding Dong." The nonsensical song title should give you clear indication of the results; the tune sounds like some discarded Us3 track. Actually, much of *Enter the MoWo!* has a musty scent to it, from the Portishead-sounding ballad "I'll Take the Woods," featuring vocalist Ambrosia Parsley, to the acid-jazz opener "Chick a Boom Boom Boom." Things freshen up on the groovy bossa nova "Salted Fatback," featuring wonderful work from Person and Frisell, and the dramatic "Move," which, thanks to Hal Willner's turntable work, has the cinematic sweep of a Blaxploitation flick chase scene. The disc's best moment, however, is Dorn's remix of Nina Simone's "Blackbird," which manages to sound less trendy and more singular as he places the singer's plaintive cries in a cavernous soundscape of ghostly reverb, eerie percussion and rippling piano.

Although *Lounge Story 2* (Dreyfus) features some outdated acid jazz—Moondog's 1969's "Lament I, Bird's Lament" is now used to peddle SUVs—gems like Carol Ventura's "I Want to Be With You" pop out here and there. With a heavy emphasis on understated-vocal tunes, *Lounge Story 2* titillates on Soulscape's melancholy "Love Shines," Hajime Yoshizawa's sunny Brazilian jaunt "I Am With You" and Povo's riveting deep-house workout "Shihab's Habit," featuring a delightful piano solo from

Heine Hansen. But elsewhere *Lounge Story 2* falls flat when it gets too cheeky, as on Patchwork's frictionless take on "Summertime" and the snoozy version of "Round About Midnight" by Eddy and Duss with Lilian Terry.

Ozomatli is a Southern Californian multicultural group that blends Latin rhythms and melodies with hip-hop, funk and jazz. On its third disc, *Street Signs* (Concord), Ozomatli adds North African and Arabic music to its sound as the band tackles social issues on "Believe" and "Love and Hope." For all its splendid musicianship and earnestness, however, *Street Signs* is an overheated mess. Blame it on Clive Davis' success with Santana's *Supernatural*, but it seems that Ozomatli wants to appeal to every urban demographic, from using rated-PG rap on "Street Signs" and "Who's to Blame" to barrio-fueled, "raise your fists" chants and suave Latin-pop vocals on "(Who Discovered) America?" But ultimately, it all sounds anonymous.



Indigenous People's *Native Go-Go Rhythms Please* (Flavateria) is perhaps the best go-go-fueled jazz-funk excursion since Miles Davis' *Amandla*. Having already proven a mastery of deep house, drum 'n' bass and funk with his outstanding 2000 disc, *Rhodes Ahead*, keyboardist Marc Cary brings the same high-level command of go-go rhythms from his hometown of Washington, D.C. The CD features an inspired guest appearance by Roy Hargrove and the funky, backend thrust of Terreon Gully and Tarus Mateen. The soulful "Let It Be," featuring wonderful vocals from Keith Ailer, is the CD's brightest moment, with Cary laying down thick, colorful harmonies and squiggly counter-melodies. **JT**



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