



Yosef-Gutman Levitt

Soul Song

SOUL SONG
★★★★½

Yosef-Gutman Levitt was born and raised in South Africa, started playing the electric bass when he was 16, and two years later moved to the United States to attend Berklee. After a period in New York, he became disillusioned with both his playing and the scene, so he dropped out of music, moved to Israel in 2009 and had a successful technology business.

In 2019 Levitt returned to music full-time, this time playing the acoustic bass guitar. He

Kaisa's Machine

Taking Shape

GREENLEAF
★★★★★

The great Michael Hamburger said that the whole project of modernism — and jazz is the quintessential modernist art form — was a continuing conflict/tension/dialogue between the essentially rural (bucolic, pastoral) and the urban. There's a strong hint of that in Kaisa Mäensivu's music. She left her native Finland seven years ago and has since been coming to terms with the still overwhelming confluence of cultures and musical styles that is New York.

It used to be said that the Finns are a people silent in two languages, and there's a certain gentle truth in that. Kaisa's been listening quietly since she came to America and her solo on "Dream Machine" is a quasi-autobiographical picture of her coming to terms with a noisy, polyglot city. Even the cover image, with a few flower-buds dotted around her dress, shows she's not leaving her old world entirely behind. Finland, in its odd way, is a different kind of cultural melting pot, and so that instinct is already in her. What's happened since the first album, though, is that the bass, instead of being a routine component of the rhythm section, has become the main compositional voice of the

credits his time away from trying to make a living out of music with him developing his own original style.

Soul Song is Levitt's eighth recording as a leader. His previous, *Upside Down Mountain*, was a trio date with pianist Omri Mor and drummer Ofri Nehemya. *Soul Song* adds guitarist Lionel Loueke, who attended Berklee at the same time as the bassist and has long been a musical friend.

Throughout the 14 Levitt originals, the quartet sounds very much like one voice, exploring the folkish and often spiritual melodies with subtle creativity. The individual statements are a logical outgrowth of the ensembles and the playing of the four musicians is very compatible, adding variations to the themes and reacting instantly to each other's ideas. It is easy to enjoy the sound and unclassifiable style of the group, which can be thought of as a latter-day Oregon. Their music is gentle but never sleepy, and there are enough mood and rhythmic variations to hold onto one's interest throughout this quietly delightful outing.

—Scott Yanow

Soul Song: Chai Elul; Soul Song; Myriad; Song Of The Sea; The Tender Eyes Of Leah; Amud Anan Duet; Torah Tsiva; Lanu Mosh; Kave El Hashem; Devotion; Tikum; Kol Dudi; Desert Song; Hashkama; Amud Anan. (61:04)

Personnel: Yosef Gutman Levitt, bass; Lionel Loueke, guitar; Omri Mor, piano; Ofri Nehemya, drums.

Ordering info: yosefgutman.bandcamp.com



group. Her bowed part on "Sink Or Swim" is a perfect miniaturization of what her music is now about.

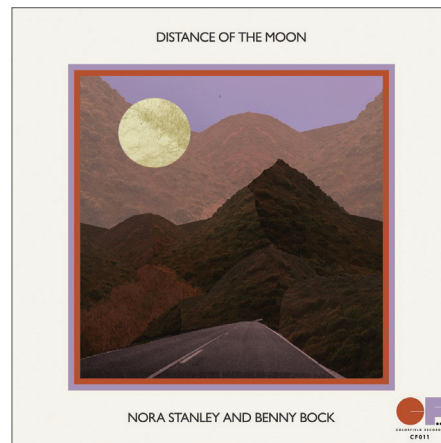
Taking away the piano on "Gravity" was a clever stroke; this group really is Kaisa's machine. The group around her is responsive and tough minded, but they know who's boss. This is a debut record of a sort, but only in the sense that all great creative records are debuts. There will be much more to come.

—Brian Morton

Taking Shape: I; Floating Light; Dream Machine; Gravity; Aurora Unbound; II; Better Intentions; Sink Or Swim; III; Shadow Mind; Sizzler; East Dessert First. (62:34)

Personnel: Kaisa Mäensivu, bass; Tivon Pennicott, tenor saxophone; Sasha Berliner, vibraphone (3, 4); Max Light, guitar; Eden Ladin, piano; Joe Peri, drums.

Ordering info: greenleafmusic.com



Nora Stanley & Benny Bock

Distance Of The Moon

COLORFIELD
★★★★½

This brief album of evocative, deceptively lightweight instrumental sketches pulls from a variety of traditions and styles. The thing about young people is that they don't draw the same genre boundaries their parents and grandparents did. You can't scare them by pointing out that, say, "Vista Ahead" is pure smooth-jazz, dripping from the speakers like melted butter as Nora Stanley and guest guitarist Jeff Parker, a man whose hip credentials are unimpeachable, play unison lines with Jacob Richards laying down a quiet but emphatic beat, heavy on hissing cymbals, and synths filling out the arrangement in a Thundercat/Kassa Overall style.

Stanley's saxophone is recorded extremely closely, so that the clapping of the keys are practically as loud as the notes themselves, and she overdubs two and three times, harmonizing tightly with herself. On "Assembling," strings and percussion swirl behind her, creating a backing track reminiscent of lush '70s soul, or at least its smoky Soulquarian reincarnation; the tripled horns could have come off D'Angelo's *Black Messiah*. Meanwhile, the haunted-sounding piano on "Maurice" brings to mind Tom Waits. "Two" is even more indie-jazz, oozing vaporwave synths laying down a bed of hold music over which Stanley lays off-kilter, disjointed lines that draw from Pitchfork-friendly R&B, before a pedal or a production effect warps them into a shimmering heat haze. "Like Smoke" features Mark Guiliiana behind the kit; it lives up to its title, floating through the room and gradually drifting away.

—Phil Freeman

Distance Of The Moon: Hawk Hill; Assembling; Vista Ahead; Maurice; Interlude; Into The Flats; Like Smoke; Peaches; Two; Distance Of The Moon. (30:34)

Personnel: Nora Stanley, saxophone, synthesizers, percussion, kalimba, drum programming; Benny Bock, piano, Fender Rhodes, Hammond B-3, pump organ, synthesizers, baritone guitar, percussion, drum programming; CJ Camerieri, trumpet, French horn; Jeff Parker, guitar; Daphne Chen, violin, viola; Owen Clapp, upright bass; Doug Stewart, electric bass; Mark Guiliiana, drums; Myles Martin, drums; Jacob Richards, drums; Abe Rounds, drums.

Ordering info: colorfieldrecords.com