

## Fretboard Feats & Finesse

**Yotam Silberstein** is part of a “second wave” of Israeli jazz musicians to arrive in New York in the early 2000s (the first wave included bassists Avishai Cohen and Omer Avital and guitarist Amos Hoffman, who all arrived in the early '90s). On *Standards* (Jojo; 43:22 ★★★★★), the guitarist is accompanied by the rhythm tandem of bassist John Patitucci and drummer Billy Hart on a varied program ranging from serene (Nelson Cavaquinho’s hauntingly beautiful “Beija Flor” and an alluring bossa rendering of “Stella By Starlight”) to swinging (Miles Davis’ “Little Willie Leaps” and George Coleman’s byzantine bopper “Lo-Joe,” featuring the 89-year-old tenor saxophonist himself as special guest). Silberstein also turns in a restful acoustic guitar rendition of Richard Rodgers’ “If I Loved You,” while Hart is showcased on Tommy Flanagan’s sprightly “Eclipse.”

Ordering info: [jojorecords.com](http://jojorecords.com)

Another Israeli guitarist of that second wave is **Gilad Hekselman**. On *Life, At The Village Vanguard* (La Reserve; 80:30 ★★★★★), he stretches out in the hallowed jazz club alongside pianist Shai Maestro, bassist Larry Grenadier and drummer Eric Harland on a set of originals and two well-chosen covers. Hekselman’s eighth as a leader opens with the spacious, rubato “Re-birth” before they collectively dive deep into a dramatic 14-minute meditation on John Coltrane’s “Equinox.” Other highlights include the conversational “Far Star” and the revved-up “Urban Myth,” which has Hekselman dropping in a quote from Monk’s “Green Chimneys” in the middle of his heavily effected guitar solo.

Ordering info: [giladhekselman.bandcamp.com](http://giladhekselman.bandcamp.com)

Slovenian guitarist-composer **Samo Salamon**, who delivered brilliantly on 2022’s all-acoustic *Dolphyology*, switches gears on *Dances Of Freedom* (Samo; 44:12 ★★★★★). Joining keyboardist Vasil Hadžimanov and shamanic drummer-percussionist Ra Kalam Bob Moses in an adventurous free-for-all, Salamon alternates between banjo, electric and steel-string acoustic guitar on the atmospheric “Cream Of Emotion,” the cinematic “Free Dances” and the pulsating, sci-fi-sounding “Pans.” Salamon bears down on banjo on the tumultuous “Dirty Zone” then wails on steel-string acoustic on top of Moses’ Afrocentric hand percussion on “Conga.” And he summons up more eccentric choices on the dramatic synth-laden “Indian Base.” For adventurous ears only.

Ordering info: [samosalamon.com](http://samosalamon.com)

Listening to **Gordon Grdina**’s gentle, luminous renderings of Tim Berne compositions from 2022’s *Oddly Enough*, where he alternated between oud, acoustic guitar and dobro, it’s hard to imagine that this is the same player who participated in such a caustic collaboration as *Duo Work* (Attaboygirl; 38:34 ★★½).



Armed with distortion-laced electric guitar and cacophonous MIDI guitar, Grdina is joined by bombastic drummer Christian Dillinger on aural onslaughts like “Dissolution,” “Ash,” and other spiky vehicles of frightening intensity.

Ordering info: [gordongrdina.bandcamp.com](http://gordongrdina.bandcamp.com)

*The Door Is Open* (OA2; 53:17 ★★★★★) is **Randy Napoleon**’s second volume dedicated to the music of eccentric Michigan-based composer Greg Hill. Backed by a core group of pianist Rick Roe, bassists Rodney Whitaker and Lucas LaFave, drummer Quincy Davis and vocalist Aubrey Johnson, whose facile, disciplined doubling elevates the proceedings, the guitarist brings a warm, appealing tone and Wes-inspired sensibility to the varied program. Guitarist and vocalist execute intricate unisons on the vibrant title track, the buoyant “Escape To Cat Island” and the delicate titular jazz waltz while Johnson steals the show with her freewheeling scatting on the tempo-shifting “Spa-Taneity.” Napoleon shines on the all-out swingers “Skyline” and “The Last Pop Tune,” the “Cantaloupe Island”-sounding “Motel Blues” and the poignant ballad “April Song.”

Ordering info: [originarts.com](http://originarts.com)

Icelandic guitarist **Mikael Máni**, the youngest of this bunch, delivers an impressionistic gem in *Guitar Poetry* (ACT; 32:27 ★★★★★½). Essentially a solo guitar outing with a couple of tracks featuring overdubbed guitar parts (the gently persuasive “Arachne’s Magical Weaving” and the swirling, psychedelic “Next Time”), it showcases the 28-year-old guitarist on refined and subtle compositions like “She’ll Arrive Between 10 & 11,” which opens with gently picked notes and ends in fusillades of distortion-laced catharsis, and the delightful and delicate “Katie, Not Klara,” which finds him deftly alternating between fingerstyle playing and plectrum playing. In some ways, Máni’s third as a leader recalls Pat Metheny’s intimate, reflective and highly expressive *New Chautauqua* from 1979. **DB**

Ordering info: [actmusic.com](http://actmusic.com)



### Fay Victor/Herbie Nichols Sung *Life Is Funny That Way*

TAO FORMS

★★★★★

Fay Victor is known for her unique vocal style, a blend of scat, spoken word and straight-ahead crooning. Thirty years ago her husband introduced her to pianist Herbie Nichols, the man who wrote the music for Billie Holiday’s *Lady Sings The Blues*; his compositional style combined bop, Dixieland, world and classical music. He was not well known in his lifetime, but today he’s considered one of the great unsung jazz composers.

Victor started writing lyrics for his tunes, performing them with the Herbie Nichols Sung band she put together in New York City in 2013. She’s now recorded 11 of these compositions and they’re outstanding.

“Life Is Funny That Way,” based on Nichols’ “Double Exposure,” opens with her scat-singing the lyric in harmony with Michaël Attias on saxophone, before the band enters and she takes off on a striking scat interlude. Anthony Coleman’s piano intro to “Lady Sings The Blues” is part classical, part blues; Victor’s take reinvents the tune with long sustained notes, shifting from high tones to a growl, while Coleman deconstructs the melody with the help of Attias and the bass of Ratzo Harris.

Victor scats her way through “Shuffle Montgomery,” trading phrases with Attias on baritone saxophone, before stepping back to let the band take flight. “Non-Fraternization Clause” closes the album with a free excursion that shows off Victor’s vocal pyrotechnics and the chops of the band, with the work of Harris’ bass and Tom Rainey’s drums particularly outstanding. —j. poet

**Life Is Funny That Way:** Life Is Funny That Way; The Bassist; Bright Butterfly; Sinners; All Of Us; The Culprit Is You; Shuffle Montgomery; Tonight; Lady Sings The Blues; Twelve Bars; Descent Into Madness; Non-Fraternization Clause. (73:29)

**Personnel:** Fay Victor, vocals; Michaël Attias, alto and baritone saxophones; Anthony Coleman, piano; Ratzo Harris, bass; Tom Rainey, drums.

Ordering info: [taoforms.com](http://taoforms.com)