

THE JAZZ CRUISE

Cabins are still available for this week-long (Jan. 27th-Feb. 3rd) cruise around the Bahamas, featuring such jazz legends as Randy Brecker, Gary Burton, Freddy Cole, Jay Leonhart, Eddie Palmieri, Houston Person, Phil Woods and many many more.

THEJAZZCRUISE.COM, \$1,950-2,500



Christmas Time is Here Knoxville Jazz Orchestra (Shade Street)
The Nutcracker Suite Tim Sparks (Tonewood)
Christmas Stomp The Grand St. Stompers (s/r)
Song of Simeon Will Scruggs Jazz Fellowship (s/r)
 by Andrey Henkin

CHARLES MINGUS THE JAZZ WORKSHOP CONCERTS 1964-65

As with those of Miles Davis and John Coltrane, bassist Charles Mingus' groups of the '60s were among the most groundbreaking in jazz, though perhaps underappreciated. That should change with this Boxed Set, seven CDs of concert recordings from New York, Amsterdam, Monterey and Minneapolis, all but one receiving previous official release and featuring such players as Eric Dolphy, Jaki Byard, Clifford Jordan and Lonnie Hillyer on some of Mingus' finest compositions.

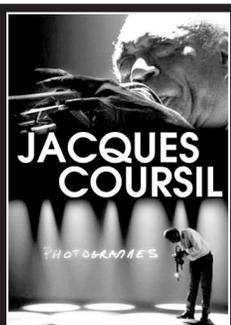


MOSAICRECORD.COM, \$119

JACQUES COURSIL: PHOTOGRAMMES

Jacques Coursil has led a double life. The trumpeter was a big part of the '60s avant garde jazz scene in both New York and Europe but then left music behind for decades to become a respected academic in the field of linguistics. He returned to music last decade with critically-acclaimed albums for Tzadik and Universal. This 43-minute film by Guillaume Dero investigates Coursil's fascinating life through footage of performances, interviews and readings of poetry.

LAHUIT.COM, €16



LP FRAME

These classy, top-loading (no need to take them off the wall!) LP-sized frames are perfect for displaying treasured selections from record collections.

ACOUSTICSOUNDS.COM,
\$52.50 (3 FOR \$139.95)



Let's not think Christmas spirit requires snow, four albums for the upcoming holiday season all come from the country's southern region, where winter precipitation is uncommon but merry music is in ample supply.

The Knoxville Jazz Orchestra's *Christmas Time is Here* represents the traditional model of holiday album (arrangements by trumpeter Vance Thompson, tenor saxophonist Greg Tardy as a principle soloist): faithful readings of classic themes like "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas", "Jingle Bells" or the Vince Guaraldi-penned title track, played with the intensity of a crackling fireplace. A vocalist is on board for "O Little Town of Bethlehem" and a pair of local choirs join the band for the traditional "Children Go Where I Send Thee". But the highlight of the disc is a rollicking take on "Russian Dance" from Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker*.

From a bit up north (North Carolina), guitarist Tim Sparks tackles "Russian Dance" plus other pieces from *The Nutcracker* arranged for solo guitar. This album, receiving a 20th anniversary reissue this year, was recorded just before Sparks won the 1993 National Fingerstyle Guitar Championship and it is clear Sparks must have asked Santa for virtuosic technique. Well, the jolly fellow sure obliged. The readings of the various dances from the ballet are expertly interpreted, with "Chinese Dance" liberally frosted with down-home flourishes. The second half of the album is a suite inspired by the works of Belá Bartók, himself a composer of Christmas carols.

Party time in New Orleans traditionally comes a couple of months after Christmas but that doesn't stop The Grand St. Stompers, led by trumpeter Gordon Au, for their *Christmas Stomp* album. The eight-piece ensemble (two vocalists, drums, banjo, upright bass, clarinet and trumpet) is made up of modern traditionalists and the album's repertoire reflects that, with expected fare like "Winter Wonderland", "Santa Claus is Coming to Town" and "O Holy Night" performed with a puckish insouciance. But the inclusion of "March of the Toys", Satchmo's "Zat you, Santa Claus" and a short Christmas theme medley are unexpected gifts.

Atlanta's Will Scruggs is perhaps the most ambitious of the group, using his *Song of Simeon* to explore the more liturgical and inspirational themes associated with Christmas. The tenor/soprano saxist leads a typical jazz sextet but adds a horn ensemble to flesh out his arrangements as needed. Only a few of these pieces are well known (check out a slinky "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen" or a postbopish "We Three Kings") but Scruggs has woven them all together into a cohesive suite, representing in music the spirituality often lacking in what was once a solemn holiday. But solemnity doesn't mean somnolence and *Song of Simeon* is perfect for celebration.

For more information, visit knoxjazz.org, timsparks.com, grandstompers.com and willscruggs.com. The Grand St. Stompers are at Nathan Bugh Diana Center at Barnard College Dec. 1st. See Calendar.