



Danny Fox Trio



Nate Birkey
Rome

HOUSEHOLD INK 150

★★★★

Nate Birkey is a veteran American trumpeter whose signature style favors a laid-back and low attack; he sings in a husky deadpan whimper, as evidenced by any listen to his work. Spurred by an invitation from drummer Alessandro Marzi, Birkey toured Italy and recorded this session, his 10th as a leader, in Rome. And—surprise—far from swooning into *la dolce far niente* (literally, the sweet do-nothing), Birkey surfaces positively energized in the Eternal City. Is he drawn to the heady joys of wake-up espresso or peering up into the Pantheon's rotunda? Perhaps, but this animated date for Household Ink suggests it's more likely that Birkey was enthralled by a fine Italian rhythm section.

Pianist Roberto Tarenzi unfurls energy in leafy sustains and rich tone across an exploratory palette, recalling Tete Montoliu or Stefano Bollani. Marzi lays down a Turkish bump-and-grind to open "Adriatico," bossa nova touches to "Estate" and "Bianca" and a saucy take of Charlie Haden's "Our Spanish Love Song." Still low-key, but less languid and with no fluffed arpeggios, Birkey echoes the poised, brassy tone of ECM-dreamers Tomas Stanko and Enrico Rava, and his Harmon mute swatches tint a post-Miles Davis aura. His unabashed melodicism, always to the fore, splashes onto his own "Enea" and "Roma di Notte," as well as on a vampy take of Michel LeGrand's "Windmills Of Your Mind." He also revisits favorites of West Coast idol and steady Italophile Chet Baker, "You Go To My Head" and a booting "Let's Get Lost." Heck, Birkey even looks like Ray Liotta. Replays are as addictive as amaretto cookies.

—Fred Bouchard

Rome: Adriatico; You Go To My Head; Estate; Cinema Paradiso; Our Spanish Love Song; How I Find You; Windmills Of Your Mind; Let's Get Lost; Roma Di Notte; Enea; Bianca. (65:52)

Personnel: Nate Birkey, trumpet; Roberto Tarenzi (2, 4, 5, 7–11), Manuel Magrini (1, 3, 6), piano; Luca Bulgarelli, bass; Alessandro Marzi, drums.

Ordering info: householdink.com

Sunshine and Shadows

Sometimes music needs only to make you smile. It doesn't have to swing or spin your head with amazing solos. It might just take a light touch, a little humor, a different kind of originality. And, of course, some music follows a darker path. Let's start in the light.

Alfredo Rodriguez, *The Little Dream* (Mack Avenue Records 1130; 48:32 ★★★★★) With the incomparable plus of having Quincy Jones producing, Rodriguez enjoys the exhilaration of being able to explore freely with his mentor's full support. His technique is obviously of the first order, yet he reins it in throughout *The Little Dream*. His focus, instead, is on composition and encouraging unusual performances. The drums deserve special mention, as Michael Olivera's busy backgrounds play a more atmospheric than rhythmic role. For traditionalists, his double-time brush work on "Besame Mucho" provides satisfaction. But cut the drums from tracks such as "Alegri" and you might mistake Rodriguez's ambitions for sophisticated new-age reverie.

Ordering info: mackavenue.com

Danny Fox Trio, *The Great Nostalgist* (Hot Cup Records 162; 48:03 ★★★★★)

Somewhat like Rodriguez's release, *The Great Nostalgist* showcases the pianist's deft touch as player and composer. Both occasionally present their composition's motif in arpeggiated form. This allows Fox to vary that motif's presentation by altering or using the figure as a springboard toward different improvisational dynamics. On "Truant," it morphs into a skipping single line with repeated references to the motif's key notes. Fox also shares Rodriguez's vision for using drums not to lay down a groove, but to bring the performance into a more intimate perspective. Whether listening to "Theme For Gloomy Bear" or "Emotional Baggage Carousel," Max Goldman's toy-store rattles and

taps are essential to Fox's intent.

Ordering info: hotcuprecords.com

Leslie Pintchik, *You Eat My Food, You Drink My Wine, You Steal My Girl!* (Pinch Hard Records 004; 46:32 ★★★★★)

A similar drum aesthetic colors much of Leslie Pintchik's new release, though like Rodriguez on "Besame Mucho," she offers some respite for those who prefer their elements in more familiar order. Start with her old-school approaches to standards: "I'm Glad There Is You" and "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes" evoke upscale listening rooms, where ballads open like flowers in the hands of empathetic caregivers. There's nothing ambitious, or even mildly alarming, on these tracks. But they're gorgeously rendered. Having established her insight into this form, Pintchik presents an equally lovely original, "Mortal," with Steve Wilson and Ron Horton joining her trio to deliver tasteful solos on alto and fluegelhorn, respectively. Beyond that, *You Eat My Food* — mirrors many of the virtues of the Rodriguez and Fox projects: compositional small-group complexity that nonetheless is easy to savor and humor.

Ordering info: lesliepintchik.com

Joachim Kühn Trio, *Love & Peace* (ACT 9861; 46:31 ★★★★★)

Now it's time to send the kids off to bed. Nighttime settles in. On cue, *Love & Peace* begins to play. Gone are the sprightly drums; the piano sinks down to its lower-mid register. Except for some unexpected flourishes on "Barcelona—Wien," tempos slow. There is poetry in these tracks, but they speak solemnly through Kühn's deliberate articulation and Eric Schaefer's tom and open-snare thuds. They even perform the Doors' hallucinatory "The Crystal Ship," with appropriate gravity. It's definitely worth hearing, as long as sunrise is a few hours away.

DB

Ordering info: actmusic.com/en