

# JAZZ

**ELAN MEHLER** displays his confident command of the keyboard; **MARIA SCHNEIDER** continues to hit new orchestral heights; plus the live takes that you won't have heard from UK jazz stalwart **CHRIS BARBER**

## Instrumental insight

ROGER THOMAS *applauds Maria Schneider's big band disc*



**MARIA SCHNEIDER:**  
astonishing feel  
for orchestration



### MARIA SCHNEIDER ORCHESTRA

**Sky Blue**  
artistShare AS 0065 63:07 mins  
BBC Music Direct £14.99

Anything new from Maria Schneider is always welcome, but this recent release on the unique artistShare label (recordings are funded by subscription-like 'micropayments' from supporters) is almost more than we deserve. At a time when any band with more than ten players tends to

be passed off as a 'jazz orchestra', Schneider not only musters a 21-piece unit covering over 50 instruments but writes and arranges for this behemoth with an orchestral sense that borders on the astonishing, particularly in the case of the band's eight-piece brass section. The pieces themselves range from euphonious anthems and folksy ballads to a pleasantly wobbly tango, but in each case the arrangements' elegance belies the intense activity going on below the surface, with rich chord structures and insinuating melodies to the fore. Performed with commitment and sonically faultless, this CD is easily one of the year's best so far.

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**SOUND** ★★★★★



### CHRIS BARBER

**Can't Stop Now**  
Chris Barber (trombone & vocals),  
Andrew Fairweather-Low (vocals),  
Chris Barber Band  
Classic Studio T-5048X 66:26 mins  
BBC Music Direct £11.99

It seems appropriate that this disc from UK jazz stalwart Chris Barber was remastered at Shepperton Studios, also a surviving name from pre-Beatles Britain. Trombonist Barber, now 77, who anticipated pop's impact on the jazz scene, has long steered a course embracing the blues elements of jazz. In this mix of unreleased live takes dating back to the '80s, Barber's trad jazz anthem 'Petite fleur' and trademark trombone-slide homages to New Orleans, share a billing with the bluesy vocals of Amen Corner's Andy Fairweather-Low.

A highlight is 'Big Noise from Winnetka', a riveting 10-minute bass marathon from Vic Pitt, with mandatory drumsticks on strings, which breaks into Cream's 'Sunshine of Your Love'. Although purists may prefer vintage Barber recordings, the performances here have a rawness that amply reflects Barber's enduring live success. *Neil McKim*

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**SOUND** ★★★★★



### FLORATONE

**Floratone**  
Matt Chamberlain (drums),  
Bill Frisell (guitar), Tucker Martine,  
Lee Townsend (production)  
Blue Note 393 8792 48:27 mins  
BBC Music Direct £12.99

The practice of recording several hours of improvisation and leaving it to producers to mould into something saleable goes back to the partnership of Miles Davis

and Teo Macero, although only lately have producers claimed equal billing, as Tucker Martine and Lee Townsend do here. Although this method sacrifices the immediacy that has traditionally characterised jazz, it's unobjectionable if it produces impressive music. Bill Frisell, capable of creating beauty of unbearable radiance or shuddering your bones (often simultaneously) has held my attention during most stages of his odyssey through Americana and beyond, but this mostly seems to be on autopilot. The producers reduce elegant tunes to mush and the occasional glimpses of what Frisell is capable of, as in the glorious smokystack-lightning of 'Louisiana Lowboat', only serve to intensify the disappointment. *Barry Witherden*

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**SOUND** ★★★★★



### ELAN MEHLER QUARTET

**Scheme For Thought**  
Elan Mehler (piano), Andrew  
Zimmerman (trumpet), Tod Hedrick  
(bass), David Moore (keyboards)  
Brownswood BWOOD021CD-P 62:14 mins  
BBC Music Direct £12.99

On his website, young US pianist Elan Mehler compares his 'compositional touch' to Bill Evans and Debussy. Confident speak, but then it helps to have self belief when you're playing in this rarefied area of modern jazz. His reflective jazz works because it is so assured. He chooses notes with care, weighting them tenderly.

There are no real tunes to hang on to in the programme, so instead you immerse yourself in a chilled pool of Mehler's controlled, rather detached abstraction. If it all feels meditatively different it is also because there are no drums. Instead, keyboards are used for colour illumination. Zimmerman's velvet tone on tenor sax plays a more conventional role, beautifully balanced against Mehler's still chording and Hedrick's bass.

*Garry Booth*  
**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**SOUND** ★★★★★

**JAZZ STARTER COLLECTION**  
**82. RICHARD GALLIANO**



**GEOFFREY SMITH**, presenter of BBC Radio 3's 'Jazz Record Requests', pays tribute to the distinctly Parisian sound of accordionist Richard Galliano



**LAST TANGO IN PARIS:**  
 Richard Galliano finds inspiration

**JAZZ IS A** quintessential hybrid, the product of European harmonies crossed with the subtlety of African rhythms. The musical melting pot of New Orleans was its natural matrix, feeding all kinds of idioms into the mix, including the 'Spanish tinge' esteemed by Jelly Roll Morton.

But a parallel ferment popped up in other places too. In Paris, before World War I, working class dance halls known as *bals-musette* throbbed to a hearty blend of folk music from the Auvergne and Italy. Waltzes were a speciality, played with syncopated gusto by the likes of the young gypsy Django Reinhardt. During the 1920s, local musicians started to add American jazz to the brew, and it was further enriched with the Parisian passion for tango from Argentina.

Those elements have given Paris its own vibrant tradition of vernacular music, embodied today in the work of the brilliant accordionist, Richard Galliano. Born in Nice in 1950, he learned the instrument from his father, as well as pursuing extensive classical studies at the conservatoire. Jazz expanded his horizons when he discovered Clifford Brown and Miles Davis, and, in 1983, his career took on another significant dimension when he began to perform with tango master Astor Piazzolla, an alliance that lasted until the composer's death in 1992.

This range of associations endows Galliano's music with a rare

and many-sided appeal. Besides his involvement with Piazzolla's 'New Tango', he has created a 'new musette', reimagining the form in contemporary terms in encounters with exciting, like-minded talents in America and France. The effervescent results illuminate every track on *Gallianissimo! The Best of Richard Galliano*. The compilation conveys the heady variety and virtuosity of the accordionist's achievement, from stalking, thrusting tangos to waltzes – rugged, wistful, lilting – to tearaway sambas. Whatever the mood, Galliano establishes his jazz credentials beyond doubt, in inspired improvisations embracing tough, bebop-style lines locked into the hard-swinging rhythm section. But in addition, the distinctness of his material gives his playing a piquancy, redolent of the Left Bank.

Galliano's mastery and idiom are matched by his partners, particularly guitarist Biréli Lagrène and reedman Michel Portal. And thanks to the London Jazz Festival, fans can savour the special affinity of Galliano and Portal live, at Wigmore Hall on 20 November. ■

**CD CHOICE**  
**GALLIANISSIMO! THE BEST OF RICHARD GALLIANO**  
 Dreyfus FDM 36616-2 £11.99

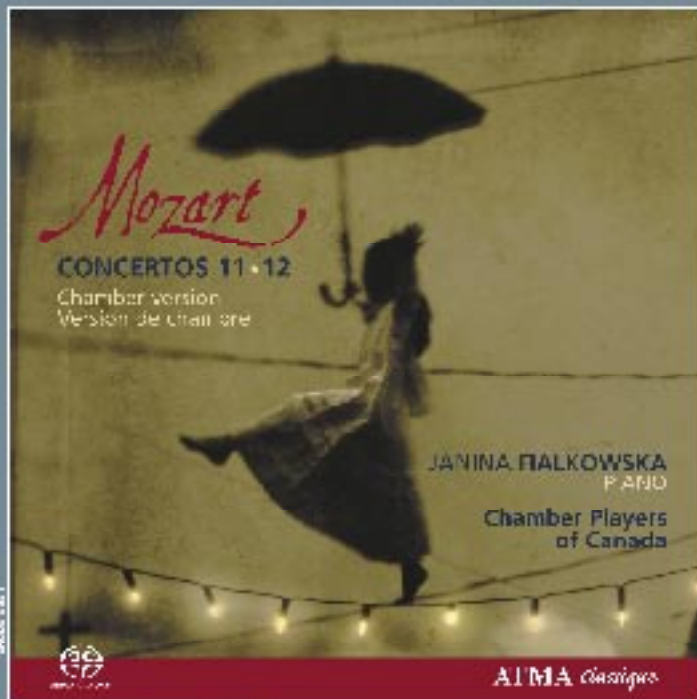
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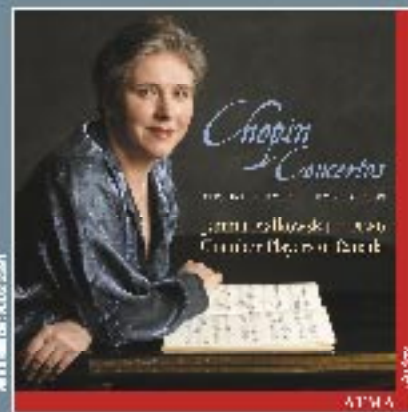
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— JOHN TERRAUDS, *Toronto Star*



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