

## Settling the Score

Perhaps the key figure in European jazz after Django Reinhardt and before the stable of ECM Records is Polish pianist-composer Krzysztof Komeda, who made a classic studio LP—1965's *Astigmatic*—that refigured the ECM sound in many ways. Atmospheric and lyrical yet with a free-minded edge, the album presents a distinctly European sensibility—one as steeped in J.S. Bach, Chopin and Scriabin as it was in Miles Davis, John Coltrane and the Modern Jazz Quartet. Significantly, Komeda partnered with Roman Polanski, creating evocative scores to the director's early films. The composer died at age 38 in 1969, after a drunken accident at a party in Hollywood, where he was scoring Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby*. Polanski said of Komeda: "His music was cool and modern, but there was a hot heart inside it. ... He gave truth to my films. Without his music, they would be meaningless."

Komeda's signature score to Polanski's 1962 breakthrough *Knife on the Water* is a highlight of the latest classy boxed set from U.K. operation Jazz on Film Records: the four-CD **Jazz In Polish Cinema: Out Of The Underground, 1958–1967** (JOF 002; ★★★★★). Brimming with dark-hued romanticism, *Knife on the Water* holds allure for most any jazz fan; it features Swedish saxophonist Bernt Rosengren as a special guest alongside the composer on piano and his Polish rhythm section. Komeda—whose actual surname was Trzcinski, having taken a stage moniker in an era behind the Iron Curtain when it was difficult to reconcile the cultural subversion of jazz with his work as a medical doctor—was an inspired melodist, above all. The tenor tune "Ballad For Bernt" is irresistibly slinky and sexy, while the more combustible "Cherry" evokes Atlantic-era Coltrane. In a characteristic curatorial touch, the set includes grittier live recordings of the main numbers as bonus tracks.

The *Jazz In Polish Cinema* set—beautifully annotated, illustrated and packaged, with diligent remastering—rescues more rarely heard Komeda scores for Polanski and other Polish filmmakers. Among them are scores for *Opening Tomorrow* (lambent, vibes-laced), *The Accident* (shades of noir) and *The Penguin* (jazz-meets-Bach), as well as the avant-tinged, Paris-recorded *Le Départ* (featuring Don Cherry and Gato Barbieri). The occasional Polish vocal or pop pastiche doesn't get in the way too much. The box also includes several soundtracks by keyboardist-composer Andrzej Trzaskowski, leader of multiple pioneering Polish jazz



Krzysztof Komeda

WOLFF/REDFERNS/SKI

bands. A key soloist in Trzaskowski's venturesome, hard-grooving score to the 1965 film *Walkover* was young trumpeter Tomasz Stanko, who also played on some of Komeda's soundtracks (as well as in his *Astigmatic* quintet). Three decades later, Stanko would release a haunted Komeda tribute album, *Litania*, on ECM.

Another recent Jazz on Film Records box is the five-CD **French New Wave: Original Jazz On Film Recordings, 1957–62** (JOF 002; ★★★★★½). This set's centerpiece is the Miles Davis score to Louis Malle's 1958 film *Ascenseur pour L'échafaud* (*Lift to the Scaffold*), one of the trumpeter's unsung masterpieces. Playing some of his most plangent open-horn melodies, Davis led a band with bebop expatriate Kenny Clarke plus the French saxophonist Barney Wilen, pianist René Urtreger and bassist Pierre Michelot. The score is a marvel of what Malle called "elegiac counterpoint," with the group improvising off minimalist chord sketches (foreshadowing the method for *Kind Of Blue*). The young Wilen went on to score the 1959 film *Un Témoin dans la Ville* (*A Witness in the City*), with his studio band including Kenny Dorham; one of this set's rarities, the soundtrack breathes a Davis-like air of cool-toned lyricism.

*French New Wave* features two swinging soundtracks by Art Blakey & the Jazz Messengers, one composed by Benny Golson (*Des Femmes Disparaissent*), the other by Duke Jordan (*Les Liaisons Dangereuses*). Also included: Martial Solal's score for *Breathless*, Michel Legrand's for *Eva* and, least compelling, John Lewis' for *No Sun in Venice* (pastels by the Modern Jazz Quartet). Again, the Jazz on Film presentation is wonderfully holistic; by the time you dig the music, read the scholarly notes and pore over the booklet's long-unseen photos and vintage posters, it can feel as if you've seen the movies in your head. **DB**

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



### Nilson Matta *East Side Rio Drive*

KRIAN/WORLD BLUE 302062428

★★★★½

I spent New Year's Eve, 2000, with Brazilian drummer Duduka Fonseca and his family at their Rio de Janeiro home, with its stunning views of Sugarloaf Mountain. Late into the night, Duduka da Franseca, Nilson Matta and a local pianist entertained with authentic bossa nova, the feeling of the music, the air, the family atmosphere as thrilling as if I was in the presence of Antonio Carlos Jobim.

A modern master of contemporary Brazilian music, bassist/composer Nilson Matta has recorded with Trio Da Paz (with Fonseca), Kenny Barron, Don Pullen, Joe Henderson, Claudio Roditi and his own group, Brazilian Voyage. As fine as those recordings are, *East Side Rio Drive* is something special.

While bossa nova is Brazil's most famous musical export, the country's pre-bossa nova music, with its grand '50s ballroom esthetic and regional flavor, is equally enchanting. *East Side Rio Drive* recalls the organic appeal of that older Brazilian style, yet is thoroughly contemporary.

There's an informality, a sense of flow and fun on *East Side Rio Drive* that is rare to hear on any studio jazz recording. Much of that feeling owes to Matta's excellent band, which includes saxophonist Craig Handy, drummer Vince Chericco, guitarist Romero Lubambo and pianist Edsel Gomez, who perform with an evocative sense of play. Nilson's beautiful bass work, with its singing tonality and richly rhythmic and contrapuntal motion, drives the group on resonant versions of "Blue In Green," Charles Mingus' "Boogie Stop Shuffle," João Donato's "E Menina," Jobim's "Mohave" and Matta originals.

Can't make it to Rio? There's a nighttime of magic on *East Side Rio Drive*.

—Ken Micallef

**East Side Rio Drive:** Sertão; Boogie Stop Shuffle; Mohave; E Menina (Hey Girl); Verde; Blue In Green; Proemio Do Mingus; Luas de Nadine; Angela; Mambo Inn. (50:22)

**Personnel:** Nilson Matta, acoustic bass; Cyro Baptista, percussion and vocals (1), percussion (4, 8); Romero Lubambo, guitar (1, 4, 8); Craig Handy, tenor saxophone and flutes (1, 8), tenor saxophone (3, 5, 9, 10), bass clarinet (4, 8); Ann Drummond, flutes (3, 5, 10); Vince Chericco, drums (2, 3, 5, 9); Edsel Gómez, piano (2, 3, 5, 9, 10); Jesse Lynn, vocals (1); Ayja and Nilson, vocals (5).

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