

# Auditions

## Roland Vazquez Band

*The Visitor*  
(RVCD)

Although he earned his stripes as a Latin jazz artist in the time-honored way, absorbing knowledge of elemental Afro-Cuban rhythms as a percussionist in Clare Fischer's 1970's-era West

Coast combo Salsa Picante, Roland Vazquez was a maverick from the beginning. While his tenure with the pianist's band was relatively brief, he was strongly influenced by Fischer's passion for composition and willingness to bend rules and blend genres. On his own in the early '80s, Vazquez quickly made a name for himself as a different breed of Latin jazz cat, placing his trap set in the center of the rhythmic vortex and creating a fusion of stylistic elements that has evolved into what he today terms "Afro-Latin chamber jazz."

*The Visitor*, an explosion of orchestral brilliance made possible by a grant from the Aaron Copland Fund for Music, is by far his most ambitious effort. It features arrangements that channel the energy and intricacy of original compositions Vazquez recorded years ago with his small ensemble into masterworks for an all-star big band. The charts merge rhythmic intensity, contrasting layers of harmonically dense brass and reed voicings, and impassioned soloing into a majestic whole.

With the leader focused on conducting the demanding arrangements, Cuban drummer Ignacio Berroa and Colombian [i]conguero[i] Samuel Torres anchor the dream rhythm section. The moods created and influences tapped are many. The opening track, "Urantia," begins regally with a brass choir evoking classic Coplan. "Thru a Window" opens serenely with pianist Luis Perdomo's lissome musings before a hurricane-like surge of crackling percus-

sion and big-band machismo is unleashed. The idyllic title track is accented by Roger Rosenberg's mesmerizing bass clarinet licks set against edgy harmonies in the horn section while "Whirlpool" mixes funky, '70s-style fusion elements with the swagger of Henry Mancini's early '60s "Peter Gunn" jazz-cum-rock experiment. The album's lone non-original, "Guarabe," a tribute to its composer, Clare Fischer, rounds out the stylistically daring program with a reverential nod to the bedrock Latin jazz sound that started Vazquez on his three-decade-long journey of music discovery.

—Mark Holston

## Barry Harris

*Live in Rennes*  
(Plus Loin Music)

Throughout his long career, which reaches back to early 1950s Detroit, pianist Barry Harris has been one of the main keepers of the bebop flame. Able to sound like Bud Powell, and a superior interpreter of the Thelonious Monk and Tadd Dameron songbooks, Harris has changed very little about his playing style during the past half-century, except for becoming a bit more individualistic.

An enthusiastic educator, Harris never misses an opportunity to engage audiences in the music he loves. On *Live In Rennes*, a late-2009 trio date recorded just a month shy of Harris' 80th birthday, the pianist discusses song selections; takes requests for notes to play in a spontaneously improvised piece (which he titled "6, 5, 7, 3"); and leads a sing-along on his composition "Nascimento." The French rhythm team of bassist Mathias Allamane and drummer Philippe Soirat lend excellent support throughout the set, which took place at last year's Jazz à l'Ouest Festival.



While some of his spoken discourse is not worth hearing a second time, Harris' playing always is. Several selections receive gentle treatment, which might suggest diminishing strength. But Harris' up-tempo playing on "All God's Chillun Got Rhythm" and his quick chordings on "My Heart Stood Still" should dispel any notions of decline. Harris also interprets Monk, Duke Ellington and Charlie Parker, his lively playing and genial manner making this a charming set by a bebop survivor.

— Scott Yanow

## Bob Mintzer

*Canyon Cove*  
(Pony Canyon/Cheetah)



Most frequently heard with his big band, or as a member of contemporary-jazz faves The Yellowjackets, tenor saxophonist Bob Mintzer

downsizes to a smart and synchronic trio on *Canyon Cove*. Nowadays, a saxophone trio generally suggests free, experimental sounds. Not so here, as Mintzer reaches back to the Hammond B3 organ trio's heyday of the 1960s, a time when vibrant, neon-lit basement dives were jammed with finger-poppin' hipsters.

That said, Mintzer's version of the organ trio — featuring organist Larry Goldings and drummer Peter Erskine — is about as subterranean and smoky as a Canyon Cove. This is open, breezy music, leaning heavily on basic jazz formats such as the blues and bop rhythm changes. Mintzer digs in and then frolics above Goldings' finessed comping, which includes excellent foot-pedal basslines and composite chords. As usual, Erskine's drumming is nothing short of butt kicking.

Abetting this millennial update is Mintzer's meaty bass clarinet, featured on four tunes, and his Syrinx flute, which

