

JAZZ & BLUES

JUNE 2011

FLORIDA



BRAD VICKERS



IRA SULLIVAN



STEPHANIE JORDAN



CHRIS THOMAS KING



DANNY BURGER



BB KING



DEBBIE ORTA



WENDY PEDERSEN



JR. DRINKWATER



DUWAYNE BURNSIDE



JOE DONATO



MIKE GERBER



KURT ELLING

WINNING SPINS

by Bill Meredith

DURING HIS 14-YEAR RECORDING career, vocalist Kurt Elling has received Grammy nominations for every CD he's released. Of course, he didn't actually *win* for any of his first seven mostly original efforts. But he finally collected a Best Jazz Vocal Album Grammy for the themed 2009 release *Dedicated to You: Kurt Elling Sings the Music of Coltrane and Hartman*.

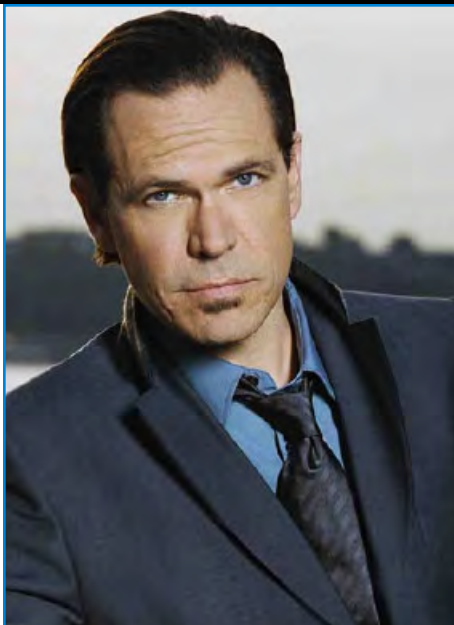
Grammy voters love tributes, especially to classic collaborations like the self-titled 1963 LP by saxophonist John Coltrane and vocalist Johnny Hartman. Elling splits the difference between homage and originality on his new release *The Gate*, eschewing a theme but focusing mainly on creative arrangements of pop covers. And the unorthodox selections, plus impressive performances by the singer and his all-star sidemen, make it likely that his nominations streak will continue.

The Chicago-born singer's vocalese skills sometimes fuel a hipster persona that obscures his musicality, but *The Gate* showcases some of the four-octave baritone's best pure singing. The Don Was-produced disc opens with the unlikelyst of jazz covers, a group arrangement (with Bob Belden) of "Matte Kudasai," from the 1981 *Discipline* album by progressive rock godfathers King Crimson.

Bassist John Patitucci, drummer and percussionist Terreon Guley and longtime Elling pianist Laurence Hobgood morph the original guitar-driven ballad into unrecognizable territory with their delicate intro. Only Elling's reverent vocal—and the solo of underrated Chicago guitarist John McLean—hint at the soaring contributions of King Crimson's singing guitarist Adrian Belew.

Other pleasant surprises come courtesy of 1970s R&B icons. Hobgood's arrangement of the Earth, Wind & Fire hit "After the Love Has Gone" features a dramatic building intro, an aching Elling vocal that covers the breadth of his range, and subtle nuances by tenor saxophonist Bob Mintzer. The pianist also arranged Stevie Wonder's "Golden Lady," on which Elling cops some of Wonder's signature phrasing through lines both sung and scattered.

Two other pop covers fall short by comparison. The Beatles' "Norwegian Wood" suffers from a forcibly different arrangement by



KURT ELLING

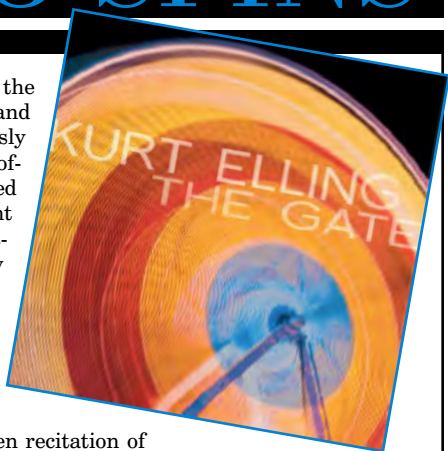
Hobgood and Elling that removes the original's Middle Eastern elements. Its highlight is the absurd middle solo by McLean, who seemed to realize that the only approach to this staggered, outside arrangement was to take it further out. Hobgood also arranged Joe Jackson's 1980s pop hit "Steppin' Out," which, in contrast, is too much like the original. The swinging shuffle was inspired by trumpeter Nicholas Payton's version, but that take didn't feature a clichéd Elling vocal that goes straight to Vegas without passing go.

However, those prove mere hiccups. Miles Davis' "Blue in Green," from the 1959 classic *Kind of Blue*, features Hobgood echoing Bill Evans as Elling hits soaring, sustained falsetto notes that approximate an instrument more than a human voice. The singer even harmonizes with himself on lyrics written by Al Jarreau and Frank Martin. Elling also adds vocal harmonies to the Herbie Hancock-Allee Willis composition "Come Running to Me," arranged with Belden and Hobgood and highlighted by the pianist's playful, intermittent note choices.

WINNING SPINS

A pair of original compositions stand out. On the infectious "Samurai Cowboy," written by Elling and bassist Marc Johnson, the singer is obviously having fun, sounding like he's reciting stream-of-consciousness lyrics over his own multilayered vocal tracks. The only instrumental accompaniment is a sparse, 6/8-timed rhythmic cadence by percussionist Lenny Castro, plus humorous blasts by Mintzer, who sounds like he's literally playing in a different room.

The nine-minute closer, "Nighttown, Lady Bright," was composed by the late pianist Don Grolnick, and Elling's additional lyrics paint a cinematic portrait of a jazz musician's life. Patitucci's evocative solo, and the singer's spoken recitation of words written by Duke Ellington in his 1973 autobiography *Music is My Mistress*, close *The Gate* with supreme elegance.



Kurt Elling performs June 11 at the Miniaci Performing Arts Center in Fort Lauderdale. Visit Southfloridajazz.org or call 954-462-0222.

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WENDY PEDERSEN & DEBBIE ORTA
JAZZ GALS: CELEBRATING THE SONGS OF
BILLIE HOLIDAY AND PEGGY LEE
SUNRISE CIVIC CENTER, SUNRISE/JUNE 3

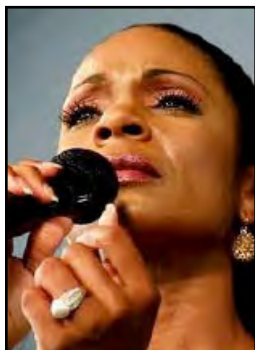
Two of South Florida's most versatile jazz vocalists, Wendy Pedersen and Debbie Orta, will display their range in this tribute to two iconic yet disparate singers. Billie Holiday's husky, aching voice was only part of her complex picture. She was one of the first African-American artists to tour the Deep South in Artie Shaw's band, and one of the first female composers of a future jazz standard with "God Bless the Child" (written with Arthur Herzog Jr. in 1939). Peggy Lee was of Scandinavian descent, toured with Benny Goodman, and had a huge hit with her coy rendition of "Fever." She also penned standards such as "It's a Good Day" and "Mañana (Is Soon Enough for Me)." Pedersen, who's been touring with the vocal quartet Mad Romance, is a UM music grad who's won awards as both a jazz and rock vocalist. Orta is working on her debut jazz CD and is equally adept in Latin, funk and pop styles.



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BM

STEPHANIE JORDAN
DAYTONA MUSEUM OF
ARTS & SCIENCES/JUNE 5

Born into a New Orleans musical family, vocalist Stephanie Jordan possesses a relaxed, stately delivery that radiates the influence of the Big Easy. And she's continued to wow audiences even after things became not-so-easy there. Uprooted from her home after Katrina, Jordan took part in a Jazz at Lincoln Center hurricane relief benefit concert with Cassandra Wilson, Diana Krall and Dianne Reeves. Alongside siblings Marlon (trumpet), Kent (flute) and Rachel (violin), Jordan delivered a passionate rendition of "Here's to Life." Recently, the masterful interpreter joined the Chicago Jazz Ensemble for a tribute to Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan. Of her version of "Lullaby of Birdland," *The Chicago Tribune's* Howard Reich wrote, "The singer had plenty of space in which to improvise—and made the most of it. At some points, the melodic contours and rhythmic syntax of the original were barely perceptible, Jordan inventing creative musical structures at every turn."



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BM



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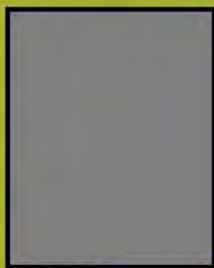
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**IRA SULLIVAN & FRIENDS
DAVIS ART CENTER, FORT MYERS/JUNE 9
ARTS GARAGE, DELRAY BEACH/JUNE 11**

For multi-instrumentalist Ira Sullivan, the secret to becoming a jazz octogenarian is likely not dwelling on the past. Sullivan has always looked to the future—exemplified by his move 50 years ago from Chicago to South Florida after he'd become a rising star in the Windy City. The gifted trumpeter, saxophonist and flutist played with Charlie Parker and Red Rodney in Chicago and toured with Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers before taking that fateful trip south. Sullivan has paid it forward ever since, nurturing jazz stars Jaco Pastorius and Pat Metheny, as well as generations of area musicians. That trend continues through his teaching at



UM's Frost School of Music's Young Musicians Summer Music Camp. Sullivan also recorded a live CD last year with the DePaul University Jazz Ensemble at Chicago's Jazz Showcase. For his Fort Myers concert, he'll be joined by saxman Lew Del Gatto, trumpeter Dan Miller, pianist Jerry Stawski, bassist Scott Smith and drummer Ron Hefner. **BM**

**DANNY BURGER QUARTET
MUSICIANS SHOWCASE @ BLUE JEAN BLUES,
FT. LAUDERDALE/WEDNESDAYS
MRS. MURPHY'S PUB, FT. LAUDERDALE/JUNE 5**

Great drummers rarely have trouble finding work, which explains why South Florida's own Danny Burger hardly ever has a night off. His playing exudes personality, plus technique honed at the University of Rochester's Eastman School of Music in New York. Burger hasn't achieved international stardom, but he's performed with people who have, including Dizzy Gillespie, Jaco Pastorius and James Moody. One of the area's ultimate accompanists, he's recently backed touring artists vocalist Giacomo Gates, saxophonist Houston Person and pianist Norman Simmons. With



his own band, Burger showcases his singular methods, which include the use of cowbells and "tompani," the customized drum on which he blows into a tube to vary the air pressure and change the tuning. Burger's bands include top area talent, and on June 5, he'll be joined by long-time comrade Ira Sullivan at Blue Jean Blues. **BM**

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JOE DONATO WITH MIKE GERBER MIAMI SHORES COUNTRY CLUB, MIAMI SHORES/THURSDAYS

To refer to Joe Donato simply as a “saxophonist” is to sell him short. His capabilities on soprano, alto, tenor and baritone saxes and clarinet make “woodwind player” a more accurate description. The son of Sicilian immigrants, Donato initially wanted to study accordion in his native New Jersey. But a neighbor who taught saxophone hastened an early formative choice. Donato’s emotive, versatile playing caught the ear of the University of Miami School of Music dean Bill Lee in 1969, resulting in a scholarship. Since arriving in Miami on New Year’s Day of 1970, Donato has earned multiple degrees from the school, started a



teaching career and become one of South Florida’s favorite multi-instrumentalists. In pianist Mike Gerber, Donato is paired with another heroic area musician, whose touch, technique and range of ideas keep him in the vanguard of Florida’s jazz elite. **BM**

BRAD VICKERS AND HIS VESTAPOLITANS BIG EASY, HOLLYWOOD/JUNE 2 HURRICANE, MARATHON/JUNE 3-4

Even if you weren’t aware of guitarist Brad Vickers’ bona fides, you’d recognize his commitment to the blues as soon as you heard him play or sing. After all, the cat named his band for a country-blues tuning (also known as open E or open D). Vickers balances his love of old-timey blues and rags with sensibilities rooted in gritty West Side Chicago blues. As a bassist, he’s backed legends such as Hubert Sumlin, Jimmy Rogers, Lightnin’ Hopkins and Lightnin’ Slim. All this is evident in Vickers’ music, as heard on last year’s terrifically entertaining *Stuck With the Blues*, which includes gems by major influences Tampa Red, Jimmy



Reed, Chuck Berry and Jelly Roll Morton. Vickers also expertly conjures his heroes on originals such as “Cold Fish” and “What About Me,” and receives superb support from his band, which includes Margey Peters on bass, fiddle and vocals. The players, including West Side blues-guitar great Bobby Radcliff, reupped for Vickers’ brand-new release, *Traveling Fool*. **BW**

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JR. DRINKWATER AND THE WEST SIDE BLUES BAND BACK ROOM, DELRAY/WEDNESDAYS

Few South Florida blues singers command the sheer soul power of Jr. Drinkwater. The Mississippi native draws on experiences from the cotton fields of his youth to the boxing rings of Miami, where he fought in the late 1960s. Fortunately, Drinkwater left the squared circle for the club circuit, and he's been knocking out South Florida audiences with his sweat-raising performances for decades. Drinkwater has a long association with Delray's Back Room and its guitar-playing owner John Yurt, who plays fiery licks behind Drinkwater along with guitarist Steve Siciliano. The group's West Side Blues Band moniker



not only honors artists such as Magic Sam, Otis Rush and Buddy Guy, but also West Side Liquors, Yurt's family business. Drinkwater is among the nicest cats in the business, but he can cut you bad with that voice on tunes such as "They Call Me Little J.R." and "Last Two Dollars." **BW**

B.B. KING SAENGER THEATRE, PENSACOLA /JUNE 9

At age 85, B.B. King hardly seems ready for the rockin' chair. The King of the Blues recently returned from a tour of Australia, and this summer he's motor-ing through the Southern states before jetting to Europe. Preceding his trip to Florida, King and Lucille will head to Jackson, Miss., and take part in an all-star concert celebrating the Grammy legacy of his homestate. The Indianola-born Riley B. King, a.k.a. "The Beale Street Blues Boy," collected his 15th Grammy for his excellent 2008 release *One Kind Favor*. With deep feeling and supreme artistry, King personalized tunes by Blind Lemon Jefferson, Lonnie Johnson, T-Bone Walker and the Mississippi Sheiks.



Reviving his early history as a popular radio personality on WDIA in Memphis, King now has a home on SiriusXM. His program, *B.B. King's Bluesville*, features his insights into classic and contemporary blues. King always travels with a topflight band, and he plays down-home or uptown blues with equal authority. **BW**

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CHRIS THOMAS KING
VINYL MUSIC HALL, PENSACOLA/JUNE 25
 Chris Thomas King literally grew up in the blues. His dad, swamp-blues great Tabby Thomas, owned a popular juke joint in Baton Rouge. So, naturally, King speaks the language of the blues as easily as breathing, although he's hardly bound by tradition. In fact, his releases have incorporated R&B, hip-hop and hard rock. But King has been most often recognized for his mastery of country-blues, as reflected in his deft acoustic-guitar picking and quietly soulful vocals. He played a fictional composite of country blues artists in the Coen Brothers movie *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* and portrayed Blind Willie Johnson in the documentary *Soul of a Man*. King's discography, however, alternates between traditional and more-modern recordings. Interestingly, his most recent release is titled *Caught in Between*, a good description of an artist who might blister the frets on a version of Freddie King's "Tore Down" and then bust out the acoustic for a seductive read of Robert Johnson's "Come on in My Kitchen." **BW**



DUWAYNE BURNSIDE
BRADFORDVILLE BLUES,
TALLAHASSEE/JUNE 30
 Born in Senatobia, Miss., Duwayne Burnside learned the blues at the side of Hill Country masters: namely, his dad, R.L. Burnside, and the mesmerizing Junior Kimbrough. Obviously, the young guitarist absorbed the feel of this raucous, sometimes majestic brand of blues while playing in the Burnside family band Sound Machine Groove, as well as in Kimbrough's Soul Blues Boys. He also had the opportunity to play with artists such as Albert King, B.B. King and Bobby Blue Bland, and developed a sound that merges hypnotic Hill Country rhythms and tonalities with soul, funk and rock. Burnside's recorded with his own band, the Mississippi Mafia, as well as with the North Mississippi All Stars. And, following in Kimbrough's footsteps, he opened a club, the Burnside Blues Cafe, in Holly Springs in 2004. In 2006, his recording *Under Pressure* was nominated for a Blues Music Award for Best New Artist Debut. **BW**



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JAZZ & BLUES FLORIDA

FLORIDA'S ONLINE GUIDE TO LIVE JAZZ & BLUES

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The Jazz Foundation of America was created in 1988 to help ensure that those who have spent their lives bringing jazz to us are taken care of in their later years.

JFA provides jazz musicians free medical care through a partnership with Englewood Hospital and Medical Center's "Dizzy Gillespie Memorial Fund," and a physician network.

JFA also assists by striving off evictions, preventing homelessness, paying rent arrears, providing emergency living expenses, offering substance abuse counseling, advocacy, and career counseling. In the past year, the JFA assisted nearly 1300 musicians, including saving many from homelessness.

Please help this work to continue by donating to the Jazz Foundation.
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