

roundup

Resonance rising

By Ross Boissoneau

WITH THE MUSIC INDUSTRY FACING DIFFICULT ECONOMIC TIMES, what's the best way to make money in a niche genre like jazz? Well, maybe by not trying to make money at all.

That's an oversimplification, of course, but veteran jazz producer and engineer George Klabin has established Resonance Records as a way to help artists and the music he loves by changing the business model. Instead of a typical setup, he established a 501(c)(3) non-profit, the Rising Jazz Stars Foundation. The foundation serves as the, well, foundation for Resonance Records, which, to date, has signed artists like pianist Mike Garson, trumpeter Claudio Roditi, pianist Bill Cunliffe and guitarist/vocalist Toninho Horta. In addition, the label's Heirloom series will present material from days gone by.

"We're sort of curators," Klabin says. "We're presenting artists who are deserving, and great music of the past. These are musicians who are less appreciated or who should be more known."

Garson, for one, is both pleased and amused at his new status. "It's nice to know that at 60 I can still be a rising star," he says with a laugh.

Garson has played with the likes of the Brecker Brothers, released numerous solo jazz albums and played on many more, including a 12-year stint with Free Flight, the classical/jazz crossover group. In addition, he spent the last 35 years as the on-again, off-again keyboardist for rocker David Bowie.

Yet here he is, part of the Rising Jazz Stars group. "I look at it like I'm always rising. I'm always a student," Garson said.

Klabin agrees, noting that "rising stars" needn't be construed as meaning youngsters. "These people are mature. They've developed their craft," he says.

Klabin says he receives recordings all the time as well as recommendations from other artists, and he checks out all of them — not because they can sell millions of records, but because they may deserve attention.

"There needs to be an organization in jazz not just concerned with how many records an artist will sell," he says. "I'm doing this for love. It's a wonderful experience to work with this music."

▲ **John Beasley** *Letter to Herbie* — Beasley's tribute to Herbie Hancock goes beyond merely playing material composed by Hancock. Such is the strength of Beasley's vision — and Hancock's original tunes —

that the results are unfailingly fresh and enjoyable. Take "Bedtime Voyage," his melding of "Tell Me A Bedtime Story" and the very familiar "Maiden Voyage." It's not so familiar anymore, as Beasley and his cohorts — Christian McBride, Jeff "Tain" Watts and Roy Hargrove — take liberties that ultimately make sense and give it new life.

▲ **Mike Garson** *Conversations with my Family* — This album blends multiple forces that have shaped Garson's work: jazz, rock, classical and New Age. The pianist wrote songs for his family over the course of many years, so these run the gamut — from lush orchestrations to simple solo piano. Nonetheless, they share a sense of exploration and joy, whether it's a quiet reflection or a jaunty blues. And Garson's engaging piano voicings lie at the center of it all are. There's truly some beautiful music here. The album also includes a live-performance DVD featuring Lori Bell, Peter Erskine and Dave Carpenter.

▲ **Andreas Öberg** *My Favorite Guitars* — Öberg performs material associated with such masters of the guitar as Django Reinhardt, Pat Martino and Wes Montgomery. Although much of the disc is

John Beasley



superb, not everything works. He sounds a bit clumsy on "Waiting for Angela" by Toninho Horta, but more than makes up for it with the swinging treatment of Horta's "Aqui, Oh" that follows. And his version of George Benson's "The Changing World" is soft yet stinging. Öberg's accompanists are top-notch, especially Vic Stevens on drums. Stevens reappears on the included DVD, alongside pianist Marian Petrescu, bassist Harish Raghavan and Öberg, for a brief concert set that swings delightfully.

▲ **Gene Harris** *Live in London* — This 1996 live set finds Harris in a straightahead session with his second European quartet. From the first note to the last, the music swings jauntily along, propelled by a rhythm section of bassist Andrew Cleynert and drummer Martin Drew. The two get a workout alongside Harris' piano on the opening "There Is No Greater Love." The late pianist is in fine form, rolling gently through the intro to "Misty" and caressing the keyboard during "My Funny Valentine." Guitarist Jim Mullen gets in more than a few licks, especially on a driving version of "Blue Monk." ▲