

citing young trumpeter Bruce Harris.

Despite the emphasis on originals, one of the album's high points is the opener, "Uranus," a spit-and-polish arrangement of the underperformed hard-bop standard by Walter Davis Jr. (recorded by Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers in 1976); it sparkles in a crisp arrangement, with turn-on-a-dime phrasing. The noir-ish "Organic Consequence" features an eloquent, world-weary Golson solo. "Kat's Dance," written by pianist Adam Birnbaum, is a duo with Riley that begins like a jazz version of a Chopin nocturne, and it becomes a lilting setting for Riley to lean into the harmony in a quietly spectacular tenor solo. The frenetic "Broadway Boogie Woogie," commissioned by New York's Museum of Modern Art, is an interpretation of the famously busy Mondrian painting. Overall, a remarkably assured performance. **ALLEN MORRISON**

## DUKE ELLINGTON & HIS ORCHESTRA

**THE CONNY PLANK SESSION** (Groenland)



Unreleased Ellington studio sessions have a paucity to match the plentitude of his vault live releases, so this crafty little quickie—just 29 minutes—is something of a revelation. The unlikely setup: Duke in Cologne in 1970 to record for synth-maven engineer Conny Plank, a man accustomed to working with Kraftwerk rather than swing titans.

But it's fascinating to hear late-career Ellington go all experimental, embracing studio wackery. Of the two cuts here, meted out in alternate takes, "Alerado" has the surest form. It's akin to a bluesy, flute-infused African samba, as though Ellington's roots have enmeshed with Brazilian rhythms and commenced growing in Germany. One wonders how quickly the takes came after each other, if their approaches were much debated or decided on the fly. The first take is pastoral; the second has a more assertive ensemble that bucks up against Ellington's Jimmy Smith-type organ voicings; and the third is gutbucket hoodoo driven by Harold Ashby's tenor saxophone. This, clearly, is the Duke enjoying himself.

The three takes of "Afrique" could have been lifted from some bizarroland Can project. The first and best is pure

sound painting with sweeps of organ roiling atop a drum roll that is akin to some tribal summoning. Stabbing piano notes break in at intervals, like that needly percussion one encounters in noir films as someone creeps up the back stairs. The old Turk has gone young again.

**COLIN FLEMING**

## SAMMY FIGUEROA

**IMAGINARY WORLD** (Savant)



After three albums co-billed with his band the Latin Jazz Explosion, percussionist Sammy Figueroa stands on his

own for *Imaginary World*. But not entirely—although his name graces the top of the album cover, a bit farther down it notes "featuring Silvano Monasterios & Gabriel Vivas," and that's important stuff. The Venezuelan pianist and bassist, respectively, each contribute four songs to the nine-track set, their compositions furnishing its direction, setting and overall tone.

Monasterios goes first, his four running consecutively. "Bittersweet" bursts to life with a cymbal crash, resounding bass and muscular tandem trumpet and saxophone, all of it anchored by Figueroa and drummer David Chiverton's rock-steady



## DAVID BERKMAN

**OLD FRIENDS AND NEW FRIENDS** (Palmetto)



David Berkman should be more famous. In a jazz world where everyone wants to be a composer, Berkman was born one. He is a natural. The nine tunes here are new, but like all good songs, they sound like they have always been there. "Tribute," for Tom Harrell, moves with its own slanting, sideways step, always toward unfamiliar lyricism. "Past Progressive" and "West 180th Street" are quietly passionate, encompassing melodies. You do not so much listen to them as let them wash over you.

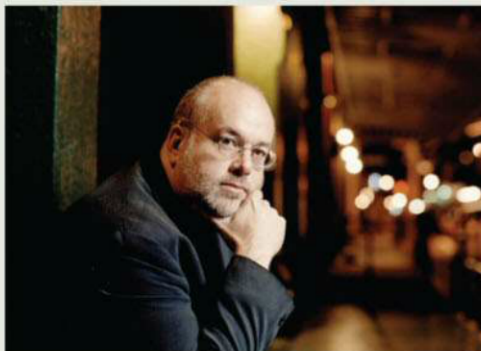
Bassist Linda Oh and drummer Brian Blade are a sophisticated, volatile rhythm team. Adam Kolker, Dayna Stephens and Billy Drewes play five different reed instruments. Berkman's piano flows through everything, in bright streams of intelligence. The solo firepower is formidable. "Tribute" contains a looping soprano saxophone effusion by Kolker and a halting, suspenseful tenor foray by Stephens. On "No Blues No Really No Blues," Drewes leads on alto but Kolker and Stephens are a choir of counterlines all around him. On "Deep High Wide Sky" and "Up Jumped Ming," Stephens, on tenor, is loose, powerful and personal. On "Past Progressive," three saxophones rotate, more intense with each turn. Oh, as articulate as any horn player, also gets major solo space.

But solos are woven into the organic, complete album concept of Berkman the composer-arranger. With all those reed instruments at his disposal, he creates a dedicated color palette for each song. The variations of three-woodwind harmony are vast. On "West 180th Street" and "Psalm," Berkman uses the reeds to create shifting

orchestral backgrounds for his own lucid, precise piano.

In an album dependent on subtlety, nuance and refinement, it is enormously beneficial that the audio quality is so vivid and detailed. The overtones and decays of Blade's meaningful cymbals have never been better recorded.

**THOMAS CONRAD**



▶ "Quietly passionate, encompassing melodies":

David Berkman