



*'Round Midnight*  
Karrin Allyson (Concord)  
by Marcia Hillman

In this, her 13th release for the Concord label, the liner notes state that Karrin Allyson has decided to take a walk around town to hear the voices of women singing in various night clubs in the "wee small hours". Accompanied by her longtime collaborator, guitarist Rod Fleeman, along with Bob Sheppard (woodwinds), Randy Weinstein (harmonica), Ed Howard (bass) and Matt Wilson (drums) - and marking the first time Allyson plays all of the keyboard parts (piano and Rhodes), *'Round Midnight* is a series of vignettes. Each track is approached individually, providing the best possible setting for each song.

The most dramatic track is the starter - Bill Evans' "Turn Out The Stars", which shows off all the nuances of Allyson's voice, a wonderfully soulful tenor read by Sheppard and an overall 'waltzy' quality with stretched-out time. Gordon Jenkins' heartbreaker "Goodbye" is given special attention, particularly with the coloring of Sheppard's bass clarinet. Another bittersweet notable is Fran Landesman-Tommy Wolf's "Spring Can Really Hang You Up The Most". Allyson manages to make it swing with a bluesy feel (sad storyline and all), offering just the right combination of her own wistfulness and a Carmen McRae edginess.

Among the collection of 'usual suspects' - "Smile", "Sophisticated Lady" "I'm Always Chasing Rainbows", Johnny Mandel's familiar "The Shadow Of Your Smile", et al - is a lovely surprise in the form of an Anthony Newley-Ian Fraser piece titled "There's No Such Thing As Love", done in a bare-bones fashion with just voice and piano. In the liner notes, Allyson credits learning the song from a live Carmen McRae recording.

Allyson wanders her way through her imagined nightclubs to arrive at the last - and title - track, which she interprets just as a duet with bass. In this, the 'torchiest' album she has ever done (does anybody really do torch songs any more?), Allyson once again is able to amaze with her voice, ideas and now keyboard abilities.

For more information, visit [concordmusicgroup.com](http://concordmusicgroup.com). Allyson is at Birdland Jun. 1st-4th. See Calendar.



*Le Voyage* Pierre Favre (Intakt)  
*4 New Dreams!* Bruno Toccane (IMR)  
*Consort in Motion* Samuel Blaser (Kind of Blue)  
by Robert Iannapolo

In the past few years, Swiss trombonist Samuel Blaser has made quite a name for himself. His discography is remarkably diverse for someone of his age, including the always-difficult solo album. Blaser is a player of enormous subtlety and beauty yet he also packs power and mastery of extended techniques in his horn that give it breadth and scope.

On countryman drummer Pierre Favre's *Le Voyage*, we get to hear Blaser's trombone as a member of a ten-piece ensemble and as a team player. Favre is one of the founding fathers of European free jazz drumming (going back to his mid '60s work with pianist Irene Schweizer) and has had a long a varied career. He hasn't done a whole lot of directing larger ensembles, which is why *Le Voyage* is a bit of a revelation. His beautiful reed-laden charts show the influence of Gil Evans and Duke Ellington but there are elements that are distinctly his own, including folk-like melodies and an open rhythmic flow. The three main soloists on the disc are Blaser, guitarist Philipp Schaufelberger and clarinetist Claudio Puntin. But this is not a soloists' album per se; it's an album of beautiful, complex compositions played by an ensemble that understands its role. Blaser's part is fleshing out the bottom with lovely low-end harmonies, adding a subtle eccentricity to the music through his command of extended techniques.

Blaser's trombone is all over drummer Bruno Toccane's *4 New Dreams!*, frequently in tandem with Remi Gaudillat's nimble trumpet. The program consists of compositions by Gaudillat and bassist Michael Bates, interspersed with brief free improvisations from various quartet groupings. It's a nice, varied program with lots of open-ended playing. Behind it all the leader's drums discretely direct the music, adding texture as well as rhythmic drive. Toccane's duet with Blaser (the humorously titled "In A Suggestive Way") is one of the special moments of the disc, the two delivering an energetic improvisation that draws on the full resources of their respective instruments. There's lots of energetic freebop (especially Bates' "Van Gogh") mixed with well-paced slower material, the highlight of which is Gaudillat's "Alicante", where the harmonized line is beautifully rendered by the composer and Blaser. *4 New Dreams!* is an auspicious debut for this aggregation. It's a good combination of players and one hopes they stick around long enough to release a few more records.

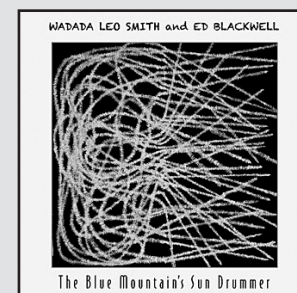
A good way to hear Blaser's vast instrumental vocabulary is on his own *Consort In Motion*. The program is derived from themes composed by Claudio Monteverdi and the more obscure Biagio Marini, two 16th century composers who were the bridges between the Renaissance and Baroque styles of composition. Not the most promising of material for jazz musicians but this quartet (pianist Russ Lossing, bassist Thomas Morgan and the great Paul Motian on drums) redefines the music for the 21st century improvising musician. Blaser essays the melodies with a big buttery tone but once he starts improvising he pulls out all the stops, peppering his solos with all sorts of punchy phrases, growls and smears. Motian gives the music a free floating rhythm, accelerating and decelerating the

tempo seemingly at will. Lossing decorates Blaser's lines with rich chords and sharp jabbing dissonances. It's a remarkable quartet performance that sustains its mood throughout the disc's hour.

All three of these releases are good exemplars of Blaser's art and point to him as one of the most imaginative and productive trombonists working in creative improvised music today. If you're unfamiliar with his music, *Consort In Motion* is a good place to start, then proceed from there.

For more information, visit [intaktrec.ch](http://intaktrec.ch), [instantmusics.com](http://instantmusics.com) and [kindofbluerecords.com](http://kindofbluerecords.com). Blaser's Quartet is at Cornelia Street Café Jun. 2nd. See Calendar.

## UNEARTHED GEM



*The Blue Mountain's Sun Drummer*  
Wadada Leo Smith/Ed Blackwell (Kabell)  
by Duck Baker

Wadada Leo Smith has made duo performances with drummers a regular part of his touring and recording schedules over the years. Previous CDs have documented such collaborations (Yoshisaburo Toyozumi, Günter Sommer, Adam Rudolph and Jack DeJohnette). The music under consideration here was recorded live in 1986, predating the other recordings even though this is its first release. Given the fact that there was no real rehearsal time, it should come as no surprise that the focus is largely on improvisation, though there are few musicians who have blurred the line between composition and improvisation better than Smith. It's probably inevitable that a review will give more attention to the trumpeter, but it would be a mistake to approach the music as anything but a completely balanced collaboration. Both musicians are master dramatists; few have ever used space more convincingly than Smith and few have better understood how to break it up and put it together than Blackwell. The great drummer has rarely been heard to better advantage than he is here and Smith seems to follow his partner's cues as much as leading.

Like several of his fellow Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians musicians, Smith can manage to reach for the stars and musical bedrock at the same time and Blackwell is particularly suited to this approach; never has he sounded more African than he does on this record. The rootsy aspect is emphasized when Smith sings and plays mbira (on "Seeds of a Forgotten Flower" and "Don't You Remember") and he acquits himself quite well as a vocalist, reminding us how many great jazz trumpeters have been excellent singers, right back to Pops. Something about the phrasing?

It shouldn't be said that this is all about grooves and spaciness. The trumpeter shoots off plenty of his trademark, deliciously abstract fireworks and the two musicians keep us engaged at every step. The main feeling is of a story that's being told the only way it can be, with every note, every sound and every nuance coming just exactly where it must.

For more information, visit [adagio.calarts.edu/~wls](http://adagio.calarts.edu/~wls). Smith is at Rubin Museum Jun. 3rd and Le Poisson Rouge Jun. 5th, both as part of FONT. See Calendar.

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