

Unearth
New Hermitage
Independent
(newhermitage.bandcamp.com)



▶ New Hermitage is a quartet from Halifax specializing in free improvisation and ambient music. It is comprised of Andrew MacKelvie (alto/tenor saxo-

phone, bass clarinet), India Gailey (cello), Ellen Gibling (harp) and Ross Burns (guitar and effects). They have been playing together since 2017 and this is their fifth album.

The premise behind *Unearth* is a dystopian world where “pollution has decimated the population of the Earth” and the “surviving humans ... live in nomadic clans.” The titles (*Boiling Off*, *Collecting Vapours*, *Light Through the Rubble*, *Pine Bottle Skylight*, *Stalkers*) evoke a quiet world of limited resources, and a civilization struggling to hold on. All the pieces are inventive and the sounds could be described as “environmental” where strings are as likely to be plucked and scraped as bowed. Lyricism is often eschewed for a sombre layering of sounds. In *Signal Scan*, MacKelvie’s saxophone is ephemeral and whimsical, sounding like someone searching through static for words or other signs of civilization. *Stalkers* has a science fiction air with forbidding noises and some kind of fog horn echoing through a tunnel.

In *Unearth*, New Hermitage have created a sparse and inventive world with scarce resources and a compelling story.

Ted Parkinson

Ontario 559 West
Harrison Argatoff; Ian McGimpsey
Independent n/a (harrisonargatoff.com)



▶ Nick Drake was a British singer/songwriter who released three albums and died in 1974. Since that time he’s attracted a larger-than-cult following who have

enjoyed his soft and melodic singing, subtle guitar playing and enigmatic lyrics. His third album, *Pink Moon*, was his most sparse with just guitar and vocals.

In March of 2020, Ian McGimpsey (guitar) and Harrison Argatoff (tenor saxophone) travelled on Ontario 559 West to Carling Township where they spent three days recording this album which is their tribute to, and interpretation of, *Pink Moon*. They have certainly captured the mood of Drake’s final album with the intricate guitar parts and luscious and melodic saxophone lines. *Ontario 559 West* is a

genuine homage to the earlier album but maintains its own identity: I listened to *Pink Moon* before *Ontario 559 West* and could not identify any specific song or melody that is covered in the later album. The interplay between McGimpsey and Argatoff contains elements of jazz, folk and some freer improvisation. At points Argatoff’s playing and tone are reminiscent of Stan Getz (particularly in the final song *Swings*) and McGimpsey’s guitar is clean and nuanced.

Ontario 559 West is an alluring concept which is executed by two sympathetic musicians.

Ted Parkinson

Recoder
François Houle 4
Songlines Records SGL1632-2
(songlines.com/release/recoder)



▶ Canadian clarinetist/composer/improviser and all-round inspiring musician François Houle works here again with Canadian Gordon Grdina (guitar), and

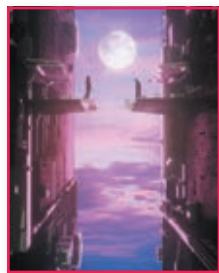
in first-time collaborations with Americans Mark Helias (double bass/clarinet) and Gerry Hemingway (drums). The eight free-improvised Houle/Helias clarinet duets, and seven full-band Houle compositions, are memorable in their smart stylistic modern jazz/contemporary diversities and performance virtuosities.

Houle’s spontaneous single-take improvisations with Helias are short – some less than a minute – yet bursting with musical ideas. Each duet is placed between the longer Houle compositions, giving a welcome contrast. The opening *Prelude* features tonal, short, sweet and calming two-clarinet melodic interchanges by the two masters. At under one minute, it tweaks interest in what is to come. *Interlude 1* features high-pitched contrapuntal lines, like the little birds singing outside my window, and is a great contrast to the fast, complex, dense full-band *The Black Bird* – the track just before it – with its slower guitar solo midsection and touches of superimposed jazz and avant-garde full-band sounds. The brilliant title track *Recoder* has all things musical, from pacesetting staccato guitar opening plucks, full-band, wall-of-sound effects, standard swinging grooves, amazing Houle rapid clarinet lines and clear production values.

Houle writes in his notes that he formulated “an approach that would be mindful of giving each instrument within the quartet complete involvement.” From calm to intense, his brave musical approach drives *Recoder* to timeless musical permanence.

Tiina Kiik

Palladium 2020
Palladium
Independent
(2020palladium.bandcamp.com)



▶ In celebration of the legendary Wayne Shorter’s 87th birthday, inspired impresario and producer Jesse Markowitz has created a two-disc, 22-track recording project featuring 30-plus musi-

cians performing compositions written and/or made famous by the iconic saxophonist/composer. Released on Shorter’s birthday, August 25, this project is also an uplifting response to a world thrown into the harsh reality of a global pandemic. The impressive roster of artists on *Palladium 2020* has been handpicked/curated by Markowitz, and reflects Shorter’s eclectic and luminous creative life, as well as many of his seminal collaborations, including those with Miles Davis, Art Blakey, Wynton Kelly, Weather Report and Herbie Hancock.

There are myriad brilliant contributions to this project, however several tracks stand out, having been culled from some of Shorter’s most memorable recordings. Embracing the length and breadth of his stellar career, it includes the ultra-cool bop exploration *The Summit*, taken from Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers’ 1960 release *Meet You at the Jazz Corner of the World*, and features Nicole Glover’s burning tenor. Consummate pianist Eric Reed’s interpretation of *Sydney* (from Wynton Kelly’s 1959 *Kelly Great*) is not only masterful, but has captured the very essence of Shorter’s deeply sensitive soul.

Of special profundity is legendary soprano player Dave Liebman’s journey around the galaxy, flying on Shorter’s *Footprints*, first released on Miles Davis’ 1966 *Miles Smiles*, and arranged in a fresh way – as an elemental duo with the great Willy Rodriguez on drums. Leibman is as dynamic and rife with ideas as usual. This entire project is a tribute not only to Shorter himself, but to the very elemental power of music – power to heal and transform – which is exactly what Shorter has done through his art for his entire career.

Lesley Mitchell-Clarke