

PRESS KIT STRAIGHT AHEAD



MONTREAL JAZZ SERIES VOL.3

GENTLE SOUL

The album *Straight Ahead* marks the conclusion of the first trilogy of the Montreal Jazz Series, a project dedicated to honoring the rich musical heritage of Montreal and its unique jazz scene. This record captures the vibrant essence of Montreal's culture, referencing the famous Tam-Tams of Mount Royal, a tradition that began in the 1970s at Café Mo-Jo on Avenue du Parc. These Sunday jam sessions,



organized by the iconic Sayyid Abdul Al-Khabyr and Dido, evolved into a cornerstone of Montreal's cultural fabric, bringing together musicians and listeners to explore music in its most authentic form. Artists would cross Mount Royal Street, bringing their djembes, congas, and contagious energy, transforming each gathering into a community celebration of rhythm and melody. It is here that the expression "straight ahead" became synonymous with a profound commitment to music, a philosophy that has guided the Straight Ahead group since its inception.

At the heart of this project is Muhammad Abdul Al-Khabyr, a trombonist deeply rooted in Montreal's jazz scene. From his beginnings with his father, the renowned jazz saxophonist Al-Hajj Sayyid Abdul Al-Khabyr, a member of the Duke Ellington Orchestra, to his collaborations with Montreal's top big bands, Muhammad embodies the essence of Montreal's jazz tradition.

The Straight Ahead group, consisting of Muhammad Abdul Al-Khabyr on trombone, Luc Beaugrand on piano, Mathieu McConnell-Enright on bass, and Martin Auguste on drums, continues to channel this essence of musical freedom.

♪ Stream the album now ♪

<https://bfan.link/montreal-jazz-series-3>

"Power house Jazz in Québec, Montréal Jazz Series 1-2-3"

- Kerilie McDowall Broadcasting, Vancouver



André Leroux

Gagnant du JUNO meilleur album jazz (solo).

"Le saxophoniste André Leroux est un exemple parfait de musicien de classe mondiale."

- James Hale



- Downbeat Magazine



Jean Cyr

Écouté en streaming dans 86 pays.

"Un des 5 meilleurs albums jazz de l'année 2024."

- Christophe Rodriguez, Sortie Jazz Night



- Downbeat Magazine



Straight Ahead

"Quatre artilleurs de luxe qui maîtrisent parfaitement les standards sans oublier leurs compositions personnelles."

- Christophe Rodriguez, Sortie Jazz Night



- Downbeat Magazine



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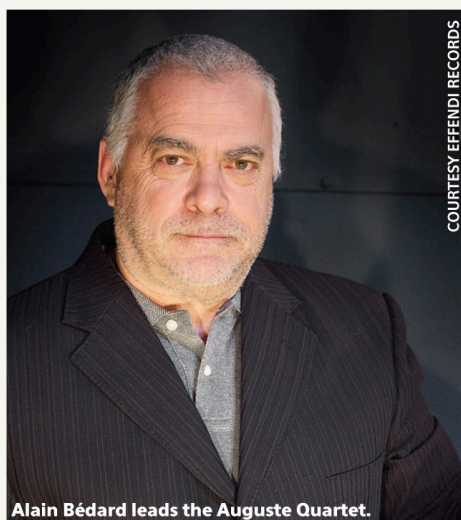
The French-Canadian Connection

Language, politics and economics have historically divided the province of Quebec from the rest of Canada. Quebecois jazz has been somewhat isolated as well, with few natives besides Oscar Peterson and Paul Bley breaking through to global audiences. That hasn't stopped several tranches of musicians from building and sustaining a strong community.

Saxophonist **André Leroux** is a prime example of a world-class musician who has developed a singular voice and maintained a busy career without becoming as well-known as American peers like Greg Osby. The 11 pieces on *Montreal Jazz Series Vol. 1: Échanges Synaptiques* (Disques BG; ★★★★★ 66:21) present Leroux with two distinct quartets — one with pianist Fred Henke, bassist Frédéric Alarie and drummer André White; the other with François Bourassa, Rémi-Jean Leblanc, and John Hollenbeck in the same positions — ably showcasing some of the best players in Quebec. Fluent in the language of Coltrane, Rollins and Shorter, 62-year-old Leroux leads both bands through a program that slides easily between the surging aggression of Steve Grossman's "Take The D Train" and Leblanc's "Up And Up," which is reminiscent of early Weather Report. The two quartets match up well, although the expressive work of Alarie gives an edge of electric urgency to the batch of performances he's on.

Leroux returns as one of six musicians on bassist **Jean Cyr's** *Montreal Jazz Series Vol. 2: Car tu existes* (Disques BG; ★★★★★ 39:47) but the musical setting couldn't be more different. The 67-year-old leader is best known for long stints with popular Quebecois musicians like the late Bob Walsh and Stephen Faulkner, but *Car tu existes* gives him an opportunity to assemble his own program. As experienced as these players are, the brief mixed bag of tunes doesn't give them many opportunities to shine. Consequently, the results sound like a very skilled band picking up some wedding gig money: a 1930s-style dance number, a tango showcase for trumpeter Benoit Gagné, a leader's showcase on "Georgia On My Mind" and a rousing, funky closer that echoes Blood, Sweat & Tears. It might make for a fun night on the dance floor; it's less engaging for dedicated listening.

While Jean Cyr's sextet sounds like a skilled band-for-hire — with a dash of breezy swing and a soupçon of late-career Miles Davis, the quartet **Straight Ahead** sounds like its members might be competing against a top-flight college music unit for DB's Student Music Awards. That's not a knock on the skills of trombonist Muhammad Abdul Al-Khabyr, pianist Luc Beaugrand, bassist Mathieu McConnell-Enright and drummer Martin Auguste, but *Montreal Jazz Series Vol. 3: Gentle Soul* (Disques BG; ★★★★★



Alain Bédard leads the Auguste Quartet.

COURTESY EFFENDI RECORDS

84:20) covers so much territory, with so much facility, that the band sounds overly performative. Relentlessly upbeat, chestnuts like "Moon River," "All The Things You Are" and "What A Wonderful World" seem superfluous on an album this long and provide pretty arid soil for expressive improvisation.

Ordering info: disquesbg.com

On their seventh album, bassist **Alain Bédard's Auguste Quartet** rolls as confidently as Max Verstappen at the Montreal Grand Prix. With fellow veteran Michel Lambert on drums and younger players Marie Fatima Rudolf and Mario Allard on piano and reeds respectively, *Particules sonores* (Effendi; ★★★★★ 55:08) exhibits a broad range of approaches: lively interaction on "Compte-Rendu III," energetic outside blowing on "A Goose Story" and a more relaxed feel on "Il Cappello de mia Sorella." On each of these, Allard demonstrates his expansive vocabulary on several members of the reed family. If *Particules sonores* has an overarching weakness, it's the lack of unpredictable solo placement.

Ordering info: alainbedardauguste.com

A mashup of Canadian franco- and anglo-phones, Haitians, Africans and people of other ethnicities, Montreal's creative music scene has been a hot house for numerous pan-stylistic bands. Guitarist **Simon Angell**, a protégé of Marc Ribot, and drummer **Tommy Crane** have worked extensively in rock and jazz. Now, on *Angell & Crane (For The Living And The Dead)* (★★★★ 41:36) the two have distilled 40 hours of wide-ranging improvisation into a 40-minute swirl of socially oriented pieces. The work slides from the intense to the ethereal and back with seamless flow — even with extremes like the idyllic blend of Angell's acoustic guitar and Charlotte Greve's flute and the hardcore thrust of "Hesa Fredrik," with Sarah Rossy's out vocals. **DB**

Ordering info: angellandcrane.bandcamp.com



Joe Alterman/ Houston Person *Brisket For Breakfast*

JOE ALTERMAN MUSIC

★★★★½

"The Savannah Music Festival ... has become a magnet for those of us who like to have our listening borders stretched," one leading journal noted, and with the appearance of tenor saxophonist Houston Person and pianist Joe Alterman in the 2023 lineup, attendees had their borders stretched and their emotions lifted higher than a Georgia pine. Fortunately, Person and Alterman had their moments recorded and it was a combustive connection between them and an enthusiastic audience. The high point occurred on "Since I Fell for You," and Person's husky, robust horn seemed to summon those who knew the lyrics to sing along with him.

Hearing the roar of the crowd for the quartet, including Kevin Smith on bass and drummer Justin Chesarek, suggests that several moments of the date were done outdoors, and that made a lot of sense given the room needed for the group's explosive sound. And in keeping with the album's title *Brisket for Breakfast*, there are some tasty licks from Chesarek on "Only Trust Your Heart."

Also, there is space where the four of them tone things down, expressing themselves intimately as they did on "Namely You," though here and elsewhere it is hard for Alterman to contain his spirited romps on the keyboard, particularly his way of getting behind Person and pushing his imaginative thunder. Invariably, listening to Person's tuneful iterations of memories of him with Etta Jones surface, and on "The Second Time Around," Alterman takes her place, answering Person's plea for another chance.

—Herb Boyd

Brisket For Breakfast: The Second Time Around; That's All; Only Trust Your Heart; Never Let Me Go; Namely You; Since I Fell for You; You Are My Sunshine. (53:30)

Personnel: Joe Alterman, piano; Houston Person, tenor saxophone; Kevin Smith, bass; Justin Chesarek, drums.

Ordering info: joelalterman.bandcamp.com

JAZZ QUÉBÉCOIS - BY JAMES HALE

The French-Canadian Connection



Available on all platforms



Vol. 1 - André Leroux

Vol. 2 - Jean Cyr

Vol. 3 - Straight Ahead



"The quartet Straight Ahead sounds like its members might be competing against a top-flight college music unit for DB's Student Music Awards. That's not a knock on the skills of trombonist Muhammad Abdul Al-Khabyyr, pianist Luc Beaugrand, bassist Mathieu McConnell-Enright and drummer Martin Auguste, but *Montreal Jazz Series Vol.3: Gentle Soul* (DisquesBG; *** 84:20) covers so much territory, with so much facility, that the band sounds overly performative. Relentlessly upbeat, chestnuts like «Moon River», «All The Things You Are» and «What A Wonderful World» seem superfluous on a album this long and provide pretty arid soil for expressive improvisation."

- James Hale, Downbeat



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MONTREAL JAZZ SERIES

f y

Available on all platforms

Vol. 1 - André Leroux
Vol. 2 - Jean Cyr
Vol. 3 - Straight Ahead



The Power of the Duo

JAN. 24, 2025 — PUTTING THE WORD

"Fire!" on the cover of this issue may seem like an odd choice, given that the L.A. fires have caused so much despair on the West Coast — even within our jazz community, as writer Gary Fukushima documents on page 13.

Maybe subliminally, it was a way to take back the word for the good: a campfire, sitting by the fireplace on a cold winter's day. Or maybe it's just the best way to describe the work of clarinetist Anat Cohen, an artist who exudes joy, the best this music has to offer and a fiery performance style that is downright infectious.

It's been fun to watch her rise to the top of the jazz world, building a true community to make her art glow — from her brothers Avishai and Yuval, who with Anat constitute the amazing 3 Cohens; to the south-of-the-border leanings of Quartetinho; to the Anat Cohen Tentet, an ambitious, driving large ensemble.

With all of it, Cohen seems to form and develop with groups that are mini families, each with its own particular flavor, each feeding a different part of her artistic spirit. That, of course, is especially true when she's playing with her brothers in the 3 Cohens.

But then there's the wonderful bond she has with Oded Lev-Ari, one of the most talented arrangers and composers on the scene today.

In speaking with Ashley Kahn, who wrote this month's cover article on Anat (see page 26), I suggested that Lev-Ari is the Billy Strayhorn to Anat Cohen's Ellington. But he corrected me, suggesting it might be more like he's the Gil Evans to Anat's Miles.

Aside from the fact that both artists would likely brush aside comparisons to those historic jazz partnerships, there's no doubt that their

success comes in no small measure from the work that they've done together.

Last summer, this writer had an opportunity to see them at the International Society of Jazz Arrangers & Composers Symposium at Vanderbilt University in Nashville. Speaking onstage, the two offered deep answers to interesting questions, joked, finished each other's sentences — the bond was undeniable.

And their connection goes beyond the music. When they formed Anzic Records 20 years ago to put out Anat's first record, *Place & Time*, it was Lev-Ari who first called DownBeat to figure out how the whole editorial and advertising world worked. At that time, we figured he was a business manager and had no idea he was such a gifted arranger and composer. He was the dude placing ads. We've come to recognize the entirety of his role in Anat's universe, and we hope to bring his name to an even wider audience.

.....

Speaking of families, and circling back to the L.A. fires, everyone at DownBeat wishes to express our love and sympathy for those whose houses and studios perished during those horrific few weeks in January. As our article reports, John Clayton, Bennie Maupin, Hailey Niswanger and so many others lost their family homes, many more were displaced for days or weeks, and even more simply lived in a state of fear for their own livelihoods and well-being.

This note is being written from The NAMM Show, safely down the road in Anaheim, where the convention is thriving, but many attendees and exhibitors have those artists on their minds. The organization, which embodies the global musical products industry, is helping the relief effort. Go to namm.com to find out more. **DB**

JAZZ AROUND TOWN - BY SCOTT YANOW

The Montreal Jazz Series

"Jazz has been an international music ever since recordings became widely available in the early 1920s. Canada has long had a rich if underrated jazz scene. BG Records, in the first three releases in their Montreal Jazz Series (available as Lps), documents some of the many talents who are active in Montreal today.

The third release, Straight Ahead's Gentle Soul, is a quartet set featuring trombonist Muhammad Abdul Al-Khabyr, pianist Luc Beaugrand, bassist Mathieu McConnell, and drummer Martin Auguste. They perform five of the trombonist's originals and two standards. On a couple of the tunes when Al-Khabyr utilizes a mute, he almost sounds like a trumpeter. His solos and that of Beaugrand are fine, falling into the swinging modern mainstream."

- Scott Yanow, LAJazzScene



Powerhouse Jazz in Quebec

In the Zen - BY KERILIE MCDOWALL

“The trilogy's Montreal Jazz Series Vol 3's, Straight Ahead - Gentle Soul, offers up more with trombonist Muhammad Abdul Al-Khabyr's, “Little Lamb,” a sweet, gentle, journeyed adventure with positive vibes and a surprise melodic quirky twist or two. Opener, “Marjolaine,” offers a poignant portrait-like adventure by quartet with compelling piano dialogue. “Notion for Motion,” sets up a vibrant groove for solos with Al-Khabyr wrapping up the Disques BG Quebec trilogy on positive notes.”

- Kerilie McDowall, Kerilie.com



SortiesJAZZnights - BY CHRISTOPHE RODRIGUEZ

Straight Ahead - Gentle Soul

“Spirit of jazz, are you there? Yes, we answer in unison. After saxophonist André Leroux and bassist Jean Cyr, it’s time for Gentle Soul (2024) by the group Straight Ahead, the third installment in the Montreal Jazz Series. For collectors, these new releases are first available on vinyl, then on all digital platforms, as they should be.

Gentle Soul – In the spirit of a jazz club

Gentle Soul (2024), as philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre once said, is jazz to be enjoyed on the spot. In the spirit of a jazz club, where friends gather to give us a truly successful evening, you’re in for a treat. Leading the way is trombonist Muhammad Abdul Al-Khabyyr, a key figure on the Montreal scene and in major orchestras. We also find pianist Luc Beaugrand and drummer Martin Auguste, culminating in a grand finale with bassist Mathieu McConnell-Enright.

Gentle Soul

Four top-tier musicians who master standards perfectly without neglecting their own compositions. Speaking of which, we open with the title track Gentle Soul — a tasteful, gentle samba that highlights all the talent of the trombonist, supported by keyboard/organ textures that bring a distinctly 1970s flavor to the piece.”

SortiesJAZZnights - BY CHRISTOPHE RODRIGUEZ

Straight Ahead - Gentle Soul

"All The Things You Are and What a Wonderful World

We jump into a well-known standard: All The Things You Are. Authentic, robust, and swinging throughout, our fellow musicians deliver a masterpiece of the blues on a silver platter, each offering a heartfelt chorus. Equally irresistible is What a Wonderful World, performed in a style reminiscent of church choirs. Vibrant and deeply moving—it's a concept that truly works.

Muhammad Abdul Al-Khabyr scats on Moon River

We conclude with Moon River, the classic by Henry Mancini. Our friend Muhammad, temporarily putting aside his trombone, sings and scats gracefully in the style of Chet Baker—a beautiful nod. This is an album that will bring you immense joy!"

- Christophe Rodriguez, SortiesJAZZnights

[Click here to read the full review](#)



Christophe Rodriguez : rod.chris@hotmail.com

Under the elegant pen of our most devoted columnist, discover the best jazz albums and books from Quebec and around the world. Christophe also writes a jazz column for Ted Audio, a classical music column for ludwig.com, and is the author of the book Les grands noms du jazz (The Great Names of Jazz).

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"Haven't had that much fun at Dièse Onze on a Wednesday since... the Brooks era! Launch of the first three LPs in the Montreal Jazz Series by BG Records: ÉCHANGES SYNAPTIQUES by saxophonist André Leroux, CAR TU EXISTES by double bassist Jean Cyr, and GENTLE SOUL by the group Straight Ahead led by trombonist Muhammad Abdul Al-Khabyr. Hats off, and long life to this new record label!"

- Stanley Péan, QuandLeJazzEstLà

Press Release
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 27, 2024

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communications@disquesbg.com
Tél. 514-265-6803



MONTREAL JAZZ SERIES

LAUNCH-SHOW

OCTOBER 23rd 2024

AT DIESE ONZE JAZZ CLUB & RESTAURANT

Montreal, Tuesday, August 28th, 2024 – We are pleased to announce the launch of a series of exceptional albums highlighting the talent and originality of Montreal jazz musicians. The first trilogy feature the formations of **André Leroux**, **Jean Cyr** and the group **Straight Ahead**. We are delighted to introduce them to you through this exclusive collection.

Montreal, the vibrant cradle of Canadian jazz, has always played a crucial role in the evolution of this musical genre. Since the 1920s, the city has been home to countless talented musicians, contributing to the enrichment of jazz history. This series of albums pays homage to this tradition by presenting artists who, although widely respected by their peers, have not yet had the opportunity to shine on the international stage.

Each album in this series has been meticulously crafted to reflect the unique essence of these musicians, capturing their creativity and passion. You will discover original compositions and new interpretations, showcasing the ongoing innovation in Quebec jazz.

We invite you to dive into this musical adventure on **Wednesday, October 23rd, 2023 at 8:00 p.m. at Diese Onze** for a launch show where you can hear the three groups perform some pieces from their album.

You will find these albums on all digital platforms and on vinyl at the Diese Onze record store starting October 23rd, 2024. We hope you enjoy this exploration of Quebec jazz as much as we enjoyed putting it together.



Vol.1 André Leroux
Échanges Synaptiques
André Leroux
 Tenor and soprano sax

Face A
Fred Henke - piano
Frédéric Alarie - bass
André White - drums

Face B
François Bourassa - piano
Rémi-Jean Leblanc - bass
John Hollenbeck - drums



Vol.2 Jean Cyr
Car tu existes
Jean Cyr
 Bass

Roger Walls - trumpet
Benoît Gagné - trombone
André Leroux - tenor sax
Gaétan Daigneault - piano
Alain Bourgeois - drums



Vol.3 Straight Ahead
Gentle Soul
Muhammad Abdul Al Khabyr
 Trombone

Luc Beaugrand - piano
Mathieu McConnell - bass
Martin Auguste - drums

Broadcast source : DISQUES BG

Venue : Diese Onze, 4115 R. Saint-Denis, Montréal, QC H2W 2M7

Date : October 23rd 2024

Opening doors to the media: 18h00

Opening doors to the public: 19h00

Show : 20h00

♪ Click here to listen **MJS1 André Leroux - Échanges Synaptiques** ♪

♪ Click here to listen **MJS2 Jean Cyr - Car tu existes** ♪

♪ Click here to listen **MJS3 Straight Ahead – Gentle Soul** ♪

R.S.V.P.

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