

sound of the words becomes more important than the meaning, and he can twist and turn that sound to his heart's content.

Born to Sing is Morrison's second album for Blue Note Records, although he released five albums on other labels after the first one, 2003's *What's Wrong With This Picture?* These collaborations with the legendary jazz label raise the question: To what extent is Morrison a jazz artist? Like his two biggest influences, Ray Charles and Mose Allison, Morrison blurs genre boundaries by borrowing musical vocabulary from jazz, blues, R&B, rock 'n' roll and country whenever inclined and commanding those inflections with authority. His jazz influences, like Allison's, are resolutely pre-bop and blues-drenched, echoing most obviously Sidney Bechet, Louis Armstrong and Jimmy Rushing.

For someone who claims to disdain musical categories, however, Morrison seems strangely obsessed with them. On his new album, he criticizes a restaurant for playing "some kind of phony pseudo jazz" and, in a later song, declares, "If there's room to move your elbows, then it's close enough for jazz." On "Goldfish Bowl" from the first Blue Note album, he proclaims, "I'm singing jazz, blues and funk; baby, that's not rock 'n' roll." Excuse me, sir, but that is rock 'n' roll, the ultimate mongrel genre.

If music fans are to have the freedom to discuss their favorite records, they need to have words like "jazz" and "rock 'n' roll" to facilitate that discussion, no matter how artists try to censor the conversation. And any such honest discussion would have to conclude that Morrison is a rock 'n' roll singer with a major blues influence and a minor but significant trad-jazz influence.

GEOFFREY HIMES

REZ ABBASI TRIO

CONTINUOUS BEAT (enja)



Flush with the attention he got for his role in furthering the "Indo-Pak" agenda in jazz alongside Vijay Iyer and Rudresh Mahanthappa, the Pakistani-born, L.A.-raised Rez Abbasi expressed the hope he and his cohorts wouldn't be pigeonholed as ethnic outliers. With *Continuous Beat*, a relentlessly probing trio effort featuring bassist John Hébert and drummer Satoshi Takeishi that closes with an uncommonly thoughtful acoustic reading of "The Star Spangled Banner," Abbasi takes another

bold step in resisting any stereotyping.

Coming on the heels of his Invocation quintet's *Suno Suno*, which fused Pakistani Qawwali music and blues, and his Acoustic Quartet's *Natural Selection*, which bridged Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and Joe Henderson, *Continuous Beat* furthers what is turning out to be one of jazz's most intriguing journeys. Abbasi's first trio effort, it affords him the sonic real estate to blanket the music with electronic effects and variations in sonority and tone. Heated slabs of sound and raga-esque effects inform Keith Jarrett's "The Cure," while chiming chords light up Gary Peacock's ambitious, 12-tone "Major Major," another vehicle for what became Jarrett's Standards Trio.

Not to be lost in the sound is Abbasi's shrewdness as an arranger, particularly as a negotiator of rhythmic and harmonic parts. That is revealed most winningly on the aptly titled original "Divided Attention," on which he and Hébert, a perfectly matched partner with a rich tonal palette of his own, begin blithely out of step with each other. *Continuous Beat* originally was to feature Paul Motian. Though he became too ill to participate, the late drummer's presence is felt throughout, both in explicit ways (the inclusion of "Off Minor," a favorite Monk tune of his) and implicit. While imparting a more kinetic approach to the traps, Takeishi is fully attuned to the subtle prods and sweeping strokes of the master. **LLOYD SACHS**

CLIFTON ANDERSON

AND SO WE CARRY ON (Daywood Drive)



For approximately half his life and the lion's share of his career, 55-year-old trombonist Clifton Anderson has suffered by comparison as the only other horn player onstage in a band with his uncle, the incomparable improviser Sonny Rollins. But Anderson's perseverance over the decades has provided an increasingly stronger foil for Rollins, and steadily more satisfying records on the rare occasions when he chooses to set his own agenda.

Despite the time lag between them, *And So We Carry On* hews closely to the template of *Landmarks* (1996) and *Decade* (2008). The playlist consists primarily of Anderson originals, including at least a couple of loving tributes, a hard-bop gem or two, a buoyant calypso and a creamy ballad. Covers that could be hackneyed standards or pop treacle are buffed with

fresh arrangements and inspired interplay. And the personnel are remarkably similar, with the majority of musicians from both his previous records again onboard.

But the upgrades are tangible, born of Anderson's due diligence to his art and his craft. As a songwriter his paeans are sharper, the emotional thrust better articulated, be it the loving sonic massage for his mother on "Alexer Is" or the high-five celebration of his strong-willed wife on "Niokim." As a player, he still eschews the splats, slurs and mugging slides that are the default crowd-pleasers of his instrument. Instead, he favors the clean, clear tone that better showcases the improvements in his nimble bop hopsotch and balladic blues nuance—and check out his extraordinary mute work on "Remember This."

As for the players, why change when you can have the lustrous timbre of trumpeter Wallace Roney on that ballad for your mother, or a Jamaican-born maestro like pianist Monty Alexander goosing your calypso? That said, the few new additions are superb, particularly the dynamic rhythmic duo of drummer Jeff "Tain" Watts and vibraphonist Warren Wolf, whose only two songs bookend the disc in glorious fashion, their inventive fusillade helping to grease the skids around Anderson's rotund tonality.

BRITT ROBSON

ANIMATION

TRANSPARENT HEART (RareNoise)



Animation is Bob Belden's project. He is a composer-arranger-producer-saxophonist who thinks big. He has made ambitious concept albums, like *Black Dahlia* and *New Sketches of Spain*, with huge ensembles full of famous musicians. But *Transparent Heart* uses a quintet comprising 20-something players from Belden's alma mater, the University of North Texas. It is his most personal, edgiest recording to date. It may also be his most important.

Belden's liner notes state his intention: to portray "the sound of Manhattan ... an observation of history through music and sound textures." Such subject matter necessarily leads to extremity and diversity. The title track is as relentless as the city's raw nocturnal energy. "Cry in the Wind" is as pensive as the city's nocturnal loneliness. "Seven Towers" is the chaos and shattering agony of 9/11, violent with splashed colors. Because of digital effects and sampling, *Transparent Heart* never