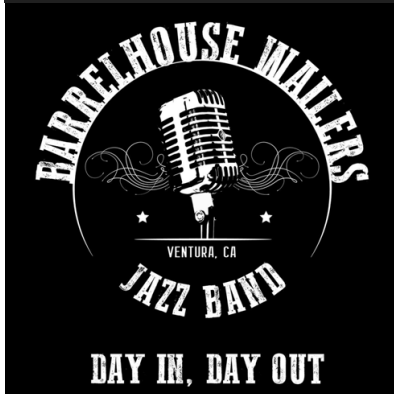


Off the Beaten Tracks

Music News and Reviews by Joe Bebco



Day In, Day Out
Barrelhouse Wailers
www.thebarrelhousewailers.com

The Ventura-based Barrelhouse Wailers have been delighting dancers and lovers of high times around Southern California since 2013. It's a wonder they haven't become regulars on the festival circuit but I expect that to change as soon as things get back to normal. They made a livestream appearance at Pismo last fall and I'd bet festival directors took notice.

This is a band devoted to the fun side of '20s jazz, the jolly-crowds-raising-glasses-in-speakeasies side of things. That said, there is nothing unserious about the musicianship they bring. They have an excellent rhythm section. Percussionist Diamono Andreo has a decked out washboard, then there's David Leoncavallo on bass, Jim Wade on tuba, and Todd Temanson strumming the banjo. They push the frontline forward and had me bouncing around the house. That front line is also hot, hot, hot; Drue Chermak on trumpet, Stan Middleton on Trombone, and John C. Webb on reeds. Middleton has the nickname "Skabone," and I'm not surprised he'd have that background. He takes the kind of extensive solos you only hear from the trombone when a band isn't afraid of entertaining the crowd.

Some of the band members are busy musicians playing with a number of groups and in different styles, several of them older on inspection than I expected them to be. That experience helps make what is solidly traditional jazz seem fresh, even contemporary. I can't imagine a bar crowd that wouldn't love to have these guys on stage. Another thing that helps create a feeling of relevance around their music (I may have buried the lead here) is that seven of the eight tracks on this album are originals! It's not that there aren't new compositions appearing in trad jazz but a full album of them is rare. I may review only one other this year and it is likely to be a swing or hot dance band album.

The notes attribute the tracks to the full band but Facebook posts suggest David Leoncavallo plays a significant part. These are excellent tracks with lyrics that you can absorb over a dozen listens despite catching the gist in a few bars. The arrangements are perfectly suited to those lyrics, complex and melodic. They aren't just shuffling up a classic chord structure and jamming, these are charted through like pop songs.

Karen Parkhouse leads the band and delivers most of the vocals. She's got a strong, bluesy voice and great timing. She gets the feeling of a lyric out, projected to the back of the room, without melodrama. The songs are a bit boozy, thrill seeking, the sort of local band you're excited to go catch on the weekend, every weekend. The album opens with a verse from "Day In, Day Out Rag" that may well set out their mission:

*I get up
Everyday
Go to work
Gotta make that pay
But I've grown tired
Of that same old drag
Tonight I'm gonna have the best night I ever had!*

Middleton provides an excellent male vocal on "Hello Heartache," the type of smoothly bluesy tune that could transcend the genre and find love among Tom Waits fans. "Black Cat" features a hot flute solo when nothing else would do. As things open up again the West Coast festivals will be falling over each other to book these cats, in the mean time you can bring that speakeasy sound home with you and pick up their album.

I Love Erroll, I Love James P.
Paolo Alderighi and Stephanie Trick
www.paoloandstephanie.com

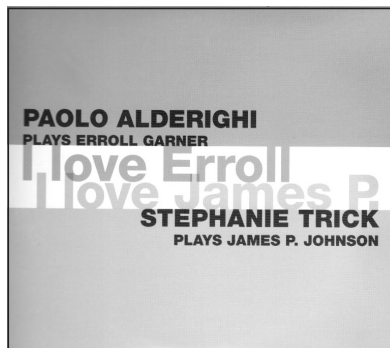
I would hope our readers know by now to seek out any new album from Paolo Alderighi and Stephanie Trick. They've been on our cover both together, and in Paolo's case separately, and we've given glowing reviews to their previous efforts, *Two For One* and *Broadway and More*. Known for their exhilarating live performances featuring four hands piano they each bring a unique musical identity to their playing.

Stephanie comes from a stride background, and went through a professional phase playing in the style of Fats Waller. She's especially devoted to Waller's teacher, James P. Johnson, whose work she explores here. Paolo on the other hand has always touted as his primary influence a later pianist, Erroll Garner, who was known as a stylistic interpreter of what had by then become standards.

On this unique double album both Stephanie and Paolo honor their influences and hopefully help share them with a new generation. Normally a duo on their recent albums, each has a full CD here mostly without the accompaniment of the other. That duality provides an opportunity to deeply compare both their differences and the works of two jazz legends not often considered in contrast. This is an important milestone in each of their careers.

Paolo's disc is perhaps more unique in that twelve of the fourteen tracks are Garner compositions. Aside from his classic, "Misty," Garner isn't particularly thought of as a composer. By playing his compositions Alderighi is able to get under the hood and explore Garner's surprisingly diverse musical interests. Alderighi captures Garner's deep sense of swing with the aid of a rhythm section consisting of Niccola Stranieri on drums and Roberto Piccolo on bass. He also takes solo piano turns when it is more appropriate to the piece. Stephanie makes an appearance on the disc playing percussion on three tracks. Hearing Paolo play with percussive accompaniment is invigorating.

James P. Johnson is primarily known as a careful composer of intricate piano works that would influence jazz piano for generations. Stephanie Trick has played many of his works on previous albums yet still finds no trouble avoiding duplication on this one. Out of 19 tracks, the only one she has recorded for release in the past is "Carolina Shout," so central, she says, to both the James P. legacy and her own relationship to his music that it couldn't possibly be left out. The tracks explore the full length of Johnson's career, including both ragtime numbers and popular hits. She plays closely to Johnson's style most of the time adding interpretive flourishes learned from her living mentor Dick Hyman. On five of the tracks Paolo joins her for the four-hands piano



playing they have become known for.

For both artists these are deeply personal statements of musical intent. This is a major release establishing them at the top of their field and certainly the lead modern acolytes of Garner and Johnson. It is a must-buy for anyone interested in the development of jazz piano, and certainly for anyone who has been following the careers of this star duo. Fans may come into the album expecting a preference for one disc and discovering a new fondness for the other artist. I certainly did.

Shake Your Blues Away with Jazz
Art Fell-David Cross & Friends
tinyurl.com/artfell-davidcross

I'm used to receiving albums from well-intentioned and often self-financed older musicians who are, to put it nicely, overly proud of their accomplishments on said album. Art Fell, a reader who now resides in France, was just the opposite. He sent me as modest a letter explaining this album as one could imagine. I was expecting only that it be modestly enjoyable.

Of course what he sent turned out to be a bit of an underground hit, a sleeper success story if you will. Reviewers on Amazon have felt compelled to expound on how many times they've listened to the album on road trips and how their children dance and sing along. For what it is, the album is excellent, and as it happens it is Art Fell's only album with musical partner David Cross released on a commercial label.

Recorded in 2006, the story of the album itself is interesting. Art was playing with a band at a very upscale resort in the Seychelles Islands, off the coast of East Africa, when a "British Industrialist" invited him to record for his label MacJazz. He was invited to form a band for the engagement and brought in David Cross on trumpet. Two very busy British musicians, Bill Stagg, guitar, and Mike Godwin, bass, joined them in studio for what turned into an ambitious 24 track 75 minute album with almost no rehearsal and very few takes, all recorded in one session. In other genres, and with less skilled musicians, that would be a disaster; in jazz it can sometimes be an asset. The warmth and entertainment of a live performance comes through.

Art and David have played together since meeting in Ivory Coast in 1985. Each has a traditional jazz background dating back to the '50s and each knows both what they enjoy and how to share that joy with an audience. Both are Americans who landed in Africa and then Europe for non-musical reasons. If you recognize Art Fell's name it is because he was a regular European contributor to *The Mississippi Rag* and has contributed several items to *TST*. He's also the host of a jazz radio show in France; search "Art Fell Swing Doctors" and you should find it.

Neither Art's piano playing or Cross's trumpet try for flash. The tracks are presented in a straight forward pleasing way, with vocals from Cross that recall entertainers like George Formby. The guitar and bass keep to a supportive role, though Bill Stagg joins on backing vocal here and there.

Most of the titles are vocal gems including "Whose Honey Are You?," "Deed I Do," "Baby Brown," "Button Up My Overcoat," "When I Take My Sugar to Tea," "Blue Turning Grey Over You," "Sweet Emmalina," and the like, as well as a few originals. It's not an album that you'll write home about but it might easily become a favorite in your home. I heartily recommend this album to long time

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