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Timbre!

A CELEBRATION OF TRUMPETS: BOLD AS BRASS

JAZZIZ

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1. **Christine Jensen Jazz Orchestra feat. Ingrid Jensen** "Fantasy on Blue" *Harbour* (Nettwerk/Justin Time)
2. **Etienne Charles** "Douens" *Creole Orchestra* (Culture Shock Music)
3. **Curtis Taylor** "Kham's Dilemma" *Taylor Made* (Curtis Taylor Music)
4. **Zachary Finnegan** "Guidance & Gratitude" *Guidance & Gratitude* (Shifting Paradigm)
5. **Triad feat. Dominick Farinacci** "La Lucha Dura" *Triad* (Ropeadope)
6. **June Iida** "Gooley Butter Cake" *Evergreen* (Origin/OA2)
7. **Josh Lawrence** "A Tragic Tango Comedy" *Measured Response* (Posi-Tone)
8. **Dave Douglas** "Day Dream" *Gifts* (Greenleaf Music)
9. **Gabriel Mark Hasselbach feat. Marion Meadows** "SunSeeker" *Count Your Lucky Stars* (Windtunnel)
10. **Wadada Leo Smith/Amina Claudine Myers** "Central Park at Sunset" *Central Park's Mosaics of Reservoir, Lake, Paths and Gardens* (Red Hook)
11. **Jeremy Pelt** "Earl J" *Tomorrow's Another Day* (HighNote)
12. **Steph Richards** "Power Vibe" *Power Vibe* (Northern Spy)
13. **Dizzy Gillespie** "Stomped and Wasted" *Soul & Salvation* (Liberation Hall)

DISC TWO : VARIOUS ARTISTS

1. **Randy Bernsen** "With You Always" *Heart Mind and Soul* (Jericho Jams)
2. **David Chesky feat. Giovanni Hidalgo and John Benitez** "Descarga No. 4" *The New York Descargas* (The Audiophile Society)
3. **Andrea Superstein** "Lay Your Head Down" *Oh Mother* (Cellar Live)
4. **Bill Banfield** "Song for Earl" *Take Time To Listen* (Mesa/Bluemoon)
5. **Mark Winkler** "Sunday in LA" *The Rules Don't Apply* (Care Pacific)
6. **Chris Standring** "Alphabet Soup" *As We Think* (Ultimate Vibe)
7. **John Korbel** "New York All to Ourselves" *Falling Feels Like Flying* (Infinite Window)
8. **Norman Brown** "Anything" *It Hits Different* (Shanachie Entertainment)
9. **James Hudson** "Moonray" *Moonray* (self-released)
10. **Kirk Whalum** "Well Alright" *Epic Cool* (Mack Avenue)

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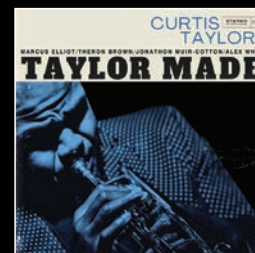
DISC ONE



CHRISTINE JENSEN JAZZ ORCHESTRA FEAT. INGRID JENSEN
Harbour



ETIENNE CHARLES
Creole Orchestra



CURTIS TAYLOR
Taylor Made



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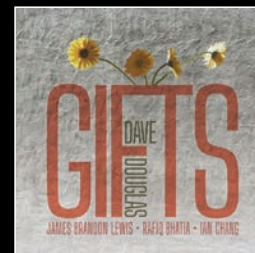
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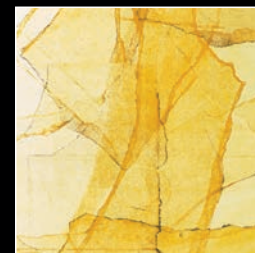
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Measured Response



DAVE DOUGLAS
Gifts



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Count Your Lucky Stars



WADADA LEO SMITH/AMINA CLAUDINE MYERS
Central Park's Mosaics of Reservoir, Lake, Paths and Gardens



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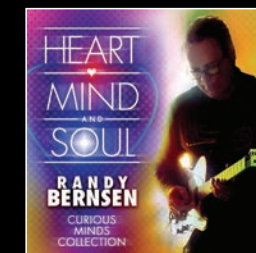


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Soul & Salvation

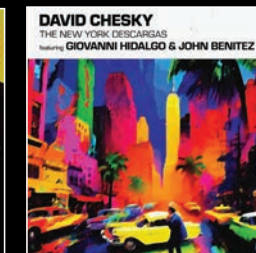
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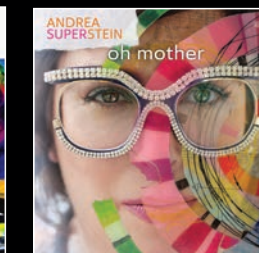
DISC TWO



RANDY BERNSEN
Heart Mind and Soul



DAVID CHESKY FEAT. GIOVANNI HIDALGO AND JOHN BENITEZ
The New York Descargas



ANDREA SUPERSTEIN
Oh Mother



BILL BANFIELD'S JAZZ URBANE
Take Time To Listen



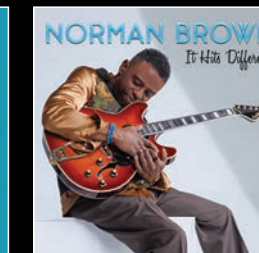
MARK WINKLER
The Rules Don't Apply



CHRIS STANDRING
As We Think



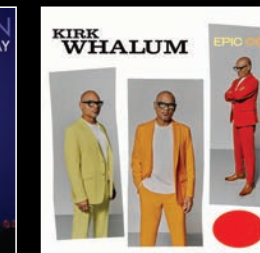
JOHN KORBEL
Falling Feels Like Flying



NORMAN BROWN
It Hits Different



JAMES HUDSON
Moonray



KIRK WHALUM
Epic Cool

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THE PERPETUAL CONVERSATION

WITH HIS TRUMPET, HIS COMPOSITIONS AND HIS STEWARDSHIP OF THE GREENLEAF LABEL, DAVE DOUGLAS ENGAGES IN A FASCINATING, DECADES-LONG DIALOGUE WITH LISTENERS.

B Y B I L L M I L K O W S K I



At his home in Croton-on-Hudson, about an hour north of New York City in Westchester County, Dave Douglas enjoys a rare moment of rest between tours. He's just returned from a swing through Europe in March with his working band (tenor saxophonist James Brandon Lewis, cellist Tomeka Reid, guitarist Rafiq Bhatia and drummer Ian Chang), performing music from the trumpeter-composer-bandleader's latest release, *Gifts*. While preparing new music for a short run of live dates in the UK and Ireland in May with saxophonist Trish Clowes, in support of their new project together, *Eyes Up*, the restlessly creative musician is also working on his memoirs, organizing "thoughts about the music that I've done and maybe adding some insights for young emerging artists contemplating the same path." He has a couple of publishers in mind but it's still early into this project.

There are also his ongoing duties as the head of Greenleaf Music, the fiercely independent label he established in 2003, and as host of his monthly podcast "A Noise From the Deep," which features thoughtful and animated conversations about music with such notables as Henry Threadgill, John Zorn, Joe Lovano, Mark Dresser,

Marc Ribot, Tim Berne, Joe LaBarbera and Enrico Rava, along with singular new talents such as trumpeter Itamar Borochoy, trombonist Kalia Vandever, pianist Kris Davis, drummer Mareike Wiening and vibraphonist Patricia Brennan. And soon he'll be turning his attention to the annual Festival of New Trumpet Music, which Douglas has directed since its inception in 2003. That's a lot to juggle.

But for this phone interview, conducted the day after his 61st birthday, he focused on *Gifts*, the latest in a decades-long discography. As he wrote in the liner notes: "*Gifts* is about the blessings of life and music that we share with each other. These gifts stem from our common humanity, so essential to our survival as a species. The musical arts are a gift that is shared between musicians, and also with listeners as part of a perpetual conversation. Cherishing the music of the past blesses us to make the music of the future. And despite the odds, to go on creating pathways for generations to come. Gifts we give and gifts we receive. That's where this music is coming from."

Douglas' latest outing is another example of his masterful playing and conceptual daring as a bandleader. Amazingly, he still has the same youthful enthusiasm for making music and sharing his gifts after all these years.

“On the straightahead gigs I would be ‘David Douglas,’ and then if I was playing a more cutting-edge gig at the Knitting Factory I’d be ‘Dave Douglas.’ So I had this dual identity going on.”

You've been putting in some time lately writing your memoirs. Tell me about that.

Well, I like writing about the music and the process. What was the initial idea? How did it come about? Who was around? Why did it sound the way it did? What was the ultimate critique? Were there any good stories that were part of making it? And I ended up feeling like rather than writing about each record, because there's kind of too many of them, it would be like each group vision and the various different project shapes. And even that is pretty overwhelming.

In the past, you've honored the musical legacies of Booker Little (1994's *In Our Lifetime*), Wayne Shorter (1997's *Stargazer*), Mary Lou Williams (2000's *Soul on Soul*), Lester Bowie (2009's *Spirit Moves*) and Jimmy Giuffre (2014's *Riverside*). On *Gifts*, you're honoring Billy Strayhorn by playing four of his tunes, including a wild re-imagining of "Take the A Train" that sounds like Ellington meets Led Zeppelin's "Kashmir."

Fair enough. I'll take that. For starters, I would have never just played it the way they used to play it back in the day. I've been playing the tune for 50 years and I love it, but I sort of feel like if you're gonna play a sacred text like that in 2024 you have to find a new way to say it.

The first Strayhorn tune that I realized I wanted to work on, and I wasn't sure if it could be on the record, was "Blood Count." Then I got deeply into reading about Strayhorn and learning different tunes. "Take the A Train" is probably his best known tune and also the one most closely associated with Ellington. But I was just messing around, practicing playing "Take the A Train" in different ways and in different keys. And so the transposition, the key that we play it in, it fell in a funny place on the horn that I liked and that also I knew would blend in a certain way with tenor saxophone. Once I started playing it in that new key, I started playing it sort of moving the melodic fragments around on different parts of the beat. Like, what would be a funny way to play something where it's an obviously recognizable melody but it's sort of falling in a funny place where you're listening and you're like, "Oh, that's 'Take the A Train,' but what happened?" And that sort of mystery is kind of what I'm always looking for.

So it was really the introduction to the piece on the wrong side of the beat that got me started, and that led me to go, "OK, I have



Photo by John Abbott

“The first time we played our rendition of ‘Take the A Train,’ there was kind of a murmuring in the audience. And by the time we got to that familiar melody, somebody screamed. It didn’t occur to us that somebody was going to have such a visceral reaction.”

to do this.” And from there I started to work out the rest of it. I had come up with an alternate bass line for the main melody that had the rhythmic displacement that you’re hearing. But then I connected it to “Kashmir” by Led Zeppelin, because it’s a similar rhythmic displacement. So then I just added a few extra little bumps in the road that nudged it a little closer to “Kashmir,” because I thought it was a funny coincidence. And then all those elements ended up sort of coming together where it feels like a new form, but it’s basically new wine in old bottles. It’s still a 32-bar tune like [Strayhorn] wrote. It just has a lot of new nooks and crannies.

How has playing this new music on the road altered it?

Playing it on the road was really funny because I think a lot of times people don’t realize that when we’re creating this new music, most of us are doing it kind of in isolation, either by ourselves or among ourselves, and just sort of preparing it. So when you first go out and play it in front of an audience, you can be really surprised. Like it didn’t occur to me that, “Oh, this is a transgressive take on ‘Take the A Train’ that’s going to provoke.”

Brings me back to my very first record, where I didn’t think that arranging Webern (“Sehr Bewegt,” the opening track from *Parallel Worlds*) for a jazz group was going to provoke. And boy, was I wrong! But the first time we played our rendition of “Take the A Train,” there was kind of a murmuring in the audience. And by the time we got to that familiar melody, somebody screamed. And we looked at each other like, “Oh, OK, right.” It didn’t occur to us that somebody was going to have such a visceral reaction. Because for me, it was just in the practice room and in the composing room, playing around with all those elements and coming up with something that I thought would be exciting for us to play. And when I first told Rafiq we were going to play “Take the A Train” on the new record, he was like, “Oh, no!” He was kind of disappointed. Like, “Really? Do we have to make a jazz record?” But Rafiq and Ian have a real connection from being in that band together, Son Lux, which did the Oscar-nominated score for the movie *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. So I knew that putting that rhythmic vibe in place that they would really dig into it. And so I think that’s part of what you’re hearing too, is their ability to hear what I was saying. Rafiq’s solo on it is one of the highlights of the album for me.



Secular Psalms band, clockwise from top left: Frederik Leroux, Tomeka Reid, Dave Douglas, Berlinde Deman and Marta Warelis

“ Rafiq would be the first to count Bill Frisell as a hero. Except he’d be the second, because I would be the first. ”

All the trio stuff on *Gifts* allows Rafiq to play so abstractly and texturally. He’s a very creative guitar player.

He really is. You know, a lot of the sounds that come from Rafiq, it’s kind of a way of doing it that he invented, that he designed. That’s not coming out of an app but rather going through a system that he has built over the years that has something to do with Ableton and other software. It’s a full frequency range sonic approach that’s really visual. Ian also has electronic elements being triggered from his drum set. And sometimes people lose sight of the fact that Ian is also contributing a lot of those sounds. Even on the live shows I’ll forget who’s doing what. So I’ll look over at Ian and I’ll be like, “Hey, could that sound be a little softer?” And he’ll be like, “Well, that’s Rafiq!”

It’s clear that the backwards guitar stuff that Rafiq is doing on this album is coming out of Bill Frisell, who was breaking new ground with electronics and pedals and stuff 30 years ago.

Rafiq would be the first to count Bill Frisell as a hero. Except he’d be the second, because I would be the first. Bill was absolutely a huge influence, sonically, but also compositionally, for me.

What about “Blood Count?” It’s such a haunting tune, Strayhorn’s last completed composition, and beautifully rendered by you as a trio.

A couple of years ago, I heard Charles Lloyd playing it [on the 2022 Blue Note album, *Trios: Blood Count*, with Frisell and bassist Thomas Morgan] and that was the inspiration for the whole project, really. Something about the way he did it made me go back and examine it really closely, and I couldn’t figure out exactly what it was that was such a gut punch for me. So I wrote to Bill and said, “What was going on there with ‘Blood Count’ that made it sound so cool?” And I immediately got a PDF file back from him where he had written on a sheet of music paper the voicings that he played on that performance. And he said, “Well, you know, it might have been that I fucked up and that that was what was actually cool. But this is what I was supposed to play.” So just to think about that and feel that and think about the sensitivity that Charles plays with and the love that he has for Strayhorn’s music, obviously, led me just do this sort of arrangement. And I definitely talked to Rafiq about the different ways to express the chords and different approaches on this tune. You know, it’s a multi-section composition, so it’s not a simple thing. We just came back from a quintet tour playing it with James Brandon Lewis on tenor sax and Tomeka Reid on cello, and it really brought out the orchestral aspect of that piece. That was pretty amazing.

You and James have a beautiful chemistry throughout this record. I was interested to see that you had interviewed him on your podcast seven years ago. So he’s sort of been in your orbit, or at least in the back of your mind, for quite a while now.

Well, I’ve known him a lot longer than that. When I was still directing the Jazz and Creative Music Workshop in Banff, Canada, James came there and he was one of the most enlightened students to come through. He was just so open to everything and really searching openly and checking everything out ... reading and having opinions, not in a know-it-all, completist, opinionated way but just in a sort of a curious, interested way. And it was one of my pleasures and thrills as the director of that program to get to invite a lot of different visiting artists. Everyone that comes, I encourage them to talk about their own work and what they do. And certain students will gravitate to certain people. James was one of the few who was just open to everyone. He asked everyone questions. So I have to say I wasn’t that surprised when his music as a leader took him to where he is now. And I forget how we reconnected. I had definitely invited him for the podcast. You know, we got in touch after [trumpeter and composer] Jaimie Branch passed. Because he had played with Jaimie quite a bit, and I knew her as well. She was also on the podcast. What a loss.

What inspired you to put together this particular group with James, Rafiq and Ian?

My second quintet with Jon Irabagon, Matt Mitchell, Linda Oh and Rudy Royston ... we were approaching our sell-by date when the coronavirus shut us all down. We made those two remote records together, *Songs of Ascent, Book 1 and 2*, but after that I felt like, “OK, I’m looking for what the next sound is. It’s time to renovate and find a new thing.” And I felt like James would bring something different, freer and more exploratory to this music. And I really love playing with him.

James brings a lot to tunes like “Goodbyes,” a beautiful, mournful way to close this record. It’s almost funereal but it has a lot of emotion. And “Seven Years Ago” is another outstanding showcase for him.

That was one that I wrote seven years ago that never went anywhere because it emerged pretty much fully formed in reaction to that bad man coming down the escalator and winning the presidential election. You know, such intense feeling. And we played it for a week at the Vanguard, the Sound Prints band with me and Joe Lovano, Joey Baron, Lawrence Fields and Linda Oh. But at some point I decided, “I

don't want that guy to monopolize my composition space." So it was my first and last Trump tune. I put it away in the drawer and I was like, "OK, that's it. Bye bye." But then, when this record came along, I kind of remembered it and I looked through the drawer and found it, and I made some edits and gave it a new title. And, yeah, it's a heartfelt piece.

When we were playing at the Vanguard in January 2017 it was called "For This Moment," and it was sort of about the inauguration. And now we put it in the rearview mirror, hopefully. But Sound Prints is ongoing. We're still at it. In fact, we're just in the phase of writing a new book and we're hitting the Vanguard in the summer.

You mentioned earlier that the group with Jon Irabagon, Matt Mitchell and Linda had reached its sell-by date. That's an interesting way of putting it.

What I mean by that is, if you look through my catalog, most of the groups that I write for, I see them as more than just like a one-off record project. So most of the groups do three records, sometimes four. But then I feel like either I've met the challenges or I'm looking for new challenges. And usually, after seasons of touring, people have moved on to new projects. In the case of that quintet, everyone's now a leader out doing their own stuff. I'm always looking at younger musicians and what they're playing and listening to, what's going on. And it's impossible for that not to influence me on wanting to form new bands and play in new ways and write in new ways. So in some sense, taking the inspiration from the young musicians that I interact with becomes part of the vision of renovating and moving to new groups.

I wanted to ask you about the name Greenleaf, the name you chose for your record label. You implied that it comes from somewhere in your history.

Yeah, it's an old family name on my father's side. He was Damon Greenleaf Douglas. He was junior, so his father had



the same name. My brother had the same name. He was Damon Greenleaf Douglas III. I was looking for something that was a connotation of growth and renewal and sustainability. And it just felt like, "OK, it's right here in my family history." They've traced it back into the 18th century, I believe in Scotland, but it's a little mysterious because we've also seen it written Feuille Verte, which is Green Leaf in French.

One of your records was dedicated to your father.

The very first one on Greenleaf Music [2005's *Mountain Passages*]. That was music that I wrote for my father that he never got to hear. He was not able to get to the premiere, and then he passed before we were able to record it. So it was very, very personal. I revisited that music for the 20th anniversary last year, playing it with the original cast of Peggy Lee, Marcus Rojas, Michael Moore and Dylan van der Schyff. So that was the first record on Greenleaf Music, and I was working on it just as I finished my last record for RCA. And it just so happened that as I finished my seventh record for RCA, the whole company got bought by Sony and there was new leadership, and it was clear I wasn't going to be able to operate with the same freedom and at the same pace. So I decided it was time to start doing my own thing.

Speaking of dedications, you had that beautiful one for your mother on 2012's *Be Still*.

That was another really personal one, obviously. And I wouldn't have played those hymns if she hadn't asked me to. And I also was struggling with how to play them. I had instrumental and

congregational arrangements. At that time, I was still touring with Brass Ecstasy so I had brass band versions of those hymns, as well. But then I was on another project called *Improvised Roots* with a bass player named Greg Garrison [a founding member of the Punch Brothers and bassist for alt-bluegrass group Leftover Salmon]. He had invited the singer Aoife O'Donovan on that project and I started explaining to her the problem: "I have these hymns, I'm not sure what I'm going to do with them." She said, "I love hymns and I know all those hymns." So that's how she became the singer on that album. And I wouldn't have done it that way if I hadn't met her and connected around that.

You're really cultivating all these young talents from all over the world, like saxophonist-composers Trish Clowes from Ireland and Julieta Eugenia from Argentina or bassist-composer Kaisa Maensivu from Finland or trumpeter Itamar Borochoy from Israel, by executive producing their projects, and in some cases appearing on their records.

I'm grateful they'll even play with me. But like I said before, I like listening to young players. So it's inevitable that, you know, there's so many good ones. The volume of music that I get in my inbox and that people forward to me or that I get calls about ... it's kind of overwhelming at this point. The hardest part of running Greenleaf is having to say no to people who are doing really great work. It's a small company and it is sustainable, which is a small miracle, I guess, in this day and age. But I would love to just be able to put out all the great music that comes across my desk.

“I'm always looking at younger musicians and what they're playing and listening to, what's going on. It's impossible for that not to influence me on wanting to form new bands and play in new ways and write in new ways.”

Those are some of the hardest decisions. What's changing, what's in transition, I think, is how we even listen to music ... how much people listen and what it means to them. And what it means to us as musicians. So for me, putting out *Gifts*, it's a very different process than the way we used to do these things. And all of that is filtering into my own work in a big way right now and it's an interesting conundrum. It makes me want to ask people like Charles Lloyd and [former Sun Ra trumpeter] Ahmed Abdullah — people who have been doing this a lot longer than I have — how they feel about all these transitions.

I remember when you played at the Jazz Standard with your quintet, you made that music available for downloads right after the set.

That was 2006. We were the first people to do that. It was cutting-edge technology at the time. I had an engineering team that I trusted and loved, so I knew I was going to get good quality sound. And the band had been together for some years at that point and they knew like 45, 50 of my tunes. We played a different set every night. We played all those tunes over 12 sets that week. And a lot of them were new and had never been on albums before. So that was a pretty inspiring week. After the Tuesday night, I came home and I was just terrified out of my wits, like, "Oh, I made a big mistake. This is going to be a disaster." Remember also, I was playing cornet — that was my six months where I switched to cornet. It ended up being really interesting and the most exciting part of that — this was in 2006 — was by noon the next day, we're getting messages from Moscow and Tokyo and cities around the world where people are listening to the music we played last night. Now it's like people just record your set with their phone and put it right up on whatever platform they want. I have mixed feelings of that, mainly because of the audio quality being so low. But, you know, different times.

What can you tell me about 2022's *Secular Psalms*?

It's a big story. It's about the painting, "The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb," that I visited first in the late '80s. And I've been touring and going to Ghent ever since then and always going to visit the painting. It was undergoing a renovation and it was coming up for its 600th anniversary. And the city of Ghent and my good friend Wim Wabbes decided to commission artists from different disciplines to celebrate the anniversary. So they asked me for a piece around this painting.

I did a lot of research about the period — poets, composers, musicians, instruments — and came

up with a very unusual cast of characters to write for — tuba and cello and organ and lute. I used some Latin texts and some medieval French texts. Then the pandemic came along, and the production of the piece turned into my reaction to the pandemic. That this is my savior and my uplift is to be working on this music in this time where very little else makes sense. So I wrote the whole thing during those days, and I did a lot of musical projects in that period.

And then the premiere got pushed back by a year. So I ended up corresponding with everyone over the internet for months and months and months, and it took almost two years to make. But I was able to create the scores and create templates and generate drum parts and everything that needed to happen. So I was really proud of how that one came out. And when we did finally play it, we got to play it in front of enormous projections of the painting and details of the painting.

Your playing goes along many adventurous paths, utilizing electronics and ambient feels and at times sounding almost cinematic.

Yet, there was a time when you were strictly a straightahead trumpet player, no?

Yes. I was still doing a lot of straightahead stuff in the '80s with people like Horace Silver and Vincent Herring. And there were some years where on the straightahead gigs I would be "David Douglas" and then if I was playing a more cutting-edge gig at the Knitting Factory I'd be "Dave Douglas." So I had this dual identity going on. And then one day I went to one of my straightahead gigs and the bandleader said, "Are you Dave Douglas of Knitting Factory fame?" And I was like, "Oh, I got caught." And that was it. I never got any more straight jazz calls again.

You've come a long way from that point to this, where you now have more than 60 recordings as a leader.

A few years ago I looked back and thought, "Well, am I just cranking them out for no reason?" But each of them tells a unique story, I think. Each of them is an original vision of what the music could be. And I wouldn't take one of them back. And just like this newest one, *Gifts*, it's sort of a new vision of what the music could be and how we could play it. And the fact that I looked back to "Take the A Train" on the new record just makes me feel like, "Wow, this is a never-ending pursuit. This is infinite!" ■

“The hardest part of running Greenleaf is having to say no to people who are doing really great work. It's a small company and it is sustainable, which is a small miracle, I guess, in this day and age.”

