

# TRYTONE

BY KEN WAXMAN

Although committed to bolstering the careers of musicians who live in the Netherlands, Amsterdam-based label Trytone doesn't dictate what is released on its CDs, as long as "there's a certain minimum amount of improvisation plus a sense of adventure and originality," says clarinetist Tobias Klein, the label's coordinator. Founded in 1998 and with 70 releases so far, the imprint is managed by a seven-person collective so that when a session is submitted for consideration "the whole team listens and decides together whether or not to release it."

While Trytone is as Dutch as windmills and Gouda cheese, the makeup of the collective has changed over the years. At Trytone's birth German-born Klein, who has lived in the Netherlands for more than a quarter century, was the only non-Dutch person involved; today some other members, all of whom have specific jobs within the collective, hail from Argentina, Portugal and Turkey. Although this reflects the increasingly international mien of Dutch improv, the clarinetist doesn't think music internationalism contributed to the need to set up the label. Still its continued existence and openness to many substrata of music and musicians—about one-third of its releases are from non-team members—testifies to the gap it filled when first created.

Klein recalls that the imprint's original impetus was to garner exposure for younger improvisers. In

1998 established Dutch jazz labels such as BVHaast and ICP had begun limiting their releases to close associates. Other labels dedicated to the Dutch neobop scene, "were more commercial enterprises, following the classic example of companies, which want to own the masters, do their own graphic design and keep financial matters as opaque as possible," Klein recalls. "There was a real lack of a label with an open ear to hybrid or eclectic jazz/improv, which might also include influences of rock, pop, ethnic and electronic music, etc." Munzruh, a quintet featuring Klein that attempted to link punk, contemporary and improvised music, was the label's first release. While he admits that "Munzruh's concept was maybe formulated a bit too ambitiously, right now combining different influences from various genres is very common to the catalogue."

Klein, who has been featured on 16 of the label's discs, continues: "Today, the question could be why maintain a label? Many musicians are releasing and marketing their recordings on their own. One good reason is that people who are interested in music and buying CDs still find that labels make it easier to keep an overview of what's out there happening and available. For anyone interested in adventurous jazz and improv from the Netherlands, Trytone is a pretty good place to start. There are also practical reasons. As a musician, you can build a web shop and get your music out to digital distributors pretty easily, but it's also very time-consuming. Sharing some of the infrastructure definitely makes sense. Any musician can submit a recording to Trytone, although chances are very small for anyone who is not connected in some way to the Netherlands." Legally constituted as a

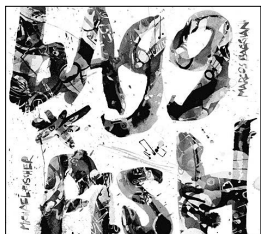
foundation, over the years Trytone also organizes specific events and concerts.

Recording for Trytone means musicians "become part of an international creative network with good distribution for a small independent label," affirms clarinetist Oğuz Büyükberber, who has had four releases on the label. He joined the team four years ago and is responsible for Trytone's social media and newsletter. Büyükberber, who has recorded about 50 CDs, including a dozen of his own for many companies, says non-team members want the Trytone imprint since it "gives artists a better chance for their work to be reviewed in the press compared to an obscure label or much less a completely home-made release. It has extensive catalogue and a rather well established good reputation."

No member of the Trytone team is paid for his efforts, so once the label decides to take on a project, the musicians involved are responsible for all aspects of the production, including personnel, engineering, mastering, production and design. "Trytone doesn't actively suggest any projects or combinations to anybody," says Klein. The usual pressing is 500 copies, which are then distributed by Trytone. "For releases by groups, which aren't led by one of the team members, Trytone withholds 33% of the sales, in order to cover overhead expenses," he explains. "The rest goes to the artist. For groups that are led by one of the team members, 100% goes to the artist. Musicians pay all and get all. Although Trytone doesn't declare itself to be a non-profit label, in reality it is one."

Guitarist Niels Brouwer, whose band Boi Akih, has just released a Trytone CD, says he joined the team this

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hAgg\*fish  
Michael Fischer/Marcos Baggiani



2005-2015  
Spinifex



Les Indignés  
C.B.G.



Wobbly Strata  
Oğuz Büyükberber/Simon Nabatov



Liquid Songs  
Boi Akih

## VOXNEWS

# IN RECOGNITION

BY SUZANNE LORGE

The U.S. first celebrated Negro History Week, the brainchild of historian Carter G. Woodson, in February 1926, to fill some gaps in U.S. history as it was then written, absent any mention of the accomplishments of African Americans. 50 years later, Woodson's Association for the Study of African American Life and History, the sponsoring organization, expanded the weeklong commemoration to a month. Now, each February the federal government, employers, politicians and civic leaders in the U.S. acknowledge the importance of African American History Month. This February, several singers—each a history-maker in her own right—will pay tribute.

As the daughter of trumpeter Louis Armstrong's arranger/bandleader Luis Russell and singer/instrumentalist Carline Ray, **Catherine Russell** grew up among jazz nobility. This pedigree makes her the perfect host for *Who Is Louis Armstrong?*, an hour-long family concert at Jazz at Lincoln Center's Rose Theater (Feb. 4th). Russell will sing, tell stories and play recordings as she walks the audience through the life of one of our greatest jazz musicians.

Russell's own path as a musician has led her to

collaborations outside of jazz with artists like David Bowie, Steely Dan, Cyndi Lauper, Jackson Browne, Michael Feinstein and Paul Simon. But she has received most of her acclaim for her work as a jazz singer. In 2012 she won a shared Grammy Award for her rolling rendition of "Crazy Blues," which appeared on the soundtrack album for the hit TV show *Boardwalk Empire*. This year she is nominated again—this time for Best Vocal Jazz Album. *Harlem On My Mind* (Jazz Village) is an elegant release that digs deep into the vocal jazz tradition and reveals Russell's tremendous versatility as a singer. (See the September 2016 VOXNews column for a review.) Two days after the Grammy Awards broadcast, Russell will have a run at Birdland (Feb. 14th-18th).

Code Noir was a nasty bit of legislation in the late 17th century that legitimized the horrifying treatment of slaves in the French colonies of the Caribbean and North America. Singer **Carmen Lundy** borrows the title of her latest album from this oppressive code; in so doing she reclaims the power of the African diaspora and its influence on modern music. The 12 originals on *Code Noir* (Afrasia Productions) cut a swath through the musical genres that derive from African-based rhythms and styles—Bossa nova, funk, blues, Swing, jazz and the avant garde. These songs "encompass the many emotions that are prevalent in the country right now," writes Lundy on her website. "We are going through tough times, with a country that is sorely

divided and many of these tracks reflect the feelings that we...are going through on an individual level." Lundy will offer a preview of the album at Birdland (through Feb. 4th) before its release on Feb. 17th.

One of Lundy's followers is innovative singer **Charenée Wade**, who leapt into prominence with her self-released 2010 debut album *Love Walked In*. Subsequent to this album, in October 2010, Wade placed for the second time in the prestigious Thelonious Monk Competition—something that no singer had done before. But it was with her 2015 album, *Offering: The Music of Gil Scott-Heron & Brian Jackson* (Motéma Music) that Wade established herself as one of her generation's finest arrangers of jazz compositions for voice. Wade will appear with her regular band to perform at Monk in Motion (Feb. 18th), a program at Tribeca Performing Arts Center showcasing former Monk competition finalists.

The Count Basie Orchestra is one of the longest-living jazz institutions in the world. Basie started the jazz big band in 1935 in Kansas City and it has stayed together in one form or another almost without interruption since then. The band has furthered the careers of some of the world's most iconic jazz singers—Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, Helen Humes, Frank Sinatra, Joe Williams and Billy Eckstine among them; modern-day jazz icon **Dee Dee Bridgewater** will participate in this tradition when she fronts the band at Blue Note (through Feb. 5th). ❖

(INTERVIEW CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6)

was play music, which is what I was there for and wanted to do. Even to this day my focus is playing music and that's what I have to keep working on, how to do that. I'm very appreciative of all of the accolades and awards, I'm very grateful about it, but it just comes from hard work. There was nothing that I was entitled to. I just got down to business and busted tail.

**TNYCJR:** You played or recorded with a lot of prominent bandleaders after graduating. Betty Carter was a mentor for many young artists. How did she help you in your musical growth?

**CC:** When I started working with Betty, that was one of the serious schools. The more known school was Art Blakey for horn players, pianists and bassists. If you got the stamp of working with Art Blakey, you're pretty much guaranteed you'd be able to do whatever you wanted. If you had the opportunity to work with Betty, that was another school, kind of like the rhythm section school. If you got the stamp of working with Betty, you were assured of success wherever you wanted to go.

In a nutshell, Betty inspired and continues to inspire me. She could never be satisfied with the status quo. She always encouraged me to think just because something was done one way, it doesn't have to be done the same way. She was very creative. You always had to mind your Ps and Qs because you never knew what she was going to do. The energy she put out was incredible. Sometimes when I'm playing I'm hearing the voice of Betty inside talking about, "Why are you doing that mess?" I worked with Jon Hendricks, George Adams, Terence Blanchard and Donald Harrison, but when I got to Betty it was all finished, it

was all about putting all of that in its proper order. She told me, "Chestnut, I see that you write and arrange. So I don't want you playing any standards. And if you do play a standard, it has to be done a different way. Furthermore, once you finish with me, you don't need to be in anybody else's band, you need to be doing your own stuff." I'm grateful that she said it and I hope she's smiling from the jam session up above. I'm a product of her dauntless work just to keep the music moving forward.

**TNYCJR:** How does a new composition evolve for you from your initial idea to a completed piece?

**CC:** It's about hearing a melody. Sometimes the composition happens at the piano and other times I hear it in my head and I just start writing. I actually prefer to hear the idea in my head and work from what I'm hearing and use the piano as a finishing work. Sometimes when I sit at the piano and start playing, I get too caught up in techniques and theories versus pure melody in music.

**TNYCJR:** How do you choose music for a record date or performance?

**CC:** Something that sounds good. I have certain ideas to test out and if it feels good I move onto it. I've learned to trust my instincts. Some things might sound good, but then "Little Antonio" [referring to himself by his middle name] comes up, taps me on the shoulder and says, "No, don't do that." So I've learned to be driven by the state of the music, not only in performance but also on recording as well. You want a record to be something that will be remembered for a long time. A record date shouldn't be an exercise but a statement, a document of where you are at that time. So I try to make it a good story. In the words of Tom McIntosh, "Youngblood, always try to tell a good story, because if you do, you'll never have to worry about your career. Because everybody loves a good story."

**TNYCJR:** What have been some of the greatest challenges that you've faced in your career?

**CC:** Being true to yourself. There are some times in the business when people want you to do certain things and jump into fads. You have to go for it with your own conviction. Sometimes it might be liked and sometimes it isn't. If it isn't right away, sometimes it gets known. Monk used to get laughed at but now he's heralded as the genius of modern music. Betty said that jazz is about finding out who you are. I'm continuing on that journey and finding out who Cyrus Chestnut is. I'm just working on it. If anything, I'm trying to send people away feeling better than when they arrived. ❖

For more information, visit [cyruschestnut.net](http://cyruschestnut.net). Chestnut is at Birdland Feb 21st-25th. See Calendar.

**Recommended Listening:**

- Donald Harrison/Terence Blanchard – *Crystal Stair* (Columbia, 1987)
- Cyrus Chestnut – *Nut* (Evidence, 1992)
- Cyrus Chestnut – *Revelation* (Atlantic, 1993)
- Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra (with Wynton Marsalis) – *Live in Swing City (Swingin' With Duke)* (Columbia, 1998)
- Cyrus Chestnut Trio – *Moonlight Sonata (Swingin' Classics)* (Venus, 2011)
- Cyrus Chestnut – *Natural Essence* (HighNote, 2015)

(LABEL CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11)

year because "I think the Dutch scene is better off with

one or two really visible labels, which also can help young musicians make their start and create some continuity. While lots of groups bring out their own CDs they have to do their promotion separately, which isn't very efficient." His band had already self-released Trytone's non-commercial and collectivist goals. "When the members like the music it will be released. Since nobody in the team earns money with the label, costs are relatively low." Brouwer, whose team function is maintaining the Trytone website and doing other computer-related work, had already helped other small groups record and mix their sessions, some of which were released on Trytone. Continuing to do this while involved with the label is "like a link in the chain," he declares.

2005-2015, a five-CD set commemorating the 10th anniversary of Spinifex, a band featuring Klein and bass guitarist Gonçalo Almeida, another team member, has so far been the label's only multi-disc release. "The initiative was entirely Spinifex' and it was definitely worth it," affirms Klein. "It's selling better than expected and most sets are sold at concerts." Trytone music is available through services such as CD Baby, iTunes, Amazon, Spotify, etc., with about 50% of its revenue coming from digital sales.

The label keeps growing. Three new sessions are scheduled for release this month: pianist Lisa Cay Miller's 682/861, which include Büyükberber in the personnel, and two CDs that feature non-team members: vocalist Kristina Fuchs' Lindens; and *Music from an Imaginary Land* by Netherlands-based world-music trio Ava, consisting of players from Italy, Turkey and Iran. ❖

For more information, visit [trytone.org](http://trytone.org).



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