

PLAYLIST | Ben Ratliff

Evil Chords and Jazz Flourishes

Xasthur

The California black-metal project Xasthur is one guy, Malefic. Malefic is Scott Conner. Scott Conner makes music that sounds as if it has gangrene. "All Reflections Drained," Xasthur's largely instrumental new record (Hydra Head) is misery on misery: unapologetic cardboard-box drums, background muttering, disorienting echoes, a guitar sound like cold,



JASON HELLMAN

granular gas. And, yeah, there's something to it. Sometimes, with layers of guitars and synth backgrounds cycling through evil chord progressions, there's a symphonic rattiness here (especially in "Masquerade of Incisions"), just demented enough to be good. Sometimes ("Obfuscated in Oblivion") it's just loud and committed enough to be good. Nearly all the time there's loads of dissonance — either from weird intonation or from purposefully clashing lines — but it doesn't make the music pointy and icy. It makes it dirty and dripping, correct for Xasthur's dismal atmosphere.

Christian McBride

Christian McBride is so often the people's choice of current bassists in jazz that it's strange he hasn't had an acoustic band as a going concern for some years. Inside Straight is the solution to that problem, a quintet recently convened for the express purpose of being able to play at the Village

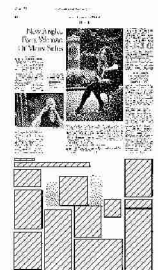
Vanguard. Its first album, "Kind of Brown" (Mack Avenue), sounds like affable, deep-



digging, not overschooled jazz from one generation back; you might think of New York in the early 1990s, when Bradley's was still at 70 University Place and jazz wasn't yet turning much to hip-hop for inspiration. All of Mr. McBride's playing — solos and accompaniment — is amazingly agile and melodic; but the alert, up-and-up feeling of his playing spreads out to the entire band, including the pianist Eric Reed (crucial on "Stick & Move"), the vibraphonist Warren Wolf Jr. and the saxophonist Steve Wilson, who creates some memorably tart, Ornette Coleman-flavored improvising on Freddie Hubbard's "Theme for Kareem."

Josh Berman

I like the stylish cleanness of "Old Idea," the first album by the jazz cornet player Josh Berman. Mr. Berman, a Chicagoan in his late 30s, came late to jazz, and this can be detected in a record that sounds a little careful, a little bit filmic and a little overindebted to the half-mainstream, half-vanguardist jazz records of the mid-1960s by musicians like Bobby Hutcherson, Eric Dolphy, Jackie McLean. Jason Adasiewicz, the vibraphonist on Mr. Berman's record, does his version of Mr. Hutcherson's spooky, dissonant vibraphone chords (as he does on two other new and tasty Chicago jazz records, the Robert Mazurek Quintet's "Sound Is" and Klang's "Tea Music"), and Mr. Berman's playing merges the textural style of Bill Dixon with old-fashioned melodic trumpeters in jazz from as far back as the '20s. It's a record with gen-



erous learning but no big attitude. There's

DAVID BELISLE

space in it, as well as harmonic mobility and gentle humor.

Tiny Vipers

Jesy Fortino, the young Seattle folk singer who goes by the name of Tiny Vipers, throws her stone into the water and waits, really waits, to watch the ripples. On "Life on Earth," her second album for Sub Pop, you hear from her voice a big Neil Young vibrato, an idiosyncratic swallowing and opening of vowels, a beautiful reverb; from her guitar, a careful and slow arpeggiated picking of chords. This seems like music for or from some ritual; it matters to say that it happens mostly in real time, except for "Time Takes," halfway through the



EARL WILSON/THE NEW YORK TIMES

record, where echoing acoustic overdubs hover over her strumming. She moves slowly, but she's a good musician and singer; this is the surprise, because in her line of work you expect more dishevelment. Ms. Fortino may be a one-woman opera-

tion, but if you're looking for good aesthetics, you should also remember the name Andrew Hernandez, the engineer who warmed it up in his analog studio.

Yob

The doom-metal band Yob, from Eugene, Ore., makes long songs earn their length. Like the rest of its work, the songs on this trio's forthcoming record "The Great Cessation" are played slowly, with meticulous care. The trick of this music is that the composed details, the subtle craft and narrative texture of it, come at you not through quietude but enveloping, mind-stun volume. (Except for when the group downshifts to mellowness, as they do on the album's title track.) Profound Lore Records will release the album on CD and vinyl on July 14; you can hear tracks at the band's Myspace page, myspace.com/yobdoom, and a full mp3 of "Burning the Altar," an Arthurian castle of a song, at the label's site, profoundlorerecords.com. Reunited after breaking up for a few years — during which the singer and guitarist Mike Scheidt formed a band called Middian that was dropped by its label after having been sued by a different band called Midian — Yob sounds back in full concentration, ready to compete.

ONLINE: RELATED LINKS

Official Web sites of the musicians mentioned in the Playlist:

nytimes.com/music

Far left, Xasthur, who is Malefic, who is Scott Conner; left, Tiny Vipers (Jesy Fortino); right, Christian McBride. Below, from left, Mike Scheidt, Aaron Rieseberg and Travis Foster of Yob.



CHRIS BRUNI