

# making tracks

## Louis Armstrong *Birth of the All Stars*

Upbeat URCD204

Here's a Louis compilation with a difference, from the period when economics and a desire for creative release shifted the great man from a big band to a smaller group. Promoter Ernie Anderson is credited here with persuading Louis's management to go with a small-combo gig in New York in May 1947. The reward was a full house and some uplifting music, represented here by four splendid quartet tracks. Mike Pointon's notes are as comprehensive as his collection of tracks - 21 in all, from 1947 to 1954, with Louis in various putative All Star groups. He sounds vibrant and engaged, alongside such stars as drummer Sid Catlett, clarinetist Ed Hall and pianist Dick Cary. Try 'Dear Old Southland' to hear Louis at his imperious best. (PV)

## Robert Fowler *Tight Lines*

Diving Duck DDRCD002

Fowler is a personable voice on tenor and clarinet, and a busy presence on the mainstream scene. His relaxed flourishes on 'Groove Yard' (over Jeremy Brown's fluent bassline) recall Scott Hamilton, and guitarist Andrew Kuc and the admirable James Pearson show clever touches on the same track. Mulligan's 'The Red Door' is nippier, with Fowler typically solid, ahead of more fine piano from Pearson. On 'C'est What', trombonist Alistair White is added, raising everyone's game. The title track is a slippery original for Fowler's unhurried clarinet, with Brown and Kuc again prominent. No barriers are breached, but this is rewarding music, full of bright moments. And, on this evidence, Alistair White may be this country's next important trombone voice. (PV)

## Fionna Duncan *Young and Foolish*

TenToTen TTTCD5755

If there's any justice, this CD will spread the word about Fionna Duncan's fine singing well beyond her native Scotland, where the recording was made. In the company of a superb rhythm section - pianist Brian Kellock, bassist Ronnie Rae, and drummer John Rae - she swings her way through a selection of superior standards, her diction immaculate, her smoky voice investing the words with subtle shades of meaning, and phrasing just like a top horn player. I agree with Ralph M Laing, who suggests in the liner notes that a

great singing stylist should be instantly recognisable. Well, Fionna Duncan certainly meets that criterion - listen to her unusually slow, and bold, treatment of 'Lady Be Good', her duet with Brian Kellock on the title track, or - my favourite in this set - her emotional reading of Andy Razaf's 'S'posin'. For some time now, Fionna Duncan has been running highly successful vocal workshops for aspiring singers; hopefully this CD will make more people aware of just how much skill, wisdom, and experience she has to pass on to them. (PM)

## 6PAC *Last Minute Changes*

6PAC02

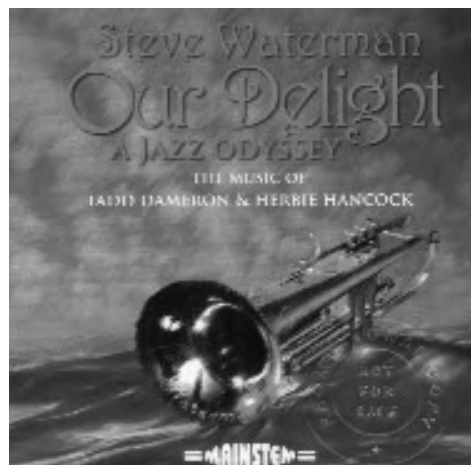
In November 2004, 6pac won the Peter Whittingham Jazz Award for an ambitious project that involved organising a competition for young jazz composers in the north of England, visiting Huddersfield and Sheffield, Manchester and Liverpool to work with potential entrants. All the pieces submitted were performed by 6pac, and judged by the band along with the distinguished saxophonists Andy Scott and Bob Mintzer. This CD is a record of the project, on which the members of 6pac - trumpeter Russell Bennett, saxophonist Kenji Fenton, trombonist Richard

Wigley, pianist Andrew Stamatakis-Brown, bassist Gavin Barras and drummer Ben Gray - play the winning two compositions, three other entries, along with six pieces by members of the band. The ensemble playing, arrangements and soloing are excellent throughout. The runner-up was Huddersfield University music student Richard Glover, who submitted the impressive three-part *Cornell Suite*, with first place going to Salma Alam of the Royal Northern College of Music for the short but highly absorbing 'Three(Four)[Five]' (PM)

## Steve Waterman *Our Delight*

Mainstem MSTCD 0041

Trumpet master Steve Waterman may not be exactly famous, but this self-effacing musician has been admired by his peers for over 20 years. All credit to Mainstem's MD, David Hays, for choosing him to mastermind a series of albums (this is the second, devoted to Tadd Dameron and Herbie Hancock) featuring the work of some of the post-World War 2 jazz writers. Waterman's sound on Dameron's 'If You Could See Me Now' (with vocalist Frank Holder echoing Billy Eckstine) is absolutely heart stopping, and he's also a marvellous arranger and inspired leader. Pianist Gareth Williams, bassist Alec Dankworth and drummer Clark Tracey make an outstanding rhythm section, as you can hear when the beat on Herbie Hancock's 'Canteloupe Island' switches to straightahead swing, heralding the arrival of that gifted vibraphonist Frank Ricotti. The ever-popular 'Chameleon', 'Watermelon Man', 'Maiden Voyage' and 'Dolphin Dance' are all here, springboards for Steve's A-team of soloists including Dave O'Higgins, Andy Panayi and Mark Nightingale. And Dameron's 'Good Bait', 'Our Delight' and 'Ladybird' remind us what a great melodist he was. Outstanding. (BB)



ROBIN ASPLAND/JEREMY BROWN/STEVE BRIDGEMAN/FX GARNETT

ANITA WARDELL NOTED



## Anita Wardell *Noted*

Specific Jazz SPEC006

Expat Antipodean singer Anita Wardell showing that scat-singing and vocalese don't have to sound contrived, ballads can be endlessly reinvented if a sufficiently imaginative artist is on the case, and that fine timing is everything. Wardell is supported here by an excellent band including saxophonist Alex Garnett and pianist Robin Aspland. Classics like 'Moanin'', 'The Sidewinder', Horace Silver's 'Lonely Woman', and 'Watermelon Man' confirm her instrument-like touch and empathy with the band, 'Autumn Leaves' gets a flat-out uptempo treatment, and in general this patiently-evolving and coolly authoritative vocal force on the UK scene sounds like she's well and truly arrived. (JF)

## Tina May *A Wing And A Prayer*

33JAZZ 134

The latest in a series of albums for 33Jazz finds singer Tina May exploring, as she puts it, 'the vulnerable side of life', and indeed there is more than a touch of melancholy about most of the songs. Far from being a succession of gloomy sentiments, however, 'A Wing and A Prayer' rates among the best of Tina's impressive list of recordings. The sheer intensity of some of these tracks not only demands the listener's attention, but presents immense challenges to the musicians. Tina May has faultless pitch and intonation, yet she still manages to suggest human frailty without lapsing into mannerism. The singer and sparkling pianist Nikki Iles have, over time, developed a marvellous understanding, and they are joined



here by the pensive and atmospheric contributions of Stan

Sulzmann on saxophones and flute. Tina added her own lyrics to a beautiful version of Kenny Wheeler's 'Gentle Piece' and to Joe Henderson's 'Black Narcissus' - known here as 'Blue Narcissus', and