

**A Beautiful Friendship**  
**Bill Watrous/Pete Christlieb/Carl Saunders/  
 Gary Urwin Jazz Orchestra (Summit)**  
 by Ken Dryden

Gary Urwin formed his Los Angeles-based big band in 2000 and has recorded and performed with it on a regular basis, utilizing a potent cast of West Coast allstars in his core group, augmenting it with guests. For his latest CD, the arranger and composer draws from a mix of standards, jazz classics, Brazilian favorites and originals, extensively featuring a trio of septuagenarians in trombonist Bill Watrous, trumpeter Carl Saunders and tenor saxophonist Pete Christlieb (who turns 70 this month).

One could easily imagine Urwin's scoring of the title track being played by the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Orchestra, the chart buoyed by richly textured interplay and strong solos. Watrous' sublime muted horn, Christlieb's mellow tenor and Saunders' sparkling trumpet blend beautifully with Urwin's arrangement of Bill Evans' "Waltz For Debby", though the ensemble adds a twist, featuring flutist Bethany Pflueger prominently. Saunders contributed the easygoing bossa nova "Autumn Sojourn", showcasing himself, Christlieb and the talented pianist Christian Jacob (known for his work with vocalist Tierney Sutton). The orchestra also delivers inspired performances of Brazilian standards "Gentle Rain" and "Look to the Sky". A chestnut like "Guess I'll Hang My Tears Out to Dry" may seem old-fashioned to many arrangers, but Urwin's magical setting provides a lush, inventive backdrop for Watrous' emotional solo. Saunders penned "Dear Mr. Florence" in tribute to the late arranger Bob Florence, featuring Christlieb as its only soloist. Trumpet battles have always been a crowd pleaser and though this is a studio date, the exchanges between Saunders and Wayne Bergeron on "Shaw Nuff" and Bobby Shew on "Joy Spring" still provide plenty of excitement. The poignant closing selection adds another surprise, a brief but heartfelt piano solo by Jacob of "We'll Be Together Again". Let's hope so!

For more information, visit [summitrecords.com](http://summitrecords.com)



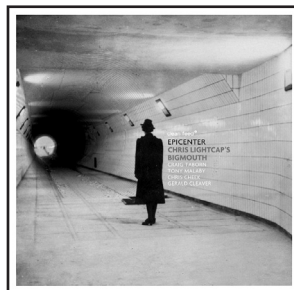
**Go**  
**Dexter Gordon (Blue Note)**  
**Soy Califa (Live from Magleås Højskole 1967)**  
**Dexter Gordon (Gearbox)**  
 by Clifford Allen

Certain architects of bop and hardbop went on to become progressive forces in the advancement of improvised music. This would not invalidate the course of standards and blues, for such idioms certainly have a wealth of possibilities to mine and it is this tack that other pioneers explored until their departure—saxophonists Jackie McLean and Dexter Gordon, for example. That's not to say that mainstream players weren't influenced by all that swirled around them, but that they preferred to solve musical problems with an eye toward known lineage.

In hindsight it's surprising that Gordon was out of the limelight at the time of his first Blue Note recording in 1961, *Doin' Alright*. Apart from a one-off Jazzland date, *The Resurgence of Dexter Gordon*, he hadn't recorded in several years owing to the plague of "personal problems" that beset many artists of the period. From 1962, *Go* is one of a pair of Blue Note albums featuring the impeccable ensemble of pianist Sonny Clark, bassist Butch Warren and drummer Billy Higgins and is widely considered one of Gordon's finest studio dates, with a mixture of finely-rendered standards and the leader's "Cheese Cake". His sound is absolutely forceful, laconic cadences matched with a steely conviction that shows reciprocity with the slightly younger Coltrane and Sonny Rollins. Whether drawing velvety drips or kicking through the gates, Gordon isn't the only voice; as with his most rewarding work, the quartet here feels like an actual unit, with the supple power of Higgins supporting and needling the leader into some of his most intriguing improvisations. Clark and Warren similarly have an elegant drive as well as a supple approach that adds a particulate caress to the ballads. *Go* is unimpeachable music, which has thankfully remained in print for decades and should be a cornerstone of any jazz collection.

*Soy Califa* captures Gordon at the height of his expatriate career, in a working quartet featuring longtime confrere, pianist Kenny Drew, alongside bassist Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen (NHØP) and drummer Albert "Tootie" Heath. Recorded in 1967 at a Copenhagen high school where the quartet led master classes, this is the Gordon of such famed live dates as the Montmartre recordings (issued on Black Lion) and the Zurich Jazz Festival (issued on SteepleChase). Released on the British archival imprint Gearbox, this brief set tears through the Gordon original title track and the Gene Ammons/Sonny Stitt vehicle "Blues Up and Down", as well as a biting rendition of "The Shadow of Your Smile". At a shade under 30 minutes some might be left wanting for more (especially considering that Gearbox LPs aren't exactly cheap) and the recording is a little lo-fi, but it's a small price to pay for a prime chase. "Blues Up and Down" is, unsurprisingly, the meat and Heath's overdriven ride cymbal stokes Gordon's wry, liquid phrases into buoyantly hot, rough energy. NHØP is a warm-toned bulwark as Drew's insistent, bright funk maintains a harmonic anchor and the performance gives ample weight to the phrase "free within the tradition".

For more information, visit [bluenote.com](http://bluenote.com) and [gearboxrecords.com](http://gearboxrecords.com). A Gordon tribute is at Dizzy's Club Feb. 26th-Mar. 1st. See Calendar.



**Epicenter**  
**Chris Lightcap's Bigmouth (Clean Feed)**  
 by David R. Adler

Bassist Chris Lightcap has arrived at something distinctive as a composer, leading a band with two tenor saxophones to summon big legato melodies full of tension and yearning. He committed to this sound early on with his 1999 quartet debut *Lay-Up* and developed it on two subsequent albums, *Bigmouth* (2002) and *Deluxe* (2008), ultimately expanding to a quintet with piano. On his fourth release, *Epicenter*, Lightcap stays with quintet, relying on Craig Taborn's mind-melting Wurlitzer and piano and drummer Gerald Cleaver's expansive tonal palette to underline

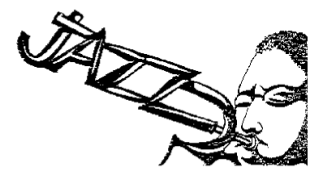
that signature two-tenor sound. Chris Cheek and Tony Malaby unite to dramatic effect when playing Lightcap's soaring melodic statements, which they voice in wide harmony, unison or octaves depending on the moment. As soloists, their personalities diverge: Cheek has a certain grace and restraint in his swing; Malaby is edgier in his tone and his harmonic and rhythmic choices.

Aside from The Velvet Underground cover "All Tomorrow's Parties", a deliberately chaotic sendoff, the seven remaining tracks all stem from a recent Chamber Music America commission Lightcap originally titled "Lost and Found: New York". The inspiration is the city, hence the "epicenter" of the album title and the freebop vibe of the title track, which brings Lightcap's fellow bassist and forebear Charlie Haden to mind.

The rhythmic character of the music is accessible though offbeat, driven as much by big-toned and agile bass as swinging, multi-textured drums. Stop to savor the unaccompanied bass intros on "Arthur Avenue" and "Stillwell" and the calmly profound bass solo on "Stone By Stone".

On "White Horse" and "Down East", packed with sonic and conceptual detail despite their pointed brevity, Lightcap seems to make a genre leap, perhaps closer to the world of The Velvet Underground than to jazz as such. The former is a lovely, fast-moving thing with Lightcap on multi-tracked acoustic guitars. The latter is a nervous rock anthem, Taborn pounding steady piano eighth-note chords, tenors entering at full blast. Here Lightcap's deft, imaginative use of the musical canvas hints at still more intriguing things to come.

For more information, visit [cleanfeed-records.com](http://cleanfeed-records.com). This band is at Cornelia Street Café Feb. 27th-28th. See Calendar.



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