

Eponymous
The EarRegulars (gen-ERIK)
by David R. Adler

There's irony in the fact that The EarRegulars recorded their debut CD not at The Ear Inn, their longtime homebase in lower Manhattan, but rather in a Berlin studio. No matter, because the live energy and unshakably strong swing-feel captured does the band proud. Guitarist Matt Munisteri and bassist Greg Cohen generate enough rhythmic juice to erase any longing for a drummer. Trumpeter Jon-Erik Kellso and saxophonist Scott Robinson are on fire as a frontline pair, displaying high skill and refinement in the polyphonic style of early jazz, the band's specialty.

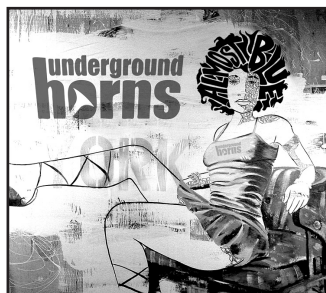
Cohen's two-beat and walking feels are infectious and his bowed accompaniment on "Baby, Won't You Please Come Home" deserves special mention—it's as old-school as this music can get. Munisteri's snappy, airtight rhythm guitar is full of subtle voice leading, a sign of his deep immersion in and love for the repertoire. His solos are rhythmically gutsy, appealingly bone-dry in tone; when the horns drop out and he takes the lead with only Cohen behind him, the effect is always intense.

It's fitting that the spirit of Louis Armstrong would hover over the session, notably on W.C. Handy's

"Aunt Hagar's Blues" and vintage pop numbers "Thanks a Million" and "I've Gotta Right to Sing the Blues". There are tips of the hat as well to early Frank Sinatra ("I'm Sorry I Made You Cry"), Jelly Roll Morton ("Good Old New York") and others. On the Sophie Tucker vehicle "Some of These Days", Robinson picks up a cornet for an improvised duet with Kellso up front.

Also brilliant is Robinson's frequent use of the tárogató, a Romanian/Hungarian woodwind instrument, perhaps never before heard in the context of '20s-'30s jazz. It sounds like a warmer soprano saxophone, especially beautiful in combination with guitar on the intro to "Baby, Won't You Please Come Home". It's just one of the ways in which The EarRegulars make this old music new and wholly unpredictable.

For more information, visit KellsoJazz.com. This band is at The Ear Inn Sundays. See Regular Engagements.



Almost Blue
Underground Horns (s/r)
by Elliott Simon

Literally NYC's Underground Horns, these musicians began as subway performers. A potent horn section led

by Welf Dorr's alto saxophone includes Patriq Moody's cornet, Kevin Moehringer's trombone and Andrew McGovern's trumpet. Drummer Kevin Raczka, djembe player Okai and tuba player Chanell Crichlow remind how exciting and integral a live rhythm section can be; they are up in the mix with a crisscross rhythmic sound, which interacts with the frontline, providing all the broad organic support that these horns need.

Almost Blue's AfroBalkan-Creole musical core also incorporates Latin and funk with a healthy appreciation of Monk, Mingus and Miles. A revved-up "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat" leads off over a pulsating African rhythm while the band also injects trumpeter Don Cherry's "Mopti" with additional exotic cultural influences, serving as an apt closer. In between the band goes on a sonic world tour that begins with "Ethio", a catchy melody whose hypnotic beat serves as a platform for individual soloing and Moehringer's funky trombone.

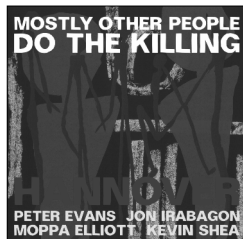
New Orleans is visited during "Mardi Gras" with a superb Second Line soundtrack followed by "Creole", a trip to Haiti written and sung by Okai in local Haitian patois. AfroLatin jazz is given its due with a sweet ensemble send-up of the great Ethiopian jazz musician Mulatu Astatke's "Cha Cha". Four originals from Dorr round out this release and stretch its boundaries: "Full Moon" is an almost breezy piece of funk; "House Song" has the band straying into an organically repetitive take on techno; "Rag A Tone" cleverly works off of a dembow reggaeton beat; and the title cut is a surprisingly elegant statement with Dorr adding bass clarinet to the sonic palate. *Almost Blue*, while true to the band's formula of brassy danceable music, stretches out stylistically with excellent results.

For more information, visit undergroundhorns.com. This band is at Blue Note Feb. 21st. See Calendar.

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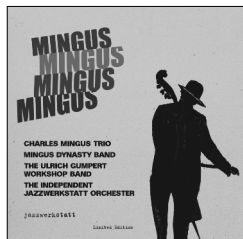
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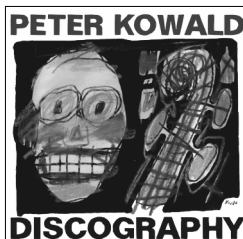
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