

**Will Sellenraad**  
*Balance*  
Beezwax Records

Guitarist Will Sellenraad chooses a chill-out jazz tune to kick off his third recording as a leader, and that's the first revelation from his simmering, sexy quartet. Sellenraad is a gifted guitarist who studied with John Abercrombie, Jim Hall and bassist Reggie Workman. His compositions are artfully constructed, building on simple themes and rhythmic hooks that energize his working quartet. By listening to Sellenraad's solos, where his clean lines are fluid and always interesting, you can hear traces of Grant Green and Kenny Burrell. His affinity for the "guitar/tenor" sound of the '60's is evident throughout the fresh, well-paced songs on *Balance*.



Another surprise is saxophonist Abraham Burton, who plays hot and cool, and occasionally tart. Burton

burst on the renewed jazz scene in the early '90's when Wynton Marsalis led the charge among the many young jazz lions, fresh out of school and technically prodigious. He studied under Jackie McLean and played in drummer Arthur Taylor's band for five years (Taylor's Wailers), all of which has made him a formidable saxophonist. Burton has too few recordings under his name and that's a shame — his vigorous tone has a passion and intensity that's infectious. Check out his kinetic chops on "Blewis," a super-sized groove written for drummer Victor Lewis, where Burton's rousing horn is matched by Sellenraad's energetic trade offs.

Kiyoshi Kitagawa is one my favorite bassists. He first caught my ear on the terrific Harper Brothers' CD, *Live At The Village Vanguard* (Verve, 1989). More recently, he's been a part of Kenny Barron, Jon Faddis and Ben Riley's groups. He sets up a fast groove on "Double Down," and contributes a poetic original, "Tell Me Why" that evokes Pat Metheny's lyricism. But the backbone of this unit could be Victor Lewis, a legendary drummer well known for the band he co-led with Bobby Watson (Horizon) and also his 11-year tenure as the drummer in Stan Getz's quartet. A much in-demand musician, Lewis applies his usual, classy coloration and shading to Sellenraad's tunes, and if you focus on his technique from song to song, you'll hear a musician brimming with ideas and it's why Lewis is a master of pace and rhythm.

The kinship among Sellenraad's group is strong and their interplay on *Balance* makes for superior listening. Sellenraad's music can seduce you one minute and push you back on your heels the next. There's so much to like about *Balance* — from the first track forward, highlighted by the bossa funk of "Nye" and the evocative, swirling melody that's "Prayer." Sellenraad is, without a doubt, a bold and rising star on the jazz scene. (9 tracks; 62:34 minutes) ★★★★★

**Derrick Gardner & The Jazz Prophets + 2**  
*Echoes of Ethnicity*  
Owl Studios

Just when the country as a whole is slimming down, trumpeter Derrick Gardner is bulking up, reconfiguring his eponymously named sextet, DG and the Jazz Prophets, by

adding two more players to the mix. Now a sleek, fast-moving octet that gets its steam and inspiration from trailblazing groups like those headed by Charles Mingus, Horace Silver and Cannonball Adderley, the music on *Echoes of Ethnicity* is steeped in the fiery, small band sound of the '60's, yet Gardner makes it utterly distinctive by combining hard-driving arrangements with finger-poppin' rhythmic energy. Derrick Gardner plays in a rounded, full-bodied style like Clifford Brown, while his bio also mentions Freddie Hubbard and Woody Shaw. Gardner has his own voice, though, and like the best jazz musicians, he can convey a range of emotions on his trumpet — something that's illustrated to perfection on the warmly played standard, "Autumn In New York."



The strongest tracks, like "4Newk," "Afros & Cubans" and "Mercury Boulevard," take advantage of the rich, harmonic textures that a five-horn frontline can provide — but it's the soloists that blow up these tunes from the inside out. Together with his brother, trombonist Vincent Gardner, pianist Rick Roe, tenorist Rob Dixon and alto player Brad Leali, Gardner and his Prophets provide a potent snapshot of a great jazz band in action and it makes this music sound ALIVE. Bassist Gerald Cannon (who provides a deep, Latin American groove to Freddie Hubbard's, "The Melting Pot") and baritone sax player Jason Marshall give these compositions extra heft, thanks to the superior recording by engineer Gary Mielke. (10 tracks; 73:37 minutes) ★★★★★

**Mike Holober & The Gotham Jazz Orchestra**  
*Quake*  
Sunnyside Records

Good music — *really* good music — has the ability to take you places and touch an array of emotions. Pianist/composer Mike Holober achieves this by bringing together top-flight musicians, many of them undiscovered and underrated, who play five original compositions and two rock standards on his second recording with his orchestra. *Quake* may suggest some seismic, earth-moving sounds, but Holober's charts substitute subtlety and refined musicianship for big and brassy. The title tune, "Twist & Turn" and a dazzling arrangement of "Ruby Tuesday" carry a modern flavor that's propelled by Holober's piano and Fender Rhodes and sustained by the solid rhythm section — guitarist Steve Cardenas, bassist John Hebert and drummer John Riley.

Arrangers like Jim McNeely and Bob Brookmeyer inspire Holober's musical palette; the latter is a trombonist and bandleader acclaimed for his influence on West Coast jazz and the post-bop cool style popularized in the 50s by Stan Getz and Jimmy Guiffre. *Quake*, however, is a thoroughly modern creation. Next to his impressive composing skills, Holober is a bright pianist and his too-brief solos on "Note To Self" and the melodic "Thrushes" take on an expressive quality similar to McCoy Tyner's. Also worth name checking are this orchestra's better known players — saxophonists Tim Ries and Dave Pietro and trumpeters Scott Wendholt and Joe Magnarelli, as well as the four stalwart trombonists — who collectively give this music the momentum it deserves and lifts your spirits while doing so. (7 tracks; 70:58 minutes) ★★★★★ ■

Nick Bewsey is co-owner of Blue Raccoon in Lambertville, NJ, and a long-time jazz fan. nick1361@yahoo.com.