

Hot Cup

by Kurt Gottschalk

It's not the most unusual thing to find a couple of cover bands at a Brooklyn bar and at least at such an eclectic club as Zebulon it might not be so rare that Velvet Underground and Merle Haggard tribute bands should appear on the same bill. But when the night is a double release party for two new records out on what is purportedly a jazz label, things start to get a little more rarefied.

The bassist for both bands on this June night was also the man behind that label, Hot Cup Records, and the driving force behind its most popular act, the reverent bastardization of hardbop known as Mostly Other People Do the Killing. Besides leading MOPDTK, Moppa Elliot backs a small coterie of bands with a rotation of members including trumpet phenom Peter Evans, talented baritone saxophonist Charles Evans and award-winning altoist Jon Irabagon, multi-faceted guitarist Jon Lundbom and the adrenaline-soaked, testosterone-laced drummer Kevin Shea. And with this variety of projects and players, Elliot is busily questioning the lines drawn around perceived genres in music and the ways in which humor can be used to smudge those lines.

"I really don't think playing straightahead harmonic jazz tunes in 2010 is valid," Elliot said. "I've

got a stack of Wayne Shorter records at home if I want to listen to that. Doing that now, when you're not covering anything new, doesn't tell me anything about what it's like to be alive now."

Elliot doesn't claim to be alone in the push for relevance. He acknowledges others in a striking new generation of players in New York who are remodeling the tradition for their own use. But the Hot Cup brand is unique - and sometimes disparaged - for its interest in garnering laughter along with the applause.

"When I listen to Jason Moran or Mary Halvorson or Vijay Iyer, even when I don't like it, they're trying something," he said. "There isn't enough encouragement of that. I don't think people think through what they're doing enough. I mean, I think it's really good to have repertory bands. If you're going to have a Miles repertory band, great, do it."

His MOPDTK uses some of the trappings of repertory. The album covers and liner notes send up the great sides of the '60s. And while the quartet can do a burning take on Dizzy Gillespie's "Night in Tunisia", it's likely to be preceded by an uproariously vulgar, uncomfortably orgiastic drum solo by Shea. And the annual "Yulenog" releases hover between the charming, offensive and insipid, with titles like "And I am Telling You I am Still a Virgin".

"I think a lot of people think humor somehow negates what you're doing, like you can't be serious, like Weird Al," he added. "Although I take Weird Al seriously."

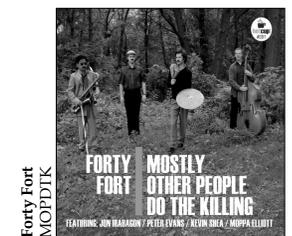
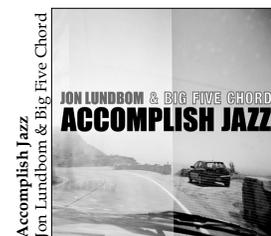
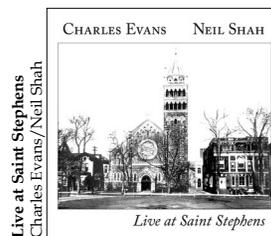
The anything-goes attitude that Hot Cup promotes stems, at least in part, from what Elliot referred to as "a month of epiphany" in college, when he discovered Han Bennink, Misha Mengelberg and the Instant Composers Pool, bolstering his listening with Kevin Whitehead's excellent 1998 book *New Dutch Swing*. It was also in his final year at Oberlin that he met Peter Evans and self-released his first record, marking the first hints of his band and label.

"That year was when all the stuff we do, in a sense, stems from," he said. "We were both reading all kinds of books and listening to all kinds of music and trying to annoy as many people as we could."

Elliot graduated with a degree in composition in 2002 and moved to New York, the self-produced CD *Pinpoint* in hand as a resume. He soon realized he was more interested in working on his own projects and teaching music (he currently works at St. Mary's High School in Manasset, Long Island, not far from his Astoria, Queens, home) than he was in trying to gig to make ends meet. Evans followed a year later and as their circle of friends and New York bandmates grew, so did the label.

And while Elliot and company aren't afraid of a little offbeat humor, it's not like everything the label releases should be filed under 'funny'. Puttin' on the Ritz's rendition of the Velvet Underground's 1968 album of rock bombast *White Light/White Heat* (released on vinyl only) crosses well into the terrain of

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 31)



LISTEN UP!

Born in Kyoto, Japan, pianist **MIKI HAYAMA** has performed with various artists including Kenny Garrett, Ralph Peterson, Aretha Franklin, Nnenna Freelon, Valery Ponomarev, Vincent Herring, Kiyoshi Kitagawa, Sean Jones, Victor Lewis and Tia Fuller (to name a few) since settling in New York in 2003. She has performed at Jazz Gallery, Blue Note, Birdland, Jazz Standard, Iridium, Smoke, Smalls, Zinc Bar, 55Bar, Fat Cat and Dizzy's Club.

Teachers: Some classical piano teachers. And I studied basic jazz piano with Sadayasu Fujii in Japan and studied from records by myself. After moving to New York, I had a chance to play many sessions with Kenny Garrett who taught me beyond my knowledge.

Influences: Too many to name! But on the jazz piano: Lennie Tristano, Bill Evans, Phineas Newborn Jr., Wynton Kelly, McCoy Tyner, Hampton Hawes, Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea, Keith Jarrett, Brad Mehldau and Geri Allen.

Current Projects: Leading my Trio and Quintet and playing in Mimi Jones Band, Pauline Jean Group, Sage, Vitaly Golovnev Group and occasionally Nnenna Freelon Group and Cathedral Baptist 100 Gospel Choir.

By Day: Practicing piano and finding some new things, learning songs for choir, watching CNN News and cooking.

I knew I wanted to be a musician when... I saw a

movie [*The Sound of Music*] when I was 11 years old.

Dream Band: I am satisfied with my bands now but I would love to play with Roy Haynes, Jack DeJohnette and John Patitucci.

Did you know? I used to have two nicknames. One is "Be" when I was in junior high because I was big fan of The Beatles at that time. Another one is "Lion" when I was at elementary school because of my curly hair.

For more information, visit mikihayama.com. Hayama is at Dizzy's Club Aug. 10th-14th. See Calendar.



Miki Hayama



Marcos Varela

Born in Houston, bassist **MARCOS VARELA** attended the highly acclaimed HSPVA and then moved to New York in 2004. He has shared the stage with Billy Hart, Charli Persip, Winard Harper, George Colligan, Jacob Sacks, EJ Strickland, Junior Mance, Bruce Barth, Tyshawn Sorey and Victor Jones, to name just a few. Most recently Varela has scored music for the films *Greenwich* and *11th* and *Roots in Water*, the

latter featured at the 2010 Tribeca Film Festival.

Teachers: Ron Carter, Michael Moore, Rufus Reid, Ben Street, Boris Kozlov, Mark Helias.

Influences: Charlie Parker to The Pixies, Coltrane to Pharrell, Hank Jones to Jimi Hendrix, Stevie Wonder to Nick Drake, James Brown to Wayne Shorter.

Current Projects: Marcos Varela/Caleb Curtis Quintet, Brad Leali Quartet, Bruce Cox Trio/Quartet, Waldron Ricks Quartet, Meilana Gillards Fine Print, Billy Hart Academy Sextet, Steve Hall Quartet, Evan Arntzen Quartet, Umar Bin Hassan (The Last Poets).

By Day: Practice, write music for film and TV and teach some private lessons.

I knew I wanted to be a musician when... I heard Paul Chambers playing on Miles Davis' live 1958 recording of "My Funny Valentine" from *Jazz at the Plaza*.

Dream Band: Herbie Hancock, Paul Motian, Lee Konitz and Wayne Shorter.

Did You Know? When I was younger I used to be a competitive archer on a national level.

For more information, visit marcosvarela.net. Varela is at *The Kitano* Aug. 12th with Lauren Sevian, *Bar Next Door* Aug. 14th with Bruce Cox, *Miles' Café* Aug. 26th as a leader and *Antibes Wednesdays* with Alex Terrier. See Calendar and Regular Engagements.