

RATINGS SCALE	Classic	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
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TAKING THE REINS



●●●●● JACK IRONS *NO HEADS ARE BETTER THAN ONE*

As impressive as they are, the typical descriptors of Jack Irons' career—early Chili Peppers drummer, mid-'90s Pearl Jam skinsman, Joe Strummer and Les Claypool collaborator, cofounder of the band Eleven—don't prepare you for the color and content of his work as a leader. On his second solo album, Irons fulfills the promise of his first collection, 2004's *Attention Dimension*, and offers a diverse selection of (mostly) instrumental tracks that are rhythmically compelling, mood heavy, individualistic, and, yes, *drummy*. Not that Jack's playing hasn't been well represented on record previously. But without a band vibe to serve, the drummer's exploratory nature really gets to flower here, with indie-ish loop intermissions ("Moon Tune," "Timbale Space Stew") and weird and worldly imaginary soundtracks ("Love Is All We Want," "Psy-Fi Disco") counterbalancing dense, driving full-kit workouts ("Doubloons," "Submarine Fez," "Sonic Tonic"). There's even a bona fide radio rocker with *hit* written all over it ("Nothing Opens Everything," featuring vocals and guitar by Jack's longtime musical partner Alain Johannes). The drum sound is wet, warm, and wonderful, and Irons is truly playing at the top of his game these days, so fans of his kit work will absolutely get their ya-yas out. With so many great ideas represented here, it's inspiring to reexamine Irons' early recordings for hints of the wonders to come. (jackirons.com) **Adam Budofsky**



●●●●● MIKE CLARK *CARNIVAL OF SOUL*

Coming from a soul-jazz vibe, beloved Headhunters drummer Mike Clark shows he's got a new trick or two up his sleeve. There's a slightly lighter, looser edge to this funk. Clark jabs triplet and double-time figures on the rock-steady "Monk's Dream." A few tracks later he plays a beautifully behind-the-beat groove under Jeff Pittson's organ solo on "Turok Son Of Stone," while still packing the fireworks. Later, "Bookin'" gives Clark a momentary chance to rip and roar, and on the very next track he's laying back in the stone-cold soul-jazz space of "Zoyd," punctuating the groove regularly with toms, as well as sweetly setting up the turnaround. The closer, "Catlett Outta The Bag," featuring guest drummer **LENNY WHITE**, is pure funk bliss, heavy on the skins. (Owl Studios) **Robin Tolleson**



●●●●● THE TRIO OF OZ *THE TRIO OF OZ*

Jazzers covering rock tunes is not new, and the concept tends to work best when those jazzers are actually fully adept at rock, as is the case with *The Trio of Oz*, **OMAR HAKIM**'s new collaboration with pianist Rachel Z. Somewhere between the dizzying 32nd-note triplets on Stone Temple Pilots' "Sour Girl" and the textured acoustic jungle beat on the Killers' "When You Were Young," it's clear the drummer isn't taking the passive approach. Featuring Hakim's colorful cymbal work and plenty of solos, the record feels less like a gimmick than a real band you're curious to catch live. (thetriofoz.com) **Ilya Stemkovsky**



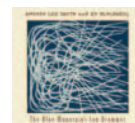
●●●●● GERRY GIBBS AND THE ELECTRIC THRASHER ORCH. *PLAY THE MUSIC OF MILES DAVIS 1967-1975*

Capturing the sounds, rhythms, and moods of 1967-75 Miles Davis, drummer Gerry Gibbs and Co. cop the dark prince's voodoo with fiery ambition. Though the twelve-piece orchestra nails such classics as "Nefertiti," "Black Satin," and "Bitches Brew," it also hits some dead ends of static jamming. Still, Gibbs acquits himself phenomenally throughout, recalling a genetic splice of Jack DeJohnette and Al Foster. (Whaling City Sound) **Ken Micallef**



●●●●● NATHANIEL STOOKEY *JUNKESTRA*

Classical composer Stookey gathered objects from San Francisco's trash heaps and recycled them as glorious percussion instruments for this three-movement octet piece. Thankfully, Stookey's inventive style, best known through string works, transcends common clatter. Skillfully arranging the instruments' timbres, Stookey creates a captivating, mysterious, and sonorous piece as performed by the **SAN FRANCISCO YOUTH ORCHESTRA**. A bonus "dance mix" provides a whimsical coda. The only downside is the disc's meager 15:33 length. One man's trash is another man's symphony. (Innova) **Jeff Potter**



●●●●● WADADA LEO SMITH AND ED BLACKWELL *THE BLUE MOUNTAIN'S SUN DRUMMER*

Funny how we're quick to associate Ed Blackwell with "free." Yet this 1986 concert of fully improvised trumpet-and-drums duets reminds us just how much the late, great drummer was really about creating clear ideas, melody, color, and structure. Supporting Smith's muscular and inventive trumpet playing, Blackwell gives the flights their arc and logic. Few drummers could pull it off with such a satisfying meeting of the cerebral and the earthy. (Kabell Records) **Jeff Potter**

MORE DRUMMER-LED RELEASES by Ilya Stemkovsky

Brooklyn's **DAN WEISS** leads his piano trio on *Timshel*, a set of introspective tunes featuring slick brushes and dramatic swells. The title track's dark, understated polyrhythmic intensity allows Weiss to freewheel around his kit, choking cymbals and accenting odd-time passages. (sunnysiderecords.com)

Muscular, swinging bop, exceptional Latin grooves, and high-energy soloing come together on **PEPPE MEROLLA**'s *Stick With Me*. Merolla's well-recorded debut as a leader pulls no punches, and his extended solo on "Mozzin" thrills with creative cowbell fills and great footwork. (peppemerolla.com)

On the live *Stories And Negotiations*, Chicago-based drummer **MIKE REED** and his group People, Places & Things recall the Windy City's 1950s roots while featuring some old-school players. Reed is equally at home with brushes and sticks, but it's his tactful support of the elder statesmen that makes the toes tap. (482music.com)

Perennial kit sideman **PAUL VAN WAGENINGEN** and his bassist brother, Marc, lay down TOP-style funk and driving Afro-Cuban rhythms on *Muziek*, a showcase for their studio-honed chops. The inventive Dutch drummer stays authentic, alternately keeping time and letting it fly as needed. (patoisrecords.com)

