

Reviews

Reviewed: Javon Jackson | Delfeayo Marsalis Uptown Jazz Orchestra | Sacha Distel

05 January 2025 [François van de Linde](#)



Delfeayo Marsalis

Javon Jackson: Javon And Nikki Go To The Movies (Solid Jackson 1009)

Tin Pan Alley/American Songbook is as far removed from contemporary cinema as Mickey Mouse from Hannibal Lector. In the 1920s-50s, this rich source of songs and the big screen were Siamese twins. It's a connection that is valued by Javon Jackson, who evokes the era with instrumentals, vocal tracks and poetry. The latter is written and performed by poet and civil-rights icon Nikki Giovanni, who worked with Jackson earlier on *The Gospel Of Giovanni* in 2022.

Jackson, alumnus of Art Blakey & The Jazz Messengers, hasn't lost anything from his burnished tenor sound and weaves his supple lines around the suave voice of Nicole Zuraitis in titles such as Kern/Hammerstein's *The Folks Who Live On The Hill*. Among the instrumental tracks, the snappy *When The Time Is Right* stands out, which benefits from Jeremy Manasia's farm-fresh piano solo.

- Advertisement -

81-year-old Giovanni's laid-back timing and down-to-earth delivery is an antidote to rap's high drama, lime-lighting three poems redolent with wit and sensuality. The samba-fied *Speak Low/That Day* makes abundantly clear that age, after all, is just a number: "Let's do what we did all day, if you got the dough, I've got the heat, you can use my oven, till it's warm and sweet..." Jackson and Giovanni's backing band, rather unobtrusive on the whole, could've used some spicy seasoning and leaves it up to their leader to ignite the flames of *Valse Hot* from Jackson's hero Sonny Rollins.

Delfeayo Marsalis Uptown Jazz Orchestra: Crescent City Jewels (Troubadour Jazz Records 8292024)

New Orleans music is a music of roots and bloodlines. The Marsalis family, though uniquely gifted in jazz improvisation, is but one prominent clan among many. Among the Marsalis brotherhood, the one who acts out the celebration of the melting pot of NO culture most fervently is [Delfeayo](#), predominantly with his Uptown Jazz Orchestra, which recorded several richly varied albums over more than a decade. *Crescent City Jewels* is no exception.

- Advertisement -

True to his roots, Marsalis produces a hodgepodge of R&B, swing and funk that is jubilant to the max, his tart trombone embedded in booming and precisely punctuated brass and reed parts. A succession of diverse soloists joins the festivities, such as saxophonist Aaron Narcisse and pianist Davell Crawford. They clearly live and breathe the NO aesthetic, revelling in a mix of grit and exotic rhythmic displacement. Brother Branford Marsalis does his two cents, elevating the Spanish march *El Último Café* (on soprano) and Joe Henderson's post-bop classic *Inner Urge* (on tenor) to silver dollars.

Singer Kermit Ruffins' reenactment of Jessie Hill's *Ooh Poo Pah Doo* is outstanding. (Speaking of clans, Hill was the uncle of trombone star Trombone Shorty.) Marsalis introduces a new singer to his band, Tanya Boyd-Cannon, who is not only outstanding but plainly "outtasight", her voice springy, greasy and tuneful. Her versatility is striking, ranging from the gospel-funk of *Valley Of Prayers* through Thelonious Monk's *Round Midnight* to swing anthem *Exactly Like You*.

- Advertisement -

There seems to be no end of fervour in Delfeayo Marsalis' vibrant orchestra.

Sacha Distel: Jazz 1955–1962 (Frémeaux & Associés 5882)

Jazz needs special mention in the title of this three-CD set to avoid confusion for customers in French warehouses and on the worldwide web. Sacha Distel is best known as a pop singer and poster boy that competed with the likes of Johnny Hallyday with sugary hits as *Scoubidou*. But before stardom in France, Distel, nephew of big-band leader Ray Ventura, had already enjoyed a career as a jazz guitarist since the late 1940s. He was part of the burgeoning bebop scene and after a visit to New York modelled himself after Stan Getz's influential guitarist, Jimmy Raney. It is the influence of Raney and such like-minded guitarists as Billy Bauer and Tal Farlow that pervades his playing on the music that is presented in this box, a first-rate release with liner notes, record covers and a complete discography.

Distel's contributions culled from Lionel Hampton's *Crazy Rhythm* album on EmArcy are commonplace and make up only a small part of the long title-track and *Night And Day*. Distel is featured more prominently on the album *Afternoon In Paris* with pianist John Lewis and the Modern Jazz Quartet minus Milt Jackson, undoubtedly the most famous release of his jazz career. It's a good album of lithe bebop. However, the recordings that catch the ear in this CD box are Distel's LPs and EPs on such labels as Barclay, chock-full of top-rate contemporary French jazz artists and mostly rare and expensive items that are hard to come by these days.

There is, among others, *Jazz D'Aujourd'Hui*, featuring bassist Pierre Michelot, trumpeter Jean Liesse, tenor saxophonist Georges Grenn and American trombonist Billy Byers. Benefitting largely from sophisticated tunes by Byers, the group engages in Mulligan-inspired cool jazz, Distel soloing with verve and conviction on Byers' hip line *Olympia Orgy* and Michel Legrand's bouncy *Avec Ces Jeux-là*. Bobby Jaspar and Distel play tight-knit ensembles on a *Jazz-hors Serie* EP, also interesting because of Jaspar's bossy tenor style, a blend of Getz and Rollins.

Distel's melancholic MJQ-ish collaboration with pianist Gérard Gustin precedes *Danse Party Chez Sacha Distel*, a less interesting commercial album with an otherwise excellent orchestra. The best is saved for last. Distel's *Hommage To Django* EP is a sort of mini-suite in collaboration with arranger and bandleader Claude Bolling, quite an exceptional recording that highlights Distel's sing-song tone and finds him in full command of his powers, lyrical during *Nuages* and on fire during *Daphné*, his harsher sound contrasting sharply with the Raney-format, somewhat in the trend of rock and roll. Distel would continue to play and record jazz beside his hi-profile pop career but he'd never again be as cocky as on this Django Reinhardt-inspired gem.

- Advertisement -