



artists to listen to, or somewhere to start, there's no one better to ask than Gilles Peterson, who has been collecting and curating jazz music for decades.

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GILLES PETERSON'S

## Artists to Watch

*The new generation of jazz artists is only growing: These are the ones Gilles is most excited to watch in the months and years to come.*

### **Allan Harris**

Music critics have a hard time agreeing on the best word to describe jazz vocalist and guitarist Allan Harris—"smooth," "versatile," "dynamic," "protean" are just a few samples—but they are in fervent agreement that he is one of today's most talented jazz performers. His awards include the New York Nightlife Award for Outstanding Jazz Vocalist (not once, but three times) and a range of local and national jazz-related awards. A native of Harlem, New York, and raised by a concert pianist mother, Harris grew up around soul, citing Louis Armstrong and Nat King Cole. Equally dedicated to music education, he is known for using his deeply intellectual original music, like *Cross That River*, an album that explores Western American expansion through the perspective of a black cowboy, as a teaching tool in schools across the country.

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# THE TIMES

## Clive Davis - London Times BEST 100 records of the year

### JAZZ

Thelonious funk: John Beasley

John Beasley Presents Monk'estra, Vol 1 (Mack Avenue)

Tributes to Thelonious Monk can be unbearably earnest. But the pianist's band serve up joie de vivre and bagfuls of funk.

Charlie Hunter

Everybody Has a Plan Until They Get Punched in the Mouth (GroundUp)

A small group making a big, brassy sound. Hunter's guitar meshes perfectly with Bobby Previte's drums.

Madeleine Peyroux

Secular Hymns (Impulse)

After a period of drift, she delivers her most soulful album yet.

Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra

All My Yesterdays (Resonance)

One of the most influential big bands of the modern era, captured at the dawn of a Village Vanguard residency.

**Allan Harris**

**Nobody's Gonna Love You Better (Membran)**

**Gregory Porter fans should seek out this singer-guitarist, who's as comfortable with a Steely Dan song as a jazz standard.**



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## Allan Harris – Nobody's Gonna Love You Better

February 1st, 2017



Title: *Nobody's Gonna Love You Better*

Artist: Allan Harris

Label: Love Productions

Formats: CD, LP, Digital

Release date: September 16, 2016

Vocalist **Allan Harris** combines the soundscapes of Harlem—jazz and R&B with a dash of blues and Braziliam beats—on his latest release *Nobody's Gonna Love You Better*. Subtitled *Black Bar Jukebox Redux*, the album is a follow up to his 2015 release *Black Bar Jukebox*, and provides the same eclectic mix of covers and original material. Harris again draws upon his longtime collaborator, Pascal Le Boeuf, to cover pianos and Hammond B3, who is joined in the rhythm section by Russell Hall on bass, Shirazette Tinnin on drums and cajón, and Freddie Bryant on guitar.



The album opens with the Harris penned "Mother's Love (Nobody's Gonna Love You), a swinging upbeat jazz number that's timeless in character, both musically and in subject matter. This is followed by a cover of Steely Dan's "Any Major Dude Will Tell You," which is nicely transformed through the syncopated jazz rhythms and excellent keyboard solos from Le Boeuf, though the somewhat limited vocal range doesn't allow Harris to shine. On the Johnny Mercer standard "I Remember You," Harris achieves a much warmer, more sultry timbre, that when combined with Le Boeuf's subtle keyboard phrasings and bluesy riffs, would be a perfect accompaniment for a candlelight dinner. This segues perfectly into an after dinner dance, courtesy of the Stan Getz & João Gilberto samba, "Doralice," which Harris sings in Portuguese. Then the classic "Moody's Mood For Love" takes us into a slow dance, for a perfect close to the evening.

Perhaps the most daring arrangement is the reimagining of Jimi Hendrix' "Up From the Skies" (the single from *Axis: Bold as Love*). Though the original song had a definite jazz feel, Harris and the band provide a smooth, swinging accompaniment making it sound like more of a jazz classic, until Le Boeuf breaks out with a funky B3 solo. The highlight of the album might be "Blue Was Angry," from Harris's *Cross That River* song-cycle. This bluesy, countrified song is a complete departure, with a mid-section that turns into a story about an enslaved man escaping his master, and a finale featuring a no holds barred jam with percussion and keyboards.

Think of *Nobody's Gonna Love You Better* as the jukebox for your Valentine's Day, with enough variety to take you from dinner to the dancefloor.

Reviewed by Brenda Nelson-Strauss

### Calendar

February 2017

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« Jan

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# rant 'n' roll

by Mike Greenblatt



LEX GREY AND THE URBAN PIONEERS

*Heal My Soul* (Pioneer Productions) by Lex Grey and the Urban Pioneers is the sixth CD from these Brooklyn underground darlings. An Etta James/Marianne Faithful/Janis Joplin combo, Lex is a ball-buster in concert. Her old-school blues and classic rock belies her stature as a larger-than-life provocateur. Here, you'll hear her howling atop guitar, drums, violin, organ, synthesizer, zither, accordion, autoharp, bass, mandolin, sax, clarinet and background vocals. This kitchen-sink approach suits her well. All 10 are original.

*DYAD Plays Jazz Arias* (Ringwood Records) has the esteemed Jersey team of Lou Caimano (alto sax) and Eric Olsen (piano), working as the duo DYAD for the last 16 years, following up their 2014 *DYAD Plays Puccini* duet CD by adding trumpeter Randy Brecker (also on flugelhorn) and tenor sax man Ted Nash to reconfigure highlights from 18th and 19th Century operas. It was George Gershwin who first fused classical and jazz with his 1924



DYAD

## LEX GREY, JAZZ ARIAS, BLUES, MORE BLUES, ERIC ST-LAURENT AND WHO IS ALLAN HARRIS?

*Rhapsody In Blue*. Here, the two professors—Caimano at the private fine arts school he founded 18 years ago in Paramus and Olsen who teaches at Montclair State, Caldwell College and the Judith Wharton Music Center in Berkeley Heights—take the most dramatic arias from Mozart's 1787 *Don Giovanni*, Barber's 1956 *Vanessa*, Bizet's 1875 *Carmen*, Verdi's 1887 *Otello* and three more to turn them into gloriously swinging jazz, no mean feat.

By *My Side* (JBR Records) by singer/songwriter/guitarist James "Buddy" Rogers, 40, has the transplanted Kansas City bluesman—who's worked for years now in Canada—heading up a combo that features Slammin' Mike Wedge on bass and the multi-talented Texan Lewis Stephens (from

Delbert McClinton's band) on Hammond B3, piano and Wuritzer keyboards. Ten of 11 are original and the one cover is of Freddie King's "Goin' Down." The result is a free-for-all blues-fest that rocks out. Period.

Anything at all from the hallowed halls of Chicago's Alligator Records is going to be great. Their latest doesn't disappoint. *The Big Sound of Lil' Ed and The Blues Imperials* (the band's ninth since '86) has to be thought of as one of the better blues CDs of 2016. Hell, they've been together for 27 years with nary a personnel change! Lil' Ed and his brother bassist Pookie Young are nephews of legendary bluesman JB Hutto [1926-1983] and cover two of his songs here. This one is a real party.

Who is Allan Harris? After

listening to his new *Nobody's Gonna Love You Better* (Love Productions Records), I still don't know. Is he the singer/songwriter of the title track? Is he the smooth jazz guitarist who covers Steely Dan's 1974 "Any Major Dude Will Tell You"? Is he an old-school soulman who takes the rather whitebread 1969 pop hit of one-hit wonder Spiral Staircase, "More Today Than Yesterday," to finally make it hip? Is he a musical archeologist who digs for such beloved gold as Frank Ifield's 1962 left-field hit "I Remember You"? Is he the latest in a long line of male vocalists who have covered the 1952 jazz standard "Moody's Mood For Love"? (You should hear him cover the Ray Charles hit "Ruby.") Is he a rock star covering Hendrix ("Up From The Skies")? You know what the answer is going to be. Yes, he's all of the

above. Like Lou Rawls before him, Allan Harris has the ability to transcend genre and material with a big, warm voice that fits like a glove on every single song he tackles.

The Planet on which Montreal guitarist/composer Eric St-Laurent resides is a free-wheeling do-it-yourself world where one can cover everything from Charlie "Bird" Parker ("Donna Lee"), Ludwig Van Beethoven ("Theme from the Second Movement of the Piano Sonata Number #8") and Carly Rae Jepsen ("Call Me Maybe"). Armed with empathetic bass/percussion/piano backing, Eric roams far and wide veering off into Afro-Cuban rhythms, guitar hero rock, soundtrack music to a movie that doesn't exist, blues and even that existential question, "What Would Steve Gadd Do." His fusion is—thankfully—vocal-free and there's no filler, just nine solid arrangements of seemingly diametrically opposed genres. But the man makes it work.

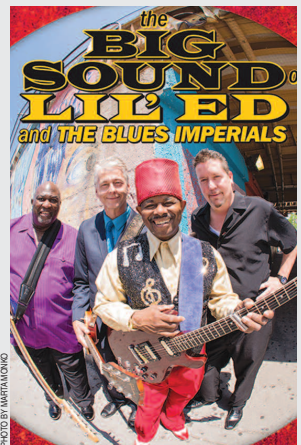
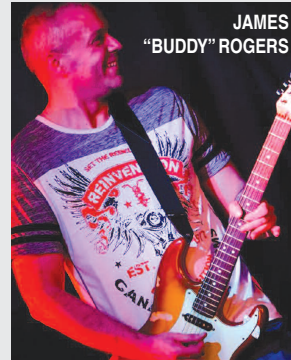


PHOTO BY MARTIN KONG



ALLAN HARRIS



JAMES "BUDDY" ROGERS



ERIC ST-LAURENT



Allan Harris is a red-blooded American jazz vocalist who owns a voice that could melt your soul. Unfortunately, the Brooklyn native isn't as wildly popular as he ought to be. However, in a music career nearing three decades Harris has consistently put out wonderful music. There isn't a public record of the number of babies conceived to Harris's albums. Harris's new album for Love

Productions Records "Nobody's Gonna Love You Better (Black Bar Jukebox Redux) is a noteworthy outing. The album is a mix of familiar jazz standards, originals, and re-imagined pop songs performed tenderly and thoughtfully by a vocalist comfortable and confident navigating any musical genre. Harris is at his best, however, singing slow jams. He does so beautifully he could make Satan fall in love.

JazzTimes Magazine March 2017



## ALLAN HARRIS

MENTORED BY ICONS,  
PERSONALIZING BLACK HISTORY

By David R. Adler

Here's an enviable yet daunting circumstance: warming up the Charlie Parker Jazz Festival in Downtown Manhattan before the Jack DeJohnette/Dave Holland/Jason Moran trio takes the stage. In late August, singer and guitarist Allan Harris faced that challenge and won over the crowd with apparent ease. Being personally mentored by Tony Bennett can have that effect (more about Bennett in a moment). Touring and recording steadily for over 20 years, even more so.

Harris, who had turned 60 in April, played material from his 2015 album *Black Bar Jukebox* and its 2016 follow-up, *Nobody's Gonna Love You Better: Black Bar Jukebox Redux*. These releases, both produced by veteran jazz A&R man Brian Bacchus, have brought Harris' artistry into sharp focus, painting a deeply personal portrait through originals, standards and unexpected detours into classic pop, rock and soul. There's a strong "working band" identity as well—so strong that the rhythm section from *Black Bar Jukebox* became its own band, King Pony, featuring keyboardist/lead vocalist Pascal Le Boeuf, bassist Leon Boykins and drummer Jake Goldbas. (Harris sings as a guest on "One More," from King Pony's 2014 eponymous debut.)

Between these albums, his tributes to Billy Strayhorn (*Love Came*) and Nat King Cole (*Long Live the King, Dedicated to You*), the beautiful duo release *Convergence* with pianist Takana Miyamoto, the 1996 collaboration with the Metropole Orchestra and all the way back to his first jazz recordings, Harris has honed an accessible, musically rigorous style and proven himself not just a survivor but an artist of continual growth. "I think Allan's starting to really hit his stride," Bacchus remarks, "and I hope that I was complicit in some way in unlocking that. But I think it had a lot to do with his background from the very beginning."

In the "man cave" of the Harlem brownstone that Harris shares with his longtime wife and manager, Pat Harris, the Brooklyn and Harlem native looks back on how it all began. His mother, Yohanna Harris, was a talented classical pianist who disapproved of jazz. "No son of mine is going to be some colored person sittin' on the stump singin' the blues!" he recalls her saying. "It was that whole Harlem Renaissance thing. So I took piano lessons from her for three years, but she was insane—she was like a Mommie Dearest. Ask my relatives, they'll tell you, 'We had to save him.'"

Meanwhile, Yohanna's sister, Theodosia "Phoebe" Ingram, was a jazz and blues singer who encouraged her nephew's growing interest and secretly bought him his first guitar. Ingram was helped along in her own career by none other than Clarence Williams, a major figure in jazz history and a close friend of Louis Armstrong. When Williams fathered a child with Ingram it was a scandal, but it transformed Williams into Uncle Clarence and brought young Allan deeper into jazz, even close to Satchmo himself. "I was afraid of him!" Harris says. "But to me he was just Mr. Armstrong, with a voice like a frog."

Spending weekends at the Williams home in St. Albans, Queens, Harris encountered musical royalty without fully knowing it. "Oh my God—Ruth Brown, Duke Ellington, Sarah Vaughan, Martha Reeves—they all used to come over to the house," he recalls. "Couple that with my great aunt who had a soul-food restaurant down the street from the Apollo called Kate's Place. There's an album by Jimmy Smith called *Home Cookin'*, and [on the album cover] he's standing in front of the place. We used to go there on Sunday between the matinees and everyone would come in, from the Temptations to Marvin Gaye, Johnny Mathis, that whole bevy of African-American musicians."

The day came when Harris' mother found out about the secretly stashed guitar, but she acquiesced. "She saw how I was improving and how it brought me out of my shell," Harris says. "She saw what she was doing to me." So she found Harris a classical guitar teacher, the first of many important mentors. Along the way her son had also caught the singing bug. And when he passed by a poster of Jimi Hendrix in a Brooklyn barbershop window, the effect was immediate. Harris' life course was set.

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

During his teens the family relocated to the Pittsburgh area, where Harris' father, a Navy man and a "cowboy," had a 600-acre horse farm. Harris attended college nearby and racked up gigging experience, ultimately moving to Atlanta, where he worked with an R&B cover band, and then finally Miami, where he sang six nights a week with a 12-piece show band. It was there, in 1994, at age 38, that Harris had the opportunity to sing "I Left My Heart in San Francisco"—of all songs—to an audience that included Tony Bennett, who immediately took him under his wing.

The next night, Bennett invited Harris to sing at an event honoring Sophia Loren. Among the audience members were David Niven, Suzanne Pleshette, Don Ameche, Tony Curtis and many more. Harris' disbelief seems to linger to this day: "[Bennett] said to me, 'What are you doing here in Florida? Here's my card. Come up to New York. I'll introduce you to some people.' He put me up for two weeks and it was—I can't describe it—he just took me to school. I realized what I was lacking. Thank God he had patience and he opened some doors for me and gave me my homework. He took me from what would've been a Vegas-type performer into a serious interpreter of the American Songbook, and I started to write my original material based upon that. And because of that I was able to attract serious musicians, not just people who wanted to make money and look good onstage." In 1995, at Bennett's urging, Harris moved back to New York.

Pulling together the varied strands of his career, Harris has embarked on a project called *Cross That River*, a theatrical concert work steeped in Americana and blues, inspired by the forgotten history of African-American cowboys (his father's ancestral heritage). He has documented the piece's evolution on two albums, *Cross That River* and *Cry of the Thunderbird*, and is now preparing a five-week Off-Broadway engagement—as many as eight shows a week—at the 59E59 Theaters beginning in late November 2017. "It's a story of pre-industrial America, told through the eyes of an ex-slave," Harris says. "I put a little more *oomph* into it, based upon this thing that *Hamilton* has done. *Hamilton* has invited the common street poet to the theatrical table. So on that note, I went back and added a little more grit. I put a little more blackness in it, you might say."

"Allan's got a million stories if we ask him," says Pascal Le Boeuf, whose smart arrangements and rich blend of piano, Rhodes and Hammond B-3 have given Harris' recent output much of its character. "But he's not somebody who's been around and *has* to tell you," Le Boeuf adds. "He interacts with everyone as though they're a colleague and a friend." It stands to reason that the two met at the post office. Harris saw Le Boeuf ahead of him on line, stuffing a score into an envelope, and figured him for a pianist. He asked him over that day to audition for a tour of Italy and hired him on the spot. "Allan always flirts with reality in some way," Le Boeuf says. "He's always talking to strangers. It's part of the way he interacts with the world. He dives into it." **JT**

## Recommended Listening:

*Nobody's Gonna Love You Better:*  
*Black Bar Jukebox Redux* (Love, 2016)

*Black Bar Jukebox* (Love, 2015)

*Cross That River* (Love, 2006)

*Love Came: The Songs of Strayhorn* (Love, 2001)

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Joe Lovano, Steve Wilson,  
Omar Hakim and  
Manolo Badrena  
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Herbie Hancock

Wayne Shorter Quartet  
with special guests  
Herbie Hancock and  
Gretchen Parlato  
Sunday, April 23 at 7pm



Esperanza Spalding

Christian McBride  
& Esperanza Spalding:  
*One on One*  
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## Allan Harris Nobody's Gonna Love You Better: Black Bar Jukebox Redux

Love Records

By **Christopher Loudon**

While all the fuss surrounding Gregory Porter is fully justified, Allan Harris is long overdue for as much respect and praise. Indeed, to borrow a Dan Fogelberg reference, they often seem twin sons of different mothers. Harris' beefy baritone is equally commanding and arresting, and he is just as gifted as a songwriter and as a liaison between jazz and R&B. (Harris is also a monster guitarist when he chooses to be.)



Last year, Harris released *Black Bar Jukebox*, a crazy quilt of covers and originals that extends from Acker Bilk's "Stranger on the Shore" to Elton John's "Take Me to the Pilot." This companion collection proves just as eclectic and even more satisfying, the canny jumble including a feather-light "Doralice" and soulful "More Today Than Yesterday," a grandly funkified interpretation of Steely Dan's "Any Major Dude Will Tell You" and a reading of the Ray Charles hit "Ruby" that eerily channels Nat King Cole, one of Harris' biggest heroes. Marvin Gaye meets Edwin Starr on Harris' organ-fueled version of Jimi Hendrix's "Up From the Skies," and he artfully navigates the slippery curves of "Moody's Mood for Love." Harris adds four of his own compositions, again a heterogeneous mix: the densely atmospheric "Mother's Love," satin-lined "Secret Moments," scorching, sizzling "Swing" and, lifted from his decade-old *Cross That River* song cycle, a muscular reworking of the rousing mini-drama "Blue Was Angry."

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## ALLAN HARRIS

### NOBODY'S GONNA LOVE YOU BETTER

*Membran*



Gregory Porter isn't the only American singer prowling the borderlands of jazz and pop. A fine guitarist, too,

Harris has a knack of unearthing sharper material than the man who has become everyone's favourite jazzier: look no further than Steely Dan's Any Major Dude Will Tell You. Pascal Le Boeuf's funky Hammond organ gives the band extra muscle. While the Porterish original Mother's Love is schmaltzy, Harris sounds spry and nimble on Moody's Mood for Love, and even takes on the bossa Doralice in Portuguese. **CD**



Players ›

## ALLAN HARRIS

*You Do It All*

Allan Harris gets bored easily. "I've done a love song," said the singer. "Now I want to move on to something else."

An ability to convincingly inhabit a hodgepodge of styles and genres—soul stirring in dialects ranging from Ray Charles to Luther Vandross, swinging standards with idiomatic Frank Sinatra-Tony Bennett flair, crooning ballads that evoke Nat "King" Cole at his most heartfelt, rocking out on the blues and signifying with raw electric guitar, fulfilling the singer-songwriter function with well-crafted lyrics—has been Harris' trademark during four professional decades.

Harris, 58, acknowledges that eclecticism has been both a blessing and a curse. "I'd like to do, and have done, one thing," he said from his Harlem home, citing a discography that includes un-Xeroxed tributes to Bennett, Cole, Billy Eckstine and Billy Strayhorn on his imprint, Love Productions. "But as a male vocalist of color, what do you do to get noticed? You do it all. I'm paying my bills. I'm traveling the world."

On the other hand, Harris added, "Promoters tell me they've seen me do so many things that they need to know what I'm going to bring to the table when they book me." For this reason, Harris decided to make an album—*Black Bar Jukebox* (Love Productions), supervised by Grammy-winning producer Brian Bacchus—documenting his heterogeneous approach to live performance.

The 13-tune program includes four self-penned songs, each distinct in style and connotation. There are personalized renditions of tunes by Elton John ("Take Me To The Pilot"), John Mayer ("Daughters") and Kenny Rankin ("Catfish," "Haven't We Met"), less-traveled Great American Songbook numbers ("You Make Me Feel So Young," "A Lot Of Livin' To Do") and Eddie Jefferson's vocalese classic "I Got The Blues," inspired by Lester Young's "Lester Leaps In" solo.

The album's title references the mixed-bag soundtrack of Harris' formative years. His mother, a trained concert pianist, listened to classical music (and Eckstine records) around their Bedford-Stuyvesant house. His opera- and blues-singing

aunt, who lived upstairs, was his voice teacher. His great aunt ran a restaurant across the street from the Apollo Theater, where performers—Harris mentions spotting Duke Ellington, Jimmy Smith and Count Basie—favored her smothered chicken and bread pudding. At 13, he heard Jimi Hendrix's "Purple Haze" at the neighborhood barbershop, and experienced what he described as "a turning point in my consciousness."

"Hendrix was a warrior," Harris said. "He had an axe, he was working it in front of white and black audiences, and he wasn't jumping up and down in tight mohair pants with his hair slicked back, singing 'Ooh, baby-baby, let me love you,' but some poetic shit that he wrote. I decided I'd be more than a romantic balladeer. I'd say something with some grit."

Two decades later, Harris crystallized this aspiration with an epic song cycle portraying and personalizing the history of autonomous African-American archetypes—black cowboys, Buffalo soldiers, black Seminoles—during slavery and the early Reconstruction years, primarily through the voice of a black cowboy protagonist named Blue. He's documented perhaps half the corpus on *Cross That River* and *Cry Of The Thunderbird*.

"Blue encompasses my whole life on stage," Harris said. Joined by his young working trio (Pascal Le Boeuf, piano; Leon Boykins, bass; Jake Goldbas, drums) two days earlier at Smoke, he'd rendered "Blue Is Angry." Goldbas' whip-like punctuations on cajon evoked an ambiance closer to "Mississippi Goddam" than the jazz-country-bluegrass marriage of the aforementioned albums.

"I'm tapping into the soulful end of the West," Harris said. "I identify with where Blue comes from, the things he surrounded himself with, how he interacts with people from a place of respect, not fear. He's astute and smart. He has a craft. He knows how to rope, how to break a horse. I direct the band where to go. I have a skill in moving my audience. From the time I get on stage until I leave, there's a choreographed plan to take you on this journey, and that's what I do." —Ted Panken

## OPENING CHORUS

## Before &amp; After



## ALLAN HARRIS

IN PRAISE OF PAYING DUES &amp; TELLING STORIES

By Aidan Levy

In his most recent album, *Black Bar Jukebox* (Love Productions), veteran vocalist and guitarist Allan Harris pays tribute to his upbringing in Harlem, where he used to eat at his aunt Kate Ingram's luncheonette, Kate's Home Cooking, a neighborhood fixture that was featured on the cover of organist Jimmy Smith's *Home Cookin'*. The restaurant had a much-loved jukebox, and in an era before carubs and Starbucks tastemaking, patrons programmed their background music for the cost of a Coke. This eclectic milieu informs Harris' record, which covers Eddie Jefferson ("I Got the Blues"), Elton John ("Take Me to the Pilot"), Frank Sinatra ("You Make Me Feel So Young") and John Mayer ("Daughters"). Harris, 59, has taken the album on tour through Europe and the U.S., and will return to the studio this summer for a follow-up with its producer, Brian Bacchus, who has taken part in fruitful collaborations with Gregory Porter and Norah Jones.

In New York in May, Harris played Reverend Gary Davis in *Search: Paul Clayton*, a new musical centering on the eponymous folksinger and his relationships within the 1960s Greenwich Village folk revival, especially Bob Dylan. Harris has appeared in several other productions, including *Cross That River*, a stage musical set in the 1860s that he developed from his 2006 album of the same name. The song cycle, which Harris currently plans to revive and restage, relates a fictional narrative about a runaway slave who becomes one of the first black cowboys.

This fall, Harris and pianist Eric Reed will bring their Billy Strayhorn tribute, *100 Years of Strayhorn*, to San Francisco,

followed by a weeklong stint at Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola. "I just love what I do," Harris says. "I make people smile. That's my gig. I pinch myself sometimes."

Harris recently sat down for his first *Before & After* with *JazzTimes* at his home in New York City's Hamilton Heights neighborhood, where he lives with his wife and manager, Pat Harris, and their dog, Ruby.

## 1. José James

"Strange Fruit" (from *Yesterday I Had the Blues: The Music of Billie Holiday*, Blue Note). James, vocals. Recorded in 2014.

**BEFORE:** Oh, wow. "Strange Fruit," huh? I love it.

**AFTER:** That's right! His Billie Holiday tribute. I listened to that. As a matter of fact, I'm doing a performance with him at the Vienna Jazz Festival. My mind was caught on Billie's version of it. I think, first of all, coming from a hip-hop/R&B background and being able to switch over the way he did is pretty daunting. I like the people who took him on that journey, and I see him in different settings, like with Wynton Marsalis. I think he's really expanded the role of male jazz vocalists. For male vocalists, I feel that he's brought the new crowd not with him, but he's invited them to come along. He's gone back into the catalog that we all grew up on, and he's putting that inner-city blues hipness to it, which is really refreshing.

## 2. Gregory Porter, Donald Smith and Mansur Scott

"Moanin'" (from *Great Voices of Harlem*, Pao). Porter, vocals; Paul Zauner, trombone; Barney Girtlinger, trumpet; Klaus Dickbauer, alto saxophone; Klemens Plien, tenor saxophone; Martin Reiter, piano; Wolfram Derschmidt, bass; Howard Curtis, drums. Recorded in 2014.

**BEFORE:** [singing vocalese with "Moanin'" horn hits] Gregory ... Porter ... I love him. If Bill Withers had a son with Oscar Brown Jr., it would be this cat. He's a journeyman and he's a storyteller, and besides all that, he's a nice guy. There's really nothing you can say about Gregory that's not positive. He's worked hard. He's good at what he does. He paid his dues here in New York at St. Nick's Pub and Smoke, and it's been a gradual climb. What can I say? If you look at male vocalists today, what better example than Gregory Porter? Especially for young cats looking at him to know that all you have to do is find your own voice and sing. He opened the door again for them.

## 3. Dianne Reeves

"Tango" (from *Beautiful Life*, Concord). Reeves, Ralph Midón, vocals; Sean Jones, trumpet; Tia Fuller, alto saxophone; Romero Lubambo, Marvin Sewell, guitars; Bobby Sparks, organ, clavinet; Peter Martin, piano; Reginald Veal, bass; Terreon Gully, drums; Leonardo Osuna, Munyungo Jackson, percussion. Recorded in 2013.

**BEFORE:** Since Sarah Vaughan, there hasn't been a female vocalist that is as unafraid to be adventurous [as Dianne Reeves is]. She has the same language as Sarah Vaughan. She doesn't copy her at all. I demand that any vocalist, male or female, if they get into this craft of vocalese or vocals, go and see [Reeves]; her interaction with the band; her choice of material, from the way she gets arrangements from Robert Glasper on down; and she's just a wonderful tactician. I love her. What can I say? She is a pure-form jazz entertainer who is from that school of Sarah and Nancy Wilson, and she takes it to that height where she draws the audience in and weaves in and out of things.

## 4. René Marie

"I Wanna Be Evil" (from *I Wanna Be Evil: With Love to Eartha Kitt*, Motéma). Marie, vocals; Wycliffe Gordon, trombone; Etienne Charles, trumpet, percussion; Adrian Cunniff, tenor saxophone; Kevin Bales, piano; Elias Bailey, bass; Quentin Baxter, drums, percussion. Recorded in 2013.

**BEFORE:** René Marie is one of my favorite singers and one of my best friends. We've done a few projects together. She is just pure joy, and she happens to have a great voice and personality. And when you see her perform, that's all she's about. She's into one thing, and that's making you smile with her. Fortunately, she has cats with her who support that groove, like Quentin Baxter on drums. And she came late to the game, too, which is really wild. [Ed. note: Marie didn't begin her career as a professional jazz singer until she was in her 40s.] She just said, "I'm going to sing." But that's what joy is about. It doesn't matter what age or where you come from. If you want to do something, you just do it. I know, because I've known her over the years. I know there are very few artists that are always joyful about what they do, never bitter, and adventurous too. And you can hear it in all of her music.

## 5. Carla Cook

"The Way You Look Tonight" (from *It's All About Love*, MaxJazz). Cook, vocals; Andy Milne, piano; Darryl Hall, bass; George Gray, drums. Recorded in 1999.

**BEFORE:** This is killing me. This is terrible. I'm at a loss here and I know who it is.

**AFTER:** God. Of course. Carla and I did a show with René Marie at Dizzy's [Club Coca-Cola]. I love her. She and René Marie invited me to do a project called *Two Skirts and a Shirt*. Singing with those two was really wonderful. Carla is ... I can't describe her voice. She's from the school not of Dinah Washington but of that era, where she just sings the melody and puts a little bit of that blues tinge on it. How dare I not know Carla Cook. She hasn't had anything out in a while. I know she's in Philadelphia teaching now, and I think I didn't recognize her because she's been under the radar. Shame on me.

Gary Peacock Trio  
Now This

Marc Copland piano  
Gary Peacock, double bass  
Joey Baron drums



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## OPENING CHORUS

## Before &amp; After

"IF BILL WITHERS HAD A SON  
WITH OSCAR BROWN JR.,  
IT WOULD BE  
[GREGORY PORTER]."

## 6. Leslie Drayton Orchestra

"When Will You Be Mine?" (from *Love Is a Four-Letter Word*, Esoteric). Barbara Morrison, vocals; Thurman Green, Maurice Spears, Mike Wimberly, trombones; Ray Brown, Leslie Drayton, Michael Harris, Fernando Pullum, Snooky Young, trumpets; Gary Bias, Alford Jackson, Donald Myrick, Curtis Pengler, woodwinds; Spencer Bean, guitar; Ron Bishop, piano; Rickey Minor, bass; Paul Humphrey, drums; Darryl Munyungo Jackson, percussion. Recorded in 1984.

**BEFORE:** The band is swinging. I don't know.

**AFTER:** Oh, God! Barbara and I were on the same label [Moss Records] and we did a tour of Germany and she blew me away. I've seen her perform solo and with Ernie Andrews. Carla Cook comes out of that same type of school, where you put that chitlin' circuit vibe on things and have your jazz chops tight, which Barbara does. Listen to her. There are three women in that vein: Marlena Shaw, Barbara Morrison and Mary Stallings. They all know each other. All three come from the same school of thought, where they've done club gigs, done big band, jumped back into clubs to survive, and they all have that wonderful, lilting R&B thing that they bring to jazz, which I see Joe James moving into.

## 7. Herb Jeffries

"Rambler Rose" (from *If I Were King: Herb Jeffries Sings Memories of Nat King Cole*, Dobie). Jeffries, vocals; Joe Diorio, guitar; Lou Levy, piano; Fred Atwood, bass. Recorded in 1978.

**BEFORE:** Herb Jeffries. You're kidding me. Oh, my God! How do you know Herb Jeffries doing this? This is amazing. Why is it amazing? Because for the generation right after me and on, he's an unknown entity and he should be part of the American psyche. He's done everything from *The Bronze Buckaroo* to working with Duke Ellington. He's just a wonderful man, and Monty Alexander really turned me on to him. I knew who he was from my family, but Monty introduced me to him and I got to talk to Herb Jeffries. We did a show in [California] in honor of Herb Jeffries last year. Monty took me out there with Jeff Hamilton and Frank Vignola, and we were going to honor Herb Jeffries for his 99th birthday, but he died a week before we went out. It just went up on YouTube.

Herb Jeffries is an icon. You talk about Bing Crosby; Nat King Cole and Billy Eckstine on one end of it, and then you move into Andy Bey, Arthur Prysock and Brook Benton. But no one talks about Herb Jeffries. Nobody. And in my opinion, he was the most well rounded of all of them, because he could act. Frank [Sinatra] could act, too, but he didn't have a voice like that. He should be remembered—"Flamingo" [with Duke Ellington]. You've got my heart because of that one.

## 8. Eddie Jefferson

"Bitches Brew" (from *Things Are Getting Better*, Muse). Jefferson, vocals; Joe Newman, trumpet; Billy Mitchell, tenor saxophone; bass clarinet; Mickey Tucker, electric piano, organ, saw; Sam Jones, bass; Eddie Gladden, drums. Recorded in 1974.

**BEFORE:** I'll let it play a little bit. "Bitches Brew" Eddie Jefferson! What can I say? There's nothing to be said about him. From Jon Hendricks to the Manhattan Transfer, through Giacomo Gates to Gil Scott-Heron. The list of the people he's touched goes on and on. Eddie Jefferson's man. Brilliant. Detroit, Pittsburgh, tap dancing. I learned so much listening to him in my formative years as a vocalist. I learned how to interact with a band rather than being a frontman. Eddie Jefferson makes you part of the unit.

## 9. Joe Williams

"Heritage" (from *Joe Williams Live*, Fantasy). Williams, vocals; Cannonball Adderley, alto saxophone; George Duke, piano; Walter Booker, bass; Roy McCurdy, drums. Recorded in 1973.

**BEFORE:** I love it. That's the late Joe Williams, where he became such a storyteller. He was doing things like "Her's to Life," and he just stepped out of his blues bag and used all those years of American blues and jazz and became a storyteller. And he did it really well, too. That's Joe Williams, man. Cordele, Georgia. Count Basie. What can I say? Beautiful, man.

## 10. Johnny Hartman

"Summer Wind" (from *Today*, Perception). Hartman, vocals; George Coleman, tenor saxophone; Roland Prince, guitar; Herman Foster, piano; Earl May, bass; Billy Higgins, drums. Recorded in 1972.

**BEFORE:** [vocalese singing] That's ... Johnny Hartman. I should have put his name in there with Herb Jeffries. He came later, and he had the benefit of having myriad wonderful vocalists before him that he gleaned from to develop his own style. I love Johnny Hartman. He has that rich sound that Joe James is turning back to.

## 11. Louis Armstrong/Dave Brubeck/Lambert, Hendricks &amp; Ross

"They Say I Look Like God" (from *The Real Ambassadors*,

Columbia). Armstrong, Jon Hendricks, Dave Lambert, Annie Ross, vocals; Dave Brubeck, piano; Gene Wright, bass; Joe Morello, drums. Recorded in 1961.

**BEFORE:** That's Pat Boone. Just kidding. Andy Williams? Pops, man. Come on. What else is there in life but that? If you have one month on an island before they rescued you, and they gave you a bunch of records, and every record had one artist, you probably would have to pick him, because you would never get tired of where he goes. He tells a story and he draws you in. It's Louis Armstrong, where anybody who sings this music has taken something from him, myself included. And anyone who tells you they haven't, I don't want to hear them.

## 12. Reverend Gary Davis

"There's Destruction in 'This Land'" (from *Live at Gerde's Folk City*, 1962, Stefan Grossman's Guitar Workshop). Davis, guitar, vocals. Recorded in 1962.

**BEFORE:** Is this Reverend Gary Davis? You didn't! That is beautiful, man. North Carolina Piedmont playing. Jerry Garcia, Jorma Kaukonen from Hot Tuna, Eric Clapton—the list goes on of those who have adopted his style of playing. It's Piedmont Appalachian style, man. It's just wonderful fingerpicking. As a matter of fact, I'm doing a few of his tunes now. They're not difficult, they're just obscure, and they have a real gospel, soulful tinge to them that has a different meter. I love playing that style.

Reverend Gary Davis is an American icon. He's the cat, man. And he's starting to get his due more and more now. Everybody's looked at Robert Johnson, of course, and Blind Lemon Jefferson and John Lee Hooker. I'm glad they're mining Reverend Gary Davis now, because he developed a guitar style that was built upon him not seeing. A lot of it was self-taught, and it really worked. I'm doing 12 gigs in the city and I'm playing the songs he wrote, and I'm doing his version of a Robert Johnson tune called "Stones in My Passway." I'm just having fun with it. The fingering's really nice. He uses a [particular alternate] tuning on one of the songs, and as you sing along with it, there's this amazing fingering. He's singing and just hitting it hard.

It's that crossroads of European neoclassical with the African, Spanish and Habsburg influences that came clashing together at the beginning of the 20th century. A lot of cats who didn't have the benefit of schooling gleaned that from working in the floozy houses and mines alongside white guys, when they all traded this information together, and out of that came this incredible music—bluegrass and country blues, flatpicking, storytelling... And there's only a handful of artists, white and black, who were lucky enough to be caught by the song-catchers who taped them. So many of them were lost to history, which is a shame, but they got Reverend Gary Davis, which is really good, because he was a strong influence. **JT**

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