

Metal From The Dark Side

In the 1990s, Norwegian black metal pioneers Emperor stretched its genre perimeters in an effort to transcend its limited appeal. Vegard Sverre Tveitan, known as **Ihsahn**, almost pulled it off but

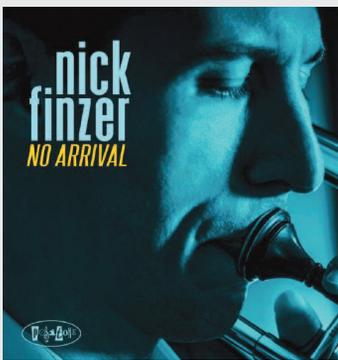


PHOTO BY BJORN TORE MOEN

the music was just too damn extreme. Maybe that was the point. Today, Ihsahn, at 42, is widely hailed as a renaissance man with seven solo CDs to his credit, the latest of which, *Amr* (Candlelight), brings prog-rock, black metal and the avant-garde into what sounds like an all-encompassing soundtrack to a horror movie that doesn't exist. Working with Opheth's Fredrik Akesson and long-time drummer Tobias Ornes Andersen, a rather claustrophobic moonscape of eerie proportions emerges. Atmospheric, bleak and, most importantly, eminently listenable, *Amr* is surprisingly melodic (except when Ihsahn roars like a lion that's being skinned alive) and filled with almost out-of-control synthesizers. It's a fun-house mirror.

Jazz From The Light Side

Trombonist/educator/composer/arranger/bandleader **Nick Finzer** might be a member of Scott Bradlee's Postmodern

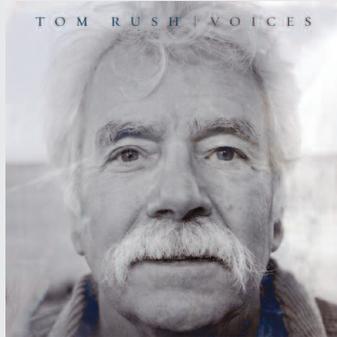


Jukebox but he's still that same teenager who entered the annual "Essentially Ellington" competition at the "Jazz At Lincoln Center" series. On *No Arrival* (Posi-Tone), his tone is positive with swing, post-bop and the kind of modernism that never goes out of style. His originals are daring. They poke, prod

and push his sextet to satisfying heights on music from Prince ("The Greatest Romance Ever Sold"), Leonard Bernstein ("Maria"), George Gershwin ("Soon") and, of course, two solid and satisfying doses of Ellingtonia. Props to the swirling tenor sax and bass clarinet of Lucas Pino who serves as foil for Finzer's bone while a rampaging piano/guitar/bass/drums keeps things hopping.

Folk From The Real Side

Tom Rush's last record was nine years ago. It was called *What I Know*. His previous record before that was 35 years



earlier. Rush, 77, was the first artist to cover Joni Mitchell and Jackson Browne. He did so on his 1968 *The Circle Game* album. He's always been more of an interpreter than a composer and was a key figure in the cultural transition of traditional folk music into the advent of the singer-songwriter. Nanci Griffith and Shawn Colvin grew to prominence opening for him on his tours. James Taylor has always cited him as a prime influence. Sure, he's written his own songs, but only about 20 or so spread out over 11 albums in 50 plus years.

Voices (Appleseed Records) is his first album ever of all-original material. Well, almost all original. He covers two old folk songs. "Corina Corina" stems back to 1928 but was popularized by Taj Mahal in 1968. "Elder Green" is a 1929 Charlie Patton country-blues. Rush sounds great. His voice is a craggy mountain of expressive wisdom. His new originals are also pretty damn terrific. He may be a New Englander but highlight "If I Never Get Back To Hackensack" sure put a smile on this Jersey boy's face. p

Tribute To A Murdered Singer

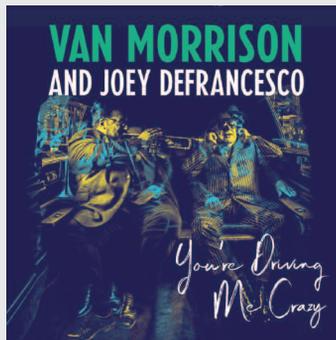
Singer Eddie Jefferson was killed in cold blood in 1979 Detroit at the age of 60 as he walked out of Baker's Keyboard Lounge. The Pittsburgh native is generally acknowledged as the main pioneer of jazz vocalese. Brooklyn singer **Allan Harris** has already lost himself in tributes of Billie Holiday and Nat King Cole. *The Genius Of Eddie Harris* (Resilience Music Alliance) has him more gruff than usual in tackling a singer who even hip-hop lyricists like Rakim, Chuck D and KRS One have hailed as an exemplar of funky street slang wordplay. Trenton saxophonist Richie Cole was with Jefferson that fateful



night. He's here with Harris too. Producer Brian Bacchus (who won a Grammy for his work with Gregory Porter) knows a little something about where to place the vocals when you have such sterling sidemen as pianist Eric Reed (on loan from Wynton Marsalis), drummer Willie Jones III and tenor saxophonist Ralph Moore (who played with the legendary Freddie Hubbard) plus sterling bassist George DeLancey. It all amounts to a classroom of swing and bop history, especially on "Waltz For A Rainy Bebop Evening" by Cole, Horace Silver's 1959 "Sister Sadie," Charlie Parker's 1945 "Billie's Bounce" and Dexter Gordon's 1946 "Dexter Digs In," highlights all. Bravo!

When Legends Collide

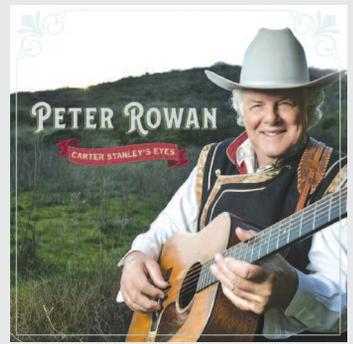
On the heels of **Van Morrison's** 2016 *Versatile* (which hit jazz No. 1), *You're Driving Me Crazy* (Legacy Recordings), with Hammond organ pioneer **Joey DeFrancesco**, is a delightful romp, played



for kicks (you can hear Van laughing with pure exultation after certain tracks) on 15 songs ranging from new arrangements of a previously-recorded Van classics to updates of Cole Porter's 1934 "Miss Otis Regrets" and Acker Bilk's 1962 "Evening Shadows." There's a playful sense of joyousness going on here as if the two artists really tickled each other musically. It was DeFrancesco who brought that organ sound of his to the forefront of the '80s jazz charts. Here, he's content to fill in the spaces of Van's eccentricity on his 39th album.

Another Legend

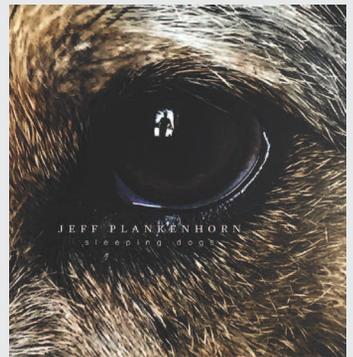
Peter Rowan joined Bill Monroe's Bluegrass Boys as lead singer and guitarist in the early '60s. He's gone on to forge his own legend ever since. Monroe -- who invented bluegrass -- introduced him to The Stanley Brothers (also bluegrass royalty) only weeks before



Carter Stanley died at 41 in 1966 from cirrhosis of the liver after a lifetime of heavy drinking. Rowan never forgot that man. *Carter Stanley's Eyes* (Rebel Records) is his tribute with traditional and original songs as well as songs from the pens of Carter and Ralph Stanley, Charlie & Ira Louvin, Lead Belly, Bill Monroe, A.P. Carter plus one terrific white gospel ("A Crown He Wore"). Those high-lonesome vocals are evident as is the fast-faster-fastest jam-band sensibility of good 'grass.

Plank Goes Solo

Austin slide guitarist **Jeff Plankhorn** has been the go-to guy for the last 17



years -- ever since he arrived in Texas from Ohio -- for a plethora of prophets and poets like Joe Ely and Ray Wylie Hubbard. Known as Plank, his *Sleeping Dogs* (Spike Steel Records) are starting to bark. Loud. No covers, just pure Americana-style playing and composing. He plays guitar, pedal steel, piano and upright bass as well as singing up a storm and co-producing (with Scrappy Newcomb) the kind of satisfying sound where a Patty Griffin vocal fits right in. It's all very laid-back yet rockin' in a front-porch kinda way. As such, it's irresistible.

Blatant Proselytizing: Country music sucks in 2018 but Americana music has rescued the genre. It's country's brighter cousin, its hipper alternative. Take that radio and TV crap erroneously called "country" and throw it out the back window into the backyard where it can be buried for good. Then go discover Guy Clark, Rodney Crowell, Lucinda Williams, Jerry Jeff Walker, Marty Stuart, Willie'n'Waylon, Townes Van Zandt, Rosanne Cash, John Prine, Steve Earle, Robert Earl Keen and a few dozen others doing *real* country music...but it's called Americana (and it rocks) with its own radio stations, awards, charts, tours and everything. Hillbillies, get hip!