

JAZZ & BLUES

MARCH 2015



F L O R I D A

FLORIDA'S ONLINE GUIDE TO LIVE JAZZ & BLUES

La Lucha

FEATURED ARTIST



PLUS...

KARLA HARRIS with THE TED HOWE TRIO

LURRIE BELL'S CHICAGO BLUES BAND

BRIA SKONBERG

REV. PEYTON'S BIG DAMN BAND

TOMMY EMMANUEL

KINSEY REPORT

GONZALO RUBALCABA'S VOLCAN

MAGGIE KOERNER

WARREN WOLF & THE WOLFPACK

ZORA YOUNG with LITTLE MIKE & THE TORNADOES

THIS EDITION IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF SUSAN LORNE MITCHELL, PAST PRESIDENT, NATURE COAST FRIENDS OF BLUES

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La Lucha

by Bill Meredith



LOOSELY TRANSLATED FROM SPANISH TO English, the name of St. Petersburg-based jazz group La Lucha means “the struggle.” That’s something nearly every musician can relate to, regardless of the genre. And the members of La Lucha, who have just released a collection of jazz chestnuts and rearranged pop gems titled *Standards, Not-Standards* (Blue Line Music), have played in some surprising settings leading up to the group’s formation.

“I grew up playing rock, and especially loved playing punk rock,” says drummer Mark Feinman during an afternoon break from teaching in the Music Industry & Recording Arts program at St. Petersburg College. “So I love Papa Jo Jones, Max Roach and Art Blakey, but when I listen to Tre Cool of Green Day, the energy is the same as Blakey’s! I’d also have to mention Steve Davis, one of my jazz mentors. But I discover a new hero every day.”

“My first love was surf rock, and then I discovered heavy metal and played a lot of that,” says acoustic and electric bassist Alejandro Arenas, who also teaches at the college. “I’d say my main influences are Paul McCartney for melody, James Jamerson for Motown, Ray Brown for traditional jazz, Orlando ‘Cachaito’ Lopez for Latin jazz, and Steve Harris of Iron Maiden for metal.”

La Lucha’s third instrumentalist is pianist/keyboardist John O’Leary III, who met Feinman and Arenas while all three were studying music at the University of South Florida in Tampa 10 years ago. The trio’s 2009 debut CD, *A Cup of Fuzzy Water*, was all-instrumental and comprised mostly original material, while their 2012 self-titled sophomore effort featured originals, standards and pop interpretations with vocalist Jun Bustamante. The singer also performs on *Standards, Not-Standards*, which alternates jazz evergreens

such as “The Way You Look Tonight,” “Love Me or Leave Me,” “Lullaby of Birdland” and “Have You Met Miss Jones?” with jazz arrangements of pop hits such as The Beach Boys’ “Warmth of the Sun,” The Jackson 5’s “Never Can Say Goodbye,” The Police’s “Can’t Stand Losing You” and Tears for Fears’ “Everybody Wants to Rule the World.” As with several younger jazz artists of the past decade, they also delve into Radiohead’s catalogue with a read of “Lucky.”

“Jun and I were actually in the jazz band in high school together,” Feinman says. “She’s a great composer and multi-instrumentalist. And when we met John at USEF, he was actually a classical tuba major before switching to piano through the influence of Bill Evans, Keith Jarrett and Brad Mehldau. We all loved to improvise, so jazz was eventually a natural vehicle.”

The group’s democratic arrangements help to make each track its own synthesis. The classically trained Bustamante’s operatic nuances transform The Cardigans’ ‘90s pop hit “Lovefool” into something completely different, as does O’Leary, Arenas and Feinman’s Brazilian treatment of Charlie Parker’s “My Little Suede Shoes.”

The four participants’ ages — Arenas is 33, the other three are 29 — help to explain why they’re as influenced by popular music as by jazz.

La Lucha

Their interpretations fuse jazz and pop via world music, which makes even more sense when considering their United Nations-worthy backgrounds. Feinman, born not far away in Clearwater, is the United States representative. Arenas is from Colombia; O'Leary was born in Mexico to a native mother and Irish father; and Bustamante was born in Japan and raised in Venezuela before she moved to the U.S.

"We didn't grow up with the American Songbook," Arenas says, "especially when you consider our different backgrounds. But we all loved the language of jazz, and wanted to include it on material more familiar to us. It's not a new concept, but it's our take on it."

"We assume our audiences are as adventurous as we are," Feinman says, "whether we're improvising on a standard or a Britney Spears tune."



La Lucha will perform on March 1 at The Ale & the Witch in St. Petersburg (thealeandthewitch.com); on March 15 at the Timucua White House in Orlando (timucua.com), and on March 27 at Riverwalk Mosaic Amphitheater in Bradenton. Visit laluchamusic.com.

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**KARLA HARRIS W/THE TED HOWE TRIO
SARASOTA JAZZ FESTIVAL/MARCH 6
THE PALLADIUM, ST. PETERSBURG/MARCH 8**

Audiences don't often get to hear the debut performance of iconic material, but the Sarasota Jazz Fest crowd will have that opportunity. Atlanta-based vocalist Karla Harris' brand-new CD, *Sings the Dave & Iola Brubeck Songbook*, features timeless instrumentals recorded by Dave Brubeck. However, the singer also interprets lesser-known lyrics written by the pianist's wife, Iola Brubeck. Harris' expressive voice breathes new life into the standard "Take Five," gems like "Strange Meadowlark" and "In Your Own Sweet Way," and even selections from a musical called *The Real Ambassadors* that the Brubecks — married for 70 years — co-wrote in 1962.



The new CD is the brainchild of Los Angeles-based pianist Ted Howe, who recorded on and produced the project, and whose trio will back Harris. The disc is the first vocal re-recording of all-Brubeck material since 1961 (a live LP by the pianist's quartet with singer Carmen McRae), and the first-ever studio re-recording featuring Iola Brubeck's lyrics. **BM**

**LURRIE BELL'S CHICAGO BLUES BAND
BONITA BLUES FEST, RIVERSIDE PARK,
BONITA SPRINGS/MARCH 7**

As the son of Chicago blues great Carey Bell, Lurrie Bell entered the family business at a young age. For better and worse, he's lived each lyric and felt the fire in every guitar lick. But in recent years, his performances have radiated joy, even contentment. After his father and his life partner, Susan Greenberg, died in 2007, Bell rebounded with a string of well-received recordings. In 2013, he showcased his church roots on the superb acoustic album *The Devil Ain't Got No Music*. And last year, he cut the sterling *Blues in My Soul*. Covering tunes by Chicago legends Jimmy Rogers, Junior Wells, Little Walter and Otis Spann, he truly reveals what the title promises. The album was nominated for five Blues Music Awards, and his self-penned title track won Blues Song of the Year. He's also been nominated for a 2015 Best Traditional Male Blues Artist BMA. For this show, Bell will be backed by longtime bassist Melvin Smith and drummer Willie Hayes, as well as harmonica player Russ Green. **BW**





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VINTAGE TAP, DELRAY BEACH/MARCH 13
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STATE THEATER, TAMPA/MARCH 15

Rev. Peyton's Big Damn Band comprises only three people, but their sound is enormous. The Rev.'s vibrato-laden vocals and angry-bee-swarm slide guitar ride the insistent rhythms of wife Breezy Peyton's washboard and Ben Bussell's martial drums, as they work the raw, anarchic edge of country blues. Their new album, *So Delicious*, is their first for the legendary Yazoo label, which released records by Charley Patton and Mississippi



John Hurt back in the day. The Rev. recalls those blues giants with his deft picking on resonator guitars. Hailing from rural Indiana, the group sound authentic when they sing about "Pickin' Paw Paws" or stealing "Pot Roast and Kisses." And they certainly know of what they sing on "Raise a Little Hell," which they do with infectious good spirits. **BW**

GONZALO RUBALCABA'S VOLCAN
MIAMI-DADE COUNTY AUDITORIUM/MARCH 7
 You won't find too many Latin-jazz supergroups with the firepower of pianist Gonzalo Rubalcaba's Volcan. His band comprises bassist Jose Armando Gola, drummer Horacio "El Negro" Hernandez and percussionist Giovanni Hidalgo. The centerpiece of the Global Cuba Fest concert, Volcan will take the stage after a Cuban Piano Marathon with Harold Lopez-Nussa, Aldo Lopez-Gavilan and Jorge Luis Pacheco, and before Swiss rap/salsa closers Lariba. The mercurial Rubalcaba is a multi-Grammy Award winner with superb technical abilities, and the same could be said of drummer Hernandez. Volcan's other two members, though, could prove to be wild cards. Puerto Rican *conguero* Hidalgo (the



group's only non-Cuban) is one of the prime reasons that his instrument and Latin music remain practically synonymous. Gola is a generation younger, but his forays on both acoustic upright and six-string electric basses have proven light years ahead. Listeners can expect plenty of improvisation among all the rhythmic fireworks. **BM**

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BRIA SKONBERG
ARTS GARAGE, DELRAY BEACH/MARCH 7
GLENRIDGE CENTER, SARASOTA/MARCH 8

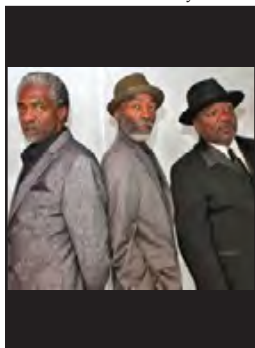
There are plenty of trumpeters in jazz, and certainly more than enough vocalists. But few can handle both disciplines with aplomb. Bria Skonberg is an exception. The British Columbia-born, Brooklyn-based musician landed her first pro gig doubling as a singer and trumpeter in front of a big band at age 16. Just in her early 30s, she's since found her own varied path, fusing jazz and comedy live — she's known to play trumpet while gyrating a hula-hoop around her hips — and experimenting with a range of electronic effects. The latter is represented on Skonberg's 2014 CD *Into Your Own*, an intoxicating blend of jazz, soul



and world music. Her blend of angelic singing and fiery playing owes to studies with trumpeter Warren Vaché, and guitar icon Bucky Pizzarelli is a fan; in fact, Skonberg coaxed his guitar-playing son, John Pizzarelli, onto her recordings. Her latest, *So Is the Day*, features mainly originals, but also tunes by Joni Mitchell, Irving Berlin and Erik Satie. **BM**

THE KINSEY REPORT
BOSTON'S, DELRAY BEACH/MARCH 17
2 BROTHERS, PUNTA GORDA/MARCH 19
LITTLE BAR, GOODLAND/MARCH 20
ACE'S, BRADENTON/MARCH 21
EARL'S HIDEAWAY, SEBASTIAN/MARCH 22

The sons of the late Lester "Big Daddy" Kinsey are a talented bunch. Raised in Indiana's industrial environs, guitarist and vocalist Donald, bassist Kenneth and drummer Ralph played behind their pop, a Mississippi-born blues king, who died in 2001. By that time, The Kinsey Report were firmly established, having released a string of albums in the '80s and '90s that set the template for genre-blurring blues rock. After a long layoff from the studio — they released a live album in 2011 —



the Kinseys returned in 2013 with the excellent EP *Standing (I'll Be)*, their talents still razor-sharp. Original tunes display mastery in writing and performing; dig Ralph's heartfelt vocals on the gospel tune "Nobody's Fault," with Donald on Dobro and slide — and the Kinseys blend of modern and traditional blues sounds as fresh and vital as ever. **BW**

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MAGGIE KOERNER
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AMPHITHEATER/MARCH 21 (3 PM)

A huge voice and equally grand persona are requirements for anyone who'd step in front of New Orleans jam-powerhouse Galactic with mic in hand. Maggie Koerner's got it covered. The Shreveport, La., native has pumped up Galactic audiences with her soul-shredding, feminist-reclamation of James Brown's "It's a Man's World," kept them grooving to the super-funky "Dolla Diva" and induced ecstatic booty-shaking with the bouncy "Hey Na Na." In 2013, Koerner released *Neutral Ground*, a collection of beautifully written Americana soul with its roots sunk in bayou soil. Her voice, while naturally lovely, carries an existential ache — dig her



sultry "He Calls Me Mama" or the dark backwoods title track. She'll be performing at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Fest in April, but stops in South Florida first. Koerner and her band will take the stage at the second annual Crawdebauchery, providing the perfect bridge between Johnny Sansone and The Lee Boys. Crawdebauchery.com for more info. **BW**

WARREN WOLF & THE WOLFPACK
MINIACI CENTER, FORT LAUDERDALE/MARCH 14
 Jazz vibraphonist Warren Wolf plays the instrument that perhaps best embodies melody, rhythm and harmony — just ask Lionel Hampton, Milt Jackson, Gary Burton, Bobby Hutcherson or Stefon Harris. And indeed, the 35-year-old Baltimore native grew up learning not only the melodic nuances of his mallet instrument, but also how to play drums (the rhythmic anchor of most music) and piano (the harmonic foundation). Factor in the young musician's early classical and ragtime training, and no style or piece of music is off-limits. Wolf graduated from Berklee College of Music in 2001 after studying extensively with vibraphonist and educator Dave Samuels. He went on to teach at the Boston institution,



while immersing himself in the city's vibrant jazz scene as a drummer and pianist as well as a vibist. Bass star Christian McBride took notice. He's employed Wolf in his Inside Straight band since 2007, and produced and played on Wolf's two solo releases. His Wolfpack quartet is also stocked with big dogs, including pianist Benny Green. **BM**

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TOMMY EMMANUEL
MANN HALL, FORT MYERS/MARCH 5
CAPITOL THEATRE, CLEARWATER/MARCH 6-7
PLAZA LIVE, ORLANDO/MARCH 8

Tommy Emmanuel doesn't play by the rules of the standard jazz guitarist. The 59-year-old Australian performs on an acoustic rather than an electric instrument, and fingerpicks rather than using a plectrum — unless, of course, you count the thumbpick he sometimes employs, which is more common to banjo players than guitarists. Emmanuel also uses the body of the guitar for percussive effects, and he's done all of this on banner releases from his 1979 debut *From Out of Nowhere* to a 1997 duet CD with Chet Atkins, *The Day Finger Pickers Took Over the World*, to last year's *The Guitar Mastery*



of Tommy Emmanuel. YouTube provides ample evidence of his genius — check out his romp through Mason Williams' challenging "Classical Gas" — as do live albums, including the 2013 CD/DVD combo *Live and Solo in Pensacola, FL.* As many of his fans will attest, seeing this six-stringed wizard in concert will make you a fan for life. **BM**

ZORA YOUNG w/ LITTLE MIKE & THE TORNADES
CAFE 11, ST. AUGUSTINE/MARCH 27
MESS O' BLUES FEST, POMPANO BEACH
AMPHITHEATER/MARCH 28
HIGH DIVE, GAINESVILLE/MARCH 29
BOSTON'S, DELRAY BEACH/MARCH 31

Chicago blues vocalist Zora Young has performed with some of her home town's greatest players. Hubert Sumlin, Junior Wells, Buddy Guy, Jimmy Dawkins — even a partial list reads like a blues-lover's dream juke box. A cousin of Howlin' Wolf, Young grew up singing in church before she transitioned to blues. And while she has the power to rattle rafters, she's also a nuanced artist who can sing jazz or interpret a Bob Dylan lyric. On 2009's, *The French Connection*, Young brought great



feeling to tunes by Muddy Waters, Willie Dixon, and Ma Rainey, backed by French musicians including Chicago transplant Bobby Dirninger. For her Florida dates, Young will perform with Little Mike & the Tornadoes. No slouches when it comes to Chicago blues, the harmonica-playing Little Mike and co. should provide expert backing. **BW**



For Press Releases, CD Reviews, Advertising Info or Listings, contact **561.313.7432** or P.O. Box 2614, Palm Beach, FL 33480

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