

# Take (More Than) Five

by Katie Bull

The VOXNews 2013 top vocal picks have a sonic indelibility that is undeniable. But in truth, hundreds of extraordinary recordings and live performances resounded last year; here are only a few of the many that are memorable.

“Someday soon we all will be together, if the fates allow,” intoned the wise young sage **Cécile McLorin Salvant** as she sang Hugh Martin’s “Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas” on the Rose Hall stage with the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra last month. In a class of her own, the 2010 Monk Competition winner patiently, architecturally yet spontaneously built deeply expressive phrasing from innocent whispers, gutsy calls and ethereal coloratura, the highest notes of which exquisitely invoked starlight. Salvant’s 2013 Grammy-nominated album *WomanChild* (Mack Avenue) is an instant classic. Hear her live at Lycée Français (Jan. 9th) and Le Poisson Rouge (Jan. 12th).

Two European vocal artists relatively unknown here in the US are experimental greats on the international scene. Their 2013 albums pushed the limits of vocal jazz and herald the coming sounds. Polish singer **Grzegorz Karnas’** *Audio Beads* (BMC) hooks the ear from the first bended note his bassist

digs into, spilling around trance-like with an undulating groove and a thick husky sound that moves resonance into every part of his body. As mentioned in previous columns, any and all of the brilliant Swiss vocalist **Andreas Schaerer’s** albums stand out, unparalleled. 2013’s *Tyr-Gly-Gly-Phe-Met: Live at Jazzwerkstatt Bern* (Jazzwerkstatt Bern), a duo with percussionist Lucas Niggli, is the most recent example of Schaerer’s prolific and relentless ability to explore and expand what we think we know.

And then there is the oracle **Andy Bey**. The epitome of vocal honesty, he has garnered a well-deserved 2013 Grammy nomination for *The World According to Andy Bey* (HighNote), self-accompanying on the piano. One hears blues, rhythm and blues and gospel edges pouring into his world as he sings, “There’s so many ways to approach the blues, but there’s really only one way to tell the truth.” Bey knows the way.

Another one of the best male singers on the scene in 2013 is **Pete McGuinness**. Also a trombone player, his *Voice Like A Horn* (Summit) reveals unparalleled lightning-fast scattling. In addition, he is a bandleader and arranger - a major talent. In an unforgettable CD release performance at the classy club Smoke in September, McGuinness’ pitch-perfect horn-sliding lines blazed into the night. He brought the house down. This man is at the top of his game.

Two more of the best live performances share a thread. **René Marie** and **Rhiannon** are shamans when

they sing. Both women have offered in bios that they shed domestic abuse years ago. These singers are fully liberated and offering their free spirits in song. In Marie’s 2013 release, *I Wanna Be Evil, With Love to Eartha Kitt* (Motéma), she sings holding nothing back. Anyone who heard her completely uninhibited live performances at Jazz Standard in November knows she commands major wattage. Hear her at Zinc Bar as part of the Winter Jazzfest (Jan. 10th). Likewise Rhiannon changed sonic form like a medicine woman at the ShapeShifter Lab last October. Her musical morphing from mortal to bird and from ocean to sky was miraculous.

Finally, the following 2013 unearthed gems and reissues are simply priceless. The producers of **Tony Bennett’s** *Live at the Sahara: Las Vegas, 1964* and Tony Bennett/Dave Brubeck *The White House Sessions (Live 1962)* (Columbia-Legacy) ought to be knighted for finding these two royal gems of the iconic Bennett legacy. *The Complete Chick Webb & Ella Fitzgerald Decca Sessions (1934-1941)* (Mosaic), is a deluxe boxed set of Webb’s Orchestra, which, after his untimely death, became **Ella Fitzgerald’s** Orchestra. Her teen and early 20s voice is captured in a reissued recording quality that brings Ella across the divide and into the room as if it was yesterday! **Nina Simone’s** *Little Girl Blue* (Bethlehem-Verse Music) is one of the deepest albums ever made and could be played one thousand times - it never gets old. ❖