

A JOYOUS REVOLT ON A FOGGY DAY

BY KATIE BULL

“That dance? The jazz dance? Ah, the dance! The dance of Life was ending,” wrote author John F. Matheus in his beautiful 1925 award-winning short story “Fog”. Matheus captured the life force impulse of jazz, setting it on a train ride fraught with racial prejudice in overt-tones. He took readers over a bridge that cracked as the train descended into a blindingly foggy river. The plunge, however, awakened all survivors to their in-common humanity. The fog soon lifted on the evolved riders, in more ways than one. In the increasingly dehumanized 21st century the singers highlighted here are some of the Best Of 2014; they are awake to the jazz dance of life and their music is evolved.

Andy Bey’s album *Pages From An Imaginary Life* (Savant) is a deeply grounding instant classic. Bey’s guiding torch of sonic truth is raw, unguilded and essential. His music is a tender antidote to the hype of our disjointed times.

Enter jazz goddess **René Marie**, parading as a human. Her 2015 Grammy-nominated Eartha Kitt tribute *I Wanna Be Evil* (Motéma) is a blast of raw energy. At 54Below last month Marie sang with incomparable depth of gut, grit and heart. In her

everyday life she is an active advocate for the homeless.

Another VOXNews ‘regular’ is now a Grammy nominee in the Best Arrangement: Instrumentals and Vocals categories; quadruple threat trombone-playing vocalist, arranger and bandleader **Pete McGuinness** will capture your heart with *Strength In Numbers* (Summit). Comparisons have been made to Chet Baker’s sound, but McGuinness has a voice all his own.

Another wizard is exploratory Swiss vocalist, composer, bandleader and human beatboxer **Andreas Schaerer**, whose album *Hildegarde Lernt Fliegen: The Fundamental Rhythm of Unpolished Brains* (Enja/Yellowbird)—and *Arcanum* (Intakt), a duo with percussionist Lucas Niggli—embodies a pioneering earthy-yet-wild, unpredictable vocal vision. **Schaerer is keeping it unreal and has *Perpetual Delirium* just out on BMC Records.**

Spun of kindred cloth, fantastic Polish experimental singer **Grzegorz Karnas** offers a completely realized trio album, *Vanga* (BMC Records), a solidly grooving, fluidly swinging odyssey outside the box of tradition, yet clearly rooted somewhere in ‘there’. Karnas’ remarkably wide resonant range and entirely original scat chops are nothing short of breathtaking.

And speaking of chops, veteran poet **Steve Dalachinsky** must be mentioned for the incredible improvisational simpatico he displays with saxophone great Dave Liebman on their album *The Fallout of Dreams* (RogueArt). Dalachinsky’s poetic intensity

forges sharp personal images that rise and fall in a sonic flood of percussive onomatopoeia.

“The true spirit of jazz is a joyous revolt from convention, custom, authority, boredom, even sorrow – from everything that would confine the soul of man and hinder its riding free on the air.” (J.A. Rogers, Jamaican-American self-taught historian, author and journalist). The list goes on with many beautiful albums “riding free”: **Orphéon Célesta’s** *Cuisine Au Jazz* (Frémeaux & Associés), **Dee Daniels’** *Intimate Conversations* (Origin), **Cyrille Aimée’s** *It’s A Good Day* (Mack Avenue) and **Curtis Stigers’** *Hooray for Love* (Concord). Some of the best albums of 2014 can be heard live in January: **Beat Kaestli’s** *Collage* (Francophone) at Bar Next Door (Jan. 19th) and **Brianna Thomas’** *You Must Believe In Love* (Sound On Purpose) at Minton’s (Jan. 11th).

Catherine Russell’s *Bring It Back* (Jazz Village), to be featured at the Winter Jazzfest (Jan. 10th), is a do-not-miss event. Russell brings down the house. Also check out fiery trumpet playing vocalist/composer **Bria Skonberg** (Jan. 10th) and hybrid-arts singer, actor, movement artist **Jen Shyu** (Jan. 9th), to name only a few of the many vocalists appearing on the festival roster, which takes place at several West Village venues (Jan. 8th-10th).

Get ready for a month of full, joyous, liberating jazz emersion. Take the plunge; be changed as you enjoy the changes. ❖