

Auditions

Abdullah Ibrahim

The Song Is My Story
(Sunnyside)

Now 80 years old and with an illustrious



career spanning more than five decades behind him, South African pianist/composer Abdullah Ibrahim continues to pave a path where

music flows freely from an intimate place inhabited by stories. On this, his 52nd solo recording, the father of Cape Town jazz draws from his vast repertoire and offers newly inspired improvisations. He even plays saxophone on two tracks — first on the opener “Celestial Bird Dance” and then again on the closing number, “Children Dance.” Both are brief, brooding sketches that tastefully bookend the disc’s contemplative nature.

As the album unfurls, Ibrahim seems to be reflecting on the many stages of his life. Some tunes, such as “Unfettered – Muken,” are new improvisations, while others revisit and reinvent the past. “Kalahari Pleiades,” a 1970 composition that, with a running time of just over six minutes, stands as the album’s longest track, is unpretentious and honest in its quest for simple serenity. “Twelve By Twelve” crafts a delicate latticework on piano that is more inquisitive than resigned. “For Coltrane” receives two treatments, with the second and substantially longer one being the most elaborately luxuriant, with its thoughtful pauses infusing meaning into sparse spaces.

For all of its stillness, however, *The Song Is My Story* contains disquieting moments. “African Dawn,” for example, is dissonant and darting.

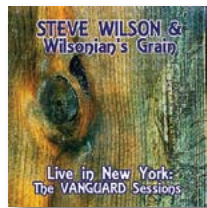
Throughout the album, quiet melodic turns coexist with sustained flourishes, giving the impression that Ibrahim’s own

life has been one harvested by the cross-pollination of improvisation and inward ruminations. Recorded in Italy last summer, the 17-track CD comes with a bonus DVD that includes tunes not on the disc and spotlights Ibrahim’s innate ability to weave wit into his stories and music with majestic aplomb. —**Lisette Corsa**

Steve Wilson & Wilsonian’s Grain

Live in New York: The Vanguard Sessions
(Random Act)

This latest CD by saxophonist Steve Wilson



— his first as leader in a dozen years — has “Bring it on!” emblazoned into every cut. Recorded in May 2014, these live selections from the Village Vanguard present Wilson at his most voracious, firing off compelling solos that enliven and, in the best ways, exhaust the listener. This hour of music captures the intensity of live performance and some of Wilson’s finest playing to date.

The quartet begins with a semi-deconstructed rendition of Thelonious Monk’s “Well, You Needn’t,” with Wilson on alto (bright, authoritative, searing) spurred on by drummer Bill Stewart who, as he does throughout the album, keeps extraordinarily busy with fills and flourishes without ever interfering. Pianist Orrin Evans composed the next tune, “Spot It You Got It,” with Wilson switching to soprano and bassist Ugonna Okegwo providing a thoughtful solo. The center of the album presents three compositions by Wilson, starting with a ballad (“Chrysalis”) and a medium groove (“Perry Street”) before turning to “Spheresophically,” Wilson’s second nod to Monk, with a head that sounds a bit like the bridge to “Epistrophy.” Evans seems particularly inspired here, tossing in

Monk-ish phrases and even strolling to let Wilson light up the stand in a trio setting.

The following waltz (“If I Were a Wind of Spring”) provides a necessary break from the intensity — although, here, too, Wilson brings up the heat like well-salted water for pasta. And then they charge into the finale: “Patterns,” a burner by Joe Chambers that features incendiary solos by Wilson and Evans, as well as a marvelous, out-of-tempo drum solo by Stewart. It’s a rousing close to an adventurous, exhilarating performance. —**Sascha Feinstein**

Kenny Wheeler

Songs for Quintet
(ECM)

Kenny Wheeler, the legendary trumpeter and composer, died last September.



Known for his pure tone and his ability to fit comfortably in both conventional and avant-garde settings,

he influenced countless musicians and composers. Fortunately, before he left us, he had enough left in him to record this exquisite collection.

Appropriately enough, a sense of inner calm pervades this set. That’s in part because Wheeler plays the warmer-sounding flugelhorn on each piece. Also, the power and command Wheeler possessed in his younger days is replaced by a hushed, plaintive quality. And the fact that he’s surrounded by longtime associates, including tenor saxophonist Stan Sulzmann, guitarist John Parricelli and bassist Chris Laurence, adds to the air of casual intimacy.

Their rapport is evident on Wheeler’s knotty yet highly melodic compositions, most of which were previously recorded in different musical contexts. Wheeler and Sulzmann deftly weave around each