

**Guitar Talk**  
Joel Harrison (AGS Recordings)  
by Robert Bush

Guitarist Joel Harrison has been quietly assembling a stellar body of work since his debut in 1996. 20 albums later, Harrison is back with a riveting collection of duets with four fellow guitarists (Ben Monder, Steve Cardenas, Pete McCann and David Gilmore) plus the electric bass of Steve Swallow.

In his liner notes, Harrison states that he had been avoiding the writing of simple, instrumental melodies in favor of other challenges, but had come back to the concept for these sessions. The album is dedicated to the memory of Vic Juris, for whom Harrison penned the memorable "Sunday Night With Vic", hoping to include him on the date. McCann spells Juris on this one and returns on "Rebound", which could refer to the prodigious amounts of delay/reverb both employ. It swings in its own sweet way and McCann is a definite keeper. Monder and Harrison are a solid match, illustrated on the swelling, orchestral "Autumn in Olivebridge" and "Winter Solstice", the latter an exercise in melodic clarity. The default motif is probably the pensive ballad that kind of hangs in the air, as in the duet between Harrison and Cardenas on "I Knew Right Away". The tunes with Swallow are especially potent. On the first, Harrison's solo is chock-full of Pat Metheny-esque double-stops while Swallow's contribution explores aggressive counterpoint. The second, "I'm Still Asking the Question", is a loping, bluesy groove reaffirming their ties to the jazz tradition. "Black Mountain Breakdown" with Gilmore has a more baroque, on the beat feel to it. At times, these duets recall the spirit (if not the letter) of *Sargasso Sea*, the 1976 ECM masterpiece by John Abercrombie and Ralph Towner.

In an album devoted to the art of the duet, what is most striking is the penultimate tune, a solo guitar exploration of Duke Ellington's "Reflections in D". It is gorgeous and timeless and Harrison's interpretation continues to linger in the ear.

For more information, visit [agsrecordings.bandcamp.com](http://agsrecordings.bandcamp.com). This project is at Soapbox Gallery Sep. 2nd. See Calendar.



**Managing the Mask**  
Craig Harris (Aquastra Music)  
by George Kanzler

Trombonist Craig Harris creates a varied tonal landscape with an innovative tentet on this ambitious album, which includes everything from funky, hip-hop inspired rhythms and collective improvising to mildly didactic vocals and fetching ballads.

Harris makes especially good use of flutes, as all three reedplayers double, often in striking ensembles. Muted brass and flutes dominate "Wildseed", from its rubato opening to cushioning solos from Jay Rodriguez (bass clarinet) and Harris. A high-register trumpet solo follows as flutes give way to communal improvising

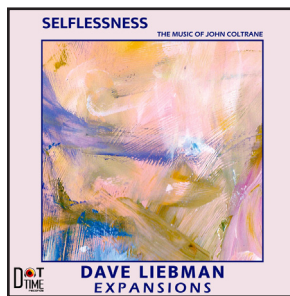
by trombone, trumpets, bass clarinet and saxophones. Flutes are also prominent in ensemble voicings on "Keep Your Razor Sharp", "Take the Time", "Song for a Friend" and "Lovejoy".

The rhythm section is also distinctive, not only for its use of martial and hip-hop patterns and odd meters like 7/4, but also a heavily electronic cast. Electric keyboards (Yayoi Ikawa or Adam Kipple), save for a B3 style organ solo (Kipple) on "24 Days an Hour", and electric bass (Calvin Jones) create expansive aural textures over the patterned drumming of Tony Lewis. There is an ethereal feel under Harris' most emotive, tender solo on elegy "Requiem for Fred Hampton" and Jones creates a throbbing pulse on the dramatically building "Makanda", flute and brass-led ensemble figures jabbing and probing behind flute, alto and baritone in tandem and trumpet (Eddie Allen) solos.

4 of the 14 tracks include Harris' vocals, sermon-like intonations for short, repeating lyrics/phrases. The longest lyric, on "Deep Thought Music", asserts "We just wanna play the real soul music" and "We just wanna play the great Black music / Yes the world could really use it". Others are just the title, sometimes slightly expanded, as in "Take the Time": "Take the time to be kind, help someone in a bind".

Harris is the main soloist. He has a deep, burnished tone and skews to the middle and lower registers of the instrument, delivering long, resonant phrases. An exception is "Lovejoy", wherein he unleashes more avant techniques while ascending to stratospheric registers.

For more information, visit [craigharris.com](http://craigharris.com). Harris is at Greater Calvary Baptist Church Fridays. See Calendar.



**Selflessness**  
Dave Liebman Expansions (Dot Time)  
by Scott Yanow

Dave Liebman, who celebrates his 75th birthday this month, first saw John Coltrane perform in 1962 when he was 15 and considers him his most important musical influence. While one can hear that in his playing at times, Liebman has had an original voice on his instruments (tenor and soprano saxophones and flute) since at least the early '70s when he worked with erstwhile Coltrane drummer Elvin Jones.

Liebman has paid tribute to Coltrane with individual songs, special concerts and such recordings as *Homage To John Coltrane*, *Compassion*, *Joy*, *John Coltrane's Meditations* and *Lieb Plays the blues à la Trane*. For *Selflessness*, he utilizes his group Expansions, a quintet with alto saxophonist Matt Vashlishan, pianist Bobby Avey, bassist Tony Marino and drummer Alex Ritz and himself sticking to soprano (other than one spot on flute). But although they perform eight pieces that Coltrane recorded during 1960-66 (plus "Lazy Bird" from 1957), at no time does Liebman's quintet sound imitative.

Uptempo blues "Mr. Day" has inventive solos from Vashlishan and Avey even if their contributions are eclipsed by the fiery Liebman, who displays his own approach to sheets of sound. He is melancholy on the mildly unsettling "Compassion" while accompanied by Vashlishan's wind synthesizer. An introspective piano introduction leads to an unusual version of "My Favorite Things", recast in 4/4 time instead of as a waltz. Both of the saxophonists make impressive statements although the song loses a bit of its personality in this time signature. "Olé", which features

Liebman's wooden flute, Vashlishan's clarinet and Ritz on frame drums, is given a very atmospheric treatment while "Lazy Bird" is reinvented with a completely different set of chord changes. Avoiding performing Coltrane's warhorses, Liebman and his group conclude by reviving such relatively obscure numbers as spiritual "Peace On Earth", passionate "One Up, One Down", the futuristic title track and somber "Dear Lord".

Liebman and Co. succeed at updating Coltrane's music to the 21st century without losing the essence of the vintage material.

For more information, visit [dottimerecords.com](http://dottimerecords.com). This project is at Dizzy's Club Sep. 4th-5th. See Calendar.

## UNEARTHED GEM

*Antibes '75*  
Billy Harper Quintet (Sam)  
by Andrey Henkin

Jazz à Juan, held since 1960 on France's Côte d'Azur, is one of Europe's most venerable jazz festivals: Charles Mingus had a legendary performance there in 1960; Archie Shepp and The Full Moon Ensemble released two volumes of their 1970 concert on BYG-Actuel; and a 2002 reissue of John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* included the only live performance of that music from the festival's 1966 edition.

Added to those and documented appearances by Miles Davis, Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie and Ella Fitzgerald is this newly unearthed set by tenor saxophonist Billy Harper, waxed on Jul. 24th, 1975 as part of the 15th anniversary festivities in a triple bill with Mingus and German pianist Joachim Kühn.

This LP contains two-thirds of Harper's presentation—as recorded by Radio France—in nice packaging with an insert of photos and essay by French music journalist Bernard Loupias. The leader is accompanied by trumpeter Virgil Jones, pianist Joe Bonner, bassist David Friesen and drummer Malcolm Pinson. This is the same band that had recorded Harper's *Black Saint* a few days earlier (inaugurating the Italian label of the same name) and comes two years after Harper's leader debut, *Capra Black*, for Strata-East. "Croquet Ballet" comes from that *Black Saint* album and "Cry of Hunger" appeared on *Capra Black*, while the not-included "Priestess" would be officially recorded two years later for Harper's Denon LP *Love On The Sudan*.

It was inevitable for Harper, coming up in the years after Coltrane's death, to be assigned the mantle as one of his successors. There is merit to that, as he shares an ecstatic quality, one that takes the saxophone out of the club and brings it into the church, using it to channel greater truths. The two pieces are lengthy workouts, drawing from '60s energy music but tempered with a more insistent rhythmic underpinning, courtesy of Pinson, who would continue to work with Harper through the end of the decade. Jones is a nice foil, pushing the band like Harper during his solo turns, and Bonner's work with Pharoah Sanders prepared him well for these kinds of forays.

For more information, visit [samrecords.fr](http://samrecords.fr). Harper is at Birdland Aug. 31st-Sep. 4th as part of the Strata-East 50th Anniversary Celebration. See Calendar.