



By Barry Bassis

You may have heard Neil Cowley playing keyboards on Adele's "19" and "21" albums, but his work with his own groups is quite different. "Face of Mount Molehill" presents his own compositions in rather brief takes. The core group is Cowley on piano, Rex Horan on bass and Evan Jenkins on drums. Guitarist Leo Abrahams joins on five pieces and there is a string section. My guess is that most of it was planned out by Cowley in advance with little improvisation. That said, his music is highly appealing, ranging from the lyrical (e.g., Lament and Distance by Clockwork) to the rowdy (Rooster was a Witness), with some eccentric touches, such as his daughter's laughter on "Mini ha ha." (The title is probably a playful reference to Minnehaha, the wife of Hiawatha in Longfellow's poem.) On Oct. 11th, Neil Cowley will play music from the album at Iridium (1650 Broadway; 212-582-2121).

Alto saxophonist David Bixler's new CD is titled "The Nearest Exit May Be Inside Your Head." Bixler often plays in Arturo O'Farrill's band, Risa Negra, and O'Farrill wrote the liner notes for the album. Performing on the CD with Bixler are Scott Wendholdt on trumpet, John Hart on guitar, Ugonna Okegwo on bass, and Andy Watson on drums. The opening "Perfected Surfaces," has a funky beat, over which Bixler and Wendholdt weave their lines in and out of each other. "Vanishing Point" has a lovely melody that almost calls out for words while "Vida Blue" is a finger-snapping hard bop gem with a snappy guitar solo. The title track is a propulsive number, which O'Farrill calls "Bixolodian." A couple of the tunes were previously performed by Risa Negra but they are re-imagined for this album. David Bixler will hold a CD release party Birdland (315 West 44th St.; (212) 581-3080) on Thursday, Oct. 18th at 6 p.m.

I once noted that when alto saxophonist David Sanborn came on stage as a guest artist, the soul level rose. Rhino has just released a 2-CD retrospective, "Then Again: The David Sanborn Anthology," a selection of his work from the 1970's until the 1990's, chosen by the artist himself. On the liner notes, Sanborn says that he rejects labels for his music is reflected in the varied music. A beautiful version of the folk song "The Water is Wide" features a vocal by Linda Ronstadt and was arranged by Don Grolnick, who also penned "Lotus Blossom." A number of pieces represent Sanborn's fruitful collaboration with bassist-producer-arranger Marcus Miller (notably "Hideaway," "Maputo" and "Chicago Song") No matter whether Sanborn is playing straight-ahead jazz, R&B or pop, there is always his distinctive sound, with its strong blues feeling. On Oct 14th, David Sanborn will perform at Staten Island St. George Theatre's Jazz Festival (35 Hyatt St. Staten Island; 718-442-2900). He will also appear on Friday, October 19th at New Jersey Performing Arts Center, Prudential Hall (1 Center St., Newark) at "For Love of Moody: A Jazz Celebration" in honor of the late James Moody. The Festival runs from Oct. 15-21.

The most haunting music that I have heard this year is "Matanë Malit" ("Beyond the Mountain") on ECM. This is the new CD by the powerful singer Elina Duni with Colin Vallon on piano, Patrice Moret on bass and Norbert Pfammatter on drums. The songs are Albanian and the lyrics (which are translated on the liner notes) are often poetic. The subject matter ranges from songs of love (both good "For a Year" and bad "Me and You") to nostalgia ("When You Remember") to stark depictions of war ("Celo Mezani," about a slain hero). The instrumental backing enhances the mood of each piece. On October 30th, Elina Duni and her group will appear at Drom (85 Avenue A; 212-777-1157). Another worthy ECM artist in town is Michael Formanek, whose new album is "Small Places" on which he plays with Tim Berne, Craig Taborn and Gerald Cleaver. The group is performing at Jazz Standard (116 East 27th Street; 212-576-2232) on October 2nd and 3rd. •

