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Aguankó

leader's classical inclinations. Woodwind artist Sam Sadigursky, on clarinet here, and cellist Erik Friedlander splendidly meet the demands of the set's most conventional piece. Friedlander's long solo segues into the next track, the more conceptually adventurous title tune. As the cello assumes an increasingly agitated tone, Sadigursky joins the fray on alto sax, while the two percussionists provide a frenzied surge of concentric rhythms.

Throughout the set, Teubal's firm-handed comping and bassist Moto Fukushima's ostinato lines provide a structural point of reference that allows others to play more freely. On "Nikko," the roles are reversed as Teubal solos on an electronic keyboard, buoyed by the ensemble's floating background figure.

The album concludes with "Milonga Para Terminar," which utilizes teasing, abstract references to the *milonga*, a feisty, more animated cousin of the tango. Teubal creates a repetitive, spiraling construct for clarinet, cello and keys, while the percussionists provide a swirl of earthy rhythmic accents. From the session's opening bar to its last, the ensemble provides a nonstop rush of intellectually curious, inherently charming and beautifully performed works. — **Mark Holston**

Aguankó
Elemental
(PKO)

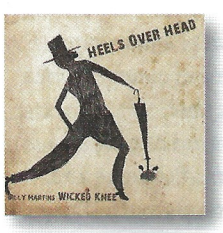
Alberto Nacif and his group Aguankó are living proof that Latin jazz continues to inspire high levels of creativity among diverse musicians in far-flung locales. The son of a Lebanese immigrant to Mexico, composer and percussionist Nacif — who is also a practicing medical doctor — lives in Michigan today. He has traveled frequently to Cuba since the early 1980s and mastered a broad range of traditional music idioms. The name of his group combines his two favorite sounds: the rush of *agua*, water, and the rippling rhythms of *guanguancó*, a bedrock Cuban folkloric style.

Elemental is Nacif's first outing as a leader after many years of concert and studio work, including a gig with Dizzy Gillespie, a godfather to Latin jazz. Adding two other master percussionists — Jose "Pepe" Espinoza and Javier Barrios — to the ensemble required extra vigilance in the studio to ensure that not one snappy bongo lick, timbale roll or *guiro* stroke was not lost in the mix. Superb audio engineering (a couple of under-recorded muted trumpet parts not withstanding) makes the date a sonic joy. And, despite the music's dense rhythm, the relaxed quality and spatial openness of the performances make pieces like the jaunty, melodically flirtatious "La Bicicleta" especially entrancing. "Summer Garden," a sultry bolero, echoes the romantic appeal of 1960s French-cinema soundtracks, while "Chasin' Chano" features a burning tempo and energized solos from trumpeter Paul

the North Indian vocal percussion of Antonia Minnecola. Somehow this odd combination succeeds. Larry Schneider adds color with an astringent soprano-sax solo. The a cappella number "The Bear" is a welcome change of pace, a Holm original featuring an 11-piece vocal orchestra. Other highlights include reads of Joe Zawinul's "74 Miles Away," which, with the addition of lyrics, is retitled "Go There Now"; and "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat," with flourishes from Schneider's soprano. A daring "Afro Blue" features Coltrane-like phrasing from Schneider on tenor and Elvin Jones-like color from veteran drummer Famoudou Don Moye. In contrast, Holm and company render Monk's "Straight No Chaser" in fairly straightahead fashion.

Holm's original material sits comfortably alongside standards by the likes of Monk and Mingus. Mixing a cappella, ragas and engaging solos, the singer has crafted an unexpected winner on the first outing under her own name. — **Ross Boissoneau**

Billy Martin's Wicked Knee
Heels Over Head
(Amulet)



During their eponymous trio's 20-year career, keyboardist John Medeski, bassist Chris Wood and drummer Billy Martin have enjoyed considerable leeway for side projects. But Martin has made the most of the group's flexibility. Since 2006, he's helmed instructional books and films, recorded a duo disc with Hammond organist Wil Blades and released an EP and the new full-length *Heels Over Head* with his horn-heavy Wicked Knee quartet.

Featuring trumpeter Steven Bernstein, trombonist Curtis Fowlkes and tuba player Marcus Rojas, the New Orleans-inspired ensemble is a credit to Martin's creative risk taking, despite its ups and downs. His frenetic second-line cadence ignites rounds of inspired horn work on Frank London's opening "Ghumba Zumba," while Bernstein's "Theme One" morphs between swing and a sci-fi film soundscape. Martin even approximates former Jimi Hendrix drummer Mitch Mitchell playing with a big band on a cover of the White Stripes' "Button to Button."

Martin's adventurous compositions include the horns-only "Rendezvous," which wouldn't sound out of place in a Spike Lee film. On his "99%," guest vocalist Shelley Hirsch contributes an imbalanced mix of singing and spoken-word performance about life's hardships. And his "Chamans Interlude" travels from eerie horn meshes to a percussive breakdown.

With its unusual instrumentation, Wicked Knee is a bit of a one-trick pony. But these downtown New York City jazz-scene vets sure know how to blow the dust off age-old material. The bottom-heavy Rojas, skillfully sliding Fowlkes and buoyant Bernstein sound like authentic French Quarter street musicians on King Oliver's "Sugarfoot Stomp." And Rojas contributes an infectious arrangement of the traditional "Canta y No Llores." — **Bill Meredith**

Chris Clark Quintet
Cedar Wisely
(Songlines)

A two-saxophone quintet is often a rambunctious affair. Recall the famous pairings of Sonny Stitt and Gene Ammons, Al Cohn and Zoot Sims or Dexter Gordon and Wardell Gray. Innate one-upmanship often manifested in exciting cutting sessions.

Not so with the frontline of tenor saxophonist Chris Clark and alto and soprano saxophonist Peter Epstein, who work in tandem to bring Clark's compositions to fruition. The opening "Improvisation I" — a freely evolving saxophone duet without rhythm section — offers a revealing forecast of the eight cuts to follow. Hardly ever rising above mezzo piano, the slow-moving horns weave a dark and moody tapestry, bending dissonant quartertones into wistful minor modes. Throughout this thoughtful set, scant reference is made to a genial major chord.

Clark is based in Boston, but on *Cedar Wisely* — his first CD as a leader — he surrounds himself with players affiliated with the University of Nevada at Reno. Clark received his masters in jazz studies there while studying with Epstein. With its reliance on deliberate dynamics and varying instrumental timbres, Clark's music might be described as chamber jazz. Only the Ornette-ish "Inside the Gloves" and the Latin hybrid "Cage Factor" charge out of the gates with relative vitality. Yet, solos build, often with the saxophonists soaring into the altissimo with split tones and primal screams reminiscent of latter-day Coltrane.

The simpatico rhythm section of pianist David Ake, bassist Zack Teran and drummer Jesus Vega begin songs softly, escalating with the intensity of each soloist. Cues are ad libbed throughout each piece, leading the ensemble to seamless segues into subsequent sections.

The days of formulaic hard bop are waning, succumbing to individual through-composed music such as this. *Cedar Wisely* is sensitive, evocative and ultimately successful music, requiring multiple listens to fully appreciate this quintet's vision. — **James Rozzi**

Emilio Teubal
Música Para un Dragon Dormido
(BJU)

Decades after Gunther Schuller coined the term "Third Stream" — a hybrid of classical and jazz idioms — musicians still struggle to create an effective synthesis. Often these experiments come off as overreaching, stiff and calculated. Not so with *Música Para un Dragon Dormido* (Music for a Sleeping Dragon), Argentine composer and keyboardist Emilio Teubal's third album as a leader.

Primary themes and countermelodies circle one another like kick boxers before merging, sparring and changing roles. Formal, repetitive motifs flower alongside spontaneous outbursts of collective improvisation within the six-member ensemble. Throughout the course of nine stylistically divergent tracks, Teubal approaches the task of genre-bending with refreshing nonchalance.

"El Acróbata," a chamberesque work with Far East tonalities buried in its serene textures, provides a window into the