

## Amina Figarova *Sketches*

BMCD 507  
★★★★½

On this intelligent, sensitive and varied set of music, pianist-composer Amina Figarova cuts a smart profile as a leader, with a stylistic stamp at once modern and linked to assorted jazz traditions. Tradition-juggling skill may, in fact, come with the territory (or territories) of her background. Born in Azerbaijan and now based in Rotterdam, with studies at Berklee School of Music during her development stage, Figarova ventures in musical directions that somehow reflect her varied cultural experience. A European harmonic air and general sophistication of bearing mixes with aspects of jazz vocabulary over the course of this fine album's 13 tracks, and her overall painterly way with a tune, arranging and soloing indicate a personal, poetic jazz sensibility at work.

In groupings ranging from solo parts to piano trio to a sextet (including her husband, flutist Bart Platteau), Figarova nicely works out a list of musical problems, inventions and just plain tunes. On the title "Sketches," a 9/8 piano ostinato leads off a sinuous, yearning melody over a restless groove and set of changes. Cooler, slightly melancholic



touches come through in the meditative "Four Steps Into ...," "Caribou Crossing" and the vaguely Chick Corea-esque "Train To Rotterdam." "WHOTSOT" is a taut exercise in syncopated accents in the band, teasing the underlying and impending swing pulse begging to be set loose. Once the song does land in the swing, tenor saxist Marc Mommaas turns out an impressive solo—impulsive and assured, by turns—and the pianist limbers up and around the changes with tasteful, knowing understatement. The going gets slow bluesy on "Back In New Orleans," albeit with transatlantic blue notes in the melody, and tempo shifts meet angular changes in harmony and mood in "Look At That."

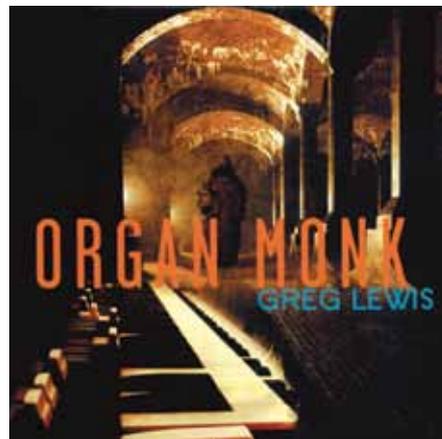
In general, Figarova impresses with subtlety and melodic logic more than blatant fireworks on the album. She and her band lure us into an emotional space where contemplative qualities and wise compositional mapping do the bidding, with burning moments in the margins.

—Josef Woodard

**Sketches:** Four Steps To ...; Unacceptable; Sketches; Caribou Crossing; Breakfast For The Elephant; WHOTSOT; Back In New Orleans; On The Road; Flight N; Look At That; Train To Rotterdam; Happy Hour; Your Room. (78:19)

**Personnel:** Amina Figarova, piano; Ernie Hammes, trumpet, flugelhorn; Marc Mommaas, tenor sax; Bart Platteau, flute, B-flat flute d'amor; Jeroen Vierdag, bass; Chris "Buckshot" Strik, drums.

**Ordering info:** [munichrecords.com](http://munichrecords.com)



## Greg Lewis *Organ Monk*

SELF-RELEASE  
★★★

For his first album as a leader, organist Greg Lewis chose 14 Thelonious Monk compositions and finishes the album with his original "Kohl's Here." While a tad on the long side, *Organ Monk* shows Lewis to be a talented and creative musician who knows the B-3 inside-out. Lewis pulls numerous different timbres and colors from his instrument, ranging from standard B-3 fare to the eerie, ghoulish atmospherics on "Criss Cross," which references the Grim Reaper on the album's cover art. He changes the organ's stops halfway through "Locomotion," giving the listener a new sonic tapestry to consider. Lewis often mixes stabling, percussive eighth- and 16th-note lines with dense, layered chords that are right out of the church, and I love how his phrases often end and begin in unexpected places.

Lewis and drummer Cindy Blackman (talk about a thudding bass drum) have a great rapport. Blackman's precise and assertive fills and kicks are perfectly placed and support Lewis' phrasing and accents nicely. Check how they bob and weave around each other at the beginning of "Criss Cross" and how she seems to know exactly where Lewis is headed on the easy swinger "Boo's Birthday." They effectively accentuate the jagged nature of some of Monk's tunes like "Trinkle Tinkle" by approaching them with plenty of rubato. "Locomotion" is given an especially start-stop stuttering treatment. I would like to have heard more from guitarist Ron Jackson, both in the mix (he's sometimes hard to hear when comping) and in terms of soloing. Jackson doesn't solo on every track, and more work like his fine single-note solos on "Coming In The Hudson" and "We See" would have been most welcome.

—Chris Robinson

**Organ Monk:** Trinkle Tinkle; Jacking; Criss Cross; Light Blue; Played Twice; Boo's Birthday; Coming In The Hudson; Four In One; Locomotion; We See; Monk's Mood; Think Of One; Work; Introduction; Kohl's Here. (67:25)

**Personnel:** Greg Lewis, organ; Ron Jackson, guitar; Cindy Blackman, drums.

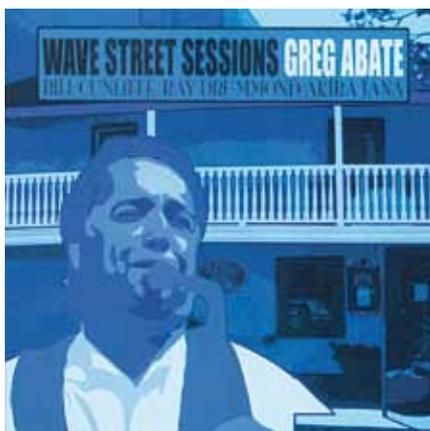
**Ordering info:** [cdbaby.com](http://cdbaby.com)

## Greg Abate *Live In Monterey*

WAVE STREET SESSIONS 0003  
★★★★½

Saxophonist Greg Abate's group, featuring pianist Bill Cunliffe, bassist Ray Drummond and drummer Akira Tana, begins *Live In Monterey* (produced by Dr. Herb Wong) with an energetic take of "You And The Night And The Music," which is full of verve and swagger. It straight off tells the listener that this is going to be a solid, swinging straight-ahead set featuring inspired blowing and ensemble work. The rhythm section drives the band hard and makes the shift between Afro-Cuban and swing feels seamlessly. Abate, on alto here, digs in and goes for it, while Cunliffe's left-hand voicings and right-hand single-note runs evoke McCoy Tyner. Drummond, who quotes the tune in his solo, is rock solid, as is Tana, who is about as crisp as they come. The band is extremely tight and the collective intensity of its members, along with their overall approach, suggest they take Coltrane's classic quartet as a model.

Unlike someone who has a similar sound on



all their instruments, Abate's approach on alto and tenor are distinctly different. His alto sound, which recalls Bud Shank's, is big and slightly rough, yet sweet at the same time, while on tenor his style comes closer to Coltrane. Abate is a melodic and inventive player who never seems to run out of fresh ideas, whether he's burning through

the changes on "Bebop" or taking time on the ballads "Oh You Crazy Moon" and his "For The Love Of Life," which is tuneful enough to fit into the Great American Songbook. At 74 minutes, *Live In Monterey* is long, but the varied arrangements, different styles (the bossa-ish take on "Infant Eyes" is tasty) and track sequencing not only make it go by quickly but give the listener a lot to dig into.

—Chris Robinson

**Live In Monterey:** You And The Night And The Music; Wongs Way; Oh You Crazy Moon; Silveresque; Bebop; For The Love Of Life; Y Blues; Forest Flower; Infant Eyes; In The Stratosphere. (74:33)

**Personnel:** Greg Abate, alto saxophone (1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10); tenor saxophone (3, 4, 9); Bill Cunliffe, piano; Ray Drummond, bass; Akira Tana, drums.

**Ordering info:** [wavestreetstudios.com](http://wavestreetstudios.com)