

The Hot Box

Critics	John McDonough	John Corbett	Jim Macnie	Paul de Barros
René Marie <i>I Wanna Be Evil</i>	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★
Swing Fever <i>Grand Masters Of Jazz</i>	★★★	★★½	★★★	★★★½
The Claudia Quintet <i>September</i>	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★
Randy Brecker <i>Brecker Brothers Band Reunion</i>	★★★½	★★½	★★★	★★★

Critics' Comments

René Marie, *I Wanna Be Evil: With Love To Eartha Kitt*

Swinging, soulful vocalist René Marie has great control and range but has had difficulty defining her territory. Oddly, this tribute album to Eartha Kitt has sparked some originality. Her clever, funky arrangement (in three) of "Let's Do It," a sexy "Santa Baby" and her daringly transgressive original "Weekend" add punch. The earnest Marie is more seduced by Kitt's theatrical "earthiness" than by her winking kitsch. —Paul de Barros

The Eartha Kitt songbook gives this excellent singer a superb array of material (from Dave Frishberg to Cole Porter) in which to show her winking, sinewy stuff. The East Side cleverness and sophistication tilt toward cabaret, but Wycliffe Gordon bridges the gap with humor and a few strange sounds. —John McDonough

Successful transfusion of Eartha Kitt's red-blooded, raw sex and exotica, purred and snarled as a steely story of determination and triumph. Marie throws a few of her own curves into the mix, but plays it rather close to the source. —John Corbett

Swing Fever, *Grand Masters Of Jazz*

Obviously prepared with love and admiration for the swing-pins. Memorable flashes from Clark Terry and Jackie Ryan, and DeFranco's got such a huge presence, but much of the disc and two freebie DVDs falls short of being extraordinary. —John Corbett

Love the idea of the locals hosting the heroes, especially when the locals kick it with so much verve. The pros demonstrate what makes them global figures—and that kind of expertise nudges everything even further. —Jim Macnie

Clark Terry, Terry Gibbs and Buddy DeFranco—caught here more than 10 years ago—play with sparkling panache, and San Francisco bandleader Bryan Gould's ensemble honors them with a solid bed of swing. But the CD, stitched from live and studio sessions (with falsely feathered applause to make it sound like it was all one show) promises more than it delivers—the principals never appear together and the expansive (and wonderful) vocalist Jackie Ryan feels like the real star. —Paul de Barros

The Claudia Quintet, *September*

The interplay of the Claudias has been magical for a few years now, but the eye-opener here is the intrepid nature of Hollenbeck's compositional sense. It's simultaneously more refined and more far-reaching on these pieces, and it's the main reason the disc is so enchanting as a whole. —Jim Macnie

Even when this superb accordion- and vibes-laced quintet is chattering in Morse code or obsessing, Steve Reich-style, over asymmetric chunks of melody, a shimmering spiritual warmth swells up around leader John Hollenbeck's inspired, orchestral drumming. "29th: 1936 'Me Warn You,'" built from imbedded historical speech, conjures contemporary social reality in a way that much music more readily labeled as "jazz" feels altogether too remote from. —Paul de Barros

If you've never heard FDR's mocking 1936 aria to eternal GOP hypocrisy set to music, you'll enjoy this quirky quartet as it teases and riffs on his rhythms. Politics aside, the music is impressionistic, intellectually vexing and emotionally rather evasive. Its elusiveness is part of its charm and its frustration. —John McDonough

Randy Brecker, *The Brecker Brothers Band Reunion*

Hard to peg the Brecker brand as nostalgia, but a reunion doesn't lie. Randy and his fusionaires are all on top of a rather half-breed game here, in jazz quarters at least. But the playing has punch, power and wattage. The surprise is Ada Rovatti, who warrants her prominence as stand-in for her late brother-in-law. Companion DVD very well produced. —John McDonough

Glint of light on metallic font—this self-tribute adopts the '70s aesthetic the Brecker Brothers helped codify, down to the design. Glitter disco + pneumatic thwack of salsa + adrenaline wail of mainstream rock + post-bop infrastructure = music that birthed 100 TV themes. For the record: "Merry Go Town" has some of the dopest lyrics this side of Men At Work. —John Corbett

Sharp playing on paper, but the studio stuff has a hokey side, and the live stuff truly seems locked in another era. That said, the band scalds through its rather predictable fusion flourishes. —Jim Macnie



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