

GUSTO

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Discs: Young the Giant, Arild Andersen, Barbara Levy Daniels and Donna Vivino

Jazz

Arild Andersen

Mira [ECM]

Funny thing about Norwegian bassist Arild Andersen. At age 68, his international profile has been raised to the highest point it has probably ever been. And that's despite his near ubiquity in European jazz over the decades and frequent appearances on ECM.

Which is another way of saying that Andersen's discs in America, since his 2008 pianoless trio disc "Live at Belleville," have been making their biggest impact in the last couple of years. When ECM celebrated its 40th anniversary, it was Andersen's large orchestral composition "Celebration" (conducted by Scottish tenor player Tommy Smith) that was the ECM celebration year's signature disc.

Andersen and Smith are obviously a gilt-edged mutual admiration society. This is Andersen's pianoless trio in its first studio recording. The drummer, as always, is Paolo Vinaccio.

What is so impressive on this ballad disc is not only the hugely underrated playing by tenor saxophonist Smith, but the unusual focus on the non-virtuoso bassist leader. That gives the saxophone trio sans harmony instrument a completely different form from what we've become used to in the discs of Sonny Rollins and his worshipful progeny.

The constant emphasis on the bassist's stately lines against the tenor's improvisations on ballads and midtempo swingers gives it all a rare sound. And Smith is superb no matter what he's playing – Andersen's tunes, "Alfie," Japanese shakuhachi flute.

Vinaccia is solidly atmospheric, but this stately show is all Smith's and Andersen's. Superb.

– Jeff Simon