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Budd Kopman's Best Of 2006

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By [Budd Kopman](#)

2006 was a fantastic year for jazz, and my only lament is that I did not have the time to do more. It did seem that a strong ECM record was appearing every week, and that fact could push many deserving albums off of my Top 10 list. So, this list will start from January and feature those albums that elicited the strongest emotions at the time, and are the clearest now.

Also, a giant thanks from me to everyone at AAJ, including [Michael Ricci](#), [Nils Jacobson](#) and [John Kelman](#).



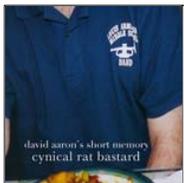
Min Rager
Bright Road
[Effendi](#)
2006

Blessed with the gift of melody, Min Rager has created an album of original compositions full of smiles, hope, laughter, and just plain great listening. [Continue...](#)



Paul Motian
Garden Of Eden
[ECM](#)
2006

If Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *100 Years of Solitude* had been put to music, it might have sounded like *Garden of Eden*. [Continue...](#)



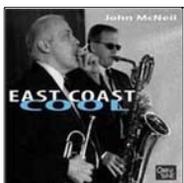
David Aaron
Cynical Rat Bastard
[Self Published](#)
2006

David Aaron presents *Cynical Rat Bastard* as “a heavy dose of aural voyeurism [which] invites the listener to press an ear to the keyhole for this insomniac’s foray through an all-night carnival.” The pose of a quirky, gen-X, ultra-cynical slacker is reinforced by the CD notes crediting someone for “missing the point” and dedicating the release to “my dear cynical rat bastard, martha,” plus placing craigslist among the thank yous. [Continue...](#)



Nik Bartsch
Stoa
[ECM](#)
2006

What is this music? What genre does it inhabit? What label best suits it? Nik Bärtsch himself calls it Zen-funk, and it easily could fit the trance label, but only at times. Reichian or Glassian minimalism springs to mind, but again only at times. Calling it progressive rock would be a gigantic stretch. Is it jazz, whatever that means to you? [Continue...](#)



John McNeil
East Coast Cool
[OmniTone](#)
2005

The best jazz is always at least a bit subversive - it does the unexpected, perhaps even setting the listener up for something, only to slap him about it later. [Continue...](#)



Iro Haarla
Northbound
[ECM](#)
2006

Beauty can mean many different things, but in my view of music, the concept centers around euphony, construction and the listener's emotional response. Consonant intervals, melodic lines that have internal logic, chord progressions that create and release tension, and timbres that blend together all work toward the beautiful. Add to this the mental imagery that some music can engender and you have the possibility of a totally engulfing experience. [Continue...](#)



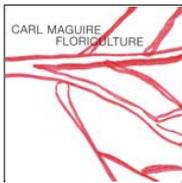
Andrew Rathbun / George Colligan
Renderings: The Art Of The Duo
[Fresh Sound New Talent](#)
2006

Renderings could be the perfect album for the jazz lover who thinks he doesn't like classical music, or vice versa. The recording is extremely beautiful for many reasons, in no small part because of the classical music chosen on which to improvise, as well as the leaders' own classically inspired compositions. [Continue...](#)



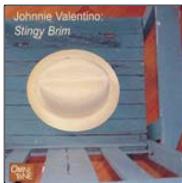
Charles Lloyd
Sangam
[ECM](#)
2006

Those who have been following Charles Lloyd on ECM as well as plenty of other people have a real reason to rejoice. *Sangam*, Lloyd's first live recording for the label, is extremely well recorded and features a new configuration. The concert was part of an event entitled "Homage to Billy Higgins," which included a screening of Dorothy Darr's documentary *Home*, which recorded on film some of Higgins and Lloyd's last conversations together before Higgins died. [Continue...](#)



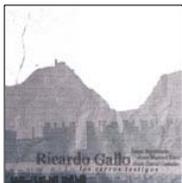
Carl Maguire
Floriculture
[Between The Lines](#)
2006

Floriculture is clearly a jazz record and does not seem to inhabit *Between the Lines'* usual niche at the point of collision between modern classical composition and jazz improvisation, perhaps because of the standard jazz band instrumentation. [Continue...](#)



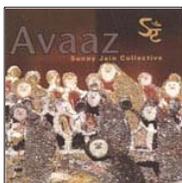
Johnny Valentino
Stingy Brim
[OmniTone](#)
2006

OmniTone strikes again with *Stingy Brim*, a release that is billed as commemorating the one hundredth anniversary of the death of the tuba as the bassline instrument, when it was replaced by the string bass. This album is very cool, hip, funny and just unpredictable enough to keep you glued to your chair, unless, that is, you are dancing to the various rhythms that Mark Ferber lays down. [Continue...](#)



Ricardo Gallo
Los Cerros Testigos
[Chonta Records](#)
2006

Living in New York City, one can sometimes take the presence of so much local musicianship and creativity for granted. Ricardo Gallo's *Los Cerros Testigos* is, therefore, a strong reminder that great music is happening all over the world. [Continue...](#)

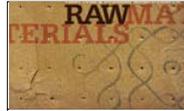


Sunny Jain
Aavaaz
[Sinj Records](#)
2006

The Sunny Jain Collective is part of a growing group of musicians whose roots are from South Asia (primarily India, but also countries like Cambodia and Thailand) and are naturally cross-fertilizing with other practitioners. [Continue...](#)



Raw Materials
[Savoy](#)



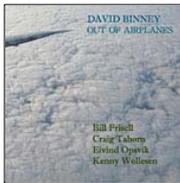
2006

The music of pianist Vijay Iyer and altoist Rudresh Mahanthappa always communicates a feeling of importance, whether they appear individually or together in any of a myriad of groups. The “alter ego” analogy is perhaps a bit stale by now, but their decade-long connection is on full display in *Raw Materials*. [Continue...](#)



Shot X Shot
Shot X Shot
[High Two Records](#)
2006

From the very first notes of this debut album, it is abundantly clear that it's an important record, and these young men (the oldest is 26!) have that special something. [Continue...](#)



David Binney
Out Of Airplanes
[Mythology Records](#)
2006

Listeners familiar with David Binney's *Welcome to Life* (Mythology, 2004), *Bastion of Sanity* (Criss Cross, 2005) or even the wonderful *South* (ACT, 2001) might be a bit surprised by the extent of the use of electronics on *Out of Airplanes*, which continues to explore his eclectic, yet recognizable musical style. Fear not though, their use is subordinated to the music, and the album is extremely satisfying. [Continue...](#)



Martin Speake
Change Of Heart
[ECM](#)
2006

One of the more interesting extra-musical things to observe in jazz is how the connections between musicians happen, and then, of course, how those connections affect the music they produce. [Continue...](#)



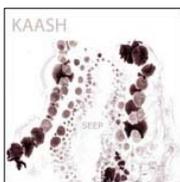
Mike Murley / David Braid
Mnemosyne's March
[Cornerstone Records](#)
2006

The Canadian scene is like any other in that players find each other “and when things click, they end up in each other's bands. This terrific quartet is led by veteran sax player Mike Murley and pianist David Braid, a brash youngster who is making a big and deserved splash. [Continue...](#)



The Source
The Source
[ECM](#)
2006

The music that makes up this most delightful and peculiar album is both paradoxical and enigmatic. Everything seems to fit together and make sense, and yet the musical world thus created is unfamiliar. While it has density and gravity, the music feels like it's almost not there. After experiencing the album, you might ask yourself what just happened. What is it about this music that kept my total attention and yet slipped right through my fingers? [Continue...](#)



Samita Sinha
Seep
[Sinj](#)
2006

Seep is a record that begs to be listened to over and over so that the experience of being totally swept away can be repeated. [Continue...](#)



Lontano
[ECM](#)
2006

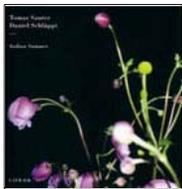
Can a recording be appreciated or understood without knowing the full history of the performer?

The answer is, of course, yes and no. In this case, yes, the music on *Lontano* creates a coherent sound world, has an artistic point of view and many levels, and thus is well worth repeated listens. [Continue...](#)



Ergo
Quality Anatomical Music Since 2005
[Actuator](#)
2006

Ergo, lead by Brett Sroka, has been performing for about a year, and *Quality Anatomical Music Since 2005* is a terrific album of sounds, moods and emotions. [Continue...](#)



Tomas Sauter / Daniel Schlaepfi
Indian Summer
[Catwalk](#)
2006

The delicate, intimate and compelling *Indian Summer*, by the guitar/bass duo of Tomas Sauter and Daniel Schlaepfi, is a most welcome release in these closing days of summer. The very sound of the recording is sensuous and surprisingly live, given it's a studio effort. [Continue...](#)



Francois Carrier
Happening
[Leo Records](#)
2006

Listeners who have followed multiple reed player François Carrier, particularly his two 2004 releases *Play* (482 Music) and *Traveling Lights* (Justin Time), will welcome this double-CD offering on Leo. Not only is *Happening* a double dose of outstanding freely improvised (as opposed to “free”) jazz, but it is recorded live. [Continue...](#)



Cory Combs
Valencia
[Evander Music](#)
2006

Valencia is a trip through the eclectic mind of Cory Combs, a terrific bassist and a mean cellist. Combs and the other members of his trio, drummer John Hollenbeck (of the Claudia Quintet) and saxophonist Dan Willis, are all graduates of the Eastman School and have been playing together since then. [Continue...](#)



Dino Saluzzi
Juan Condori
[ECM](#)
2006

Juan Condori is one of most heartfelt and deeply moving releases you will come across. It is about remembrance of childhood, people and place, of things lost and regained, of relationships, of a life lived fully, with intent. [Continue...](#)

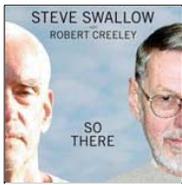


Jay Foote
Ubuntu!
[Self Published](#)
2006

Ubuntu! is an extremely deceptive release that hides its expertise underneath seeming simplicity. Evoking

the moods of such disparate recent releases as Paul Motian's [Garden Of Eden](#) and David Aaron's [Cynical Rat Bastard](#), this record, while short at under forty minutes, sank its tentacles deep into my mind and would not let go for days on end.

[Continue...](#)



Steve Swallow with Robert Creeley

So There

[ECM](#)

2006

So There is a mixture of Robert Creeley reading short poems and fragments of longer ones, surrounded and accompanied by Steve Kuhn's light, dazzling, free piano and Steve Swallow's feathery bass (and guitar-like solos in the upper register) ♦”plus occasionally the Cikada String Quartet, both alone and with Swallow and Kuhn. [Continue...](#)



Francois Carrier / Dewey Redman

Open Spaces

[Spool Music](#)

2006

With *Open Spaces*, Francois Carrier has given us an opportunity to hear him paired with the magnificent Dewey Redman, recorded over two nights live in Quebec City in 1999. [Continue...](#)



Roberto Magris

Il Bello Del Jazz

[Soul Note](#)

2006

Il Bello Del Jazz is surely one of the most entrancing mainstream albums of the year. This group swings so effortlessly and with such sureness that its music transcends such labels as mainstream and becomes the simple the Ellingtonian “good.” [Continue...](#)



David Braid

Zhen

[Self Published](#)

2006

Zhen feels like an important record: the compositions make big impressions, the playing is intense, and the sound is joyous. [Continue...](#)

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