



**More Like Us**  
Michael Blake's Blake Tartare (Stun)  
by Sean Fitzell

*More Like Us* is the second CD from saxophonist Michael Blake's Blake Tartare, with Darish wunderkinds keyboardist Soren Kjaergaard, bassist Jonas Westergaard and drummer Kresten Osgood. As the title suggests, the group has developed cohesion, easily maneuvering the circuitous compositions.

The subtle opening of "The Meadows" shifts after Blake's pronounced fluttering theme; the rhythm section bolsters him through a freer blowing section until Kjaergaard roars it in - effortlessly gliding through the changes. Similarly, on "Something in the Water", the urgency of Westergaard and Osgood's groove under Blake's bouncy soprano line lighly transitions to a section inspired by Mingus' "Meditation..." (covered on their first CD) for the leader's bass clarinet musings.

The CD is full of firsts for Blake the leader. On "Hush", the wordless vocals of Maria Laurette Fris add texture, doubling the piano's austere melody and represent the first vocals on a Blake release. Fris returns for her "To Whom This May Concern" with singsong delivery of the bittersweet lyrics. This is another first. Blake's CDs have featured his tunes, not those of his musicians. The leader wields a clarinet on "Hush", an instrument he uses as a sideman, but not for his own music. The woody tone blends effectively with guest cellist and fellow Lounge Lizards alumnus, Jane Scarpantoni's foreboding counter line.

Speaking of the Lizards, in another first, Blake interprets one of their tunes - the crowd-pleasing though never released "Happy Old You". Kjaergaard nails the staggering piano line, its rhythmic feel the foundation for the whispered lines of Blake and another guest Lizard alum, slide trumpeter Steven Bernstein, who soars over the quirky meter. For a final premiere, Blake adds his raw vocals to the reggae-inflected "Johnny Too Bad", the subdued tempo building for a classic R&B tenor solo over the outro.

Blake offers something different to make each new release unique, but retains his compositional identity. *More Like Us* successfully maintains that delicate balance while living up to its name.

For more information, visit [www.vanguard.de](http://www.vanguard.de). Blake is at 55Bar Dec. 8th, Barbès Dec. 12th with Ron Horton and The Stone Dec. 13th with Grachan Moncur III. See calendar.



**Because of You: Freddy Cole Stays Tony Bennett**  
Freddy Cole (HighNote)  
by Andrew Rowan

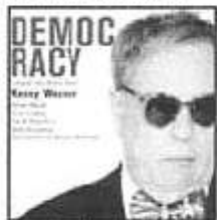
Confession, they say, is good for the soul. So this reviewer must confess to only a recent realization of Freddy Cole's extraordinary talent. Simply put, he knows how to do it; this tribute to another singer who gets it - Tony Bennett - is touching.

Cole's relaxed, bluesy approach, enhanced by those cracks in his voice, is perfect for "I Got Lost in Her Arms". And although Billie Holiday comes to mind first for "Getting Some Fun out of Life", there is no quibble with Cole's reading, shadowed by Houston Person's scuffling tenor sax cruise. Key to this session too is arranger/pianist John DiMartino. His settings never call attention to themselves; they simply provide the perfect frame for Cole to tell his stories. Likewise, he offers self-effacing accompaniment that complements the singer and the band (catch what he plays under the singer's reprise on "Blame It on My Youth") and he shines when he steps out to solo.

The mood here is subdued, but swing rears its head beautifully on "Because of You". Unfortunately, this song highlights the session's one weakness: It is too much of the same thing - mood, tempo, routine - though expertly done. It misses the pop of his previous release, *This Love of Mine*. It does though offer "All for You", Django Reinhardt's haunting "Nuages" outfitted with words (and a Latin rhythm) as well as the seldom-heard "What Are You Afraid Of?" and Louis Armstrong's "If We Never Meet Again". But, these notwithstanding, the sense of surprise and whimsy in the previous session is missing.

When the discussion turns to his singing, his raw act of creation, Cole is virtually beyond reproach. Mellow and loving, he offers here a heartfelt tribute to the octogenarian Bennett, his compatriot in the noble art of singing popular music.

For more information, visit [www.jazzdepot.com](http://www.jazzdepot.com). Birdland Dec. 20th-23rd. See calendar.



**Democracy: Live at the Blue Note**  
Kenny Werner (Half Note)  
by Ernest Barteldes

Pianist Kenny Werner's new album, recorded at the beginning of this year, begins in a manner that his concert did during his residence at the same club: with a solo piano emphasizing the subtleties of the pianist's fingers exploring the whole keyboard in a classical manner. The band joins in after a few bars, the focus is mostly on Werner's piano work, with (on stage) the chops of young trumpeter Shulman (Kenny Wheeler, who performed was not present this time around), the advantage of the reverb on his mic. Shulman David Sanchez also shines on the tune.

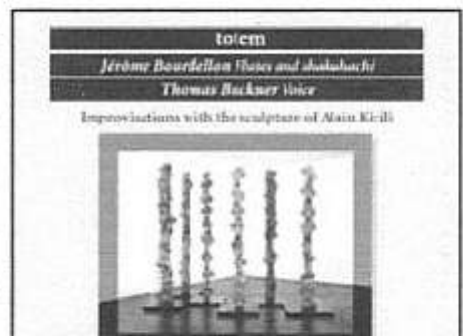
"One for Joni" is inspired by the music of Joni Mitchell, who Werner mentioned listening to while driving back home after a gig. The tune has a bluesy feel that gives a lot of freedom to the musicians to play around. Certainly one of the most enjoyable parts of the concert.

The only part of the album (and show) was not enjoyable was Werner's adaptation of Williams' "Hedwig's Theme", taken from the soundtrack of the *Harry Potter* movies. The piece, in its original format, helps bring to life the J.K. Rowling's pages, but in a jazz setting it just doesn't work. Werner's quintet nails it well, it is still hard to hear.

Werner also played two tunes that were

the *Democracy* album. "New Amsterdam" is between a '70s funk groove and Brubeck-esque feel. The tune, performed mostly as a trio, showcases both bassist Scott Colley and drummer Brian Blade's talents. He also played the mellow "Uncovered Heart" mostly solo followed by a sax/trumpet duet, ending with Shulman blowing to create a wind effect. Werner said the song was dedicated to his daughter (who tragically died in a car accident in October) and would be featured on an upcoming disc.

For more information, visit [www.halfnote.net](http://www.halfnote.net). Werner is at Blue Note Dec. 3rd. See calendar.



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