



**Sonny Rollins**  
*Sonny, Please*  
(Doxxy)

Any time Sonny Rollins picks up a saxophone, it's a major event. That this is Rollins' first studio recording in five years only reinforces this notion. Rollins was in top form on his previous disc, the stunning *Without a Song: The 9/11 Concert*. Though the material on the new disc doesn't carry the emotional resonance or thematic focus of the previous outing, Rollins himself still sounds great.

The leader is in full command here, altering his tone to suit the material. He's gruff and grainy on the hard-swinging "Nishi," but rarely has he sounded as romantic as he does on "Someday I'll Find You" or "Stairway to the Stars."

The lack of a pianist in the sextet gives these seven tracks an airy feeling. Some selections, particularly the ballads, could use a little more weight — it often seems as if Rollins is soaring beyond the rest of the players. But the lineup works well for the harder-edged pieces like the title track. Anchored by Bob Cranshaw's repeating three-note bass line, Rollins is free to stretch out to far-reaching corners during his solo.

The piano-less setup also places more responsibility on guitarist Bobby Broom. He certainly takes a light-handed approach, occasionally fading so far into the background that he hardly seems present at all. (Broom sounds particularly disengaged toward the end of "Serenade.") But when he does assert himself with a solo, as on the exquisite "Stairway to the Stars," Broom exhibits a sly economy that nicely contrasts Rollins' more effusive style.

Notoriously inscrutable at times, Rollins mostly plays it straight throughout this set. On the other hand, just when he's gaining traction during his solo on "Someday I'll Find You," he begins trading off with drummer Steve Jordan. It's a jarring experience so early in a song, yet with Rollins you have to expect the unexpected.

But the upside of being unpredictable is that Rollins never settles into a routine — except, of course, when it comes to making music that's deeply satisfying.

—John Frederick Moore

**Cheryl Bentley**

*The Book of Love*  
(Telarc)

With her third solo disc for Telarc, veteran vocalist Cheryl Bentley showcases her gift for imbuing a melody with feeling. The theme might seem overbearing, especially with those come-hither



photos of the well-endowed Bentley scattered throughout and the division of the songs into chapters: Longing, Flirtation, Lust, etc. But the performances pretty much render those objections moot. Take her version of "Blue Moon." It would seem to be long past the chestnut phase, approaching novelty. And with a violin solo? Yet she pulls it off with aplomb, trading verses and harmonizing with the always-tasteful John Pizzarelli. Unfortunately, the following "Let's Do It" is a little too far gone to rescue, despite the zesty treatment by Bentley and her band.

But for the rest, it's all good. The gorgeous harmonies of the title track find Bentley, Zoe Allen, and Mark Kibble and Alvin Chea of Take Six in rare form, recalling some of the best work of Bentley and her Manhattan Transfer mates. Chris Tedesco contributes a gorgeous trumpet solo to "You Go To My Head" and uses mute effectively on "Disillusion." The string section, arranged by Bentley's husband and musical director, pianist Corey Allen, supports her with sensitivity.

The best work here, however, is that of Bentley. She hits the notes with accuracy and passion, singing with grace and style, and is never overbearing. Whoever wrote the book of love, Cheryl Bentley gets credit for brilliantly interpreting it.

— Ross Boissoneau

**Martirio & Chano Domínguez**

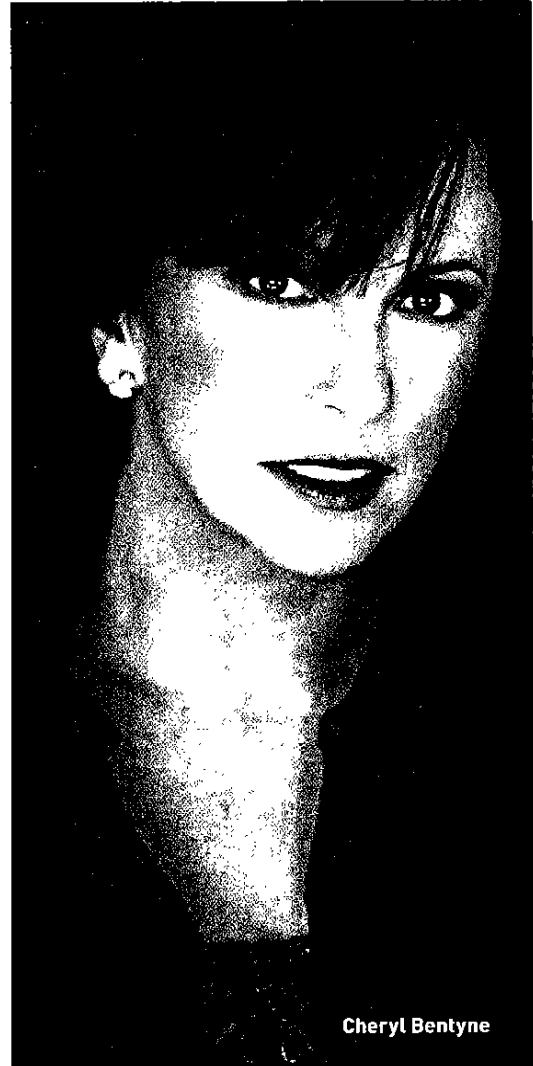
*Acoplados*

(52 P.M./Sunnyside)

Vocalist Martirio is a one-of-a-kind figure or the Spanish pop scene. With smarts, attitude, and impeccable interpretative skills, Martirio — the theatrical, sunglassed alter-



shy-stay-at-home-wife Maribel Quiñones — has built a career of a fascinating



Cheryl Bentley

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blend of old Spanish styles with jazz, blues, and a touch of flamenco. Pianist Chano Domínguez, who first came into view for most American audiences in the Latin jazz film *Calle 54*, blends flamenco and jazz (as per Bill Evans and Herbie Hancock) with intelligence, grace, and conviction.

On *Acoplados*, Martirio and Domínguez — his trio augmented by the Big Band y Orquesta de Radio y Televisión Española (Spanish Radio and Television's Big Band and Orchestra) — tackle a set of traditional *coplas*, a popular Spanish song style, with an old-style big band jazz sensibility. It's a fascinating hybrid that challenges and refreshes the canon in both realms.

Classics such as "La Bien Pagá" (The Well Paid), "Ojos Verdes" (Green Eyes), and "Dicen" (They Say) take unexpected turns. The first is Arabic-tinged blues (yep), the second gets a stride accompaniment and the hint of swing, and the third has a good, old-fashioned swing chart. Rather than find a compromise, Martirio and Domínguez simply remain true to their loves. The high drama in Martirio's interpretation stands in nice contrast to the alternatively cool and romantic backgrounds — but it's also framed perfectly, now and then, by the oversized charts. Call it big band music with an accent or copla in a tuxedo, it's music with heart, swing, and elegance.

— Fernando Gonzalez

### Delfeayo Marsalis

*Minions Dominion*  
(Troubador Jazz)

Delfeayo Marsalis, possibly better known for his production work (and rapturous liner notes) on his brothers' releases than for his own music, has maintained a high level of quality by taking his time between albums. *Minions Dominion* is only his third release, on as many labels, since his 1992 debut, *Pontius Pilate's Decision*. Each has been a listener-friendly, relatively theory-free exercise in modern (istic) hard bop, and this one is no exception.

Recorded in 2002, the disc features older brother Branford on four of its seven tracks, and pianist Mulgrew Miller on five. It's also Elvin Jones's final recording behind horn players, though that description might tend to relegate it to nothing more than the answer to a trivia question — an unfair judgment. Jones is in terrific form, rumbling, and crashing with all the energy he mustered

behind John Coltrane, and the various band members seem invigorated, not intimidated, by the titanic presence at their backs.

Indeed, on "Lone Warrior," they conjure a modal mood very reminiscent of the Coltrane quartet's simmering works. "Lost In The Crescent" is possibly even more of a Trane tribute, with the band's energy swelling to a climax that's nearly fervid before receding to a mournful main theme. Marsalis's trombone lines, while clearly indebted to J.J. Johnson, are just as obviously the product of a musical intelligence developed over time (much of it spent in Elvin Jones's Jazz Machine band). He's a major talent who should work under his own name more often.

— Phil Freeman

### Nancy Wilson

*Turned to Blue*  
(MCG Jazz)

At this stage of her career, Nancy Wilson has nothing left to prove. Still, it's tough to be impressed by this uneven mix of small-group ballads and hard-swinging big-band arrangements.



Although her voice has lost some of its intensity, Wilson can still hit the right emotional notes. On "Knitting Class," Wilson's quiet, detached performance is appropriate for conveying the thinly masked heartache behind the lyrics.

But she relies too heavily on ending phrases with her trademark yodel-like yelp — an affectation that quickly becomes grating. Worse, Wilson seems out of her element on a couple of selections. Her rendition of the 1981 Quincy Jones-James Ingram hit "Just Once" gets off to a good start in the opening verse, which features her in a duet with bassist John Clayton. But when the rest of the band settles in, Wilson hops back and forth between hushed tones and gruff shouts so often that it seems as if she can't find the song's emotional center.

And the multilayered, cocktail-lounge backup vocals of the title track never gain traction with the bossa nova rhythms. Wilson herself sounds out of sorts, as the dark, off-kilter melody doesn't allow her to swing as easily as she does on some of the other selections.

This disc isn't without its high points. Listening to "These Golden Years" and "Old Folks" reminds you of how well Wilson can still get inside a song and take you with her. But such moments only make the low points that much more disappointing.

— John Frederick Moore

