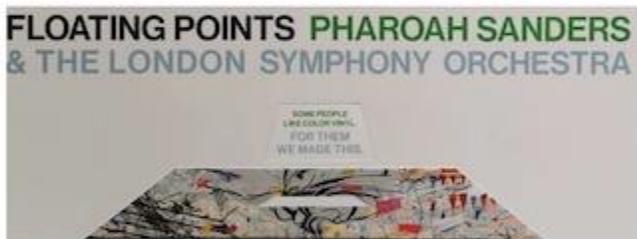


AMERICANA HIGHWAYS (1/5)

<https://americanahighways.org/2022/01/05/bentleys-bandstand-january-2022/>

Bentley's Bandstand: January 2022

Bill Bentley January 5, 2022



Bentley's Bandstand January 2022

By Bill Bentley

Dion, *Stomping Grounds*. When a person is so well-known they get to go by a single name—think Prince for the epitome of that honor—it's usually a strong sign they've created their very own identity. Dion was one of the first in those ranks during the budding years of rock & roll. His early hits, like "Runaround Sue," "The Wanderer" and so many others, put Dion in the highest ranks then, and he has stayed there. This burning new collection is one in a recent series, and really takes the Bronx hero to

the very top. There is a roll call of guests that are awe-inspiring in themselves—ranging from [Eric Clapton](#) and Billy F Gibbons to Bruce Springsteen and Mark Knopfler. Even better, each one has a distinct purpose in recording with Dion, which means it not only makes sense but takes the songs to their highest plateau. Add to that the fact that every song is written and produced by Dion and Mike Aquilina and the respect rises through the roof for what has been created. All the music has a distinct, almost urban swamp vibe to them, which shows how one of the best artists from the first explosion of rock has stayed in top form and is still perpetually inspired to lay his hands on greatness no matter what he touches. In a way, timelessness has taken over STOMPING GROUNDS almost like a feat of magic, and shows how those pioneering titans from beginning avalanche or rock & roll are still capable of making the skies open up for what they are doing now. And the man with his name on the front cover of this indispensable new release says it all. Dion DiMucci forever.

Dwayne Dopsie and the Zydeco Hellraisers, *Set Me Free*. Quite possibly the Holy Trinity of zydeco bliss will always remain Clifton Chenier, Rockin' Dopsie and Boozoo Chavis. With some of their progeny taking up the cause, the music—even in modernized form—is still rolling heavy. Rockin' Dopsie's son Dwayne Dopsie has amped up the attack of the Louisiana music with his Zydeco Hellraisers and sounds like they could be equally at home opening shows for Dead & Company as well as headlining the zydeco stage at the annual New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival. They've got some brawny rhythm section muscle along with plenty of bayou gyrations on the accordion. All a good thing, because there is no way any musical style can stay static. Forward is the future, and that's exactly where this Dopsie is taking it. And don't forget: there's a solid chance everything recorded at FatTone Studio in Luling, Louisiana is going to have a backwoods bounce no matter how modernly bodacious it is. Throw in plenty of washboard and just the right amount of screaming saxophone courtesy of the Sportsman's Paradise-bred band, and there is no way not to know this music is partially born in the genes of Rockin' Dopsie Sr. Right in the middle of the album is a down home homage to another Pelican State hero Guitar Slim in the form of his monstro 1950s' hit "The Things I Used to Do," beautifully dedicated to Daddy Dopsie. No matter what amplitude or tempo is on display, this demonstration of zydeco in the year 2022 is a full-on assault on where the music can go. Dwayne Dopsie knows exactly what he's doing, and he ain't takin' no mess. The man plans to get over on what his father and his friends started, and there is no turning back now. Set him free.

Floating Points, *Pharoah Sanders & The London Symphony Orchestra*. Floating Points is the musical name for England's Sam Shepherd, and of course he also has degrees in neuroscience and epigenetics. How could he not? And for his latest album release Shepherd has affiliated with jazz saxophone guru Pharoah Sanders and the London Symphony Orchestra for one of the most beautiful and soul-provoking releases of this still-new decade. Naturally, it's on David Byrne's Luaka Bop label. There is such a totality of how everything flows together that sometimes it feels like the ground is moving underneath, taking a lead in spurring humanity to a new and needed reality. It is such a provoking amalgamation of sounds and feelings that there can be no way not to be excited by how a musician of Sanders' stature fits so seamlessly with this celestial sound. Of course, the saxophonist cut his always-evolving teeth in the avant-garde world of jazz when it was grasping at the heavens in the 1960s with guiding lights like John Coltrane, and Sanders has been in those advanced ranks ever since. It's almost like he was preordained to link with Floating Points. The album credits describe this as "A composition for Saxophone, Strings, Keyboard and Electronics entitled 'Promises'," which encapsulates the sonically-irresistible piece perfectly. Because that's exactly the emotions invoked: a promise for the past, a promise for the present and a promise for the future. In a time when the entire globe seems to be wobbling a bit precariously, these are the kind of sounds that can stabilize such psychic instability through a rush of unseen truths. Sometimes not knowing can provide the most advanced kinds of possibility, and when the London Symphony unleashes their power alongside Pharoah Sanders and Floating Points, there are no limits. All is there.

Roy Hargrove and Mulgrew Miller, *In Harmony*. Jazz is a music that is all about perpetual power. Beginning over a hundred years ago, it is a sound that is able to capture the momentum of America in a way that is always awe-inspiring. In so many styles, it is really the soundtrack of our nation, no matter what direction it's headed. It tells the story of citizens who had to create in spite of all the roadblocks in their way. And in those creations an undeniable glory is shared. Trumpeter Roy Hargrove and pianist Mulgrew Miller are definitely in possession of a beautiful power on this double-disc set of live performances recorded in 2006 and 2007. Though both musicians are now deceased, it sure feels like they are alive and well on all these songs. The way their respective instruments speak to each other is like ESP, going back and forth often in call and response, and bringing down from the air a musical language that is really beyond words. Hargrove's horn is a study in emotion. He can capture excitement and solitude sometimes in the same song, without ever losing the pulse of the human heart. Miller's piano never ceases seeking the road forward, even when he is staying in the background. It's like they are joined at the soul and never lose sight of what each other is able to convey on their instrument. The playing is obviously a resounding success, because usual combo instruments like the bass and drums aren't really missed. This is swinging that never stops, even at slower tempos, and shows how jazz never loses its ability to intrigue and inspire. And the booklet with personal stories about the two players told by their compadres in jazz are valuable first-hand histories from those who were there. Jazz is a music for the ages, no matter when its story is told. Listen and love.

Miranda Lambert, Jack Ingram & Jon Randall, *The Marfa Tapes*. Sometimes a musical idea emerges that is just so perfect that it's a wonder it hasn't happened before. Getting Miranda Lambert, Jack Ingram and Jon Randall together to record a spontaneous album of songs is so full of feelings and sparks that it's like an emotional earthquake could occur. And it does. Each of the three artists is enough of an individual that they all bring something unique to the outing. The way the music is presented really does feel like the group is right there next to the listener. There is no souped-up studio gyrations or instrumental do-overs. This is straight from the heart, letting the computer chips fall where they may. Best of all, it's not like one artist dominates the affair. It is all a real love-fest of songs, and whatever good luck brought it all together, it never feels like it's a career-enhancing concoction thought up in a management or record label conference room. The songs that are chosen fit exactly the sound of the voices and depth of the spirits in a way that could not have been done any other way. Deep in the heart of West Texas, still out of reach of the big cities filling in so much of the Lone Star state's spaces in the Houston-Austin-Dallas triangle, there is room to sit under the stars and not hear the sound of jackhammers and freeways. Yet, instead, tranquility allows for contemplation and easeful care, so when Lambert, Ingram and Randall start blending into the ballads and beauty they've come with, there is nothing to stop it all from taking over their world there. It doesn't happen that often anymore, and who knows when it will happen again. But for now, everything is right where it belongs. THE MARFA TAPES.

Love By Numb3rs, *Colours*. Every few years an EP is released and immediately demands to be heard right next to all the full-length albums. The Portland, Maine group Love By Numb3rs may have decided to only record six songs for COLOURS, but with such inventive instrumentation and unforgettable voices that is exactly enough. Vocalist/keyboardist Anna Lombard is joined by instrumentalists/vocalists Dan Connor and Jon Roods to make the kind of trio sound that seems heaven-sent. Their playing and voices blend in a way that is other worldly, and the title song "Colours" feels like a gospel caravan has invaded their souls and taken them to the promised land. Really. Creations like this track don't come around every day, and the way it nearly stops time signals something very special is happening. And the five songs that follow are in that same league as well. A group that makes music so significant that it's hard to describe is always the one to keep an eye and ear on, and that is a true fact here. Lombard's voice on "Oak Tree" is one for the ages, taking the song into the inner depth of past memories chilling in their evocative strength. And all through the songs, the way Connor and Roods flow in and out of the melodies, rhythms and most impressive of

all the moody mystery of all that is being played has such a tangible touch, it's like Love By Numb3rs are casting a spell as much as they are recording a song. That doesn't happen that often. The next time an off-road urge takes hold find this release, start with the first song "Colours" and ride it to the end of the line. Beauty awaits there.

Ben Levin, *Still Here*. The longer the planet exists, the more obvious it becomes that playing blues has nothing to do with age. Decades ago, it seemed like a musician needed to be at least in striking distance of joining AARP before validity kicked in. Not true: there are now those barely out of elementary school who have the soul and the swagger to make the music swing in all the right places. Sitting pretty at an age when he can legally buy alcohol in any state in the United States, Ben Levin is wonderfully capable of being all set to sing and play the piano like he's full-born ready to boogie with the best of them. The songs, a rollicking mix of covers and those written by the young man and guitarist Aaron Levin (father and son, in case anyone asks), make it obvious the Levins have a direct line on a moving natural take on America's most heartfelt sounds, aka the blues. It's such a joy to hear someone as enamored with a music that will always be the bedrock of so many later styles, but one that never goes out of favor now, as long as it's played with such true feeling. In the end, Ben Levin is the real deal, no matter how old he is or where he comes from. And that location being Cincinnati, which is a natural hub for down home sounds, many of which were once centered around the mighty King Records. Mix in prodigious influences from the super fine piano excursions of New Orleans titans like Professor Longhair and Fats Domino, and Levin is more than halfway home already. Several non-pareil Chicago kingpins take Levin's schooling all the way, and help the young man create the kind of collection that isn't heard anywhere near enough these days. There is no reason to wait to kick 2022 into a righteous groove, because both Mr. Levins are happening, and the blues is knocking. Start right here.

P.J. Proby, *The Enigma in Gold: Volume Five/The Lockdown Sessions*. This is a singer who pulled one of the best cultural switcheroos in music history. Born James Smith in Houston, Texas, the young man started out in Hollywood during the early 1960s singing and trying to break into the acting business. Somehow, he got steered to London around 1964 and going by the name P.J. Proby, had some fairly significant hits there, taking off in earnest as a Swingin' Englishman at the height of Beatlemania. Best of all, Smith/Proby could really sing, keeping much of his native Texas soul roots and adding '60s rock & roll atmospherics to that. He became a star and has been singing, acting and cutting up ever since. Always an energetic sort, during the past two years of pandemic lock-down Proby started recording in a home studio, and through the wonders of the internet developed a working relationship with friend and producer-guitarist Jon Tiven in Nashville. Those early sessions developed into other songwriters signing up and the result is THE ENIGMA IN GOLD. Proby's voice still has the muscular strength he's possessed since the '60s, and his various songwriting collaborations highlight how he's continued to shine on that front as well. For kicks, the singer and his players covered two Chris Stapleton highlights—"What Are You Listening To" and "Keep Your Hands Off My Heart," proving that you can take the boy out of Texas but you can't take Texas out of the boy. There really isn't anyone in Proby's league right now, as an artist who started in the early '60s and keeps pushing for that new horizon. With Jon Tiven's spot-on help, this just might earn the Sneak Attack of the Year award, something that few would have expected from someone from the downhome roots of Westheimer Road in Houston, let alone Carnaby Street in London. What a wonder.

Stuffy Shmitt, *Stuff Happens*. When it's time to burn down the cornfield, Stuffy Shmitt is likely the perfect person to light the match. He makes the kind of rock & roll that usually leads to someone ending up in jail, and pushes the delerium meter to the point of no return. It is obvious he is not holding anything back for a retirement plan. Shmitt tries to hit it out of the park on every song. STUFF HAPPENS is a stunning attack on the neural fibers of all who claim to live for music, and while some of the songs seem to have a secret code that needs cracking, much of the joy of listening is trying to

do just that. Stuffy Shmitt's voice is so full of emotion and experience that it teeters on the edge of explosion. And even though the album was recorded in Nashville, twenty years ago making a collection like this there would likely be some sort of felony, with the record execs on Music Row turning the limos around instead of crossing Shmitt's path. Which is exactly what makes songs like "Jim's Dad," "Scratching at the Cat" and "Sleeping on the Wet Spot" unlikely to get Shmitt a slot on the Academy of Country Music awards show. No matter, because the beauty of Music City can be how now and then people like Townes Van Zandt, [Kinky Friedman](#), Billy Joe Shaver and a few other semi-loonies get to take over the asylum and let it rip. As long as efforts like this can be recorded in Nashville, there is a chance for music and mayhem to remain bedfellows on occasion and for America to retain its place as the best hope possible. We've come unglued.

Ben Sidran, *There Was a Fire: Jews, Music and the American Dream*. There can be little doubt that one of music's abilities is to help create a kind of human miracle: to transport the spirit to a place it could not get there without. Celebrated musician Ben Sidran's book is not only a description about what occurred with the Jews who arrived in America from Eastern Europe starting in the late 19th century, but even more is what an everlasting impact they had on the evolution of the sound and selling of all that transpired. It's an important part in the march of human history that had such an impact on all that occurred later. And in that story is a weaving of the incredible and successful history of American recording, so much of which was steered by those of Jewish descent, and how all the twists and turns in that world have come to create music today. Between the players and the professionals exists a total development of what listeners hear now, and is so deeply a part of social evolution during the past century-plus, it's almost like a puzzle that needs unraveling to really comprehend the true importance. It doesn't hurt that Sidran has been an active part of music his entire life, playing with popular artists and making his own influential recordings with a joyful drive that lets him in on the inner sactum of the American sound From Michael Joseph Gusikov to the Beastie Boys, it's all here in THERE WAS A FIRE, an untold story that needs to be shared. Pivotal figures like [Morris Levy](#), [Bob Dylan](#), Clive Davis, Paul Simon, Lou Reed, Bob Krasnow and so many more are each given their due and put together to illustrate how the music business gave them all a chance to exert a permanent influence on American culture. Turn it up.