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**Cloud Bowling with Claude Bolling:  
Music for Tuba and Jazz Trio**  
Jim Shearer (Summit)  
by Terrell K. Holmes

On the ambitious double album *Cloud Bowling with Claude Bolling: Music for Tuba and Jazz Trio*, Jim Shearer (tuba), Chris Reyman (piano), Erik Unsworth (bass) and Andy P. Smith (drums) reaffirm the tuba's viability as a lead instrument in jazz and classical settings.

The first disc revisits the landmark album *Suite for Flute and Jazz Piano Trio* (1975) by jazz pianist Claude Bolling (who passed away four years ago this month at age 90) and classical flutist Jean-Pierre Rampal, a Grammy-winning jazz and classical amalgam that spent a decade at the top of the classical music charts. The quartet took a calculated risk in reinterpreting the iconic album, but the opening notes of "Baroque and Blue" dispel any skepticism regarding the contrast between flute and tuba. The tubaist's tone and facility prove that two instruments with widely different pitches can convey similar musical ideas and evoke the same emotions. Shearer's lovely, comforting sound on "Sentimentale" shows how effective the unwieldy instrument can even be on ballads. The tuba's grinning at the stuffed-shirt deportment of "Fugace" seems to hasten its shift to a quick-witted jazz workout. "Irlandaise" contains the somber, reflective elements of "Greensleeves". "Javanaise" has a rhythmic and stylistic kinship with "Take Five"; and in another moment it recalls the vamp on Coltrane's version of "My Favorite Things". A slick stride piano riff is added by Reyman on "Versatile". While the quartet is faithful to the Bolling-Rampal original, it adds its own improvisatory flourishes that work from the album's original ideas and mesh with them perfectly without being ostentatious.

The second disc, *Cloud Bowling*, was composed for Shearer by Reyman, who wanted to showcase the tuba primarily in a jazz setting. The first tune, appropriately titled "The Opener", maps out the album's thematic explorations. Shearer touches on various musical styles, underscoring that the tuba can groove, swing, weep, smile and dance as well as any instrument. "Ellingtonian" recalls the dreaminess of some of Duke's most memorable melodies and has a great plucked solo by Unsworth. The Middle Eastern-flavored "Brubescque" (ostensibly a tribute to Dave Brubeck) brings to mind, musically and titularly, "Arabesque Cookie", the Ellington-Strayhorn reworking of *The Nutcracker's* "Arabian Dance". The gem "Double Ones" is free, mercurial and brooding, with the players seemingly independent of each other yet combining their statements wonderfully (this tune would be at home at a loft or a concert hall). Shearer and Unsworth are excellent on the straight-ahead "Borrowed Time", while the ballad "Overshadowed" shows another dimension of the quartet's depth and color. Concluding the album, "The Closer" has a moment where Shearer takes a solo that recalls the piano solo in the middle of George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue", another landmark composition that linked jazz to classical music. The release is a triumphant way of bringing *Cloud Bowling with Claude Bolling* full circle.

Shearer and his excellent quartet show that the leader's chops are universally formidable, and that he

has secured his place as one of the important tubaists not just in jazz, or in classical, but in music.

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**Good Friday Blues**  
The Modest Jazz Trio  
(Pacific Jazz-Blue Note Tone Poet)  
**The Dublin Concert**  
Louis Stewart & Jim Hall (Livia)  
by Ken Dryden

Jim Hall, whose birthday and death anniversary month is December (b. December 4, 1930 – d. December 10, 2013), is widely acknowledged as one of the masters of jazz guitar and these two records are but a sampling of his guitar genius.

The Modest Jazz Trio's *Good Friday Blues* was a one-off with bassist Red Mitchell (who played on Hall's *Jazz Guitar* leader debut three years earlier in 1957). Here Mitchell is heard on piano, with Red Kelly taking care of bass duties. This late night 1960 session supposedly was made to produce just two tracks for a Pacific Jazz label anthology, but resulted in a complete album that has now been re-released by Blue Note for its Tone Poet 180g vinyl reissue series. Hall is the brightest spot in the trio, as his limber, never busy lines work well, as expected. Mitchell's piano playing is not at the virtuoso level of his primary instrument, but he is more than adequate, while Kelly's bass work is solid throughout. The Mitchell-composed title track is a stirring opener with a fluid line from the guitarist, a soft but potent pulse from the bassist and punchy piano from its composer. The trio's leisurely setting of the standard "Willow Weep for Me" brings out its innate lyricism, with Hall's spacious playing conveying the unheard lyric. The brisk treatment of "I Remember You" is highlighted by a constantly shifting guitar solo, followed by whimsical piano. Hall's compositional contribution to the date is the lively bop vehicle "But Not Phil", which sounds like a contrafact of a standard. This engaging composition best showcases his early potential as a jazz guitarist on the ascent.

Irish guitarist Louis Stewart was known primarily for his work in the British Isles. This previously unknown 1982 *Dublin Concert* with Hall was issued by the recently revived Livia to better document Stewart's discography. While the recording seems to have been made for posterity rather than an eventual release, the audio is nonetheless of high quality. Since Stewart was inspired as a young man by Hall's records, they easily adapted to playing as a duo, unencumbered by a rhythm section and with a vast repertoire available to explore. What is remarkable is that the two guitarists didn't have time to rehearse, nor had they played together previously. Yet the result sounds like they were old friends used to taking the stage together. Hall's sound is easily recognized within a few seconds, while his approach at this point in his career was to constantly shift the harmony. Stewart was a bit younger but also a seasoned veteran, and his work alongside his "guest" audibly has stood the test of time. "Stella By Starlight" is a virtual master class with its intuitive interplay and counterpoint. Sonny Rollins' calypso "St. Thomas" is an invigorating workout with plenty of fireworks and a free flow of ideas between the two guitarists. There are also several solo features for Hall, including his deliberate reshaping of "All the Things You Are", his invigorating Latin-flavored setting of "My Funny