

Toronto Star

ALBUM REVIEWS

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Pop

JILL BARBER

Mischievous Moon (Outside

Music)

(out of 4)

People are in love these days with mid-century modern decor and furniture, so why not the musical esthetic? With echoes of everything from Burt Bacharach to Blossom Dearie, Canadian singer-songwriter Jill Barber has what must be the most beautifully orchestrated pop record in years. Her boopsie-girl voice is a love-it-or-leave-it proposition but she's a stylistic chameleon - a smoky '60s lounge crooner one moment (in "If It Weren't for Loving You") and a '40s country-folk songstress the next. The songs are all the more endearing with the up-close-and-personal sound from producer Les Cooper. Barber plays Tuesday evening at the Rivoli.

John Terauds

ACID HOUSE KINGS

Music Sounds Better With You (Labrador)

Julia Lannerheim's vocals are a consistent treat on the 10 unrelentingly shiny nouveau-retro tracks of this veteran Swedish pop outfit's album of well-crafted '60s-flavoured pop. In my favourite, "(I'm in) A Chorus Line," the lyrics speak directly to office drones everywhere. The verse, "It's so hard to see what they're making of me/ It's hard to see what they're breaking in me," becomes a call to optimism in its catchy refrain: "Look up, hold your head up high . . ." Smile; it's spring.

J.T.

JOSHUA GRAY

Joshua Gray (joshuagray.net)

Gray, a 24-year-old Broadway baby, has a gorgeous voice in search of the right producer. Here, with the songwriting help of brother Travis, Gray presents a debut EP of five light-rock odes to love, not so much overpowered by his tenor as shown up for their insipid melodies and indifferent arrangements.

J.T.

Jazz

AMANDA TOSOFF

Looking North (Oceans Beyond)

Vancouver-to-Toronto jazz-piano transplant Amanda Tosoff sweats the small stuff in this satisfying slice of mainstream jazz. My favourite is the first of 10 Tosoff originals: "Bluke" (which Tosoff says is short for Blues for Duke), which gently stirs together jazz, salsa and blues into a satisfying, simmering rhythmic stew. Sean Cronin's bass is a treat all the way through the album, as is Tosoff's work at the keyboard.

J.T.

GILAD ATZMON & THE ORIENT HOUSE
ENSEMBLE

The Tide Has Changed

(World Village)

English-Israeli sax player Gilad Atzmon electrifies in this collaborative work with his 10-year-old ensemble. "Bolero at Sunrise," their take on Ravel's work, is way more sexy than anything you've ever heard from a symphony orchestra. Although the album starts off promising a party, it prefers a late-night, loungey, downtempo groove, where inventive sound textures pile atop each other, before ending with two klezmer-textured riots. In "London to Gaza," the sax turns into an muezzin call; there's politics behind Atzmon's work, but the real reward comes from his sheer love of music.

J.T.

Classical

Drama queens take note: Here are two of the world's hottest young conductors packing enough bluster to drown out an Arab Spring rally. Both discs get :

NEZET-SEGUIN/ORCHESTRE
METROPOLITAIN

La Tragédie de Salomé (ATMA)

Those who attended the Toronto Symphony Orchestra's concerts last week heard the dynamic derring-do that is La Tragédie de Salomé, a 1912 ballet score by French composer Florent Schmitt. Canadian conductor Yannick Nézet-Séguin and his Montreal orchestra show off their best with it, as well as César Franck's emotionally charged Symphony in D.

DUDAMEL/ SIMON BOLIVAR ORCHESTRA

Tchaikovsky & Shakespeare (Deutsche
Grammophon)

Tchaikovsky was a natural at squeezing every ounce of melodrama out of Hamlet, The Tempest and Romeo and Juliet for his symphonic fantasies. These days, no one does Tchaikovsky with as much gravity-defying zest as this Venezuelan effort nicely led by Gustavo Dudamel. Batten down the hatches.

J.T.

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