Sarah L King

Sarah L King
The Light Ahead

Peccadillo PD00151922 (CD, DL)
★★★★

Sarah L King (v), plus various personnel including Jim Watson (p, keys), Laurence Cottle (elec b), Jamie Murray (d). Rec. 27 June 2025

I was a big fan of singer-songwriter Sarah L King's 2024 debut album, *Fire Horse* – I was especially taken with the Bacharach-like richness of King's self-penned 'Mystery Ride' – so it's great to hear her going from strength to strength in this impressive follow-up. Similarly featuring eight originals and a quartet of judiciously chosen covers, the latter include a mellifluous take on Stevie Wonder's 'Overjoyed', the delicious pocket of Nicola Conte's 'Like Leaves in the Wind', a deeply swinging arrangement of the 1971 Clifton Davis-penned hit for the Jackson 5, 'Never Can Say Goodbye', plus a gorgeous version of 'Just a Little Lovin (Early in the Morning)', a song forever associated with the great Dusty Springfield written by the legendary husband-and-wife songwriting team of Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil. The fine originals include album opener 'The Heron', marked out by its ear-catching backing vocal arrangement, the pleasing 5/4 lilt of 'April', and the engaging melodicism of 'Let Me Be The One You Love'. Produced by Claire Martin, and recorded, mixed and mastered by Chris Traves, King is accompanied by the world-class trio of Jim Watson on keys, bassist Laurence Cottle and drummer Jamie Murray, an absolute dream team for any vocalist. **Peter Quinn**

Orlando le Fleming
Misterioso

Whirlwind WR 4849 (LP, DL) ★★★★

Mark Turner (ts), Orlando le Fleming (b) and Jeff "Tain" Watts (d). Rec. 2025

It's a tough call to work with a trio of this instrumentation, and listening to some of the slower pieces requires quite a feat of concentration, although that is rewarded by the depth of thought and interest they produce. However, where this band shines brightest is on the up-tempo material, where Watts plays with his natural flamboyant flair, le Fleming's basslines lock in to keep everything moving, and Turner produces excellent soloing over the top. A case in point is Coltrane's 'Lazy Bird' where the band really goes for it. Watts's solo, with brief bass and tenor punctuations, is a fine example of his deft work across the whole kit. He shines again on 'Countdown', but this pieces owes its growing sense of drama to Turner, who starts at a ballad tempo with just bass accompaniment, and then gradually accelerates the phrasing he places over the ballad sequence until, almost without us noticing, by halfway through the piece, the entire trio is playing at a faster tempo. There's great empathy here between the players, and that's especially true of the closing 'Dingle Dangle' which keeps a swing feel going under some fiery playing from all three. **Alyn Shipton**

Mammal Hands
Circadia

ACT Music (CD, DL, LP) ★★★½

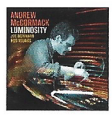
Nick Smart (p), Jordan Smart (ts) and Rob Turner (d). Rec. date not stated

Mammal Hands return after a three-year hiatus with a fresh instalment of their characteristic musical vision. Together with Roller Trio and GoGo Penguin they comprise a trio of trios who all developed a fresh take on jazz-adjacent instrumental music in the 2010s and accumulated a considerable audience in doing so. While Roller Trio were more overtly electronic and experimental and GoGo Penguin were more epically bombastic, all three bands shared a common musical language that derived as much from ambient electronica, dance music (especially drum & bass) and Steve Reich-inspired minimalism as it did from jazz. In this latest release the Hands have stuck to their distinctive formula – hypnotically repeated keyboard ostinatos bolstered by twitchy polyrhythmic drum patterns with folkily modal saxophone melodies drifting across the beat like clouds over landscape. New member and ex-GoGo Penguin drummer Rob Turner brings some of the heft of his previous outfit to bear on 'Alia's Abandon' which builds up quite a head of steam: elsewhere the mood is introspective, reflective, emotive. Some may find the reluctance to commit to thematic development frustrating – for others that's the heart of the appeal. Music that invites you into its soundworld on its own terms to weave its own enchantment. **Eddie Myer**

Andrew McCormack
Luminosity

mccormackmusic.bandcamp.com (CD, DL) ★★★½

Andrew McCormack (p), Joe Downard (b), and Rod Youngs (d). Rec. date not stated



Andrew McCormack has established an international reputation, not least for his long-term chair in Kyle Eastwood's band, and his duo recordings with Jason Yarde marked him out as an adventurous musician who's thoroughly at ease in the mainstream but also unafraid to venture outside. This latest release presents a set of trio performances of six original compositions and two interpretations: there's furious dark uptempo on 'Port De Cassis', straight-eight ECM airiness on 'Changes' and classical-folk flavours on 'Shadow Dances' but the overall tone is set by the swinging, elegantly minimal reading of 'Sweet And Lovely'. McCormack's improvisations on this tune are spacious and carefully poised, breaking into contrapuntal flourishes that resolve into further space in the impressive cadenza: Downard contributes a delightfully relaxed bass solo: Youngs swings imperturbably. It's a deliberate return to a more traditional melodic and harmonic approach that delivers more emotional directness. Downard contributes powerful, imaginative accompaniment and some memorable solos and Youngs is a model of sensitive creativity: It's a great trio, and this is one of McCormack's most appealing and accessible releases. **Eddie Myer**

Lucy Mellenfield
Tell The Water, She Will Listen

Stoney Lane Records SLR1900 (CD/DL) ★★½

Lucy Mellenfield (p, ky, ag, voc), Tom Henery (eg, ag), Alex Collett-Sinfield (ts, as, f, ag, kalimba, mandolin), Josh Vadiveloo (el b, b), Jonno Gaze (d, perc) and Chris Hyson (electronica). Rec. date not stated

Viewed alongside a Stoney Lane back catalogue boasting the likes of Paul Dunmall, Xhosa Cole and Trish Clowes this album is something of an anomaly. Lucy Mellenfield has been called a folk-jazz singer but neither genre is especially audible on much of this lengthy 12-track debut. Rather it is an album of two halves, albeit jumbled up, opening with 'Like A Feather' and 'Fact of Life' recalling the big production pop sound of Goldfrapp and ending with the stadium rock grandeur of marathon numbers like 'Breathing Sideways' and 'At The Mercy'. The latter feature some fine flourishes from Tom Henery's guitar, and Alex Collett-Sinfield's sax leads a well-judged improv break in 'Why Fear The Night', but, on the whole, this is not about instrumentals but words, of which there are many. Mellenfield's voice is compelling and does indeed show a folky side on the lilting