



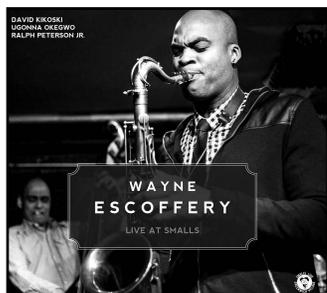
**Emerge  
Secret Keeper (Intakt)**  
by Marc Medwin

Secret Keeper has built its aesthetic on what might be viewed as a contradiction. Stylistically, guitarist Mary Halvorson and bassist Stephan Crump have perfected the art of inhabiting different worlds simultaneously. The former's allegiance to the various forms of creative improvisation remain visible but blurred as her sound has morphed over time. The latter works along similar lines and both have been involved in more musical diversity than can be documented here. Consequently, when they present Irving Berlin's "What'll I Do" as the opening track on their sophomore disc, it is neither wholly unexpected nor predictable. As what sounds like rain in the background, adding a layer of homespun ambiance, the music emerges with a sense of quiet whimsy as it's almost plunderphonically dismembered. Halvorson's trademark pedal work and Crump's frenetic high-register bowing fracture the melody but sometimes present it as a warped mirror image, which almost slides into plain focus before shattering again.

The duo shares compositional credits throughout the rest of the disc, but they also bandy melody and harmonic implication back and forth with humorous dignity. Listen to them trading pointilisms on "In Time You Yell", Halvorson nodding toward bebop for good historical measure even as each tone's double skews the picture. Yet fun and games disappear for the beautifully chamber-like textures of "Disproportionate Endings". The players function as a unit, mirroring the other's subtlest dynamic shifts as the neo-Romantic melody slithers its serpentine way forward.

The recording is close but not claustrophobic, detailed in a way that brings out the harmonies implied by each note. "Nakata" rings with harmonic ramifications as Crump's Scott LaFaro-like sonorities support the intricate chords Halvorson lays down. Crump's overtones on "Erie" are just that and, again, the two instruments merge in the service of triads and unisons that may as well be interchangeable at strategic moments. This blues-inflected track ends an album as diverse as it is enjoyable. Such loose but precise music is difficult to execute well and the fact that the compositions are also uniformly excellent simply adds to the disc's overall effect.

For more information, visit [intaktrec.ch](http://intaktrec.ch). Mary Halvorson is at The Stone May 1st and Roulette May 7th with ICP Orchestra. Stephan Crump is at Cornelia Street Café May 1st-2nd with Rez Abbasi and 14th as a leader and SEEDS May 20th. See Calendar.



**Live at Smalls  
Wayne Escoffery (smallsLIVE)**  
by Terrell Holmes

Tenor saxophonist Wayne Escoffery, backed by a powerhouse rhythm section of pianist David Kikoski,

bassist Ugonna Okegwo and drummer Ralph Peterson, underscores his reputation as a go-for-broke player with this smoking live set.

Escoffery takes a cyclonic leap out of the box with his "Concentric Drift", playing with fire, stridency and relentlessness. His tenor bellows like a foghorn and grouses like a curmudgeon. When it seems that Escoffery is about to slow down, he inhales and dives in for more. He seems to be percolating even when he's at rest. The rhythm section follows his lead, particularly Kikoski, who in his own way matches Escoffery's tonality, speed and emotion, buoyed by Okegwo and Peterson's steadfast underpinning.

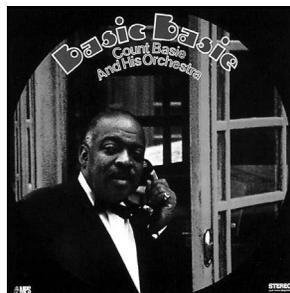
Escoffery's touch on Keith Jarrett's "So Tender" shows that he's not just all fire and brimstone and can, as Lester Young would have observed, sing a song. The heartfelt extended intro to this breezy samba is a tune unto itself and the rhythm section is splendid behind Escoffery's romantic musings.

The long intro that opens Willard Robison-Larry Conley's "A Cottage for Sale" bobs and weaves, filled with Coltrane-like inflections, down to the harmonics that cap it off. But where the "So Tender" opening is melodic, sequential and thoughtful, "Cottage" sounds like a warm-up. The repeated figures sound forced and uncertain, as if Escoffery is wood-shedding on stage. The body of the song doesn't suffer, though, and Escoffery's dolorous, slightly wavering tones set the perfect mood on this ballad.

Escoffery and the band initially play the Gus Arnheim standard "Sweet and Lovely" according to the blueprint Monk established, taking it at the familiar confident strolling pace. But soon enough it accelerates step by step from stroll to vibrant rumba to breakneck sprint, shifting among these tempos flawlessly. Escoffery unleashes tightly packed, blistering lines like a fire-breathing dragon and Kikoski follows with an equally fierce solo that mirrors Escoffery's, right down to the pauses, showing how they share the same high improvisational I.Q.

The album closes with a relatively simple surprise, Escoffery and Okegwo on a splendid duet of Billy Strayhorn's rarely heard "Snibor". "Relatively" because, even as they capture Strayhorn's signature measured compositional cool perfectly, both men, especially Escoffery, play densely packed flurries that give the song solid tonal muscle.

For more information, visit [smallslive.com](http://smallslive.com). Escoffery is at Blue Note May 2nd with Chris Massey. See Calendar.



**Basic Basie  
Count Basie and His Orchestra (MPS-Edel)**  
by Russ Musto

This 1969 German MPS production (later reissued in the US as *Evergreens* on Groove Merchant) finds Count Basie and His Orchestra still going strong, swinging in the characteristically straightforward fashion that made it an enduring favorite of big band fans all over the world for a large part of the 20th Century.

Though not the star-studded organization of earlier years, the 16-man group is comprised of talented players, including many of the ensemble's mainstays like trumpeters Sonny Cohn and Waymon Reed, trombonists Bill Hughes and Grover Mitchell and saxophonists Bobby Plater, Eric Dixon and Charlie Fowlkes, along with perennial guitarist Freddie Green. Tenor saxophonist Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis and

trumpeter Oscar Brashear are the stand-out soloists on the program of a dozen classics, all but one arranged by Latin jazz legend Chico O'Farrill. In addition to O'Farrill's presence, the date is further distinguished by the fact that, at the behest of the label, Basie stretches out a bit more than customary, contributing pithy intros and longer-than-usual solos, often in dialogue with the various horn sections.

That the Count rises to the occasion is clearly evident from the opening chords to the hard-swinging "Idaho", a propulsive piece powered by Harold Jones' forceful drumming. An easy grooving "Blues In My Heart" slows things down some without diminishing the swing factor a bit, as rhythmic guitar buttresses the midtempo pace. Dixon spells O'Farrill in the arranger's seat to deliver a beautiful orchestration of "I Don't Stand A Ghost Of A Chance With You", a poignant tenor feature that concludes with a potent soaring cadenza, and alto master Marshall Royal makes a cameo appearance, standing in for Plater on "Don't Worry About Me".

Basie's piano stands out on "Red Roses For A Blue Lady", "Moonglow", "Sweet Lorraine", "Ain't Misbehavin'" and closing "I've Got The World On A String". And O'Farrill's wailing arrangement of the rare Basie original, his theme for the Paul Newman-Lee Marvin television series *M-Squad*, shows that the bandleader could also compose. The band's playing remains exemplary throughout, insightfully described by producer Sonny Lester as "disciplined, clean, with such a feeling for timing and teamwork that you had the feeling that every band member was guided by the same brain." Simply basic Basie of the highest order.

For more information, visit [mps-music.com](http://mps-music.com). The Count Basie Orchestra is at Birdland May 5th-9th. See Calendar.

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