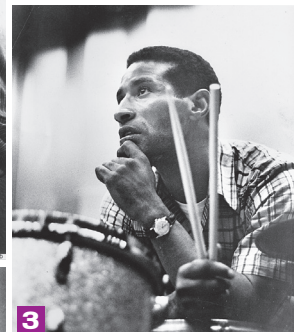


THE GREATEST JAZZ CONCERT EVER

I can't get enough of the album *Jazz at Massey Hall*. The 1953 concert also acquired a mythical dimension because of its back story

THERE ARE times when I dig out and play the old copy of an album that has never left my collection of music. It's *Jazz at Massey Hall* by the Charlie Parker Quintet. It's an album that I have as a CD as well as in lossless digital files and if I get one in vinyl format I shall buy it. The concert took place in Toronto's Massey Hall on May 15, 1953. The band was what we can (blasphemously) borrow from rock's lexicon to describe as a 'supergroup': Parker on saxophone; Dizzy Gillespie on trumpet; Charles Mingus on bass; Bud Powell on piano; and Max Roach on drums. These five were unarguably the stars of that era's bebop, each one on top of his game, and the concert was the first and only one that they recorded together. For Bird (Parker) and Diz (Gillespie), this was the last time they would record together because Parker died a couple of years later.

The concert is a perfect example of bebop, a jazz style that emerged in the 1940s and one that is characterized by



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CHARLIE PARKER QUINTET

The band was what we can describe as a 'supergroup': 1. Charles Parker on saxophone 2. Dizzy Gillespie on trumpet 3. Max Roach on drums 4. Charles Mingus on bass 5. Bud Powell on piano. Right: the *Jazz at Massey Hall* album cover



Sanjoy Narayan

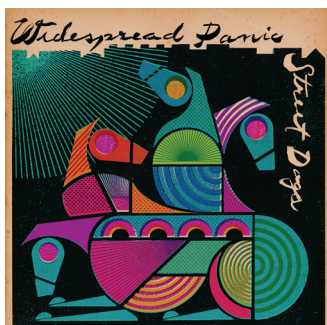
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LIVE AND ALIVE

Widespread Panic's new album, *Street Dogs*, has a loose, live, gig vibe but yet is remarkably well recorded



a fast, uptempo and frenzied pace, and trademark solo improvisations by each player. All the five musicians were the best exponents of bebop and the album's six songs showcase their talent perfectly.

But what adds a mythical dimension to the album is its fascinating back story. First, the concert's organisers didn't realise that May 15, 1953 was also the date for a Rocky Marciano versus Jersey Joe Walcott boxing match with the result that they couldn't sell enough tickets to be able to pay the musicians. Second, Parker (his heroin addiction had made him infamous) landed up without his saxophone, which he had pawned ostensibly to get drug money. So he got a plastic sax from somewhere and played that through the gig. Third, pianist Bud Powell who was out with permission from a New York hospital where he was being treated for mental illness, came drunk and remained so through the performance. Fourth, Gillespie kept meandering off backstage between his solos to try and catch the commentary on the boxing bout and would come back and announce what was happening to the audience. Fifth, the original recording was so terrible that Mingus went back and re-dubbed his bass lines.

Yet, it's such a great album that one version of it is marketed with the title, *The Greatest Jazz Concert Ever*. As soon as the band begins with the sizzling opening tune, *Perdido*, which showcases both Parker's saxophone and Gillespie's trumpet, and then moves into *Salt Peanuts* (a Gillespie composition from 1942), you know that you're on to something unique here. As you progress through the rest of the album – *All the Things You Are*, *52nd Street Theme* (a Thelonius Monk composition), *Wee (Allen's Alley)*, *Hot House* and, fi-

nally, *A Night in Tunisia* – things get even better. It is very rarely that I spin *Jazz at Massey Hall* and don't repeat it. It's just that kind of an album – I can't get enough of it.

I can't get enough of another band of six extremely talented musicians. Singer John Bell, bassist Dave Schools, lead guitarist Jimmy Herring, percussionist Domingo S Ortiz, keyboardist John Hermann, and drummer Todd Nance make up Widespread Panic, a band from Athens, Georgia, which is known more for its long jams and for its melding of rock, blues and folk music all with a southern twist. This September they released a new album, *Street Dogs*, which was recorded live in a studio. It's their best studio effort in a long time. The 10 songs have a loose, live, gig vibe but yet are remarkably well recorded. The trademark Panic sound is there: John Bell's gravelly vocals infused with just the right touch of disquiet; the versatile Dave Schools who plays the bass guitar like it's a lead guitar; Ortiz and Nance's nicely complementing percussion and drums; Hermann's keyboard in a style that is redolent of New Orleans jazz; and above everything else Jimmy Herring's superlative lead guitar.

Widespread Panic struggled for a bit after they lost their original lead guitarist Michael Houser in 2002 but Herring (also a member of Aquarium Rescue Unit and Jazz is Dead – the latter a band that does Grateful Dead songs only in instrumental jazz style) is a perfect fit. On *Street Dogs*, his virtuosity as well as that of the other members shines brightly. If you've never heard Widespread Panic, get this album for a starter. And then go on to their live ones.

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