

A black and white photograph of two jazz musicians. In the foreground, a man in a dark suit and bow tie is playing a saxophone, his head tilted back and eyes closed. Behind him, another man is playing a double bass. The background is dark, with some light reflecting off the instruments.

THE
PENGUIN
GUIDE TO
JAZZ
ON CD

The comprehensive, critical
guide to recorded jazz –
from its beginnings
until the present

FOURTH EDITION

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& BRIAN MORTON

Mimmo Cafiero DRUMS***** Domani E Domenica** Splasc(h) 425-2Cafiero; Salvatore Bonafede (*p*); Paolino Dalla Porta (*b*). 2/94.***** Triangles** Splasc(h) 604-2Cafiero; Stefano D'Anna (*ss, ts*); Diederik Wissels (*p*); Pietro Condorelli (*g*); Dario Deidda (*b*). 9/96.

Cafiero doesn't set out to dominate these records, but he's a big physical presence and he gives plenty of lift to two engaging if unexceptional sessions. The trio on the earlier disc tackle a conservative programme of standards and three originals, and it's made valid by the unassuming mastery of the playing. Bonafede has all kinds of lyricism under his fingers and Dalla Porta (reliable as usual) and Cafiero give him every support, with the long, thoughtful treatment of the title-track a particular pleasure. The quintet date benefits from a few surprises. Though the programme is basically straightahead, Deidda's popping electric bass lines lend an almost funky edge to the music at times, and, with Cafiero occasionally overdubbing a conga line on to his kit parts and D'Anna alternately reserved and bristling, this is a clever variation on the standard formula – and Cafiero's all-original programme deserves applause.

Michael Cain (born 1966) PIANO****(*) Strange Omen** Candid CCD 79505Cain; Bruce Saunders (*g*); Glen Velez (*perc*). 11/90.***** What Means This?** Candid CCD 79529Cain; Anthony Cox (*b*); Marvin 'Smitty' Smith (*d*); Paul Hannah (*perc*). 3/91.****** Circa** ECM 1622Cain; Ralph Alessi (*t, flhn*); Peter Epstein (*ss, ts*). 8/96.

If we had opened a stud book in 1990, it would have suggested that Mike Cain be picked up by ECM. From the very start, he sounded like a latter-day version of Chick Corea: not a copyist, but someone who was developing a concept very like Chick's thoughtful swing-as-philosophy/philosophy-as-swing. The album with Saunders and Velez is interesting enough, though it's the guitarist who provides the two most interesting pieces. Cain's 'Piano Sketch' sequence is quintessentially Corean.

The 1991 set with Cox and Smith was obviously an attempt to create a more mainstream jazz sound. The problem is that – again – Cain is upstaged by his playing partners. The piano often seems to be adding an accompaniment to what is going on with the bass and drums. It's still all very imprecise and indefinite, though; why invite trouble by calling a piece 'Meander'?

Circa came as a hugely refreshing change. Cain conceives of the piece as a rite of passage, inspired by the landscapes of Nevada and the curious cultural environment of Las Vegas, where he spent part of his childhood. One almost thinks of the Desert d'Or Norman Mailer conjures up in *The Deer Park*, a place compounded of showbiz huckstering and an almost apocalyptic beauty. Cain's own writing is superb, with 'Red Rock Rain', 'And Their White Tigers' and 'Top O' The Dunes', which come in the latter part of a notably coherent set, standing out. The instrumentation is as effective as it is unusual. Lacking a rhythm player and someone to anchor the chords means that the pianist has to work very differently. Cain almost plays as if he is accompanying singers, shadowing a line, shading in its contours, ironizing and reinforcing by turns. Superb.

Uri Caine PIANO*****(*) Sphere Music** JMT 514 007Caine; Graham Haynes (*c*); Don Byron (*cl*); Gary Thomas (*ts*); Kenny Davis (*b*); Ralph Peterson (*d*). 4 & 5/92.****** Toys** JMT 514 022Caine; Dave Douglas (*t*); Joshua Roseman (*tb*); Don Byron (*bcl*); Gary Thomas (*ts*); Dave Holland (*b*); Ralph Peterson (*d*); Don Alias (*perc*). 2 & 3/95.

As a soloist, he has more in common with Herbie Hancock than with anyone else, underlined by the inclusion of 'Cantaloupe Island' on *Toys*. As a writer and bandleader, he is already and formidably his own man. It would be hard to look for two more confidently inscribed visiting cards than these discs.

Caine had recorded previously with vibist Gust William Tsilis, workmanlike performances that gave only a limited sense of his potential. It's slightly surprising that he should have left his synthesizer at home for both *Sphere Music* and *Toys*. He uses electronics tastefully and with acute perceptiveness. For his debut, though, he obviously favoured a bluntly resonant acoustic sound, picking his players accordingly. Byron provides the coloratura, whistling away above Caine's forceful vamps on 'Mr BC' and on the beautifully conceived 'Jelly', a pair of titles that may well help point the listener to the pianist's strong sense of jazz history.