

The album is broken down into six tracks, utilizing a paint-by-numbers scheme, spanning the spectrum from "Black," "Purple," "Orange," "Green," and "Red" to "Blue." Each composition interprets the corresponding color in kind with moods that shift from fiery to stark and reflective.

There is an honesty and rawness on this album that recalls early rock and fusion exploits by Jerry Goodman with Mahavishnu Orchestra, Eddie Jobson, Jean-Luc Ponty and SugarCane Harris. Well done! — **Eric Harabadian**

SUPER-STRING-THEORY: *Principles of Transformation*

2006 (CD, 36:47); Super-String Theory

Style: Progressive

Sound: ★★★ Composition: ★★1/2 Musicianship: ★★★

Performance: ★★★ Total rating: 11 1/2

Attention guitar speed freaks, this is what you have been waiting for. Super-String-Theory is the brainchild of hotshot guitarist Aaron Roten. Backed by drums and the occasional keyboard (Roten plays almost all of the bass parts), the music is eclectic, with styles that embrace prog, metal, fusion, jazz, flamenco, and more.

Roten shreds with the best of them, with blistering fretwork that seems to defy human limitation. The style, color and energy of metal, which is at the root and heart of Roten's musical being, informs much of his playing. However, as Roten developed as a musician and discovered new genres, his stylistic orientation was broadened, diversified and enriched by these discoveries. For example, there is a bit of Allan Holdsworth in Roten's playing, be it a swollen metal version on steroids. He can swing when he wants, as on "The Colored Pencil Heist," which is almost straight-ahead. "Seducion del Prototipo" demonstrates that he has assimilated flamenco styles. However you like your frets shredded, Roten can deliver. — **Dean Suzuki**

JOHN SURMAN: *The Spaces In Between*

2007 (CD, 60:53); ECM 0008744-02

Style: Chamber music

Sound: ★★★★★ Composition: ★★1/2 Musicianship: ★★★★★

Performance: ★★1/2 Total rating: 14

Multi-reed threat John Surman has almost completely abandoned the jazz esthetic on this disc, yet the result is one of his most beautiful recordings ever. That's not really a surprise, as Surman always has straddled the divide between jazz and classical music.

On *The Spaces In Between*, his reeds are placed midway between the woody bass of Chris Laurence and a string quartet. Surman is a master of the bass clarinet, and he uses that unwieldy instrument to great effect here. The opening "Moonlighter" is a moody, introspective piece, while the following "You Never Know" opens up more, the strings first supporting, then leading the proceedings, with Surman's bass clarinet jabbing away in the background. "Where Fortune Smiles" was first recorded in 1970 with John McLaughlin, Karl Berger, Dave Holland and Stu Martin, but fits easily into the chamber music vibe here. On this second collaboration between Surman, Laurence and the strings (the first was almost 10 years ago), the unique combination makes beautiful music together. — **Ross Boissoneau**

THE BAD PLUS: *Prog*

2007 (CD, 64:52); Heads Up 3125

Style: Jazz/pop

Sound: ★★1/2 Composition: ★★★ Musicianship: ★★★

Performance: ★★★ Total rating: 12 1/2

Prog? Not really, but this is certainly not your standard jazz piano trio, not with these bad boys. For starters, who else would open a jazz album with a cover of Tears for Fears' mega-hit

"Everybody Wants to Rule the World"? It's a thoroughly engaging listen, gently exploring chords and structures while keeping the melody mostly intact. Then there are covers of tunes by Bowie and Rush, and, oh yeah, Burt Bacharach, along with a handful of originals by all three members. Bowie's "Life on Mars" gets deconstructed, while "Tom Sawyer" shows more compositional depth than listeners (or Rush) probably realized was there. It's followed by "This Guy's in Love with You," taken at a languorous tempo.

The originals stand comfortably alongside these disparate tracks. It adds up to a thoroughly enjoyable recording, at once accessible and challenging, melodic and angular. Pianist Ethan Iverson carries the day, with David King's drums and especially the bass of Reid Anderson playing key roles in these tunes. — **Ross Boissoneau**

THE COMMONWEALTH: *The Commonwealth*

2007 (CD, 49:39); Let's Be Quiet Records LBQR 001

Style: Folk/post-rock

Sound: ★★★ Composition: ★★1/2 Musicianship: ★★★

Performance: ★★1/2 Total rating: 13

From deep in the heart of bluegrass country cavorts this not-so-down-home outfit that ploughs an experimental acoustic furrow which will keep you guessing the entire time laser is on the disc.

I'd be tempted to call this "post-rock for shit kickers," but for the inaccurate imagery such an assertion may conjure. Using traditional bluegrass instrumentation, in addition to sax and clarinet, cello, and likembe (an African plucked instrument), The Commonwealth fuses elements of world and roots music into a quirky post-pop style that eludes categorization. Think Alec K. Redfearn (sans accordion) jamming with Gordon Gano (The Violent Femmes), or some of Roy Wood's chthonic early pieces.

Daniel Duncan's resigned voice announces the serio-tragicomic lyrics with a signature, devil-may-care post-rock sigh as removed from Hank or Merle as you can get. In other words, those expecting Hot Rize or The Dreadful Snakes will be stylistically and sonically jarred, but those listening with an open perspective will get off on this big time. — **John Patrick**

THE FLOWER KINGS: *The Sum of No Evil*

2007 (CD, 75:01); InsideOut IOMCD 285SPV79622

Style: Progressive rock

Sound: ★★★★★ Composition: ★★★ Musicianship: ★★★★★

Performance: ★★1D2 Total rating: 14 1/2

Many fans of The Flower Kings would cite *Stardust We Are* as the band's classic album. Those same fans likely would identify players on *Unfold the Future* as the group's classic lineup. With *The Sum of No Evil* it seems that band leader Roine Stolt was aware of this and attempted to achieve the best of both worlds with album that is clearly in the classic-prog vein of *Stardust ...* but with the supreme musicianship of the *Unfold ...* lineup.

Opener "One More Time" may be the album's best song. It's everything a Flower Kings piece should be — majestic, uplifting, intense and melodious, and perfectly executed. The obligatory epic, "Love is the Only Answer," is slightly less successful. It has all the elements but blends them with less perfection. One has the sense, though, that all will improve in the live environment. There is, no "filler" on this album.

Whether this album is *Stardust Part II* or *Flower Power Part II*, the bottom line is that it's one you should own. — **Michael A. Gardiner**