



**BELINDA
UNDERWOOD**
Greenspace
COSMIC MUSE
RECORDS

As the publicity for vocalist Belinda Underwood suggests, she is unique. After all, upright bass playing female vocalists are not that common, especially one also holding a degree in Astrophysics and holding a pilot's license. Based in Portland, Oregon, she has a delightful new release, "Greenspace" with some unusual covers and her originals, that sometimes are whimsical, fit the playfulness of some of the performances. Her alto voice has a bit of sassiness, yet also is quite playful, and enchants with her delivery and phrasing. She plays bass on several tracks, but for much of the disc, Phil Baker of Pink Martini handles the bass with Martin Zarzar, also of pink martini on drums. Benny Green is the pianist and on three tracks, Belinda's sister, Melissa is heard on saxophones. Nancy King adds her vocals to two selections and Egyptian Alfred Gamil adds violin to one track. Green is such a marvelous accompanist; no surprise from his tenure with Betty Carter and the rhythm is first-rate throughout.

The program opens with Underwood and Nancy King scatting to John Coltrane's "Bass Blues," followed by her lovely reading of Stevie Wonder's "Secret Life of Plants," which is one of several songs indicating a concern for things natural, even if she expresses it sometimes unusually. "No Moon At All," is a playful waltz about falling in love with Green having a choice solo. An instrumental, "Seeing Red," on which she plays bass has a Latin rhythm with Green emphatically stating the theme before her sister comes in on tenor. Her lovely way with a ballad is exhibited on "Blue Gardenia," which is followed by her rendition of the bossa, "Estate," singing about Estate and how he bathes her in the glow of his caresses and turns her no's to tender yeses. "Polar Blue," has a playfully expressed, but sober lyric about global warming, how the icebergs are melting and wondering why no one cares about the plight of polar bears. It is followed by a whimsical song of chickens in the chicken coop, recalling their fearful youth and the "Midnight Creeper," the raccoon who snook into their Hen House. Her playful, vocal is matched by the delightful trio accompaniment. Then there is her demonstrative lyric about singing in odd time signatures, "Odd Meter Blues." A bit of middle-eastern flavor is added by Gamil's violin on "The Oasis." On this, Belinda plays the oud as well as bass while the rhythm conjures images of a camel caravan heading to a desert oasis.

There are plenty of pleasures on "Greenspace," from the songs, the wonderful playing and, most importantly, Belinda Underwood's delightful manner in delivering a song that results in these completely enchanting performances. "Greenspace" is available from her website, <http://www.belindaunderwood.com>, cdbaby.com, amazon.com, and iTunes and other discerning retailers. **Ron Weinstock**

**Buckwheat Zydeco
Signs With Alligator**



Alligator Records has announced the signing of musical legend Buckwheat Zydeco. The Louisiana accordion master and vocalist began recording his debut for the label on January 10 at the famed Dockside Studios in Maurice, Louisiana with Steve Berlin (Los Lobos) producing. The multi-Grammy nominee will celebrate his 30th anniversary as a solo artist with the new CD and a lengthy tour.

RENOLDS JAZZ ORCHESTRA

Cube
SHANTI RECORDS

An international orchestra, Renolds Jazz Orchestra, led by Swiss reedman Fritz Renold with his wife Helen Savari-Renold handling the vocals (she is also the lyricist), is heard on a marvelous recording of the big band suite "Cube." Among the international cast on reeds (besides Renold) are Greg Tardy, Tommy Smith, Donny McCaslin, and Bernd Konrad. The trumpets include Willie Murillom, Randy Brecker, Barrie Lee Hall, Steve Bernstein and Amir El-Saffar. On trombones are Vincent Gardner, and David Taylor, while the rhythm section has Jamshied Sharifi on piano, Miroslav Vituos on bass, Adam Nussbaum on drums, with Willie Kotoun on percussion and Patrick Furrer conducting.

A myriad of musical colors underlay the performance of this suite, from Ellingtonian harmonies, Afro-Cuban rhythms and Middle Eastern exotic seasoning. "Grave Intrigues" opens as Helen Savari-Renold evokes the mid-east with her vocals before some Cootie Williams growling trumpet by Barrie Lee. Fritz Renold's twisting soprano, pianist Sharifi's piano interlude with a Latin groove under the solos from David Taylor and Barrie Lee (now playing without a mute) add to the shifting tempos and tone of the piece. The tempo picks up on "Caiaphas," a song about the high priest who brought Jesus to Pontius Pilate. It opens with Greg Tardy's serpentine clarinet solo, Steve Bernstein's crisp trumpet and Tommy Smith's hard bop tenor, while the band again conjures up an exotic flavor. "The Potter's Field" is meant to symbolize where people are exploited, manipulated and deserted as Helen's evocative moan, almost a call to prayer," is followed by Amir