

Our current CD review features musicians with very different styles. Nevertheless, these three artists—two of them Atlanta-bred—have much in common: All are young, fearless and incredibly innovative.



Eldar (Sony Classical)

Eldar, a jazz pianist from Kyrgyzstan (formerly part of the Soviet Union) has been compared to the great Art Tatum. The *Kansas City Star* called this 18-year-old prodigy a "musical phenomenon." Dizzy praise, perhaps, but not without merit. This is, after all, a kid who, at the age of five, would hear a piece of music and repeat it exactly on the piano. On his new, eponymous album, Eldar attacks "Sweet Georgia Brown" with wild abandon and takes on "Moanin" (by Bobby Timmons) like it's a brand new piece of music. Michael Brecker guests on saxophone on Eldar's own composition "Point of View," a rollicking celebration of sound that doesn't let up for close to seven minutes. Eldar's ballads "Raindrops" and "Lady Wicks" are both sublimely eloquent. And he's not afraid of Thelonious Monk, for that matter, interpreting both "Round Midnight" and "Ask Me Now" with gusto and originality. The fact that this pianist is already at this level of technique and expertise is astounding. Eldar, who now lives in San Diego, will be around for a long time. Lucky us. His band members must be mentioned—John Patitucci plays bass and Todd Strait is on drums. Both are superb.

Legs To Make Us Longer (Epic Records)

Kaki King has the distinction of being a solo guitar player whose extraordinary style—a mixture of folk and basic punk—is hard to categorize. King, who treats her guitar as a percussive instrument, is a musician of remarkable skill, without formal training of any kind. She honed her craft while playing as a busker in the less-than-congenial subways of New York, where she is now based. Inspired by Leo Kottke and the Smiths' Johnny Marr, the dexterous King does things with a mere six-string guitar that whole bands would find daunting. *Legs To Make Us Longer* is the title of her second album, a startling effort and a considerable achievement. In the frenetic track "Ingots," she picks the melody on the strings while thumping the guitar for the backbeat. That's not easy to do well. "Playing With Pink Noise" could conceivably be played using only drums, an instrument which, it turns out, King can also play. All of 25 and five feet tall, this pierced-lip virtuoso is more than just flash and fury. There is tremendous energy on this record, even on the quieter tracks. As if all that weren't enough, this deft innovator plays lap steel guitar on several songs, and takes a stab at singing on the gentle "My Insect Life." The lyrics are sporadic syllables used as sound effects. The fluid "Can The GWOT Save Us?" is a brooding contemplation on George Bush's war on terror, with tuning that, as with most of her work, is anything but standard. Much like King herself.



Sean Costello (Tonecool/Artemis Records)

Sean Costello is a 1960s soul singer trapped in the body of a 25-year-old white man. This Atlanta resident has the voice of an old timer, blending R&B and blues to make a mixture that is as intoxicating as it is masterful. On his new album, Costello's choice of cover songs says a lot about him. There is Al Green's "I'm A Ram" and Johnny "Guitar" Watson's "I Get A Feeling," both delivered with verve and confidence. Just to keep you on your toes, there's his version of Bob Dylan's "Simple Twist Of Fate," which fits in just fine. Considered primarily a guitarist—and a very good one—Costello states: "Right now, I'm more interested in writing songs and singing them, and playing with a really cool band." Indeed, his own songs here are a good sign of things to come, and will help Costello avoid being pigeon-holed as just another young upstart bluesman with a penchant for regression. He avoids the pitfalls of showing off, letting his talent and the songs speak for themselves. The company he keeps isn't too shabby either, having played in the past with the likes of Buddy Guy, B.B. King, and Bo Diddley. On this album, he is joined by Levon Helm (from the Band) and members of the gospel-tinged Ollabelle. On the opening track, "No Half-Steppin'," which he wrote, Costello sings: "I've come so far / I've got to keep pushing all the time / Don't write me off / I've got such a long, long way to go."

Other worthy releases: **Robbers On High Street** —*Tree City* (brash, youthful rock & roll, reminiscent of the sixties.); **Chiara Civello**—*Last Quarter Moon* (jazzy debut from Italian singer and pianist, all original compositions); **John Hammond**—*In Your Arms Again* (the blues master is back, sharp as ever); **Ali Farka Toure**—*Red & Green* (long-awaited re-issues from the revered Malian musician); **Various Artists**—*The Spanish Recordings, Basque Country, The Alan Lomax Collection*: (indigenous folk at its best).

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