

USIC ist

This month's critics' picks

sprawling three-CD packet, trumpeter Marsalis had already copped a Pulitzer Prize for this, his monumental jazz opera. So why bother reviewing it? The answer: Like the crack of a whip, the composer's ebony-hued slave tale compels *every* listener to react. As told by swaggering Duke Ellington-style horns and the urgent voices of Miles Griffith and Cassandra Wilson, Marsalis' story is full of rage, laughter and—quite possibly—the truth.

—JOE VANDERFORD

Bundy Brown, *Directions Echoes* (Soul Static Sound). Given that he absolutely hates to perform live, Bundy Brown does a pretty remarkable job of implanting real-time vitality into his studio creations. Since quitting Tortoise in late 1994, Brown's hardly strayed from the (re)mixing board, the one semi-exception being last year's excellent *Directions in Music*, a melodic dub-rock record that Brown made with James Warden and June of 44's Doug Scharin. For this EP, Bundy drops his partners and opts for amazingly natural-sounding samples: soulful acoustic bass, hypnotic sax, piercing flute, jazzily-syncopated drums, even a sitar. The final mix? Two gorgeous variations on an extremely organic instrumental hip-hop/world/jazz groove.

—TIM ROSS

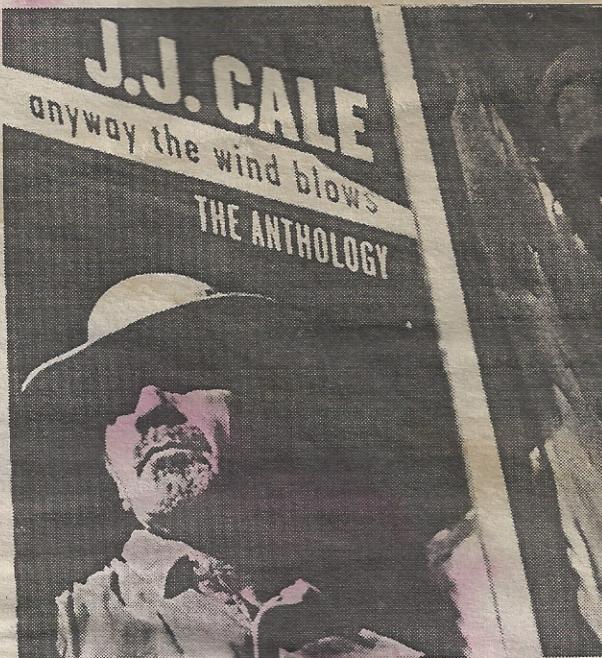
Jack Lawrence, *It's About Time* (G-Run GRR 1001). Charlotte's Jack Lawrence, best known as Doc Watson's accompanist for the past dozen years, steps out with his first

solo CD. It demonstrates how much excellent taste he's developed since he went to work with Doc. Check out his bluesy reinterpretations of bluegrass tunes. Accompanied by Doc, Chesapeake and others, Jack on fluid lead guitar and vocal treats us to material from the Byrds to Charles Pettee.

—ART MENIUS

J.J. Cale, *Anyway the Wind Blows: The Anthology* (Mercury 314 532 901-2). Best known for penning hits for other artists, J.J. Cale finally gets a showcase on this twofer, which culls the best tracks from his studio output, including six unreleased tracks and all his hits: "Crazy Mama," "Call Me the Breeze," "After Midnight" and "Cocaine." If you have Cale's other discs, you won't find many revelations here. Insightful commentary by Colin Escott fleshes out the enigmatic Oakie. Cale's laconic style belies his intensity on stage. Simply put, Cale live kicks butt. So why not a whole disc of live J.J.?

—CHUCK WATERS



Various Artists, *Latino! Latino!* (Putumayo PUTU 131). Too heavy on the Latin Jazz sound (Poncho Sanchez, Willie Colon) to be the comprehensive collection it would appear to be, *Latino! Latino!* nonetheless swings with top-notch American- and

Caribbean-based Latino musicians, along with fusion units such as the Brazilian-Senegalese experiment, Kaoma. On but 10 cuts, all released in the last decade, the compilation manages to include *cumbia*, *son*, *salsa* and *rumba* as well. Despite its shortcomings, this disc is hot.

—ART MENIUS

Neil Young, *Year of the Horse* (Reprise 46652-2). Neil Young heads into the millennium with both guns blazing. His latest double-disc live set (with compadres Crazy Horse) has the look and feel of bootleg: The liner photos have all the charm of a police line-up, and you don't even know what songs are on which disc until you fire it up. But no matter; Neil roars "It's all the same song" at the outset, and proceeds to grind through grunge-fueled versions of "When You Dance," "Pocahontas" and "Dangerbird." Essential? Maybe not. But it sure beats the bejesus out of the Spice Girls.

—CHUCK WATERS

Orchestre National de Lille-Region Nord/Pas-de-Calais, with Jean-Claude Casadesus, conductor, *Debussy: Pelleas et Melisande, opera in 5 acts* (Naxos: 8.660047-9, three CDs). Debussy's impressionistic music is a perfect match to Maurice Maeterlinck's eerie symbolist drama with its tenuous, ambiguous plot. Set in an ill-defined time and place—perhaps reality, perhaps dream—the play about two ill-fated young lovers fits Debussy's understated music.

Soprano Mireille Delunsch, as Melisande, beautifully captures the ambiguity of the role, switching from waif-like innocence to ardent lover and bewitcher with ease. Gerard Theruel's Pelleas is at times a confused and frightened child, at times a wooer and seducer. Includes English synopsis but only French Libretto.

—JOE & ELIZABETH KAHN