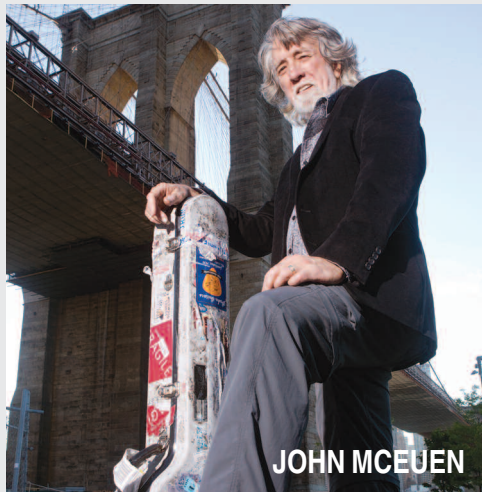


RIK WRIGHT



JOHN MCEUEN



GABRIEL ESPINOZA

FUNDAMENTAL FORCES, JOHN MCEUEN, PETER SALTZMAN, GABRIEL ESPINOSA, NORAH JONES & A CHICAGO FARMER

The *Subtle Energy* of Seattle guitarist-composer **Rik Wright's *Fundamental Forces*** is a reimagining of Wright's color trilogy (2013's *Blue*, 2014's *Red* and last year's *Green*). As its title depicts, the instrumental rock herein is not as muscled as the previous three. Still, its strength is derived from the interplay—both in unison and harmony—of Wright's guitar hero spirals and the clarinet of James DeJoie, especially on the 8:48 "Butterfly Effect" opener. Bassist Geoff Harper and drummer Greg Campbell are one and fill their roles with verve and syncopated surprise. The 11:45 title track is a symposium on how to arrange, perform and excite when it comes to rock with no vocals that straddles jazz. Unlike the old masturbatory excess of Yngwie and his acolytes, Wright is tasteful, always in tune and witty when it comes to sharp turns and various detours. The five tracks are solidly entertaining.

John McEuen, 70, has to be looked upon as a true American original. As the guiding light of the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band (whose 1971 all-star *Will The Circle Be Unbroken* is one of the most cherished albums to ever emanate from Nashville), his half-century as an entertainer, producer, composer and string wizard has resulted in 9,500+ concerts over three million miles of the planet while recording 40+ albums, the

latest of which is *Made In Brooklyn* (Chesky Records) with yet another all-star cast.

David Amram, 85, adds pennywhistle, flute and percussion while David Bromberg, 71, sings and strums on Jerry Jeff Walker's "Mr. Bojangles." The Flatt & Scruggs classic "Blue Ridge Cabin Home" uses traditional bluegrass instrumentation of banjo/fiddle/mandolin/bass/guitar. John Carter Cash his daddy's 1958 "I Still Miss Someone." "Travelin' Mood" is heightened by some Dixieland clarinet. Comedian Steve Martin plucks banjo on Warren Zevon's "Dirty Life and Times." Linda Ronstadt's 1971 "She Darked The Sun" and Zevon's "Excitable Boy" ("one of the most disgusting and morbid songs I've heard," says McEuen in the liner notes) are my personal highlights. "I Rose Up" is a poem by William Blake [1757-1827] set to music. McEuen wrote "Jules' Theme" for author Jules Verne [1828-1905] and the mysterious death of his wife.

Blues, Preludes & Feuds: A Musical Memory Parts 1-4 (Salt Muse, Inc.) by **Peter Saltzman** is a solo piano CD of many hues. The 28 tracks in 59:28 bespeak a quiet elegance (yet he can light up a fire at even a hint of ostinato). Dude can play the blues. He goes from Bach to improvisation at the drop of a G-clef. Billy Joel once wrote that "the

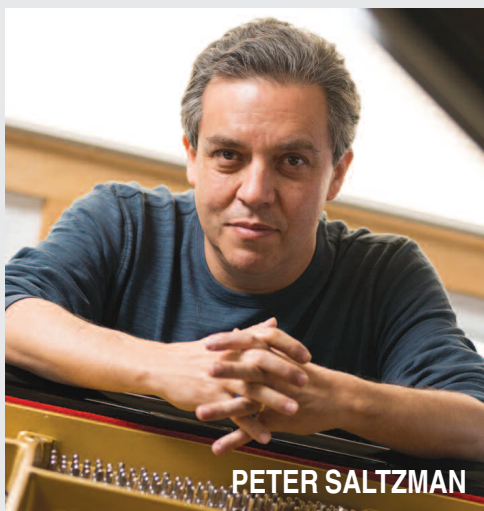
piano it sounds like a carnival." In Saltzman's hands, it can also sound like a symphony.

We go from Bach to Bacharach as bassist/composer/arranger/vocalist **Gabriel Espinoza** celebrates the *Songs of Bacharach and Manzanero* on his fourth Zoho release as a leader. Arguably Mexico's greatest composer, Armando Manzanero came to popularity, as did Burt Bacharach in the U.S., in the 1960s. With five songs apiece, the 12 musicians lay down a percolating percussive Latin groooooove—sophisticated, subtle and very adult. "Alfie," "Close To You," "The Look Of Love," "What The World Needs Now" and "Raindrops Keep Falling On My Head" are the Bacharach-penned hits but it's the Manzanero material (sung in English and Spanish) that tugs at the heartstrings, especially "Somos Novios" which was originally written in 1968 as a bolero and famously covered in English by Elvis Presley as "It's Impossible."

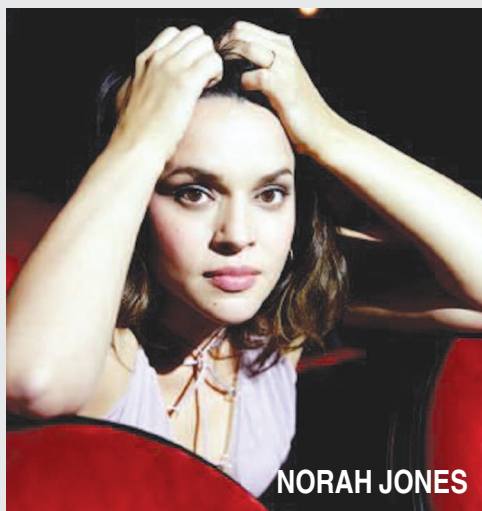
Day Breaks (Blue Note) by **Norah Jones** could be seen as a return-to-form although she's been denying it during interviews. Still, those who loved that 2002 *Come Away With Me* 18-million seller should love this. Seven albums later, the daughter of '60s sitar star Ravi Shankar is an international superstar and, as befitting such, *Day Breaks* lives

up to the hype. Towering jazz figures like saxophonist Wayne Shorter, organist Dr. Lonnie Smith and drummer Brian Blade add some guts to her already pristine back-up band. She wrote or co-wrote nine in the devastatingly confessional style that Joni Mitchell pioneered. Her covers are sublime: Neil Young's "Don't Be Denied," Duke Ellington's "Fleurette Africaine" and Horace Silver's "Peace." Despite her smooth-jazz flair, a lot of the lyrics herein are dark...real dark. She's not afraid to take on the two subjects my grandmother always warned me not to talk about: religion and politics. "Tragedy" tackles alcoholism. Yet even if the lyrics are lost in the sauce, the music itself is so soothing, soulful and jazzy—and her vocals so sexy, purring and whispered—that it's the aural equivalent of getting a 48:54 massage.

Cody Diekhoff is on his seventh CD as **Chicago Farmer**. He's a protest singer, as righteous as early Dylan, as profound as Phil Ochs. His genre may not be pure unadorned folk music as he has a habit of rockin' out and hitting you over the head with his self-released *Midwest Side Stories* but if you like gritty story-songs about meth, depression, job loss, used cars, the late shift, factories and farms (with a time-out to sing of skateboards and cover John Hartford's "I'm Still Here"), he's your man.



PETER SALTZMAN



NORAH JONES



CHICAGO FARMER