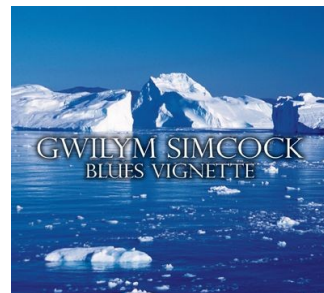


## GWILYM SIMCOCK "BLUES VIGNETTE"

(BASHO RECORDS SRCD 32-2) REVIEWS



JazzChicago.net

**Gwilym Simcock - "Blues Vignette"** (Basho Records)  
28-year-old Welsh pianist Simcock has taken the British Isles by storm, receiving awards and acclaim both as a classical pianist (and French horn player), as well as a jazz artist, and garnering critical comparisons

to Keith Jarrett and Brad Mehldau in the process. His sophomore effort is a sprawling 2-CD recording with the first disc devoted to solo piano, along with a 20-minute duet suite for cello and piano, which focus on his classical abilities and techniques (in a subtle and less showy way) combined with jazz improvisational skills. The captivating solo work recalls Keith Jarrett, although the young man has a different style and less powerful left hand. A delectable take on Movement II of Grieg's Piano Concerto is sincere and unhurried, while he shows a sense of humor on a whimsical version of the Tin Pan Alley pop hit "On Broadway." Three Jarrett-esque improvisations center the side, followed by the mysterious "Caldera" and the fanciful Weather Report tribute "Jaco and Joe" (a highlight), before he partners with cellist Cara Berridge on his wonderful suite. Simcock lists Ravel, Stravinsky and Mark-Anthony Turnage (the latter well-known to Chicagoans from his stay here as Mead Composer in Residence with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra) as influences, and one can hear the sounds of those composers, along with some jazzier flourishes in this work, as it moves from its moody first movement to its bright dancing second movement. The second CD turns Simcock's attention to his new jazz trio, which also features drummer James Maddren and Russian bassist Yuri Goloubev. The latter is an especially good choice: as the longtime Principal Bassist with the highly regarded Moscow Soloists, he possesses the stunning technical ability to match Simcock's own. His arco work on the bass especially is beautiful enough to make a listener weep. Maddren is more muted in his contributions, but one can appreciate his sensitive input and he can kick it up a notch when the music requires it. After a pensive "Introduction" the trio kicks into the rollicking "Tundra" - a highlight of piano trio jazz. The stunning title track follows and perhaps most clearly enunciates Simcock's ability to merge modern classical and jazz (and blues) components together in a meaningful manner. The rest of the side includes "covers" of songs such as Sonny Burke's "Black Coffee," (nicely upbeat) Gershwin (an obvious precursor in his mixing of classical and jazz) 's "Nice Work if You Can Get It," the folksy pop song "Cry Me a River" and a couple of interesting originals - the shimmering and vaguely Latin-flavored ballad "Longing to Be" (which mutates into a bit of a burner 2/3rds of the way through before Doloubev helps them "bow" out gracefully) and the deliriously shifting, album-ending "1981." Simcock is certainly going to open some eyes and ears in North America with this ambitious release, which demonstrates why this still young musician and composer is starting to be mentioned as being among the very best in the world.

[www.gwilymsimcock.com](http://www.gwilymsimcock.com)

toledoBlade.com

**BLUES VIGNETTE Gwilym Simcock (Basho Records)**

There are parallels to be drawn between up-and-coming British pianist-composer Gwilym Simcock, 28, and one of his biggest influences, Keith Jarrett, though Jarrett remains one of the world's top masters of jazz piano improvisation.

Still, there is reason to get excited about Simcock's potential, for improvisation is the purest form of musical expression and Simcock does a lot of that with finesse on this two-disc set. The first CD is a combination of solo and duet work with cellist Cara Berridge; the second features his new trio of himself, classically trained Russian bassist Yuri Goloubev, and British drummer James Maddren.

The two discs incorporate jazz and classical, featuring anything from a Grieg piano concerto to a Gershwin arrangement to original compositions by Simcock for himself as a soloist and with his trio. It's hard to put Simcock

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on par with Jarrett's heart, drive, and fearless passion, but Simcock is certainly one to watch, a talented crossover pianist with a fresh musical vision.

Among other things, he was voted "Jazz Musician of the Year" at the 2007 Parliamentary Jazz Awards and was nominated as best instrumentalist in the 2008 BBC Jazz Awards competition. - **TOM HENRY**

## STEP TEMPEST

Cool and Hot Sounds- Richard B Kamins

As I write this column, the thermometer is nudging 100 degrees and the humidity/dew point is rising. Looking upon the cover of pianist's **Gwilym Simcock's** 2-CD project, "**Blues Vignette**" (Basho), it's hard not to cool down a bit. (Of course, the cynics among us might turn their minds towards global warming - but I digress.)

This is his 2nd release and it's quite an ambitious project. Disc 1 features 8 solo piano pieces and a 2-part "**Suite for Cello and Piano**" featuring cellist **Cara Berridge**. Disc 2 features Simcock's working Trio composed of bassist **Yuri Goloubev** and drummer **James Maddren**. Taken as a whole (130+ minutes of music), this is quite formidable but never boring.

The solo pieces reveal Simcock's flowing lines, sense of humor and adventure. "**Little People**" jumps out with its majestic phrases, fulsome melody and little bluesy asides. Following that, the "**Exploration of Mvt II of Grieg Piano Concerto**" sounds and is quite formal at the onset yet the pianist moves the work slowly but steadily forward. Somber, sober and lovely, the piece is the perfect set-up for the rhythmic and sonic adventure of "**On Broadway**." Here, the left hand creates a roiling rhythm while the right hand dances out the melody and solo lines.

The remainder of the solo pieces show Simcock's restless creative mind and technical (but not overtly showy) prowess. The "Suite" introduces Berridge's lovely cello and, together, the musicians move through the various melodic, rhythmic and harmonic variations Simcock created for them.

The Trio CD introduces the audience to Simcock's excellent Trio. Bassist Goloubev's displays his sweet arco (bowed) bass tone on "**Introduction**" - it's easy to tell he spent years as a classical bassist. Drummer Maddren shows up on the second piece, "**Tundra**", and one quickly understands why Simcock chose him. Here, the bassist is in charge of moving the piece forward while the drummer moves along with the pianist, punctuating the flowing lines with sensitive cymbal work and the occasional move around the drum set. Later in the piece, Maddren takes over, heartily kicking the piece through to the close. The title track has a fine Latin tinge in the brush-on-snare drum work and an understated yet fiery drive in the pianist's left hand and the bass lines. Goloubev's funky pizzicato lines lead in Sonny Burke's "**Black Coffee**", the first of 3 standards on the program. The piece has a playful that spills over to the Trio's take on "**Nice Work If You Can Get It**", with its ever-shifting tempos. "**Cry Me A River**" has a mournful feel, moving at a slow pace throughout so that individual notes stand out, like teardrops.

One can hear the influences of the classic Bill Evans Trio as well as Keith Jarrett and Brad Mehldau in Simcock's approach. Yet, I hear a 29-year old adventurer staking out his own territory, creating music that moves beyond influences. Such a pleasurable journey should be shared by many - to find out more, go to

[www.gwilymsimcock.com](http://www.gwilymsimcock.com).

<http://steptempest.blogspot.com/2010/07/cool-and-hot-sounds.html>

**GWILYM SIMCOCK/Blues Vignette:** Here's one of those jazz/classical piano cats that you kick yourself for not knowing about. He's a whiz at the whole jazz/classical/improv thing and he plays with the kind of energy and style that grabs you right away and holds on. Already a well decorated player in England, he launches his stuff here with an ambitious double cd that finds him working out solo, duo and trio, in that progression doing a sprightly mix of original and cover that keeps you on board just so you can hear what comes next. A straight up winner throughout, this is a real ear opener for jazz piano fans looking for a hot, new kick.

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Pianist Gwilym Simcock is a delight to listen to. He devotes much of *Blues Vignette* (a two-disc set) to original compositions. No matter what he takes on, Simcock dives in with authority and a jazz-classical technique that rises in intensity and falls off gently like a spring thunderstorm. What's also remarkable is how tender he can be when romping through songs like his *Little People* or Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil's *On Broadway*.

**Mark Myers, Jazz Wax**

The youthful British pianist, Gwilym Simcock, has won numerous prestigious awards, with his 2007 debut album, *Perception*, receiving rave reviews. His new recording, *Blues Vignette*, comprises two disks, one consisting for the most part of solo piano, but closing with his "Suite for Cello and Piano," and the other featuring his trio.

The first CD contains both named compositions and pieces labeled as improvisations. But the compositions contain improvisatory sections as well and it is often hard to tell the difference between the written and the improvised. Some of the pieces have a Jazz-like feel in places, but for the most part could not be said to "swing" in the conventional sense, while much of the music is more reflective of the Classical aspect of Simcock's background. That's especially true of the "Suite for Cello and Piano." But again, there are spots in that composition where a Jazz-like piano articulation suggests improvisation. In all cases, however, Simcock proves to be a sophisticated, resourceful composer and a prodigious performer, seemingly in total control of his instrument. His superb partner for the "Suite," Cara Berrige, is the cellist with the award-winning Sacconi Quartet, founded at the Royal College of Music in London.

The music on disk two constitutes outstanding piano trio Jazz. Whether on Simcock's own engaging compositions or on his unique arrangements of the standards "Black Coffee," "Nice Work If You Can Get It," and "Cry Me A River," the group creates captivating, creative music. The pianist swings as well as anyone while enunciating every note with a beautiful tone and crystal clarity. And his improvisations feature cliché-free melodic lines and imaginative harmonies. Yuri Goloubev, a Classical virtuoso as well as a Jazz player, also shows a high level of creativity in his melodic, rhythmically-inventive bass lines and demonstrates one of the most gorgeous bowed bass tones in Jazz. Drummer James Maddren adds an intelligent and tasteful rhythmic layer to the mix. Together, they have mastered the art of playing as a cohesive unit—tempo and stylistic shifts are negotiated with perfect coordination. But although the trio can swing forcefully or gently or even in a quasi-funk mode (as on the jaunty "Black Coffee"), the music sometimes calls for a more meditative approach. Indeed, several of the tracks, such as Simcock's lengthy "Longing To Be" feature some of both.

**David Franklin, Cadence**

**EJAZZNEWS**

The latest release from the gifted, young pianist Gwilym Simcock, *Blues Vignette* (Basho 2010), offers a welcome challenge – to listen carefully and not be restricted by the classifications of genre and style. Purists of one sort

or another, who would define classical or jazz music as confirming to a short list of recognizable traits, will likely struggle with the over two hours of music on the curiously titled *Blues Vignette*, an ambitious double-CD that ranges from solo piano numbers, to a concerto duet for cello and piano, to the familiar – but fresh-sounding – trio of piano, bass, and drums. Gwilym Simcock is generous with his surprises.

The first disc seems to offer Simcock in what might be described as a "concert hall" mode, presenting the pianist alone, working through his ideas and showing his chops on his instrument or playing thought-composed pieces. Opening with a lyrical composition, "Little

People," Simcock lets everyone know that his European training can swing as well. This is followed by two pieces in tension with each other, the serene "Exploration on Movement II of Grieg Piano Concerto" and the familiar "On Broadway," which Simcock tears through, even utilizing the wood and metal guts of the piano for percussive effect. Shifting moods, Simcock then mediates over the keyboard in three "Improvisations." Further exploration of the landscape of the piano happens in the dramatic "Caldera," a composition which takes its name from a particularly interesting geologic formation found in volcanic craters. Simcock finishes his solo work with the dynamic "Jaco and Joe," a study in left hand and right hand interplay named with musicians Pastorius and Zawinul in mind, one assumes. Closing the first half of Blues Vignette is the two part "Suite for Cello and Piano," on which Simcock is joined by Cara Berridge, and the music here is thoughtful in a similar manner to the earlier improvisations.

More suited to jazz fans is the second disc, where bassist Yuri Golubev and drummer James Maddren join Simcock in moving to a jazz trio setting. Always mindful of the order of songs on Blues Vignette, however, Simcock's "Introduction" to CD two sounds very "classical" indeed, right down to its bowed bass lines. "Tundra" is a brisk baroque swinger that could have come straight out of the Brad Meldau catalog. By the time we settle into the title track, the group is indeed swinging and moving through the blues in a angular, supple manner without ever losing its sense of collective groove. Most radio-friendly of the bunch is the cheerful "Black Coffee," which finds an irresistible burn thanks to Golubev and Madden. Simcock's "Longing to Be," "1981," and Hamilton's "Cry Me A River" all have their pleasures, but a highlight of Blues Vignette is certainly the trio's work on Gershwin's "Nice Work If You Can Get It," which has as flexible a sense of tempo as you can imagine but which never stumbles. It is an exciting display of collective playing.

One can often hear the jazz side of Simcock's musical influences Bill Evans, Keith Jarrett, and the aforementioned Meldau, but Simcock never seems to copy or resort to musical cliches. The challenge in encountering Simcock's prodigal talent is to listen with fresh ears to a full dose of musical ideas that are themselves quite new. There's not much proper blues on Blues Vignette, of course, but the music is nevertheless bent in interesting new directions, and Simcock certainly understands the transformation of the blues: playing about feeling bad in order to feel good. Come to think of it, with some 130 minutes of music, the release is anything but a vignette; Simcock must be having a joke at his own expense, and the pianist and composer is all the more likable for the irony. Confident, smart, ambitious, Blues Vignette shows a young talent coming fully into his own and points the way for even better music to come.

### Mark Hayes



The impressionistic chamber jazz of pianist Gwilym Simcock proves equally sublime on "**Blues Vignette**" (**Basho Records, A-**), be it his solo variations on a Grieg Piano Concerto, tribute to "Jaco and Joe" or pensive trio treatments of "Cry Me a River" and "Nice Work If You Can Get It." Truly chillin'. **Mike Posner**



Until the arrival of "**Blues Vignette**," was placed in my hands I had no earthly idea who this twenty-eight year old *British* pianist named **Gwilym Simcock** was.

"*Little People*" the opener, is lyrically fascinating and elegantly expressed by the imaginative play of pianist *Gwilym Simcock*. His imposing presence, style and arrangements are brilliantly executed on the impending suite titled "*Improvisation I, II, & III.*" The lush tempo of this trilogy is perfectly matched to the exquisite nuances of "*Caldera*" followed by the energetic "*Jaco and Joe*" will indeed amaze music enthusiasts globally.

By the end of the Disc 1, *Simcock* calls upon the gifted and classically trained cellist **Cara Berridge** to expand her transcending voice on the stimulating yet dramatic underlying theme of "*Suite for Cello and Piano.*" For a moment, while listening it occurred to me how I was forced to endure classical music "101" during my school

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days while in middle and high school. Funny thing, after all these years the remnants of this music finally manifested in a way I can comfortably embrace what was once thought boring is now a revelation of *classical* and *jazz* infused into one unforgettable silhouette of sounds.

"Introduction" is the opening track on Disc 2. While seemingly understated, the lingering tones from the previous disc appear to trickle through as a sequel in harmony to shape the integral voice of classically trained bassist & cellist from *Russian* – **Yuri Goloubev** in concert with pianist **Simcock** connects seamlessly as one. Soon thereafter, their marvelous interplay forges through with shifting patterns and unrefined motion the trio intercedes to strategically unveil the complex "*Tundra*" for the next seven unwavering minutes.

The in depth of tones and textures of "*BLUES VIGNETTE*," are impeccably explored by these phenomenal musicians. In essence, the groove of "*Vignette*" is shaped with bending notes, colors and impulsive gestures burst forward into a effervescent collage of familiar melodies driven by their engaging voices.

Compositionally, *Simcock's* vision entails a flood of complex components twisted together in symphonic harmony on this inescapable voyage. Therefore, as a group they are called to masterfully articulate this template with sense of optimism. At this juncture, they unite to explore the sobering qualities in a suite of intriguing melodies with the invasion of "*Black Coffee, Longing to Be and Nice Work if You Can Get It*" all are beautifully appointed to enhance their amazing ability to accomplish this array of blissful melodies through their harmonic voices to swap ideas, textures, colors and rhythms flawlessly.

In the meantime, the elegant yet tranquil interpretation of "*Cry Me a River*," is gracefully navigated by the remarkable touch of *Simcock* on keys in the seventh spot also features his incomparable sidekicks *Goloubev* and drummer *Maddren* from the U.K.

The closing piece, "*1981*" surpasses expectations to finish the session with impressive dexterity and prowess as eloquently illustrated throughout this breathtaking recording by pianist *Gwilym Simcock* and friends.

No doubt, "*BLUES VIGNETTE*" is exactly what the doctor ordered. At least for me, that is. At a young age, pianist **Gwilym Simcock** has quickly established a name for himself in *Great Britain* with numerous awards in 2005 as the first "*BBC Radio 3 New Generation*" jazz artist. He was also voted "*Jazz Musician of the Year*" at the *Parliamentary Jazz Awards*. These awards are mere imprints of what's yet to come from this amazing young talent.

## Rob Young, The Urban Flux



The latest release from British pianist Gwilym Simcock, an ambitious double CD set entitled *Blues Vignette*, demonstrates his unique ability to successfully straddle the line somewhere between jazz and classical music. However, in the words of the artist himself the music on this collection is "*neither jazz or*

*classical, it is just music and the type of music that interests and stimulates me*". Regardless of how you want to categorize it Simcock seems more focused on making that all important emotional connection with the listener, which I think is something that most artists strive for when they create their art. I can honestly say though that with *Blues Vignette* he has succeeded in a big way.

The album which as mentioned is a double CD contains over two hours of music and features Gwilym performing in a solo setting, as well as in both a duo and trio configuration as well. Largely made up of original compositions and improvisations he shows his extraordinary range and versatility as a player early on by offering up a truly moving interpretation of the second movement of Greig's "Piano Concerto". He then follows that up with his arrangement of the Barry Mann/ Cynthia Weil penned "On Broadway", a track that has been covered by everyone under the sun since The Drifters first had a hit with it back in 1963. On the surface these two compositions appear to be polar opposites and yet with Simcock's guiding hands and skillful, lyrical playing it's nothing less than a musical marriage made in heaven. The other major highlight for this reviewer on the first disc is the absolutely stunning suite for cello and piano, on which Simcock is joined by classical cellist Cara Berridge. Clocking in at a shade over twenty minutes the duo enraptures the listener for the full duration with some incredibly moving melodies. In addition to highlighting the world class talents of both of these musicians, the

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grand scope of this musical suite just further proves what a highly skilled composer and arranger Simcock is as well.

The transition over to disc two is absolutely seamless as Gwilym gently eases the listener in on "Introduction" with a contemplative piano melody, before his new trio of Russian bassist Yuri Golubev and drummer James Maddren are formally introduced into the fold on the track "Tundra", which is showered with Simcock's most vibrant and upbeat playing thus far. The title track is an eight minute tour de-force that is the very definition of how to successfully utilize light and shade, as this song is full of peaks and valleys. Another gem here is the twelve minute original composition "Longing To Be", which features another gorgeous melody and some beautifully fluid playing from Gwilym. This multi-faceted original piece of work is sandwiched between the trio's spot on interpretations of Sonny Burke's "Black Coffee", Gershwin's "Nice Work If You Can Get It" and another jazz staple, "Cry Me A River". The lively original "1981" brings *Blues Vignette* to its rousing conclusion.

*Blues Vignette* is a remarkably diverse and engaging listening experience from beginning to end, which is a significant accomplishment just when you consider the volume of music that has been offered up here. Fans of Brad Mehldau and Keith Jarrett should take note because with this album Gwilym Simcock has definitely reached the point in his career where he deserves to be mentioned in the same breath as these legendary musicians.

**Ryan Sparks 5 stars \*\*\*\*\***